

Thursday  
5 May 2016

Volume 609  
No. 154



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

Thursday 5 May 2016

---



# House of Commons

*Thursday 5 May 2016*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

FAVERSHAM OYSTER FISHERY COMPANY BILL [LORDS]

*Lords message (4 May) relating to the Bill considered. Resolved,*

That this House concurs with the Lords in their resolution.—  
(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

HABERDASHERS' ASKE'S CHARITY BILL [LORDS]

*Lords message (4 May) relating to the Bill considered. Resolved,*

That this House concurs with the Lords in their resolution.—  
(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

NEW SOUTHGATE CEMETERY BILL [LORDS]

*Lords message (4 May) relating to the Bill considered. Resolved,*

That this House concurs with the Lords in their resolution.—  
(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

## Oral Answers to Questions

### DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Great British Food Campaign

1. **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Great British Food campaign in promoting British food and drink. [904817]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** We set up the Great British Food Unit to drive export growth and help companies identify new opportunities. The British brand is world renowned for heritage and quality. In April, I was in the US championing products from the great British curry to gin and British beef and lamb.

**David Morris:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that impressive response. Britain is famous for its seafood, and the delicacy of Morecambe bay shrimps, from my constituency, is internationally renowned. It is nice to know that the Government are doing all that they

possibly can to ensure that such dishes are on international dinner plates; will she elaborate a little on what she is doing to make sure that they are internationally renowned?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I agree that Morecambe bay shrimps are a fine product, along with other great Lancashire products, such as Bury black pudding, the Eccles cake and the hotpot. May I make a suggestion? Yorkshire has three protected food names, whereas Lancashire has only one. At the Department we would be very keen to help Lancashire producers get that protected status, so that they can become world renowned, too.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that Weetabix, which is based in Burton Latimer in my constituency, is a great British breakfast cereal, because she launched the Great British Food Unit at its headquarters. Will she ensure that Weetabix is always served at her Department's breakfast meetings and all the international trade symposiums it organises around the world?

**Elizabeth Truss:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that Weetabix is a fantastic product. Not only is it exported around the world, but all of the wheat is grown within 50 miles of the Weetabix factory, so it is a real example of linking through from farm to fork. I proudly display my own box of Elizabeth Truss Weetabix on my desk at the Department for all visitors to see when they arrive at my office.

**Mr Speaker:** It is always useful to have a bit of information. We are very greatly obliged to the Secretary of State, as we have learned more about her domestic arrangements.

#### Badger Cull

2. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): If she will reconsider her Department's plans to extend the badger cull; and if she will make a statement. [904818]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** The Government are taking action to deliver a long-term strategy to eradicate bovine TB in England and protect the future of the dairy and beef industries. That strategy includes strengthening cattle testing and movement controls, improving biosecurity on farm, and badger control in areas where TB is rife. The veterinary advice is clear that there is no example in the world of a country that has successfully eradicated TB without also tackling the reservoir of the disease in the wildlife population.

**Ann Clwyd:** Badger culling in England costs around £7,000 per badger killed; in Wales, the badger vaccination programme costs around £700 per badger vaccinated. Lord Krebs, the renowned scientific adviser on the subject, has continually said that

“rolling out culling as a national policy to control TB in cattle is not really credible.”

Why, then, do the Government persist with a policy that is stupid, costly and ineffective?

**George Eustice:** The cost of doing nothing would be £1 billion in 10 years' time. As for the cost of running the culls, there were one-off costs initially, but those

were halved in the most recent culls last year. The right hon. Lady will also be aware that Wales has had to suspend the vaccination programme because of a lack of availability of vaccine and on the advice of the World Health Organisation. The vaccination programme was also in a tiny pilot area of about 1.5% of Wales. Wales has had success with cattle movement controls just as we have done, and that is the reason it has been able to bear down on the disease in the same way we have.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): My hon. Friend the Minister has already pointed out issues with bovine TB. My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile)—who is not in his place—and I share a love of hedgehogs. Years ago I brought a hedgehog into the Chamber, which was completely out of order—[*Interruption.*] Not in your time, Mr Speaker: it was under Baroness Boothroyd, who did not approve. It did something terrible in my hand, I dropped it and it scurried off. That is off the point, sorry.

The hedgehog population is falling, and it is partly because they are part of the food chain of badgers. Badgers may be cuddly, while hedgehogs have spikes but they are cuddly too, and we need to remember that they are being attacked by all the badgers where there is no cull.

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend is a real advocate for hedgehogs, and many other hon. Members have supported their cause, including my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile). Some research suggests that badgers compete with hedgehogs for some foods and in their environment, but there are many other pressures on the hedgehog, including gardens that are not particularly hedgehog friendly. Everybody can play a role in helping hedgehog populations to recover.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): It is, of course, national hedgehog week, and we need to do all that we can to protect their habitats rather than blaming badgers.

Usually when experts tell us that something is not working the sensible thing to do is to stop. So why, when the Government's experts said that last year's efforts were ineffective and inhumane, and when bovine TB increased by 34% in Somerset, is the Department so determined to push ahead with yet more culling? May we have a moratorium on the granting of any more licences this year until we have had a full public debate, with all the information in the public domain, so that we can decide whether it is worth proceeding with culling?

**George Eustice:** The country's leading experts on tackling bovine TB are in DEFRA, including the chief vet and his veterinary team. Their advice is clear: we will not eradicate this disease unless we also tackle the reservoir of disease in the wildlife population. That is why we are committed to a roll-out of the cull in areas where the disease is rife.

**Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): The Minister was characteristically generous to the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). Can he give us the figures for the increase in outbreaks of bovine TB in Wales and in England? For those of us who have

constituents on the Welsh border, will he continue to roll out the cull and do as much as he can, rather than punishing beef and dairy farmers with post-movement testing?

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend will be aware that in England we slaughter some 28,000 cattle a year. Last year, both England and Wales saw a slight increase in the prevalence of the disease, but that tends to move in cycles. In the previous year, we saw a slight reduction in the disease. I understand that the cattle movement controls we have put in place are frustrating for some farmers, but they are also a necessary part of eradicating this disease. We have to do all of these things—deal with the reservoir of disease in the wildlife population, improve biosecurity on farms and, yes, improve cattle movement controls so that we can reduce transmission of the disease.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): When will the Minister be able to give the scientific figures for the badger cull areas to show the reduction in the amount of disease in cattle?

**George Eustice:** As my hon. Friend knows, the randomised badger culling trials a decade or more ago found that the benefits of the culling of badgers were only seen some four years after the conclusion of the culls. The reality is that the programme is a long-term commitment and it will be several years before we can see the impact of the culls. From figures from last year, however, we know that perturbation, which several hon. Members have previously highlighted to me, was actually far less of an issue in years one and two of the culls in Gloucester and Somerset than people predicted.

## Air Quality

3. **Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): What recent progress her Department has made on reducing levels of air pollution; and what targets she has set for air quality in 2016. [904819]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** Air quality is improving. Since 2010, emissions of nitrogen oxides have fallen by 17%. We will further improve air quality through a new programme of clean air zones, alongside investment in clean technologies.

**Neil Coyle:** Elephant and Castle, in my constituency, has the worst air quality in south London. Air pollution has a proven impact on people's health and life expectancy. Nearly 9,500 people die each year in London due to poor air quality, which is why my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), a candidate for London Mayor, is planning to consult on bringing forward and expanding the ultra-low emission zone if he wins today. He knows London cannot wait. Why is the Environment Secretary waiting for a judicial review to force her to develop a comprehensive strategy for the whole country?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The fact is that it is my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) who has made cleaner air a priority of his mayoral campaign. He has a long-standing record of talking

about environmental issues, unlike his opponent. The Government have set out a very clear plan for clean air zones right across the country to deal with this issue. We are prepared to mandate those zones to ensure we are in line with World Health Organisation limits.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): DEFRA's plan says that local authority action is critical to achieving improvements in air quality. On this local elections day, will the Secretary of State tell us what resources she will provide to struggling councils to do that, given that her Department has cut payments to councils under the air quality grant scheme by nearly 80% since 2010? Will she give councils the powers they need to tackle this problem, not just in the five cities but wherever people are suffering—in some cases, even dying—because the air is not clean enough for them to breathe?

**Elizabeth Truss**: We absolutely have given powers to all cities that want to implement a clean air zone. They are fully able to do that. We will also assist with funding for the five cities projected to be above the WHO limit of 40 mg of nitrogen oxide. We are working with those local authorities at the moment. We need to ensure the zones are in the right place so that the problem does not get moved from one part of the city to another. The resources will be available for those local authorities to put that in place.

### British Farming

4. **Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): What assessment she has made of the potential contribution of data and technology to increasing the productivity and competitiveness of British farming. [904821]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice)**: Data and technology have a central role to play in increasing the productivity and competitiveness of British farming. Last October, I launched the first of our agri-tech centres of excellence, the agrimetric centre at Rothamsted. They will develop new software models to improve our ability to understand and utilise the huge volume of data that exist. In addition, we are on track to open up 8,000 data sets to the public, which can help food and farming to achieve its potential.

**Mr Baker**: As a software engineer, I very much welcome my hon. Friend's response. Does he agree that the implementation burden of vast changes, such as this year's common agricultural policy, make it difficult to realise all these benefits? Does he agree that there is a simple solution, which is to vote to leave the EU?

**George Eustice**: As my hon. Friend knows, the Government's position is that we should remain in the European Union. He will be aware, however, that I have exercised the option granted by the Prime Minister to disagree with the Government on this particular issue. From a personal perspective, I simply say that the vast majority of problems farmers complain to me about are the consequence of dysfunctional EU legislation.

### Milk Price

5. **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What progress her Department has made on ensuring that farmers receive a fair price for milk. [904824]

8. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What progress her Department has made on ensuring that farmers receive a fair price for milk. [904829]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice)**: These are undoubtedly very difficult times for many dairy farmers. The combination of oversupply around the world coupled with a weakening of demand in major markets such as China has led to a very depressed commodity price. We secured a £26 million support fund last November to alleviate short-term cash-flow pressure. We introduced a dairy supply chain code to improve dealings between dairy processors and farmers. Longer term, we are working on a project to introduce a dairy futures market to help farmers manage future risks. We are exploring the potential to facilitate investment in new dairy processing capacity, so that we can add value to our production.

**Cat Smith**: A food-secure Britain needs British farmers to be able to make a living. Milk prices plummeted in March this year; they were at their lowest since 2009, with farm-gate prices as low as 16p per litre. This comes at a time when British dairy incomes are dropping; they are forecast to fall by almost half this year. I was disappointed that there was nothing for dairy farmers in this year's Budget. What action will the Minister take now, working with supermarkets, retailers and farmers, to ensure a future for the British dairy industry?

**George Eustice**: We have introduced tax-averaging across five years to help farmers who face a tax bill; they can average it against difficult years. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has been clear that it will take a generous approach to the time-to-pay provisions to help farmers who may be under pressure with their tax bill. I completely understand that this is an incredibly difficult time for many farmers. There is a mixed picture; a small number are still on aligned contracts, and still receive a fair price. We constantly meet retailers to try to improve the contracts that they offer, and to encourage them to offer more aligned contracts and to source more dairy production. Many of them are now offering those aligned contracts, or higher prices, to their farmer suppliers.

**Liz McInnes**: Can the Minister tell the House and Britain's farmers why the Government failed to support EU efforts to improve the school milk scheme, which provides a valuable market for our struggling dairy farmers? Can he confirm that the Government will roll out the scheme in our schools, and say what benefit it will bring for British farmers?

**George Eustice**: It is not the case that we did not support the school milk scheme. The European school milk scheme is very small; it is worth around £4 million a year. It is dwarfed by our domestic schemes. The one funded by the Department for Education and the Department of Health, for infants, is around £60 million a year. The issue that we had with the school milk



scheme was the bureaucracy and administration that the European Commission was trying to add to it. We were keen to pare that out, but we certainly supported the scheme; it is not true to say that we did not.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): In north Yorkshire, in the last 15 years, we have lost 50% of our dairy farmers, and 90% of those still in business are losing money, despite generous taxpayer subsidies. Does the Minister agree that now is the time for the supermarkets to start paying British farmers a fair price for British milk?

**George Eustice**: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes, and as I say, these are very difficult times for farmers. People often lay the blame on supermarkets, but we have to recognise that at the root of the problem is the worldwide issue of low commodity prices. There are very low prices in New Zealand—far lower than we have here—and many people have been driven out of business there. This is a global challenge. Some of the supermarkets have stepped up to the plate and offered aligned contracts, and many of them are selling their milk at a loss; we should recognise that and give credit where credit is due. Of course, we are always trying to improve the position of farmers in the supply chain.

**Calum Kerr** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): Perhaps there is a win-win here. The hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) made a suggestion about Weetabix; if we advocate having British milk with it, that might offer a little solace. The Minister has spoken about a commitment to strengthening the voluntary code of practice for the dairy sector; when will that be in place?

**George Eustice**: I have already had this discussion with NFU Scotland, and I have offered to meet it to discuss its concerns. The voluntary code of practice for the dairy industry is GB-wide, as the hon. Gentleman knows, but the reality is that it tends to help farmers more in a rising market, when prices are firming, than in a difficult time in which there is over-supply. The crucial element of it is that it gives farmers the ability to walk away at three months' notice, and that enables them to extract a better price. That obviously only works when market prices are going up, rather than down, but I have offered to meet NFU Scotland to discuss its concerns. We will review the code again with a view to strengthening and improving it where we can.

### Bovine TB

6. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What progress the Government are making on delivering their strategy to eradicate bovine TB. [904825]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice)**: The Government are determined to use all available measures necessary to eradicate this devastating disease as quickly as possible. We have continued to make improvements to cattle movement controls, most recently introducing a requirement for post-movement testing of cattle travelling from the high-risk to the low-risk area. At the end of last year, we launched a new project to promote better on-farm biosecurity in order to reduce cattle-to-badger contact.

Finally, we also started a cautious roll-out of the badger cull to an additional area in Dorset last year, which was successful.

**Fiona Bruce**: I thank the Minister for his reply, but I urge the Government to do all they can to ensure that bovine TB is checked in Cheshire so that it does not take further hold. It is the cause of extreme concern to farmers in my constituency.

**George Eustice**: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I recognise the specific challenges in parts of the edge area, notably in Cheshire, and we have therefore introduced much more frequent—six-monthly—testing in Cheshire to get on top of the disease, which has been a success. We have also increased the use of the more sensitive interferon gamma blood test as a supplement to the skin test to ensure that we can remove infected cattle from herds more quickly.

### Rural Payments Agency

7. **Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the effect on the farming community of delays in payments by the Rural Payments Agency. [904827]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss)**: All farmers in England have received their full payment or a bridging payment of half their expected claim. Overall, 90% of eligible farmers have received full payment.

**Stephen Phillips**: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. I am pretty sure that colleagues with rural constituencies will have numerous examples, as I do, of problems with Rural Payments Agency delays. I wish to raise the particular case of my constituent, Mrs Musson, who has been left in severe financial difficulties this year due to her payment being delayed, and has had extraordinary difficulty contacting the RPA, as far too many farmers do. The response I had from the RPA was that the payment would come “in due course” and that my constituent should call the agency for hardship assistance, yet that is precisely what she has been unable to do. What assurances can my right hon. Friend give me and my constituents that farmers will not be left in such dire straits in the future, that the relevant help will be more easily available and that the RPA will be more easily contactable?

**Elizabeth Truss**: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for his question. All eligible farmers should have received a bridging payment by the end of April, and if this is an ongoing issue for his constituent I would be happy to assist directly. This has been the first year of implementation of the new common agricultural policy system. All payments need to be made within the payment window between December and June, and all payments will be made within that window. I appreciate that farmers are struggling with cash flow because of this year's low commodity prices, which is why we have put in place bridging payments for those final few farmers who have not yet received payments. All that data are now on the system, so 2016 will be much more straightforward and we should be able to pay farmers much earlier in the payment window.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for listening to the concerns of farmers in my constituency about basic payments. In order to move forward, can she reassure us of three things: first, that these problems have been heard across the piece; secondly, that solutions such as a dedicated phone line are being considered and sought; and, thirdly, that as we move into the 2016 registration period, the system really will be fit for purpose?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and I would be happy to assist any constituents who have outstanding issues. We have paid more than 90% of farmers, and the payment window ends at the end of June, so all full payments will have been made by then. The data are now on the system, so next year will be much more straightforward. I add that both Wales and Scotland have made fewer full payments than England, and that we are on track to do what needs to be done by the end of June.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) will know, the farming community of Lincolnshire will be gathering together on 22 and 23 June for the Lincolnshire show. If my right hon. Friend is not doing anything on those particular days and can find time to come to Lincolnshire, I could introduce her to a group of farmers who oppose our membership of the EU. Can she find time in her diary for that?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and I could not possibly imagine what anyone might be doing on 23 June. What I would say, on behalf of all farmers, is that the EU and the single market have brought about massive benefits for food and farming. For example, 97% of lamb exports and 92% of beef exports go to the European Union. There would be a real risk to the future livelihood of those industries if we were to leave and were not able to export our fine products to those European countries any more.

#### Broadband: Rural Businesses

9. **Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the effect of slow broadband services on farmers and other rural businesses. [904830]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** Broadband is, of course, essential to farmers so that they can gain access to the latest precision farming techniques; to schoolchildren so that they can gain access to educational tools; and to small rural businesses so that they can overcome variance of distance and reach customers and markets that they would not otherwise be able to reach. That is why, from January this year, we have guaranteed a minimum of 2 megabits per second, with Government backing, and we aspire to reach 10 megabits per second by 2020 through a universal service obligation.

**Christina Rees:** The Public Accounts Committee concluded that “digital focus” for the CAP delivery programme was “clearly inappropriate” because of poor broadband service in so many rural areas. Indeed, the

Committee’s Chair said that the programme was “an appalling Whitehall fiasco” that should have focused on the needs of farmers, rather than ending up as a digital testing ground that caused payments to farmers to be severely delayed. What commitments will the Minister give to guarantee that farmers will receive the service that they deserve from broadband providers and the United Kingdom Government?

**Rory Stewart:** Some of those issues relate directly to farming and the Rural Payments Agency, but let me deal with the point about broadband, which is relevant to my part of the Department. We have made two separate commitments. First, if any farmer in the constituency of any Member wishes to gain access to a 2 meg connection that would provide access to Government databases, our grant scheme will provide the necessary infrastructure. Secondly, we have made a commitment to a 10 meg service through the universal service obligation.

**Mrs Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): During a very constructive meeting with the Secretary of State, the Church of England’s representatives offered the use of church towers and spires to extend broadband and mobile phone coverage in rural areas. Will the Minister update the House on progress?

**Rory Stewart:** Church spires are ideally located in remote rural areas to allow point-to-point broadband coverage and good cellular coverage. The offer from the Church Commissioners is greatly appreciated, and we are working closely with our colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to take advantage of the technological opportunities.

#### British-produced Meat

10. **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): What steps she is taking to encourage more people to consume meat produced in Britain. [904832]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** We have some of the best native breeds of cattle, pigs and sheep in the world, and we want to promote quality meat that is produced in the United Kingdom. Because we secured country of origin labelling legislation, such labelling is now mandatory on poultry, pigs and lamb, as well as on beef. Two weeks ago, the Secretary of State was in the United States, working to open the market there for British beef, and I was in Japan making the same case for our top-quality beef to the Japanese Government. We are also exploring ways in which to use the GREAT branding in retail settings to encourage more consumers to choose British products.

**David T. C. Davies:** I greatly welcome that. I recall that, last November, Parliament was festooned with banners reminding us about something called “vegetarian week”, and urging us to try a vegan meal. In the interests of fairness, may I suggest that we organise a similar event to encourage people to try British meat—perhaps a “British meat May”? If we launch such an event, can we ensure that Opposition Front Benchers are invited as well?

**George Eustice:** I am sure that my hon. Friend's suggestion will enjoy cross-party support. He makes the good point that we need to promote our top-quality meat. The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board also performs an important role. I recently signed off two of its campaigns: a television advertising campaign to promote pulled pork, which is currently running; and a mini-roast television marketing campaign, which is intended to increase consumption of, in particular, underutilised lamb and beef cuts. There is already some very good work going on, but my hon. Friend's suggestion of a parliamentary event is a useful one, and I shall be happy to explore it with him.

### Hedge Maintenance

11. **Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con):** What assessment she has made of the effect of changes to hedge-cutting regulations on (a) contractors, (b) farms and (c) hedge maintenance. [904833]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** We have consulted a range of people on hedge cutting, from the National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Association to various environmental organisations, and we have come up with a deal on hedge cutting that provides both protection for birds and derogations for specific agricultural activities.

**Tom Pursglove:** I thank the Minister for his answer. My constituent, Bob Rutt, is a contractor who specialises in hedge cutting, and the extension of the hedge-trimming ban has cost him thousands of pounds in lost revenue. He has no intention of harming wildlife, but the policy is seriously affecting his business. Will the Minister engage with farmers and contractors to ensure that conditions on the ground are taken into account so that arrangements can work for the contracting industry and conservationists?

**Rory Stewart:** I am happy to engage with my hon. Friend and indeed farmers on this issue. It is important to understand, however, that certain birds, including blackbirds, turtle doves, goldfinches, bullfinches and whitethroats, have longer breeding and rearing seasons that last through August and into the beginning of September. There are two specific derogations that could affect my hon. Friend's constituent: one relates to the planting of oilseed rape; and the other relates to seasonal grass, which allows him to get his equipment in, in accordance with agricultural practices. I am happy to discuss the details with my hon. Friend.

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister is a veritable mine of information, is he not? We are deeply obliged to him, as I dare say the constituent of the hon. Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove) will be, to boot.

### Brexit

12. **Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab):** What recent assessment she has made of the potential effect on the agricultural sector of the UK leaving the European Union. [904836]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** I can tell the hon. Gentleman that 60% of our food and drink exports go to the EU—that is worth £11 billion to our economy. That is vital income for our farmers and fishermen. If we were to leave, exporters would face crippling tariffs when selling their goods to Europe, such as up to 70% for beef products, which would cost £240 million per year.

**Nic Dakin:** I agree with the Secretary of State, the National Farmers Union and the Food and Drink Federation about how vital the EU is to our farming industry. The Secretary of State has given quite a full answer, but would she like to put a figure on what the lost trade would cost our farmers each year if we were to leave the single market?

**Elizabeth Truss:** What we know is that no country that is not a full member of the EU has full access to the agricultural market. Whether it is Norway, Canada or any other of the countries whose models the out campaign have talked about, none of them has full access without quotas or tariffs. I have given the example of beef, with a cost of £240 million a year. The sheep industry would be even harder hit because 40% of all the sheep that we produce here in the UK are exported to the EU.

### Topical Questions

T1. [904807] **Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab):** If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** The Government are taking action to help farmers to manage low prices and market volatility, which is why we have ensured that all eligible farmers have now been paid their full basic payment or a bridging payment for 2015. To help farmers in the future, we have extended the period of tax-averaging from two to five years, and this month I am convening farmers, food producers and the European Investment Bank to seek further investment in improved productivity and processing capacity.

**Liz McInnes:** I thank the Secretary of State for her response. Can she confirm that any grant money from the EU solidarity fund will be additional money to be spent in the communities that have been affected by floods, and that it will not be swallowed up by the Treasury as payback for money already spent?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I can confirm that that is additional money that is being applied for through my colleague, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

T2. [904809] **Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** In a written answer to me today, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), has told me that restaurants in England are encouraged to show their hygiene scores on their doors. However, the truth is that those that have a very low score—one or two out of five—do not display their scores. In Wales, it is mandatory to show hygiene scores on the doors. What can my right hon.



Friend do to encourage the Department of Health to make it mandatory, as it is in Wales, to show scores on the doors? This practice has been shown to raise hygiene standards in restaurants in Wales.

**Elizabeth Truss:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on his campaign. Food safety standards are one of the reasons why British food is so respected around the world, and our exports are growing because people respect the work of the Food Standards Agency. It is important for consumer confidence that we have transparency in the safety of food, and I look forward to hearing more about my hon. Friend's discussions with the Department of Health.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that our largely foreign-owned water companies made £2.1 billion profit in 2014-15 and paid out £1.8 billion in dividends, but fell well short of paying full corporation tax. She will also be aware of the complicated structures that the companies operate, which can bamboozle us all. Does she agree that the expected water Bill to introduce competition into the domestic market could be used to ensure that companies are more open and transparent, and pay more tax in the UK?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We are introducing further measures to improve competition in the water industry and to carry on driving efficiencies. Under the Labour Government, water bills rose by 20%, whereas Ofwat's most recent decision will lead to a fall of 5% in customers' water bills.

**Alex Cunningham:** I had hoped that the Secretary of State would have proved a greater water, consumer and taxpayer champion, so I will give her a second chance. Water UK, which represents the water companies, told the weekend media:

"Water companies are also providing more help than ever before for customers in vulnerable circumstances including social tariffs and other schemes to reduce bills."

She will know, as I do, that such schemes are arbitrary and variable. Does she agree that the next water Bill could provide an opportunity to introduce a fair scheme for all vulnerable customers?

**Elizabeth Truss:** More social tariffs are being introduced right across the country, but the key point is that everybody is seeing a reduction in their water bills overall, because we have a good regulator and an efficient industry, and we are introducing further competition.

T4. [904814] **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Dairy farmers are suffering due to low prices—there is a lot of milk in the market. One of the markets that we still cannot get into is Russia. What is happening? Is there any chance that we can get back into that market? European and British dairy farmers are paying a high price for the ban on exports to Russia.

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** My hon. Friend makes the important point that the Russian trade embargo has exacerbated the challenges facing the dairy sector and others, such as the pig sector. However, we put in place sanctions against Russia because of its totally

unacceptable conduct against Ukraine and its incursions into Ukrainian territory. It is important that we show solidarity with other European countries and do not accept how Russia has behaved towards Ukraine.

T3. [904812] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): We have already heard about the £1.6 billion profits of water companies and their £1.8 billion payout to shareholders. They are rich organisations, and some, to their credit, are already living wage accredited. Does the Secretary of State therefore back Unison's campaign for the current living wage to be paid throughout the industry?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** We have to tackle such issues directly with Ofwat. As the hon. Gentleman will know, it is extremely important for the industry to ensure that there is a predictable future in which politicians are not micromanaging. We are going through a price review process and dealing closely with Ofwat, but we must ensure that neither I nor the Secretary of State try to micromanage an independent regulator from the Dispatch Box.

T5. [904816] **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The recent Groceries Code Adjudicator report showed that Tesco breached the code of practice by delaying payments to suppliers and demanding extra fees, which has been raised with me by farmers in my constituency. What are the Government doing to ensure that further such breaches do not occur?

**George Eustice:** As my hon. Friend will be aware, we introduced regulations at the end of the previous Parliament to make it possible for the Groceries Code Adjudicator to levy fines against retailers that breach the code. The action that she took against Tesco was evidence that that is starting to work, and that she is beginning to pick up on and deal with bad practice. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will shortly be leading a review of the role of and our approach to the Groceries Code Adjudicator. As part of that, we will be looking at ways in which we might be able to improve the code.

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Recently, two of my constituents were sentenced to just six months' electronic tagging for the brutal and horrific abuse of their pet bulldog. The community has been rightly outraged by the leniency of the sentence, because these people also videoed the abuse and were laughing as they carried it out. The dog was subsequently put down. I have written to the Secretary of State for Justice, but may I ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to chase up my letter and to review animal sentencing, given that the maximum sentence for animal cruelty is just one year?

**George Eustice:** We have looked at the issue of animal sentencing; there can be an unlimited fine, and my understanding is that the sentence can be up to five years for animal cruelty. I will check that point and write to the hon. Lady if that is incorrect. The evidence shows that for most offences the courts are not using the maximum sentence, so we do not believe there is a case for changing it. We have looked at the issue of fighting dogs and organised dog fights, where there is

some evidence that the courts are restricted by current sentencing guidelines. The hon. Lady will be aware that this is an issue for the Ministry of Justice, and I am sure that its Ministers will want to discuss it with her.

**Rishi Sunak** (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): As a keen rambler himself, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), will be familiar with the coast-to-coast walk, which runs across both our constituencies. It is one of England's most popular long-distance walks, yet it is not an official national trail. Will he meet me to discuss my campaign to give the coast-to-coast the formal recognition it deserves?

**Rory Stewart**: I would be absolutely delighted to meet my hon. Friend, and in fact I propose that we meet by walking the national trail together.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): There is growing concern about the environmental impact of microbeads, the tiny pieces of plastic that are found in many consumer products and are now swilling around in our oceans. The Americans and Canadians are moving to ban them. What are the UK Government doing?

**Rory Stewart**: We are very clear that microbeads potentially pose a serious threat, because the stuff does not biodegrade and it can collect toxic material. We have run a research programme and have been working very hard to make sure that the full 500 million members of the European Union sign up to a common position, but if we cannot get a common position out of the EU, we are open to the possibility of the United Kingdom acting unilaterally.

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): Part of the fantastically successful national forest falls in my constituency. Its benefits to the community are clear, as are those of woodlands and trees more broadly to the community and to air quality. What steps are the Government taking to encourage the planting of more trees across the UK, building on their success to date?

**Rory Stewart**: I had the privilege of being in the national forest, and I can tell any Members who have not seen it that it is an extraordinary project, found between Leicester, Nottingham and Derby. It has regenerated 200 square miles of brutalised countryside and created one of the great new forests in Britain. We will be looking at taking forward ideas like that in the 25-year plan, and of course we are committed, as a minimum, to planting another 11 million trees between now and 2020.

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State please tell the House when the Government will deliver on their promise to ban wild animals in circuses?

**Elizabeth Truss**: That is a manifesto commitment and I can reassure the hon. Lady that we are committed to doing it.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): Log-burning stoves are one of the pleasures of living in the countryside and for more fashion-conscious townies. They tend to be

produced by family-owned businesses, almost all of which are in rural areas in the UK. The industry is very concerned that this great way of life and tradition might be under threat because the stoves are needlessly brought into air-quality regulations. For the sake of everyone who enjoys them and for everyone who manufactures them in rural areas, will the Minister meet the industry to try to protect them?

**Elizabeth Truss**: I thank my hon. Friend for his question; we certainly would be very happy to meet the industry to discuss that issue. I am absolutely clear that making sure we have cleaner air is a vital priority for this Government.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

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

### Same Sex Marriage: Clergy

1. **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What discussions the Church Commissioners have had with the Church of England on supporting clergy who have entered into same sex marriages or civil partnerships. [904800]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman)**: I should first declare my personal position, which is that I voted in favour of same sex marriage when the decision was before Parliament, but I do recognise that it is difficult for the Anglican Church. The Anglican Communion extends over many different cultures and many continents, and not all cultures and societies move at the same pace. It is therefore all the more remarkable that the Archbishop of Canterbury managed to get a unanimous agreement among all the bishops of the Anglican Communion, in Canterbury, in January, that there should be a new doctrine condemning homophobic prejudice and violence, and resolving “to work together to offer pastoral care and loving service irrespective of sexual orientation.”

**Cat Smith**: I thank the right hon. Lady for her answer. She will be aware that many people feel called to ministry, including, naturally, many people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Although Church of England policies protect heterosexual couples if they are in a marriage by not taking their status into account when it comes to jobs within the Church, the same is not true for those who have entered same sex marriages. Is she aware of cases of written permission from bishops placed on file, and of refusals to issue licences when new positions are sought, including even secular positions? Will she do her best to ensure that LGBT clergy are not discriminated against here in the Church of England?

**Mrs Spelman**: As I mentioned, the Anglican Communion is extremely diverse. What we must remember, living here in the liberal west, is that a typical Anglican communicant is in Africa and black, female and under 35; in many African nations there are also very strong views on this subject, and keeping the Communion together is a big challenge. It is open to Church of

England clergy to enter into civil partnerships, and many do so. The Church of England in England is moving forward in its understanding with a shared conversation, three parts of which have already occurred. In July this year, the Synod will move forward with the shared conversation about sexuality—the nature of human sexuality. I reiterate the point that the whole Communion agreed unanimously that the Church should never, by its actions, give any impression other than that every human being is the same in God’s sight regardless of sexuality.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): The Dean of Lichfield cathedral, Adrian Dorber, is always telling me how short of money the cathedral is. May I just say that I live for the day when gay clergymen can be openly gay and there will be gay marriages, which will be paid for in Lichfield cathedral and all the other cathedrals in England and the rest of the United Kingdom, in a liberal nation.

**Mrs Spelman:** I look forward to visiting the Lichfield diocese. Indeed, the Government have been very generous in their funding for repairs to that beautiful cathedral. On the specific subject of human sexuality, I do not think that the Archbishop of Canterbury could have been clearer about his leadership in bringing the whole Anglican Communion together for the first time, united behind the doctrine that we should condemn homophobic prejudice and violence at home and abroad.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Sir David Amess—not here.

#### Near Neighbours Programme

3. **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): What progress has been made on the Near Neighbours programme. [904802]

**Mrs Spelman:** I am so sorry that we do not have the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), as it would have given me an opportunity to thank Mr Speaker for hosting a reception in his apartment to celebrate the Queen’s birthday. What better opportunity could there be to bring the community together—people of all faiths and all backgrounds—in every one of our constituencies than to celebrate the birthday of the Head of the Church?

Specifically, in relation to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), I wish to highlight that a further tranche of £1.5 million-worth of funding has been made available for a Near Neighbours programme, which is administered by the Church urban fund to encourage people of different religions to come together to understand each other better and to improve the cohesiveness of our society.

**Martin Vickers:** I thank my right hon. Friend for a very full answer. In Lincolnshire, we have both coastal communities and, in the agricultural industry, many seasonal workers who come from all sorts of different faiths. Will she outline what additional work the Near Neighbours programme can do to support coastal communities and rural areas?

**Mrs Spelman:** This kind of fund provides very small grants to communities, which are used to meet a range of pressing social needs, including employment skills,

environmental work, homelessness, healthy eating projects and so on. It is significant that 71% of those projects have continued to run after the funding has ceased. It is precisely because of the diverse backgrounds of the seasonal workers in Lincolnshire—many are from the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church—that such grants could facilitate the cohesiveness of the society in my hon. Friend’s constituency.

#### Iraq: Christian Communities

4. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What discussions the Church Commissioners have had with Christian communities in Iraq on the future of those communities. [904803]

7. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What discussions the Church Commissioners have had with Christian communities in Iraq on the future of those communities. [904806]

**Mrs Spelman:** In March, the Bishops of Coventry, Leeds and Southwark, who play a leading role for the Church on international development issues, travelled with Christian Aid to Iraqi Kurdistan, where they met internally displaced people from Iraq and refugees from Syria, and saw at first hand the pressures that Christians in those communities suffer.

**Nigel Huddleston:** I appreciate the good work that the Church Commissioners are doing with the Christian communities in Iraq. What role are they playing in communicating the outcome of those discussions back to Government, and indeed congregations in the UK, and is there more that concerned Christians in my constituency can do to show the strength of feeling on that important issue?

**Mrs Spelman:** Yes, immediately upon their return the bishops, with their first-hand knowledge, wrote to the Foreign Office, drawing its attention to the persecution suffered by the Christians in those countries. In order to inform our congregations, many of us have Church-based non-governmental organisations who have produced excellent briefing documents, which are shared with parishes up and down the country so that they can pray in an informed way. I have written to the Foreign Office about what is effectively genocide, particularly of the Yazidi community, and I recommend other like-minded Members of Parliament to do the same.

**Fiona Bruce:** Persecution of Christians is an increasingly worldwide concern. I recently hosted the launch by Open Doors of its report on northern Nigeria—I visited Nigeria with the International Development Committee just a few weeks ago. The report, entitled “Crushed but not defeated”, outlines how more than 1 million Christians there have been affected by targeting, discriminatory practices and violence, including by Boko Haram. Does the right hon. Lady agree that it is crucial that the whole international community helps to address this, to restore reconciliation in communities there?

**Mrs Spelman:** Yes, we are all familiar with the terrible pictures from northern Nigeria. When the Archbishop of Canterbury convened representatives of the middle



east Churches, he actually spoke at a prayer vigil, where he highlighted that this is a moment for such evil to be brought to an end. He said:

“It must stop...If it does not stop...in...places around the world, such as northern Nigeria...it will continue to spread.”

The Church is well aware, as I am sure we all are, of the need to make a stand against this evil, so that it does not spread further.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I spent several years as special envoy on human rights to Iraq, so I met many of the beleaguered minority religions of Iraq. I hope that the Church Commissioners will look at the plight of all of them—the Mandaeans, the Yazidis and the Turkmen, to mention just a few. Will the right hon. Lady pay particular tribute to Canon Andrew White, who was known as the Bishop of Baghdad for his work over the many years that he spent in the country, attempting to bring all the warring sides together?

**Mrs Spelman:** The position of the Church of England is indeed to speak up for all religious minorities where they have been persecuted in that region, and those Church representatives could not have put it better in stating that the region is

“in desperate danger of losing an irreplaceable part of its identity, heritage and culture”

in all those religious minorities. The hon. Lady is right: Canon Andrew White has done a remarkable job speaking up for the plight of the Christians in the region. I am regularly in receipt of his email and I recommend that other Members of the House who are interested in the subject read his emails.

### Apprenticeship Levy

5. **Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): Whether the Church Commissioners have made an assessment of the effect of the apprenticeship levy on the Church of England. [904804]

**Mrs Spelman:** The Church of England supports the Government's drive to increase the number of apprentices. Apart from some of the central bodies and larger diocesan offices in cathedrals, most Church bodies will not be affected by the levy, because their payrolls fall below the £3 million threshold, but the Church is in the rather unusual position of having 8,000 office holders out of its total 24,000 employees, and the Church would very much like to see the levy being used to train more ordinands.

**Mark Spencer:** May I push my right hon. Friend to expand a little more on that unusual position? Clearly, those office holders are not employees. How does that affect their situation?

**Mrs Spelman:** In a way, the Church is an anomaly. Quite a lot of organisations have office holders—unless I am much mistaken, MPs are technically office holders—but every vicar in every parish is not in a position to employ an apprentice. Indeed, having a curate is quite a luxury, as it takes so much to train people. I hope the

Government will support the Church's quest to use some of the moneys from the apprenticeship levy to meet its shortfall of approximately 40,000 ordinands.

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): My right hon. Friend highlighted the shortage of clergy for parishes, and it is important that the apprenticeship levy does not compound that situation. Does she agree that it is also important that it is not compounded by an enforced retirement age for clergy who are able and willing to continue serving their parishes where there would often be a long interregnum otherwise? Will she take this matter up with the Church Commissioners?

**Mrs Spelman:** I expect all of us have met or been ministered to by a wise elderly priest, but the statutory retirement age for clergy is 70. Exceptions can be made. Although that is officially the retirement age, clergy may be given permission by the bishop to continue to officiate. A team vicar may have their term extended by two years, and a further extension may be achieved by a fixed-term licence, particularly in a diocese where there is special pastoral need. So there are ways in which exceptionally able clergy can continue to serve beyond the age of 70.

### ExxonMobil: Climate Change Policies

6. **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): What the purpose is of the resolution co-filed by the Church Commissioners to commission ExxonMobil to carry out an impact assessment on the effect of climate change policies on that company's portfolio and strategy. [904805]

**Mrs Spelman:** The Commissioners have co-filed a resolution with the New York State Common Retirement Fund so that ExxonMobil's shareholders can indicate to the company their wish to see better corporate reporting on the long-term risks that the transition to a low-carbon economy presents to Exxon. This includes a scenario in which the implementation of the Paris agreement restricts warming to below 2°C.

**David T. C. Davies:** Before they are too critical of the oil companies, may I suggest that the Church of England Commissioners read the Bible—Matthew 25, the parable of the oil lamps and the 10 virgins—and remember that it was the five virgins who lived happily ever after and who had a cheap and ready supply of this much-maligned fossil fuel?

**Mrs Spelman:** My hon. Friend and I perhaps do not share the same interpretation of the Bible when it comes to belief in climate change as a phenomenon. When I shortly visit the diocese of the Arctic, I shall have very much in mind the recent news that the British research station is in danger of sinking into the sea, as was shown in a documentary on television last night. Will my hon. Friend recognise that the Church Commissioners have been commended with a number of prizes for their work on an ethical investment strategy, which includes taking account of the risk that climate change poses to investments?



## Business of the House

10.32 am

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week, please?

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

**MONDAY 9 MAY**—Debate on a motion relating to BIS Sheffield proposal and Government Departments outside London. The subject for this debate was recommended by the Backbench Business Committee, followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Energy Bill, followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Housing and Planning Bill, followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Immigration Bill.

**TUESDAY 10 MAY**—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by business to be recommended by the Backbench Business Committee.

**WEDNESDAY 11 MAY**—Consideration of Lords amendments, followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Armed Forces Bill, followed by, if necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by business to be recommended by the Backbench Business Committee, followed by, if necessary, consideration of Lords amendments.

**THURSDAY 12 MAY**—Consideration of Lords amendments.

The House will be prorogued when Royal Assent to all Acts has been signified.

I should inform the House that Ministers will provide a quarterly update on Syria before Prorogation.

**Chris Bryant:** Talk of the fag end of a parliamentary session, the business the Leader has just announced is the sludgy, slimy, foul-smelling, trashy, ych a fi dregs of politics.

Yesterday's Prime Minister's questions showed me, if nobody else, that there ain't no gutter low enough for the Prime Minister to slop around in. That kind of despicable smearing of one's opponents degrades the whole of politics, and I would gently say to the Government that those who live by the gutter die in the gutter. I am absolutely certain that that kind of politics is not welcome to British voters.

What a year it has been! Every single economic target missed. Growth forecasts constantly downgraded. Debt up. Homelessness up. The use of food banks up by 19%. Absolute child poverty set to rise. NHS waiting lists up. Libraries closed. Net migration higher than it has ever been. There has been one Budget in which the Chancellor attacked working tax credits, and another in which he attacked welfare payments. Morale at rock bottom—in the NHS, the teaching profession and the police. Election rules bent to benefit the Tories in marginal seats. Financial rules rigged to give more cash to the richest councils. Standing Orders changed to benefit the Tories in this House. Was it just a cruel joke last year to make Her Majesty say:

“My Government will...adopt a one nation approach”?

Come off it, this is not a one nation Government: it is a nasty, vindictive Tory Government, balancing the books on the backs of the poor and the vulnerable. I hope

voters today will say, “Enough! Now go!” and will vote Labour in London, Wales, Scotland and across the whole United Kingdom.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): And Northern Ireland.

**Chris Bryant:** Northern Ireland is in the United Kingdom, in case the hon. Gentleman has forgotten his history.

You can tell state opening is coming. The awnings are going up outside the Lords. The Doorkeepers have been rubbing up their brasses. Countesses have been brushing off their tiaras. The Clerk has had a haircut—you cannot tell, but underneath his wig, he has had a haircut. And I gather you have even had your annual bath, Mr Speaker. [*Interruption.*] Don't do that mock outraged look, it doesn't suit you. Could we introduce an innovation this year at state opening? I know the Leader of the House does not want to listen to the President of the United States of America, but could we have a roll-call of ambassadors and high commissioners, just to check which of our allies want us to stay in the European Union? So far as I can see, they include not just our oldest ally, Portugal, and every other EU country, but the Commonwealth countries of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, and doubtless many more. Who knows, perhaps we will be adding Japan later today and of course Norway—so the Norway model is that we should stay in. The only international figure who wants us to leave is Donald Trump—Grayling with a hairpiece. How on earth can the Leader of the House argue that we would increase our influence in the world by leaving the European Union?

May we have a debate about the BBC? The Culture Secretary says he relishes the demise of the BBC. He wants to ban “Strictly” and “The Voice” and to force the BBC to make deliberately unpopular programmes. He has even said that if he does not renew the BBC charter by the end of this year,

“it may be that the BBC will cease to exist”—

something he calls “a tempting prospect.” Now, I do not want to get into the Culture Secretary's temptations, but when will Ministers get it into their fat heads that the British people love the BBC? They are proud of it and see it as our greatest cultural institution, and they do not want some right-wing Minister pursuing a personal agenda and handing British broadcasting over lock, stock and barrel to his chum Murdoch. Will the Government publish the White Paper next week, stand by the financial deal they signed up to with the BBC last year and guarantee that there will be a new 11-year BBC charter in place this autumn?

In recent years, some of the most destructively powerful people in the land have done their level best to avoid appearing before Select Committees of this House. The Maxwells, Rebekah Brooks, Rupert and James Murdoch, Philip Green, Matthew Elliott—they all initially refused to attend and had to be formally summonsed or persuaded to attend. Irene Rosenfeld, chief executive of Kraft Foods, point-blank refused to appear to discuss the takeover of Cadbury and got away with it. Surely that is not just a clear contempt of Parliament, but a contempt of the British public as well. Our constituents want us to hold the powerful to account, and we should not be shy of doing so. Some people think our powers are unclear, and witnesses are beginning to call our bluff, so

[Chris Bryant]

we have to do something. In 2013, the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege recommended changes to Standing Orders to make it absolutely clear that Parliament can arrest, punish and fine offenders, saying that

“if the problems we have identified...are not resolved...today’s Parliament should stand ready to legislate”.

The Committee said that doing nothing was not an option, but that is exactly what the Government have done—absolutely nothing. So surely it is time for us to make it a criminal offence to fail to appear or refuse to appear without reasonable excuse before a Committee of this House.

The mayoral election ends today, so will we finally now get a decision on Heathrow? In the words of Bucks Fizz in their epic Eurovision-winning number, “Making Your Mind Up”, just before they so memorably tore off their skirts,

“Don’t let your indecision

Take you from behind.

Trust your inner vision

Don’t let others change your mind.”

Incidentally, good luck to Joe and Jake next week—let us hope the UK agrees with them that “You’re Not Alone” in the European referendum on 23 June.

**Chris Grayling:** May I start, Mr Speaker, by congratulating you on your indulgence and your patience? I am sure you have powers that would enable you to take much more robust action against comments such as the ones we have just heard.

What a load of twaddle we just heard from the shadow Leader of the House. Let us be clear: we have spent the past 12 months fulfilling the trust that the public put in us at the general election last year when we defeated the Labour party. Let us look at the things that this Government have done. We have introduced new powers to turn around failing schools. We have paved the way for the northern powerhouse. We have passed the European Union Referendum Act 2015. We have provided substantial new powers of devolution to Scotland. We have paved the way for the national living wage. We have passed English votes for English laws. We have passed a childcare Act that doubles the amount of free childcare each week. We have taken further important steps to consolidate peace in Northern Ireland. These are real achievements that Government Members are proud of.

The hon. Gentleman talks about a one nation party. I am proud to be part of a Government who have seen unemployment fall to its lowest levels since the 1970s. It is worth remembering that there has never yet been a Labour Government who left office with unemployment lower than it was when they started. I am also proud that we are living in a nation where we now have more than half a million fewer children growing up in workless households than there were in 2010—a legacy of poverty that we inherited from the previous Government and that we are turning around.

The hon. Gentleman talks about the language of politics. I hear the language of politics on the Opposition Benches as Labour Members fight like ferrets in a sack,

desperately working out how to deal with their leadership crisis and trying to deal with the endemic problem of anti-Semitism in their party.

It is worth saying today that this week marks the 37th anniversary of a great step forward in equality in our society: the moment we elected our first woman Prime Minister. I am sure that everyone, even the shadow Leader of the House, would agree that that was a really crucial moment in our political history that we should mark unreservedly.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the BBC. Once again, he is making the mistake that I am surprised he does make of always believing everything he reads in the papers. He needs to wait for the White Paper on the BBC, which will be brought before the House shortly. He and his colleagues will have the opportunity to question that White Paper when it appears, but I say simply that Conservative Members expect the BBC to have a strong future in this country.

The hon. Gentleman made a serious point—among others—about attending Select Committees. On this point, he and I do agree. It is essential for the workings of this House that if people are summoned to appear before a Select Committee, they do so. I am very happy that in the new Session we hold cross-party discussions on how we ensure that happens.

The hon. Gentleman asked about Heathrow. I am surprised, because Labour Members have been raising issues about air quality, and the reason we are taking time over the airport decision is precisely to address air quality and NOx emissions around Heathrow. If they were in government, they would be doing exactly the same thing.

As the hon. Gentleman said, today is of course local election day. There are not just local elections—we have mayoral elections and police and crime commissioner elections. I think we should send our thanks from this House to everyone involved in those elections—the officials, the counting agents and the police, as well as every participant, regardless of their political persuasion, because without them putting their heads above the parapet to stand for election we would not have a democracy in this country. Obviously, I want Conservatives to win. We will watch with great interest, though, after the Labour leader said that he was going to lose no seats at all at these local elections, to see whether his forecast is fulfilled. The next few days will be big ones for the shadow Leader of the House, because we know how much disquiet there is among Labour Members about the leader of their party. Members of the Shadow Front-Bench team are seriously considering quitting over the next few days because of their despair about their leader.

The shadow Leader of the House has other targets in mind. He has a campaign group set up, and he has been courting support from Conservative Members for his plan in due course, when you decide to hang up your hat, Mr Speaker, to take over from you. If he has a different goal, if his Front-Bench position does not matter to him and if he really does not approve of his party leader, will he join those who are looking to put principle before career in the next few days and resign after these elections?

**Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend consider allowing a short debate on the Government's 2014 review of sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983? I raise the matter because I am particularly concerned about the application of section 136 in private premises, where the ability of the police to intervene for the safety of a disturbed individual, even in an emergency, is pitifully limited.

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The issue of mental health causes concern on both sides of the House, and I will make sure that the Health Secretary is aware of the comments that he has made. We have Health questions next week, and I am happy to make sure that the Health Secretary is aware of the matter. It is also a matter for the Home Secretary, and I will make sure that she is aware of the concerns that my hon. Friend has raised.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing what amounts to, and what is left of, next week's business. It is great to have such overwhelming support from my Scottish National party colleagues, who are, of course, in Scotland fighting to ensure that we get an unprecedented third term of SNP Government, and that we get a majority SNP Government in a Parliament that is designed to ensure that that prospect does not happen. I echo the thanks of the Leader of the House to all who are involved in today's elections, and I congratulate them on the efforts they are making.

Our attention now turns to what will happen once the elections are concluded. It is hard to believe, but the Conservatives have been quite constrained, thus far, to try to ensure that they get the best possible result today. After today, I see the prospect of them tearing lumps out of each other. Friendships forged in the playground of Eton will amount to nothing as they get oiled up for this gladiatorial contest. It is going to be the greatest Tory show on earth. Perhaps we should look at getting in the peacekeepers, because Labour's result tomorrow will result in them tearing lumps out of each other, too.

We need an urgent statement on what is going on with the investigation of the Conservative party for breaking campaign spending rules in last year's general election. The claims are absolutely extraordinary, and they centre around 28 Conservative candidates failing to register the use of a battle bus for local campaigning and some £38,000 of accommodation for local campaigns. If anybody is found guilty of such a charge, they could face one year's imprisonment and an unlimited fine. Surely, we must hear the Government's view on that. There must be no whiff of a suggestion that this Government cheated their way to power.

I think that we in this House all welcome the apparent U-turn on child refugees made by the Prime Minister yesterday in response to sustained questioning from my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). It would be useful, however, to know whether the Government intend to accept the Dubs amendment on Monday without any amendment of their own. It would be good if the Leader of the House announced that today, so that the nation knows whether the Government are going to do the right thing.

Finally, it is worth while, as the Labour shadow Leader of the House said, acknowledging what has happened with our business this year. The biggest innovation

in the workings of the House has been English votes for English laws: something so divisive, so useless and so incomprehensible has defined Parliament in the last Session. As we go into the next Session of Parliament, an urgent review is very much required, and I seriously hope that English votes for English laws will be hopelessly consigned to the dustbin of history and that we will become a House that has one class of Member once again.

**Chris Grayling:** I echo the hon. Gentleman's comments about the election in Scotland, and my comments about those who are involved in today's elections very much extend to those involved in Scotland. We should be grateful to everyone who works hard to make these elections a success. I have a sneaking suspicion that he and I have a shared interest in today's elections in Scotland, because we both want the Labour party to do badly. I am confident that under the leadership of Ruth Davidson we have every chance of consigning the Labour party in Scotland to third place—frankly, that is where it belongs.

The hon. Gentleman talked about civil war within political parties, but I am afraid he is looking in the wrong direction. It is very clear that, even though the shadow Leader of the House will not put principle before career, many of his Front-Bench colleagues are clearly profoundly unhappy with their party leader. I expect to see all kinds of trouble in the Labour party after the elections, which the hon. Gentleman and I will both watch with interest. He will not see anything like that among Members on our Benches, because the hostility existing between people in the same party in this House is all to be found on the Labour Benches.

On the issues relating to electoral and other activities, I simply remind the hon. Gentleman that it is for the proper authorities to address such issues whenever they arise. I have been very careful to say that that is the case when those issues have affected the Scottish nationalists, as we have seen in recent months. On the subject of child refugees, the Prime Minister set out our position very clearly during Prime Minister's questions yesterday.

On English votes for English laws, we have had this debate many times over recent months, but I simply remind the hon. Gentleman that people in Scotland are today electing a new Administration that will have more power to govern Scotland than ever before. It is for the SNP to decide how to use those powers if it is successful in today's elections. I think the Scottish nationalists will find it is much tougher than they expect to take real decisions, rather than simply to talk about things. We stand by our view that it is right and proper to ensure that England has a share in the devolution settlement as well, and that is what we have done.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): May we have a debate in this place so that we can be truly obnoxious and rude about the debacle of connecting Devon and Somerset with broadband? It has been an absolute fiasco. The two people who have caused the most trouble—the Laurel and Hardy of this entire affair—are John Hart and Peter Doyle. It is beyond a joke: they are just not connecting Devon and Somerset. May we have a chance to vent our spleen in



[Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger]

this place to make sure they clearly get the message that they should just go and should let someone who can actually connect Devon and Somerset get on with it?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes his point very succinctly, as is his customary style when he faces challenges in his constituency. He brings a certain panache to his role as the Member of Parliament for Bridgwater and West Somerset, and I commend him for it.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. Members will have noted that time has been allocated for Backbench Business Committee debates on both Tuesday and Wednesday. Because of the uncertainty of the timing of business for next week, the Backbench Business Committee has had to make contingency plans. We have prioritised outstanding applications for the remainder of the Session for 10 and 11 May, when we hope to secure debates on the effect of the implementation of universal credit on children and on the frozen pensions of UK pension recipients residing abroad. Which debate will be on which day is a matter for negotiation with the primary sponsors of the applications for those debates, but we hope to be able to inform the House about that as soon as possible.

May I thank the Clerk and the support staff of the Backbench Business Committee for their professionalism, patience and, in my case, humour in our dealings with them in the past year and during this Session?

**Chris Grayling:** As we near the end of the Session, it is appropriate to thank the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee for the work he has done over the past few months and, indeed, to thank the other members of the Committee for their work. It is also appropriate for me to express my good wishes, because I know that this is a tense and nervous time for the hon. Gentleman. There are a few days left before he learns the truth, but we will keep our fingers crossed. His team is just above the relegation zone, and I am sure he will keep fingers firmly crossed, although perhaps not quite in the same way as his colleague, the former shadow Chancellor, will be doing over in Norwich. It will be a tense few days.

I echo the points that the hon. Gentleman made. I very much hope that, over the coming Session, he will see greater participation by Members in bringing forward ideas for debates. I know that, on occasion, not as many subjects for debate have been suggested as the Committee would wish. My message to the House as a whole is that this involves a large slice of parliamentary time and hon. Members on both sides of the House should try to use it as fully as possible.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): May I echo the words of other Members about today's elections? I of course hope that people will vote Conservative, but given the amount of effort put in, there will be far more losers than winners. I think we should have a statement next week on how well our parliamentary democracy and our local government elections are working.

May I also take this opportunity to thank both the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House for the way in which they have conducted business

questions in this Session? I wish the shadow Leader of the House in particular all the best for the future—I am not referring to his alleged efforts to take your place, Mr Speaker, as I hope you will be here for a very long time to come; I was thinking in other directions.

May we have a statement next week on whether we are going to go forward with changes to the relationship between this House and the other place? If we are to go ahead with those changes, can we make sure that we have proper and lengthy consultation first, because it is clearly a constitutional matter?

**Chris Grayling:** I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. I did not actually say this, but because next Thursday is when we are due to prorogue there will be no business questions. I am grateful to him for his comments and for being such an assiduous attender of these sessions, bringing colour to the occasion, if nothing else. [Interruption.] The shadow Leader of the House says that my hon. Friend has not been here for weeks, but you and I will remember, Mr Speaker, that his tie has been a regular attender in recent times; we could not really miss him, could we?

I give my hon. Friend an assurance that changes that have a constitutional impact will never be brought before this House without proper time for consideration of their implications and purpose.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): May I say in defence of the shadow Leader of the House that, unlike other Members in this place, he is going to be safe in his constituency for as long as he wishes to stay there, because time after time the Rhondda gives one of the largest majorities in Britain to its MP?

I have been here for more than 30 years, and have never felt so devalued as I did during the vote earlier this week on the Housing and Planning Bill, when I trooped through the Lobby and my vote was not counted in the total. It is an outrageous situation. I hope that the House of Commons will look at this issue again. We have always believed that Members are of equal value, wherever we come from—England, Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales—but it appears that we no longer are.

If I may stretch your patience a moment longer, Mr Speaker, may I say to the Leader of the House that I do not think that the Prime Minister made the situation about child refugees clear? In fact, all the commentators were saying it was much too vague. Who will the child refugees be, when are they coming, in what numbers, where are they going to go and what preparation will be made on their behalf? I already feel totally distressed by the failure over the past months to deal with the child refugees—in fact, all the refugees—as we should have. This country has always had a proud tradition on this, but I am afraid the present Government have devalued that.

**Mr Speaker:** The right hon. Lady wants a statement on the matter.

**Chris Grayling:** Although I do not doubt, given the popularity of the shadow Leader of the House in Wales, that his position is secure for the foreseeable future, I am surprised that the right hon. Lady seems to



be countenancing the idea that a number of other Labour Members will not be here in the future. Perhaps that is what will happen under their current leader.

On the issue of the counting of the right hon. Lady's vote, it is never acceptable for any Member's vote not to be counted. Of course mistakes sometimes happen, but I am sure you have listened to her point, Mr Speaker. Within the rules of the House, everyone participates in all Divisions that take place except those in the Legislative Grand Committees.

I have to say that not only do I disagree with what the right hon. Lady said about child refugees, but her actual comments are deeply disparaging to those working in the camps in and around Syria, supported by British money, to help bring refugees from those camps to the United Kingdom. We are doing more than virtually any other country in the world to provide support to those refugees. She should be proud of that.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): A criminal in Bradford—who was, incidentally, out on licence from a four and a half year prison sentence—evaded arrest by throwing acid in the face of a police officer and was given only a 20-month sentence for that assault, to the understandable disgust of the Police Federation. That was not, in my view, the fault of the judge, who did his best within the sentencing guidelines. Assaults on police officers and other public servants are aggravating factors in sentencing, but no guidance is given as to how much longer a sentence should be for such an assault. May we have a debate on the topic, so that we can consider the length of sentence that should be added in the case of aggravating factors such as assaults on police officers and other public servants, so that they are treated as seriously as they should be by the courts and so that public servants are given the protection that they deserve?

**Chris Grayling:** I have a lot of sympathy with my hon. Friend's points, and he will remember that I legislated to introduce a mandatory whole-life tariff for those who kill police officers or prison officers in their line of duty. Other issues are related to attacks on police officers, and I am sure that the Justice Secretary will have heard my hon. Friend's comments. We should always work to provide the maximum possible support for our public servants and give judges the powers they need to deal with appalling situations such as the one he describes.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): May I add my voice to those of the many hon. Members who have congratulated Leicester City on their premier league win? To win the title as 5,000:1 outsiders is a truly remarkable achievement. I am a regular member of the parliamentary football team and sadly odds of 5,000:1 are about right for us just to win a match. However, all hon. Members are welcome to come and watch our next match at Millwall on 23 May, when we will mark the 20th anniversary of "Show Racism the Red Card".

The average age of a premier league season ticketholder is now well into the 40s, and there is a real concern that younger people are being priced out of the game. May we have a debate on what more can be done to enable the next generation of football fans to attend premier league matches regularly?

**Chris Grayling:** I echo the hon. Gentleman's comments about Leicester City's extraordinary achievement, which will live in the annals of sport in this country for a long time to come. Of course, we will all be cheering them on in the champions league next year. It is also appropriate to express our congratulations and condolences to Tottenham Hotspur. At the start of the season, nobody would have expected the top two in the premier league to be Leicester and Tottenham Hotspur.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about premier league prices. I commend those clubs that are trying to make cheaper tickets available to young people. It is of paramount importance that in today's world football is a family occasion in a way that it was not perhaps a generation ago. If we look back to the terrible events at Hillsborough that were described in the House a few days ago, we can see that it was a different world. Football has become a much more family-friendly and open place. We would not want that to change because of high prices.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): May we have a debate on the future of the UK's military partnerships? NATO has been the cornerstone of our defence since 1949 and has helped to keep the peace in Europe, but now Germany and other members of the European Union want an EU army.

**Chris Grayling:** That question gives me an opportunity to speak for both the Government and the leave campaign, which—as people know—I support. It is everyone's view on both sides in the Government—and I would hope on the other side of the Chamber too—that we do not want the creation of a European army, or our armed forces subsumed into such an army. That is a uniting factor on our side of the House.

**Philip Boswell** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): Given the seriousness of the election fraud allegations made by Channel 4, the Leader of the House's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) was just not good enough. Does the Leader of the House not agree that it is incumbent on the Government to take action and work with any investigation, police or otherwise—and if there is none, to instigate one—especially as the allegations have been made against the party in government?

**Chris Grayling:** I simply repeat my earlier point: when allegations are made, there are proper authorities to investigate them.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): There seems to be some confusion out in the country about whether people need to re-register to vote in the EU referendum on 23 June. I would of course never seek to pass comment on these matters, but I have been led to believe that some of this confusion is emanating from the Government's pro-EU propaganda. May we have a statement next week to put this matter beyond doubt and clarify the situation?

**Chris Grayling:** Let me set the matter completely straight today: anyone who is currently on the electoral roll does not need to re-register for the referendum.

**Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): A Kent firm has bought the profitable community pub, the Bull's Head in Rochdale. Behind the backs of the landlord, landlady and regulars, it is now trying to turn it into a veterinary surgery. I accept the Government have done some good work to protect pubs, but perhaps we need a debate on whether planning powers need strengthening further to protect excellent pubs like the Bull's Head.

**Chris Grayling:** Our changes to planning laws have given local authorities greater control. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point: we have seen a distressingly large number of pubs disappear around the country. Local authorities and local communities have greater powers than they did. I share his view that it is a great shame if a much loved local pub disappears. One hopes that that does not continue in this country; we have lost too many already.

**Calum Kerr** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): The Scottish National party manifesto for today's Scottish Parliament election commits to examining the feasibility of extending the Borders railway, which was opened last year and has proved to be a huge success. I support its extension to Hawick and Carlisle. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on this matter, so that we can hear and discuss how the UK Government would propose to support such a significant and exciting national infrastructure project?

**Chris Grayling:** The new Administration in Scotland, whatever their political persuasion, will be able to pursue devolved matters, including transport. If the line crosses the border into England, I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will wish to discuss carefully and constructively with the new Scottish Administration how we can ensure that the route is completed.

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): May we have a debate on the future of the Crown post office network—Post Office Ltd is looking to franchise 39 of the Crown post offices, including Lancaster in my constituency—and the relationship MPs have with Post Office Ltd? Many MPs will agree that they have found Post Office Ltd difficult to work with and to get clear answers from.

**Chris Grayling:** I am sure the hon. Lady's comments will be noted by the Post Office. It has been through big changes in this Parliament, but we have now finally reached a point where it is much less of a drain on the public purse, and we can spend the money on other priorities. I understand the point she makes, but it is in all our interests in today's world to spend money where it will be most useful.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Last week, we had a 60-minute debate in Westminster Hall on East Anglian devolution. It was massively oversubscribed, reflecting the unhappiness of Members across the House about what has been going on. I suspect we would find similar disquiet in other parts of the country. Thousands of people are standing for election to local councils today. A complete constitutional mess is being created in this country. Will the Leader of the House allow a proper discussion in this House on what we are actually doing?

**Chris Grayling:** We just heard from the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee that it does not necessarily have enough applications for business at the moment. That will, of course, carry through into the new Session, when more time will be available. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will find a ready audience for such a debate.

## Backbench Business

### Voluntary Sector: Faith Organisations

11.8 am

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the contribution of faith organisations to the voluntary sector in local communities.

Christians possess a rich heritage of social reform and charitable care that is alive today. In the 19th century, William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury led campaigns for the abolition of slavery and child labour. Others, such as Barnardo and William and Catherine Booth, were involved in founding charitable organisations, covering every conceivable form of human need, as an expression of Christian love. The Christian principles that drove Wilberforce and Shaftesbury are still very much alive in Britain today and are as relevant as ever.

The Evangelical Alliance, the largest and oldest body representing evangelical Christians in the UK, estimates that there are more than 2 million evangelicals in the UK. This is an increasingly diverse constituency, including 500,000 Christians from black majority churches and, more widely, over 1 million UK Christians from black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities.

To clarify, I shall speak mainly about the contribution of Christian communities, as those are the ones I know best. I am sure that other hon. Members will speak about the contribution of other faiths to our local communities.

The 2014 national church and social action survey listed the top 10 activities of churches sampled as involving: food distribution; parent and toddler groups; school assemblies and religious education work; festivals and fun days; children's clubs for those aged up to 11; caring for the elderly; debt counselling; youth work for those aged 12 to 18; cafés that are open to the public; and marriage counselling courses. Every one of these activities takes place in my constituency, most multiple times. The tremendous work done by church members in my constituency is, I am sure, representative of that taking place across the country, often in the toughest and most challenging situations and areas. I am talking about street pastors helping the homeless at night; addiction support; job clubs, which are particularly successful in New Life church in my constituency; helping victims of human trafficking; supporting children with special needs; prison visiting; literacy projects; fostering and adoption support; and getting alongside those with mental health problems.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. To add to her list, over Christmas when we had terrible floods in Yorkshire, some of the people who helped the most in our communities were from faith-based organisations. I should particularly mention the Salvation Army and the mosques in Bradford; people from them came over to my constituency to help with the clear-up operation. They play a vital role when there is an emergency such as flooding.

**Fiona Bruce:** My hon. Friend is quite right, and indeed the Brethren also play a vital role in disaster relief support. The value of these activities to society is

vast. They represent a glue that holds together the fabric of our communities, particularly in many needy places. Indeed, I have heard it said that youth work in this country would collapse without the churches' involvement. Toddlers might miss out on the developmental benefits of playing with others at a vital age, and their mothers—particularly young mums—would miss out on relationship building and support. Cafés provide not only nutritious, wholesome and economical meals in pleasant surroundings, but a place with a listening ear for the vulnerable, the lonely and the low.

Marriage counselling services invest in families and stable homes, which we know bring massive benefits to society, in terms of children's mental health and educational attainment. When things go wrong, there is a great emotional cost to families and society. In fact, the Marriage Foundation has estimated that the cost of family breakdown is greater than the entire defence budget. That shows the invaluable contribution that strengthening family life can make to our society.

On caring for the elderly, we know what a strain our social services are under, caring for an ageing population and providing them with dignity, when families are often at a distance. It is so often the church that fills the gap when things do not work out as intended. Faith-based organisations and charities often go the extra mile in ensuring that someone is seen, remembered and reassured. They often provide bereavement support, too.

Faith groups and churches are doing vital work on debt counselling, helping individuals to best manage their finances. We know the cost of spiralling debt: it can lead to family breakdown, emotional heartache and misery for many. I commend the work of Christians Against Poverty, which works with the whole person to provide a range of services for those in debt, without any public funding. It was recently named debt advice provider of the year at an industry awards ceremony.

I can confidently say that most of these services are provided without public funding. Where public funding is obtained, the value for money is outstanding. To speak for a moment in monetary terms, a recent report by the Cinnamon Network, the "Cinnamon Faith Action Audit", estimates that collectively the Church provides over £3 billion of social support to UK society. It also found that faith groups deliver 220,000 social action projects, serve 48 million beneficiaries, and mobilise 2 million volunteers. The Church may not be perfect, but without her society would certainly notice a difference.

Research by the Evangelical Alliance found that 81% of evangelical Christians do some form of voluntary work, serving in the wider community with their church at least once a year, and 37% do so at least once a week. At the recent mayoral hustings for churches in London, the Church of England was quoted as having three times as many outlets in the capital as Starbucks. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) said in his remarks at the end of the debate:

"The Evangelical Alliance is part of the Big Society, on the front line tackling crime, on the front line tackling homelessness, and so many other of the challenges London is facing."

That is so true.

I shall now refer to other quotes from both individuals and organisations, including one from the Prime Minister who said:



[Fiona Bruce]

“I’m an unapologetic supporter of the role of faith in this country...Across the country, we have tens of thousands of fantastic faith-based charities. Every day they’re performing minor miracles in local communities. As Prime Minister, I’ve worked hard to stand up for these charities and give them more power and support. If my party continues in government, it’s our ambition to do even more.”

I was very pleased indeed to hear that. Similarly, several local authorities have spoken positively of the contribution that church groups make to our local communities, many of them speaking of the fact that they are closely embedded and close to the grassroots of their communities. They speak of their continuing involvement in local communities, which is so important.

Today is an election day. Political parties will come and go when it comes to their authorities in our communities, but the Churches will be there enduring—this century, as they did last century and for centuries before. That is why it is so important that we support them in the way that we need to.

**Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that these faith groups are the unsung heroes of society, who—day in, day out—selflessly look after others and provide help within our communities without looking for any thanks whatever, doing so purely for the satisfaction of being able to help people less fortunate than ourselves?

**Fiona Bruce:** I absolutely agree and thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention.

Churches across the country are not just buildings that bring people together; they are made up of people of all ages, of all political persuasions, the well-off and the not so well-off who, compelled by compassion, work—day in, day out—alongside some of the most vulnerable on our streets and estates to support our local communities.

Local authorities, however, would do well to improve their understanding of what faith groups do and the way that they work. I believe this has improved over recent years, but I still think more could be done. During the last Parliament, the all-party Christian group produced a report that dealt with this issue. Some of its recommendations still stand today. Local authorities have been concerned about, for want of a better word, the “motivation” of faith groups, while faith groups themselves often have a limited understanding of how local government works and the language required to engage with it.

Guidance from central Government on how to improve these relations and how to improve religious literacy on the part of all of us working in our local communities would be helpful. Steps should be taken to help us all understand the diversity of beliefs in today’s United Kingdom—a key factor in strengthening civil society and promoting community cohesion, stability and resilience. Also helpful would be an approach by local authorities to provide what has been termed “reasonable accommodation” of religion and belief, wherever possible.

Faith groups do not expect funding for what is often called “proselytisation”, but they do ask to be free to be open about their beliefs and values. If, for example, a conversation starts naturally during voluntary work, it

is not unreasonable to be allowed to continue it, particularly if it was initiated by those who are being helped. It is, after all, their faith that motivates religious people to work in their local communities in the first place. An approach should be adopted that allows faith groups to be open about their beliefs and values and the practices they encourage rather than promoting a privatisation of belief. This would provide for authentic religious expression.

Many Christians, in particular, are deeply concerned about their religious liberty and freedom of expression. Not so long ago, the Evangelical Alliance conducted a poll, and 97% of those who responded said that

“policies which ensure religious liberty and freedom of expression were important to them”,

and 71%—1.3 million people—said that it would affect their votes. That is almost an election-shifting number. Of all the concerns that were highlighted in the poll, that was the one that mattered most to Christians, even more than issues such as euthanasia and policies to reduce the availability of pornography. The Government would do well to note that.

Many of the recommendations contained in the Christians in Parliament report “Faith in the Community”, produced in 2013, remain relevant today. Only last week, the Oasis Foundation published a report entitled “Faith in Public Service—The Role of the Church in Public Service Delivery”. Time prohibits my quoting from it in as much detail as I should like, but I do want to quote from one or two sections. For instance, the report stated:

“Local authorities...have yet to grasp the opportunities for engagement with the voluntary sector”.

That, I think, is very relevant to the work of the churches, which is what the report was highlighting. It also stated that

“the Church possesses...An unparalleled reach and volunteer membership...A sense of ‘place’ both in terms of physical presence and as a bridge into local communities...A traditional and largely accepted...role in community cohesion and regeneration...The ability to deliver locally-specific integrated services, tailored to individual needs, with both personality and precision. These strengths have enabled individual churches around the country to engage confidently in the delivery of...important projects that have benefited their local communities. Research commissioned for this report finds that churches feel confident in that delivery and the public feels confident in the competency and abilities of church groups to deliver those services.”

I pay tribute to organisations such as the Cinnamon Network, the street pastors, the Trussell Trust and Christians Against Poverty, all of which have done important work in encouraging that level of confidence. They have rolled out programmes that churches have been able to adopt, knowing that they will be successful and effective. However, according to the 2013 report:

“There remains a perception on the part of local authorities and the public that faith organisations will be conditional in who they deliver services to and that they will seek to proselytise...that fear is more one of perception than reality”.

I ask Ministers to think about how we can get the balance right, ensuring that there is the freedom of religion that is so yearned for by people of faith while also ensuring that local church groups are confident that they can engage with local authorities, that the expression of their faith will be accepted and understood, and that they are able to exhibit it freely. We can all do more in that regard.



Let me make one more point before I end my speech. A great many organisations and volunteers are concerned about a proposal, on which consultation took place a few months ago, for Ofsted inspectors to regulate and inspect out-of-school activities among young people that take up more than six hours a week. Earlier this year, the Schools Minister told us that there had been more than 10,000 responses to that proposal, although the consultation had taken place over the Christmas period. It is proposed that if members of a Christian youth group engage in sport or games on one day a week, or meet on one evening a week and, perhaps, on Sundays to discuss their faith, Ofsted inspectors can visit them to establish whether their activities are compatible with a list of British values drawn up by the Government to find out whether they are extremist. Could any of the types of work that I have described today be described as extremist? Actually, perhaps they could, because of their love, care and concern for the most vulnerable and needy in our society. However, I submit that there is nothing less British than the Government restricting the expression of religious faith based on an arbitrary set of values drawn up in Whitehall. That is the very opposite of what I understand conservatism to be.

Ofsted inspectors are unlikely to be looking for illegal activities. They will be looking for activities that fit into a vaguely defined list of sentiments such as non-violent extremism. This was criticised only yesterday at the Joint Committee on Human Rights—a Committee of both Houses on which I sit—as being an impossibly vague definition. It is not clear what the list of British values actually involves. There have been countless statements on the matter from Ministers, including the Prime Minister, and a number of uses of it in regulations. If the Government do not have a clear idea of what these values are, how can anyone else do so? As we in this House should be well aware, vague laws and vague policies are a breeding ground for abuse and misapplication.

There is grave concern on the part of many Christians across the country about these proposals, and rightly so. A witness who appeared before the Joint Committee yesterday told us that the proposals could deter volunteerism. That is by no means the first time we have heard that opinion being expressed, including by many faith organisations. Many small immensely valuable initiatives fear that if they use the wrong word or if their words or phrases are misinterpreted, they will come under unfair scrutiny from inspectors, whose job is to inspect schools.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that concerns have also been expressed by teachers? Many of the volunteers who work in Sunday schools and other youth organisations are teachers, and they are afraid about possible damage to their professional reputation following an Ofsted inspection. This could well result in their withdrawing from such work, which would be hugely damaging to those organisations.

**Fiona Bruce**: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that teachers are concerned about their professional reputations and even about their jobs.

Ofsted's job is to inspect educational standards in schools, not to make ideological judgments about church youth groups or any other voluntary initiatives. Professor Julian Rivers told us in his evidence to the Joint Committee

on Human Rights that the proposal could well be in breach of the European convention on human rights because even the registration—let alone the inspection—would restrict the free exercise of religion.

A joint statement made last month by several national organisations representing millions of Christians said of the proposals that

“the scope for vexatious complaints is considerable, especially in the current climate of aggressive secularism and religious illiteracy.”

That is something that I mentioned earlier. The statement went on:

“Whilst Christians wholeheartedly support reasonable measures to prevent terrorism and violent extremism, these proposals will lead to a loss of civil liberties and create a large bureaucracy that will divert resources away from restraining extremists who reject UK law. Such individuals will simply ignore or effortlessly circumvent the registration requirements. We urge the government to drop these proposals and develop a targeted, intelligence-led approach that will genuinely inhibit the activities of violent extremists.”

I ask the Minister to consider this and supply a response to these concerns, perhaps not in this debate but later.

I should like to give the House an example of an organisation that is concerned about the proposals. Christian Camping International UK provides in excess of 30,000 children and young people with more than 500 events across more than 250 venues. They are experts in this sector. My own boys have benefited from camping holidays run by faith groups. The organisation has listed a number of potential unintended consequences from the proposals. It says:

“Much of the activity referred to above is dependent on a large number of volunteers. Finding volunteers is a constant issue and the Government should be aware that increasing the level of bureaucracy involved in providing such events will only exacerbate the difficulty.”

The organisation points out that it is already regulated in a number of ways, including under charity laws and regulations and safeguarding regulations, and through the Disclosure and Barring Service. It says that

“there are no examples of such Christian ministries in the UK teaching extremism, nor encouraging young people to celebrate terrorism or become terrorists...The proposals have the potential both to overload the sector with more costs and red tape...which the Government seems to have radically underestimated”.

I ask the Minister to respond to that.

The Government have begun to roll back on some of the proposals put out in the consultation document. Earlier this year, the Minister for Schools said that one-off residential activities would not be included, and we have had an indication that Sunday schools would also not be included. While I welcome those intentions, I point out again to the Government that the proposals have severe issues that run far deeper than those few qualifications can address.

**Mr Speaker**: Has the hon. Lady concluded her speech?

**Fiona Bruce**: I am conscious that it is important not to take more than a fair amount of time. There is much more that I could say on the issue, but I believe that I have made the important points.

**Mr Speaker**: Thank you. I was merely asking.

11.30 am

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on securing this debate. She has certainly kept the Backbench Business Committee busy in recent weeks and to great effect, not least on this occasion. I agree with everything she said, including her apposite criticism of the Government's dreadful proposal in effect to turn Ofsted into a state regulator of religion. I hope that her criticisms will be heeded by the Minister and that the proposal will be abandoned in due course.

I hope that this debate will achieve two things. First, I hope it will draw attention to the extraordinary scale and importance of the contributions made by faith-based organisations to communities up and down the country. The hon. Lady set out well the breadth of what is being done. Secondly, I hope that the debate will allow us to consider a specific proposal made by the all-party parliamentary group for faith and society, which I chair, to ease the constraints that currently hold back faith-based organisations when they seek to work with both national and local government. I will set out that proposal and I hope that the Minister will be able to respond to it.

There is undoubtedly a new movement of faith-based social activism in Britain today. Its significance has not yet been fully understood or acknowledged, but at a time when some people argue that religious faith is on the way out, there is no doubt that the movement is making a growing and immensely positive contribution to our society. The movement is one of the most hopeful developments around.

I chaired the advisory group for a report by the think-tank Demos called "Exploring the role of faith in British society and politics...". It was published in 2013 and is available on the Demos website. The researchers analysed the UK findings of the European Values Study, a regular, highly regarded pan-European survey, and found that about one in eight people in Britain say when asked, "I belong to a religious organisation." Demos cross-tabulated that with participation in volunteering, and the analysis showed that people who say that they belong to a religious organisation are far more likely to volunteer than others. More than that, it showed that for quite a number of the types of volunteering examined, including volunteering for a trade union, on local community action, on women's issues, on international development and on human rights, the one in eight who belong to a religious organisation account for a larger number of volunteers than the entire seven in eight who do not. That tells us something important and surprising—perhaps even rather unsettling for some—about where the capacity to change things for the better can be found in modern Britain.

The most striking example, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Congleton, has been the food bank phenomenon. If we had speculated 10 years ago about what would happen if tens of thousands of people were suddenly, following changes of Government policy, unable to afford enough food for themselves and their families, I certainly would not have predicted that the faith groups would have been the ones to step up to meet the need. That, however, is what has happened. The 400-plus food banks organised by the Trussell Trust have provided food for more than half a million households in the past year, giving, on average, just over two lots of three-day emergency food supplies to each

of them. Every one of those food banks is based on a Church. Islamic Relief has organised in a number of areas in the mosques to collect food in support of those food banks, too. It has turned out that in 21st century Britain it has been the Churches, uniquely, that have had both the motivation to tackle this problem, which has erupted so quickly, and, perhaps more surprisingly, the capacity and the resources to take it on. Nobody else has been able to do that, but the faith groups have. That again tells us something very important about the realities in Britain today and where the potential for changing things for the better resides.

One striking example of this new movement of faith-based social activism, and a very distinctive element in the voluntary sector we are reflecting on in this debate, is London Citizens. It is made up of churches, mosques, a synagogue, schools, trade union branches and community organisations, and it campaigns on issues that the members collectively agree are pressing in their community. For example, it has campaigned in favour of a living wage at a higher level than the statutory minimum wage, with the aim of making life easier for the lowest-paid workers. That specific initiative taken by London Citizens lies behind the Government's national living wage initiative. Its campaigning, of which that is an example, has had a remarkable impact, and there is no doubt that the faith commitment of the Muslims, the Christians and others of faith involved in London Citizens has been key in its work. Last week, it gathered 6,000 people at the Copper Box on the Olympic park for its accountability assembly with the two main candidates for today's elections for London Mayor.

Four years ago, we established, in the House, the all-party group on faith and society, which I chair. Its role is to support faith-based organisations in the contributions they are making to serve their communities, helping to make their contributions better understood and, where we can, to remove some of the barriers that hold them back. The secretariat of the all-party group is provided by FaithAction, which has a pioneering contract with the Department of Health, and I commend the leadership the Department has provided in acknowledging and supporting the contribution of faith-based organisations. That contract is to enable FaithAction to support faith-based health initiatives. Following its establishment, the all-party group held a series of meetings with representatives of faith-based organisations. We held one for organisations contributing to welfare to work; one on health and well-being; one on work with young people, recognising that most youth work in Britain today is undertaken by faith groups, as the hon. Lady mentioned; and one on international aid and development.

The organisations we met included: the Sikh Nishkam Centre in Birmingham, where we discussed its work to support unemployed people into jobs; the Muslim-led Faith Regen Foundation, where we discussed its contribution to the Government's Work programme; the Spear programme, based at St Paul's church in Hammersmith, which is literally transforming the life chances of unemployed young people; the LifeLine Institute's alternative school, run by the LifeLine church in Dagenham; the Faith, Relationships & Young People project, based in my borough of Newham; the Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade; the Hindu-led, Peepal Care; the Parish Nursing initiative; and Jewish Care, which

provides outstanding residential care. Of the organisations that are focused overseas, we met Hindu-led Sewa International, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Sikh-led KhalsaAid and Muslim Aid. After those discussions and meetings, we reflected on what all the groups had said to us. A theme that emerged was that many organisations experienced a little bit of difficulty with their local authority—not so much with the members, or councillors, but with the officers.

Council officers frequently find it quite difficult to deal with faith. They are nervous that, if they deal with one faith group, they will find themselves, in fairness, having to deal with all the others, and who knows what that might amount to. They are a bit uneasy anyway that the people involved in these groups may be a little bit out of the ordinary. It just feels to them like quite dangerous territory, which it is probably easier to avoid altogether. Frankly, life would be much simpler if it were not necessary to deal with faith groups at all.

More substantially, local authorities are nervous that if they were to commission services from faith groups, one of two things would be likely to go wrong—either that public funds would be used to try to convert people rather than to deliver the service, or that there would be bias in delivering the service in favour of members of that faith group. The evidence—in so far as there is evidence—is that neither of those things happens in practice. The Demos report touches on that. In its conclusion, it says:

“We found little evidence to confirm critics’ fears about faith group service providers: that their main motivation is proselytising, they are exclusivist and they discriminate. Rather, faithful providers”—that is the term that Demos uses for them—

“are highly motivated and effective, and often serve as the permanent and persistent pillars of community. Faith appears to be an effective motivator for community service providers, akin to the notion of a public sector ethos.”

That positive affirmation for those groups is correct, but, of course, it is not inconceivable that one of those concerns felt by local authority officers might, in a particular case, turn out to be well-founded. It is not inconceivable that one of those problems could arise.

The all-party group on faith and society decided to develop what we call a covenant—it was actually the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy)—in the hope of building trust on both sides, between local councils on the one side and the faith-based organisations in their area on the other. The text of that covenant is on the website of the all-party group. Let me read the preamble to the covenant, because it explains what our intention is.

“The coming decade will see the country facing new social needs and tough new challenges. There will be fresh demands on public health, social care, education, employment support and community inclusion. These challenges will require the identification of a new set of resources. We will need to unlock the potential of every part of our society to contribute towards solutions. We believe that one important resource can be realised by supporting faith-based organisations to work with local authorities constructively and effectively, as part of civil society. That will mean ensuring that local authorities are confident in commissioning services from, and transferring assets to, appropriately qualified faith-based organisations, and that they include faith groups when they look for solutions to social needs.

The APPG on Faith and Society is convinced that faith groups have a great deal to offer as providers and advocates for the communities in which they serve, and that some of their potential

is being unnecessarily overlooked at present. To help tackle the problem, the Group has drafted a Covenant which can be adopted by faith groups and local authorities in cities across the UK. Together, local authorities and faith communities should work out a local version of the commitments below, according to the priorities and needs of that locality. The Covenant is a joint commitment between faith communities and local authorities to a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that exists and to promote open, practical working on all levels.”

**Fiona Bruce:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his work in the all-party group on faith and society, which he chairs, and for jointly securing this debate with me. He might not be aware, so I thought I would mention, that a report published by the Oasis Foundation last week, “Faith in Public Service”, highly commends the work of the all-party group and says:

“The Covenant which the APPG has developed in partnership with FaithAction provides a framework in which faith organisations can make explicit commitments to good practice, not least in terms of inclusion, while having their faith identities fully respected.”

The report states that a mere handful of localities “have yet adopted the Government’s provisions”,

so it calls for

“greater national urgency in driving forward this...work, both from central government, through the Local Government Association and through national Church denominations.”

It argues that the Church could even develop a national inclusion charter and kitemark, based on the covenant, so that individual churches could signal to their local authorities and the public their commitment to inclusion. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with those recommendations?

**Stephen Timms:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for drawing attention to what the Oasis Foundation has said. I was aware of that—I was going to refer to it later—and I very much appreciate it. It underlines the importance of making progress in this area.

I was pleased that the first local authority to sign up to the covenant, in December 2014, was the city of Birmingham, the biggest local authority in Europe. Like all local authorities, it faces an enormous challenge over the next few years, as big cuts in spending have to be made. Members of Birmingham City Council rightly concluded that working with faith groups could be one way to help them to get through. They might commission some services from faith groups, perhaps transfer some assets and buildings to faith groups, and ask them to run services—a variety of possibilities might be pursued.

**Fiona Bruce:** May I commend an excellent initiative that Warrington Borough Council undertook with a group of people of faith? When the local library was to be closed, it was taken over by that group, which is now running it very successfully for the local community.

**Stephen Timms:** I believe that many such things will have to be done if services are to be maintained.

When our all-party group paid a visit to Birmingham, we visited the central mosque and the central synagogue. At the remarkable Sikh Nishkam Centre, where an enormous number of things are being done, we took part in a roundtable discussion hosted by the Bishop of Birmingham, David Urquhart. The faith group leaders in Birmingham have been meeting regularly ever since



[Stephen Timms]

9/11 and have a very good relationship, and the new partnership between the faith groups in the city and its civic leadership, signified by its signing up to the covenant, is blazing a trail that others will want to follow. The covenant has since been signed by several other local authorities in Leeds, Northamptonshire, Barnet, Solihull and, most recently, Calderdale.

It is difficult in such a debate to do more than scratch the surface of what is being delivered. The hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) mentioned the Salvation Army. It has been providing community services for 150 years, especially to those who are vulnerable and marginalised, and today it says:

“Motivated by our Christian faith, we continue to offer local provision in over 700 centres throughout the UK to all who need them.”

A recent initiative has been #TOYOURCREDIT, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s task group on responsible credit and saving, which was launched in 2014. There has been a pilot in London and Liverpool, and you might remember, Mr Speaker, what the Archbishop had to say about Wonga when this all began.

The pilot in London and Liverpool has engaged more than 200 churches, trained 150 credit champions and is on target to bring in 3,000 new credit union members. The planned 18-month roll-out to 30 dioceses aims to benefit 2.5 million people. Next month is the first credit union month across the London diocese. I welcome the initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury to host a celebration of positive grassroots action of faith communities at Lambeth Palace in a couple of weeks’ time, including a presentation from the Department for Communities and Local Government’s Near Neighbours initiative.

Like the hon. Member for Congleton, I commend the Cinnamon Network, which identifies successful and effective initiatives undertaken by a church in one area, and encourages the adoption of that idea on a franchise model by congregations elsewhere. I welcome, too, the important work of the Inter Faith Network and its director, Harriet Crabtree.

It is interesting to look at how such work is carried out in other countries. In Germany there is a formalised arrangement for the main Protestant and Catholic Churches to deliver some welfare services on behalf of the state. In 2009, in the USA, President Obama set up a diverse advisory council on faith-based and neighbourhood partnerships. He asked it to recommend how to strengthen the social partnerships between Government and non-Government providers, including how to strengthen their legal basis. That led to the publication at the end of March of Executive Order 13559 on fundamental principles and policy-making criteria for partnerships with faith-based and other neighbourhood organisations. The order makes it clear, rather as our covenant does, that faith-based organisations can participate in federally-funded social service programmes on the same basis as any other organisation, and it specifies, for example, as a condition of direct federal assistance that an organisation must not discriminate on the basis of religion, or require a beneficiary to attend or participate in any explicitly religious practice. Other points along those lines are also set out.

That executive order is 304 pages long and represents a very different approach in the USA from the light-touch voluntary covenant advocated by our all-party group. Nevertheless, looking at examples from other countries strengthens the case for a Government initiative in the UK.

The hon. Member for Congleton intervened a few minutes ago to draw attention to the Oasis Trust. That multi-academy trust is one of the biggest school providers in the country. The Oasis Foundation aims to carry out research in this area and to publish reports. As the hon. Lady noted, its first report, “Faith in Public Service”, points out correctly that the covenant that I have described has been taken up by only about half a dozen local authorities so far.

I commend to the Minister the report’s call that the Government, under the auspices of the Office for Civil Society, should

“articulate a clear strategy for national and local engagement with faith organisations, to include...sponsorship of the Covenant developed by the APPG on Faith and Society”,

and should offer further encouragement to local authorities to engage churches and church-based organisations in their commissioning decisions. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), who speaks for the Opposition on Office for Civil Society matters, is in the Chamber. I welcome the further endorsement of the covenant provided by the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, chaired by Baroness Butler-Sloss, in its comprehensive and thoughtful report “Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good”, which was published last December with the support of the Woolf Institute of Cambridge.

I want to read part of a newspaper article that appeared some time ago. It was written by Neal Lawson of the think-tank Compass, and it is about the role of faith groups in our society. I will not quote much of it, because quite a large amount comprises criticism of people such as me who were Ministers in the last Labour Government. However, it goes on to say something about faith groups that I very much agree with:

“they don’t just talk. They do. Religious communities are among the increasingly few places that bring people together as citizens rather than as consumers—fighting for a living wage and against poverty.

For me, as an atheist and a full-time politico, this is unsettling...I am a secularist and believe in the disestablishment of church and state—in particular, I want to see the end of faith schools. And, of course, religion has been the cause of terrible deeds—although none perhaps in recent years as abhorrent as those of atheists. But in words and deeds, in the world I see around me, the positive role faith plays far outweighs the negatives.”

I think that that will be the view of a growing number of people—including, surprisingly, people such as the author of that article—as they look at what is happening in our society and think about where we can find signs of optimism and hope, as well as new ideas about changing things for the better.

I hope that, through this debate, we will be able to draw attention to the extraordinary scale, range and quality of the contributions that faith-based organisations make to communities up and down the country, and that the Minister will be able to acknowledge that contribution at the end of the debate. I also hope he will



consider the proposal from the all-party group on faith and society that the covenant should be signed in local communities—by local councils and by the faith-based organisations wanting to be commissioned by them—to try to get over a number of the barriers that currently hold back some of the activity we have talked about.

11.57 am

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) on securing this incredibly important debate on voluntary organisations and faith groups. We should not forget that a tremendous number of people of faith also work in voluntary organisations that are not specifically faith based, so the work of people of faith extends far and wide—further perhaps than that of the organisations we are talking about today.

**Fiona Bruce:** One excellent example from my constituency is the Middlewich Clean Team—more than 200 people from the Middlewich community who are out and about every weekend keeping Middlewich clean and tidy. The team welcomes members from all faiths and none, and it was initiated by a lady who, in prayer, sought something meaningful she could do for her community.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** Every Member will probably see an example of that in their constituencies.

I do not want to go over all the things that have been mentioned in the two excellent speeches so far, but I do want to talk about a few organisations in my constituency, perhaps to draw some conclusions about how we go forward and to seek some guidance from the Minister.

In Stafford—as, I imagine, in most constituencies—we have faith groups running nurseries. We also have faith groups doing youth work. I am involved in that a little myself, and it gives me great pleasure, because it is a little outside the run of normal politics.

The street pastors work right across the country. They do tremendous work, and I have been out with them a couple of times. I have seen what they do, in a very gentle way, to support and counsel people on the street, who are often in great distress. It is not easy work; they go out at 10 o'clock, often on a cold winter's night, and they may be up until two or three in the morning. I have to say that I usually knock off earlier than the rest of the team, and I have great respect for their determination.

We have a children's bereavement charity, which is so important for children who have lost loved ones, and which is run by people of faith. We have the Salvation Army and the Plymouth Brethren. We also have based in Stafford international faith-based voluntary organisations, the most notable of which is the Dalit Freedom Network, which seeks to work with organisations in India that support Dalit people and their rights.

We have an organisation called House of Bread that started up a few years ago. Last week I had the honour of being the speaker at its fundraiser, and it was wonderful to see how many people were there—how many people it is involved with—and the extent of its work. It started by providing a hot meal on a Wednesday evening to anybody who needed it, whom it invited to a building

then owned by one of my local Anglican churches. The Wednesday meal has since gone around the town to various buildings, including Trinity Methodist church, as well as St Mary's church. It even spent a year and a bit at the Stafford Conservative Association club because we believed it was so important to give a home to this wonderful work. It is now looking to secure its own premises, which is vital because it provides not only meals and food banks but all sorts of support work for people with addictions, as well as family support work.

Housing is an area in which Christian organisations, or faith-based organisations, were, traditionally, involved but tended not to be for many years and have now come back into it. Throughout this time, the YMCA has operated across the country. In my area, YMCA North Staffordshire, based in Stoke-on-Trent but covering Stafford borough, is doing tremendous work in providing homes for young people—perhaps a bedsit—as well as support and opportunities to get into work. It now wants to help them get out from the bedsit into their own home—a flat or a small house in the community—and be able to stand on their own two feet. I pay tribute to the work of YMCA North Staffordshire and its inspirational leader, Danny Flynn, who is a great friend of mine, and who has done a tremendous amount for young people throughout north Staffordshire, as have his whole team. The fact that the number of staff has almost trebled in the past five or six years shows how these organisations can grow. They have managed to build nearly 100 units for young people at a time when funding has not been that easy.

I also pay tribute to the organisations of other faiths that provide services within my community, whether Sikh, Muslim or Hindu, and particularly to Hifsa Iqbal, who is always trying to work on behalf of people of all faiths and none from within her community.

I would like to raise four points, starting with funding, because that is probably the most discussed. We need funding arrangements that are not short term. When there is an arrangement between the voluntary sector and the public sector, within the voluntary sector, or between the voluntary sector and the private sector, the key thing is consistency—a long-term approach. The last thing we want is for money suddenly to be made available and then, just as quickly, for it to be pulled and the service to be discontinued. It is almost harder and more heart-breaking to see a service stop suddenly and people left without it than it not to start in the first place.

**Fiona Bruce:** My hon. Friend raises the critical issue of funding. Does he agree that it would be very helpful if local authorities offered faith-based organisations more proactive help with bid-writing, because navigating the thickets of complexity in these documents often dissuades them from even embarking on the process?

**Jeremy Lefroy:** I totally agree with that. I think we should be looking for funding that is available for many years, even if it is at a lower level and starts in a modest way, rather than writing a big bid. The tendency is to say, "Let's bid for as much money as we can." We get the money and the money is spent—it has to be spent within a fairly short period because of public accounting rules—and then there is nothing, and no provision has been made for the continuation of that service.

**Fiona Bruce:** Does my hon. Friend agree, therefore, that it would also be helpful if, for national initiatives such as the Trussell Trust, street pastors or CAP job clubs, local authorities agreed a nationally accepted and very simplified form of application?

**Jeremy Lefroy:** I am always in favour of cutting red tape and of simplification, but let us look long term. Let us look not for one or two-year contracts but for five-year or 10-year programmes. Of course, there has to be quality assurance, and if a programme is going off track, it needs to be looked at.

On funding, I also want to mention the local housing allowance, particularly when it comes to housing support. I know that the Government are looking carefully at this, but it will be a big issue if the cost of support—particularly for young people, but for vulnerable people of all ages—is included in the local housing allowance assessment, and therefore the contributions cover only rent and not the cost of support. Unless we sort that out, quite a lot of programmes will close in the coming years, because it will not be possible to run them within the local housing allowance framework unless the support element is removed from that.

My second point is about co-operation, which has been addressed at some length and very well. I pay tribute to local authorities generally, and certainly to my own local authorities Stafford Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council and South Staffordshire District Council. They are never afraid to work with faith organisations, and they are very practical about that. That goes for both the elected members and the officers. Of course, some people are a bit nervous about it, as the right hon. Member for East Ham has said, but in general I have found people to be positive. That has probably improved over the last 10 years since I was in local government.

**Fiona Bruce:** Does my hon. Friend think that much of the reluctance to engage results from having the faith-based organisations, misconceptions about how they will be received when they do so?

**Jeremy Lefroy:** That is a very good point, and that may well be the case. Sometimes in faith-based organisations we are a little bit reticent. We do not want to appear to be thrusting ourselves on an unwilling local authority, even though there may actually be a great willingness in the local authority to work together.

My third point is about training and support. We are talking about people giving up an awful lot of their time. In some cases, they are really passionate about something but they need training to enable them to be most effective. Although I am not asking for large sums of money for training or support, perhaps we need to ensure that all proposed programmes contain a training element, because volunteers really appreciate that. Often, such training is done within the programme. Street pastors has excellent training programmes, as do most other organisations. Such training is necessary; without it, people may soon feel out of their depth and become discouraged, which may make them less able or willing to volunteer. We must recognise that these programmes are not for the short term. People often give up years—

sometimes decades—of their life for such programmes, and they need to be supported with refresher courses as well as initial training.

Finally, as my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton has so eloquently put it, we need to allow these organisations space to be who they are. They are faith organisations and people who work in them have faith, so they must not be afraid to show that faith in an appropriate way. We cannot expect them to deny the source of their motivation.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this subject, and I ask the Minister to touch on some of the points I have raised. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton and the right hon. Member for East Ham for bringing such an important subject forward for discussion today.

12.9 pm

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) on securing a debate on such an important subject, and it is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy).

I will talk about a number of things, but I first want to state that I have a great deal of experience in this regard, as hon. Members will know. I was born into a family whose members have devoted their lives to Christian service in running several Christian charities and, indeed, churches. That has been my experience for my whole life, and I speak as someone from that background.

There is no doubt that faith-based organisations play a very significant role in our local communities up and down the country. The vast majority of those involved are volunteers, who freely give their time, their talent, their energy, their love and, very often, their money for the good of other people. As I say, they do so freely and willingly. As we have heard, they do so in the vast number of food banks that have sprung up throughout our country to meet a very important need in our communities; in the pre-schools or youth clubs that are run by Churches and other faith organisations to provide such vital services to families and our young people; in the groups that provide meals and shelter for the homeless, the elderly or the lonely; or organisations working with ex-offenders and those suffering from addiction and, as has been mentioned, the street pastors who go out in our towns and cities to provide a very important service at weekends. They all provide vital services in supporting some of the most vulnerable and needy people in our country.

Back in 2014, a report commissioned in Cornwall sought to put a value on the amount of time given by volunteers from Churches and other faith-based organisations. The report came up with a figure of £20 million every year for the value of the time given by volunteers from Churches in Cornwall, which has a relatively small population. If that was reflected across the whole country, the amount contributed by such volunteers to our country would be several billion pounds a year. I should say that that figure was based just on measuring the contribution of Christian Churches, but many other faith organisations also contribute significantly to our communities up and down the country. We are

therefore talking about groups of people who make a very significant contribution to our society, and they should be respected for that.

It is clear that people of faith make such a contribution across the country, but this is not a new trend; it has gone on throughout the history of our nation. Our very nation has been shaped throughout our history by great men and women of faith who have stood up to be counted and who have broken new ground, such as Wilberforce in abolishing slavery, Florence Nightingale in nursing injured soldiers, the Rev. Chad Varah in founding the Samaritans or, more recently, the street pastors. Throughout our history, people of faith have brought change and reform to our society, and it is very much because of their faith that they have carried out such work.

**Fiona Bruce:** Will my hon. Friend join me in commending Marriage Care for the work it does? It provides relationship counselling and marriage preparation classes across local communities in England and Wales, with 600 trained volunteers. It was founded 70 years ago, after the war, to help ex-servicemen and their families to rebuild their relationships.

**Steve Double:** I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating that group. The Church and other faith groups can make a huge contribution to our society in supporting marriage and the family in general. Family breakdown is the cause of many of the challenges and difficulties that our communities face, so the more that families can be supported, the better it will be for our communities. The Church has a very important role to play in doing just that.

The Church can and should be proud of the contribution that it has made and continues to make to our society and our local communities. Often, the Church and other faith-based groups are best placed to meet and address the very real needs that our communities face. They are often very close to or embedded in those communities, and are aware of communities' needs from a place of involvement. They are often flexible and adaptable, and are able to respond quickly when a need arises—we heard earlier about faith groups responding very quickly to crises such as flooding. They are also very practical. They go right to the point of need, rather than getting caught up in process and bureaucracy. They can see the needs that people face and respond quickly and practically to meet them.

It is also pleasing that we have a Prime Minister who is not afraid to acknowledge the work of the Church and other faith groups in our country. It is pleasing to hear him stand up in this House and declare that we are a Christian nation, and that it is our Christian heritage and the values it has given to our country that have made us the great country that we indeed are. He also actively supports the Church, other Christian organisations and other faith groups in their vital work. It is incredible that, in the 21st century, we have a Prime Minister who is not afraid to stand up and make statements like that, including in this very Chamber. We should be thankful that he is prepared to do so; it is quite refreshing, especially in an age when the Church is increasingly marginalised and is even sneered at in some quarters for its work.

Christians often feel that they need to play down their faith when they volunteer or are carrying out the work that they do. That is deeply regrettable. It is their faith that motivates them, so to find that they have to apologise for or in some way play down the role it plays in the work that they do is deeply concerning.

**Fiona Bruce:** Will my hon. Friend join me in extending deep appreciation to Her Majesty the Queen, who has made it clear in a number of her Christmas broadcasts that her own deep personal faith has sustained and motivated her in her great sense of duty towards her citizens over so many decades?

**Steve Double:** I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. Her Majesty the Queen is a shining example of someone of deep faith and conviction who has given her whole life to the service of our country and is prepared to acknowledge her faith and say that it is one of the reasons why she has been the person whom we all love and respect. We should be very grateful for that.

We often find that the place of Christians and the Church in our society is being eroded and undermined. There is a growing feeling that the work of the Church and its freedom to stand up for what it believes to be right and true are under attack. I have stated in debates elsewhere in this House that I believe that we have surrendered too much of our liberty in the name of equality. The Christian Church has often felt the brunt of that erosion of freedom of speech. We should never be afraid to make the connection between the excellent work that the Church, Christian organisations and other faith groups carry out in our society and the deep faith and conviction that motivate them to do that work.

I put on record that I believe we should show our great gratitude to the many thousands of men and women of faith who work tirelessly and give of themselves for the good of others in many of our communities. It is right that today we show our appreciation of everything that they do. We should also celebrate and value the work of the Church, but we should not seek to restrict the freedom to exercise faith. Hon. Members have already touched on the proposal to force Sunday school and other Church groups to register with Ofsted, and I am already on record as describing that as a deeply regrettable move. I hope that the Government will drop that proposal. We should not seek to restrict further the work of the Church: we should seek to do all we can to encourage it, support it and help it to do more of the excellent work that it does.

I hope that the Minister will clearly state that our country needs the Church and faith organisations. They often carry out work that the state is not able to do, and if they did not do that work it would place an even greater burden on the state and public finances. The work of the Church and faith groups is therefore very necessary and we should do all we can to encourage and support them. I hope we can send a strong message from the Chamber today that we are grateful for the work that men and women of faith do, and that we will do all we can to help, encourage and support them in doing it.

12.21 pm

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** I join those who have thanked the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and my right hon. Friend the Member for East



[Anna Turley]

Ham (Stephen Timms) for bringing forward today's debate on an issue of real importance. I also wish to place on record my thanks to the Backbench Business Committee, which plays an important role in the democracy of this place and the ability of hon. Members to give voice to issues that may not be urgent, have a high profile or be raised on the "Today" programme, but are none the less important to the fabric of our society and deserve time in the Chamber. Today's debate is an example of just such an issue.

Some really interesting points have been made and valuable experience relayed by hon. Members today. The hon. Member for Congleton gave a real sense of the breadth of the services and support provided by faith communities from cradle to grave. I was struck by some of the examples she gave, especially on early intervention and groups that support people before they get into crisis and the state has to intervene, often at great expense. Those groups are there to prevent that. As the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) mentioned, they often save the state money and do things that the state would not be able to do. They play a huge role.

The hon. Lady also mentioned extremism, in the context of Ofsted, which is an issue of grave concern to many civil society and faith groups. Some analysis in *The Guardian* showed that more than a quarter of the statutory investigations launched by the Charity Commission since 2012 have been directed at Muslim charities associated with running mosques, providing humanitarian relief or undertaking aid efforts in Syria. Of course we have to be vigilant and no one would want to see a single penny devoted to terrorism or those forces that we are trying to tackle here and abroad, but our counterterrorism strategy has to have support from, and integration and communication with, civil society and faith groups at its heart. We must not alienate communities further, and I look forward to working with the Minister with responsibility for civil society and the Charity Commission to ensure that we do not tip the balance too far the other way.

My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham raised some interesting issues. He mentioned the Trussell Trust and I was struck by how many faith groups are there in times of crisis. Sometimes we take it for granted that when the state has failed—and we in this place have failed—faith groups are there to pick up the pieces. I was struck by the examples he gave of what a powerful force multi-faith groups are, across the breadth of faith communities, when they come together. They are a real source of energy, determination, commitment and passion to build a better society. I am grateful to him for the examples he gave of where that is working. I will come on to mention the covenant, raised by the all-party group, later on in my speech. I give it my wholehearted support. I think it has huge potential for clarifying some of the misunderstandings and myths. I hope it will play a role in supporting faith groups to deliver more services.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) mentioned some important points that affect a lot of civil society groups—not just faith-based groups—and they include the huge issue of long-term security of funding; training and support; and the space to be who

they are, something that struck me in particular. Civil society groups play a different role from public services. They are not an arm or an agent of the state, but they are often able to do work that our public services cannot. They can respond quickly, be flexible and take risks. There are times when public services are not able to do that, and it is vital civil society is able to respond and react to problems.

The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay also raised a lot of interesting points. I was struck by the £20 million value put on the work of church groups in Cornwall—a huge contribution to local society, one that is reflected throughout the country. I join him in paying tribute to all the volunteers who give up so much time, effort and money to contribute to our society.

I want to continue my speech by sharing, as other hon. Members have, in the celebration of the role of faith groups in civil society. Indeed, throughout our history the role of faith and faith organisations has run through centuries of social progress: from before the Reformation, when religious duty meant Christians undertook their seven corporal works of mercy, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked or visiting the prisoner; the church parishes that administered the Elizabethan poor laws; to the work of Victorian Quakers, such as Rowntree, who studied and worked to remedy the destitution and slums of the industrial revolution. In recent years, it was the energy and imagination of faith groups that drove the Make Poverty History campaign and helped to ensure the Government's commitment to international aid. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham mentioned London Citizens, a multi-faith organisation that has done so much to shape and drive the debate on the living wage. It has made a real difference to people's lives. Today, we see many faith-based humanitarian groups saving lives and bringing aid and succour in some of the darkest and most desperate parts of the world.

Faith has driven much of the social progress of British society. Faith organisations continue to be a source of energy, new ideas and passion in civic society today. A recent Demos publication, which my right hon. Friend mentioned, found that religious people are more likely than non-religious people to volunteer regularly in their local community and to feel a greater sense of belonging. They also feel they can influence decisions locally and nationally, and are more likely to take decision-making roles, such as being a councillor, school governor or magistrate.

In my constituency, I see fantastic work undertaken by local faith groups every single day. Footprints in the Community is a faith-based group linked to the Trussell Trust which runs our local food banks in Redcar. It also runs what it calls a men's shed: a workshop space in which men can meet, learn new skills, and tackle social isolation. Our local mosque in South Bank is so much more than a place of worship; it is a community hub and a resource centre that helps people to learn English, get into work, get help and advice, and tackle problems such as social isolation. We also have the Redcar Beacons Street Angels—other hon. Members have mentioned them—who help people on a Friday and Saturday night in the centre of town. I know from my own experience the role that Christians Against Poverty plays in my local area to help those struggling with debt and financial exclusion.

As has been explored today, many faith groups feel there is a reluctance among local authorities and others to commission services from faith-based providers. Conversely, many local authorities and commissioners have important concerns, which cannot be ignored, over the use of public funds to support faith-based services. It is vital that we try to tackle any misconceptions that exist. There can be a perception that potential users could be excluded on grounds such as religious belief, or that support is founded on outdated views of faith-based morality. However, Dr Sarah Johnsen's in-depth study at the University of York in 2009 concluded that there was no evidence that faith-based organisations used public funds to propagate religion, or exclude potential users on grounds of religious belief or sexual orientation.

In the coming decade, this country will face new social needs and tough new demographic and economic challenges. There will be fresh demands on public health, social care, education, and employment support services, and on community inclusion. These challenges will require new resources. We need to unlock the potential of every part of our society to contribute towards solutions, and faith groups will be a vital part of that.

**Fiona Bruce:** As the hon. Lady says, faith groups are playing, and will increasingly play, an important role in promoting community cohesion. Does she think that both local and national Government should do more to reach out to faith groups, to help them to fulfil their potential in that respect?

**Anna Turley:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Faith groups will play an increasingly important role, and not just in the way we deliver services. She mentions community cohesion; we have in our society challenges of integration and understanding, and in dispelling myths. Community groups are right on the frontline of communities and are able to bridge divides and break down myths and boundaries. I wholeheartedly support local and central Government in taking steps to build on that.

The big society promised to unleash great civic power, but for many groups it has turned out to be a bit of a damp squib. Many faith groups, instead of benefiting from a huge unleashing of opportunity, are simply picking up the consequences of policy failure, desperation and crisis, as we have seen with food banks. I would like faith-based organisations to be seen as an important resource throughout the delivery of public services. If they are to be supported in working constructively and effectively as part of civil society, it will mean ensuring that local authorities are confident in commissioning services from them and transferring assets to them, and in working with appropriately qualified faith-based organisations. We need to make sure that local authorities include faith groups when they look for solutions to local social needs.

I recognise the work of the all-party parliamentary group on faith and society in demonstrating that faith groups have a great deal to offer as providers and advocates for the communities in which they serve. Some of their potential is unnecessarily being overlooked. To that end, I welcome the covenant that the group has established, which my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham explained in such detail. The covenant could be adopted by faith groups and local authorities in

cities across the UK, and I would like to see it more widely promulgated. It could go a long way towards breaking down myths, providing confidence and, by establishing agreed frameworks, building a relationship of trust and practical support.

Politicians of all religious beliefs and none do well to remember that we do not have a monopoly on the social conscience of this country, nor on social action. That is why the support of, and respect for, civic society is so important, and must remain at the heart of the Government's vision for public services and social change.

I welcome this debate on today of all days, when I sincerely hope with all my heart that we will celebrate having the first ever Muslim Mayor of our capital city of London. That will send out the message to people around the world that our society in Britain is a place of openness, decency, and tolerance; a place where a person's love of their community and city, and their commitment to others, to public service, and social good, is what defines them; and a place where faith is a source of positive energy, not something to be perverted as a smear. I sincerely hope that today's election result shows us, in the spirit of this debate, that hope and unity will triumph over division in both British politics and civil society.

12.33 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton):**

What a fascinating debate this has been. It has touched on areas of Government policy in a lot of Departments, and on experiences that so many hon. and right hon. Members have had in their constituencies. We have heard about so much of the great work that those of different faiths in our society do for the communities that we are all here to represent.

Faith is a deeply personal and individual thing. It can inspire us when we strive to achieve, to do more, and to change the world and the circumstances around us. It can console us when we are at our lowest ebb. It is interwoven into the history of our great country and throughout our society. It clearly has inspired many of the comments that hon. Members have made in this debate, which I welcome given its importance and relevance to so much of what is happening around us.

The Prime Minister has rightly praised the role and importance of faith in our society. Members of Parliament from across the party political divide recognise the different aspects of faith, and the ways in which it contributes to what we all want to achieve: a better, more successful society, community and country.

Faith organisations represent a huge part of our charitable and voluntary sector. There are nearly 50,000 faith-based charities; 27% of the charities registered in this country are faith-based—from small groups to large organisations such as the Salvation Army, which has been mentioned more than once today and has made a real contribution to our society for some 150 years.

Faith also makes a contribution to our policy and policy development. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on her work in this area and securing this debate in tandem with the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms). She spoke of the range of charities and organisations that work in this area and the variety of work they do.

[James Wharton]

I would like to mention street pastors. There are some in Stockton, and when I was first elected—I have done so subsequently—I went out with them to see the great work that they do on my local high street. They help people when they need a bit of extra support and calm people when they are scared, frustrated or frightened. I remember one night vividly. At about 2 o'clock in the morning, we approached one young lady who was somewhat the worse for wear—"tired and emotional" might be the appropriate jargon in this context. She gladly took the support—the bottle of water, the flip-flops and the welcoming arm around the shoulder—that the street pastors gave her. She looked at me and said, "You—you look like that Tory!" I said, "Don't worry about that now; we're here to help." That is what this Government and these organisations are about—not party politics, but assisting people in our society to make it a better place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton spoke about campaigning work on the crucial issue of human trafficking, as well as literacy, youth work and keeping Middlewich clean. Contributions are made at different levels and in different ways, but they all matter, and they speak to the great work done by many people in our society, inspired by their faith.

My hon. Friend inspired my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) to make an intervention about his constituency's experience during the flooding. I know from my visit to his constituency and others throughout the north of England when those devastating floods were experienced over Christmas and the new year that although it was often the Christian organisations that helped, the mosques in Bradford—this was the specific example that my hon. Friend gave—also stepped forward and were quick to organise the most effective support. It was the churches that opened their doors to those who had lost access to their homes because of the impact of the devastating weather across much of the north of England; and it was the churches and other faith and community-based religious organisations that were there to help people when they most needed help.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) called faith groups "unsung heroes", but they have certainly not all been unsung in today's debate. While many have been recognised, there are many more. Indeed, there are so many doing so much that we would not have time to comment on them all this afternoon.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton raised genuine and legitimate concerns about the way in which local government engages with faith-based organisations that want to do good work in our communities. Sometimes fear or a lack of understanding can prevent good things from being done for those communities that local government exists to serve. I am a Communities and Local Government Minister, so this issue resonates particularly with me. I would, of course, be happy to discuss it further with my hon. Friend because we want to ensure that when a positive contribution can be made, everything is done to facilitate it.

I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said about Ofsted inspections. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education have been clear that the registration

of out-of-school settings will not apply to organisations such as Sunday schools. We do not propose to regulate institutions such as Sunday schools that teach children for only a short period every week. We have to ensure that organisations do the right thing and meet the standards expected of them, but I have listened to my hon. Friend's concerns. I am sure that they will be drawn to the attention of the Secretary of State for Education. I shall do that, and I know my hon. Friend will, too—in fact, she probably already has.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for East Ham on his work with the all-party group on faith and society, and the incredible contribution it makes to informing Members of the breadth of work done out there in the communities we all represent by faith-based organisations. He spoke of faith-based social activism and gave specific examples of the difference it can make when organisations inspired by their faith lead a debate that ultimately contributes to policy change in this place. They convince those who, by virtue of our democratic process, have the opportunity to effect political change by supporting the right issues.

The right hon. Gentleman also spoke about the faith covenant, the development of which by the all-party group on faith and society is welcome. We wanted engagement in the delivery of Government services—particularly at local government level, as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton—to take place in a way that would secure the maximum benefit for all who rely on those services, and the covenant makes a welcome contribution to that discussion.

**Stephen Timms:** May I ask the Minister to reflect on the Oasis Trust's proposal that the covenant should be sponsored by the Government, and that the Government should help to spread it among local authorities throughout the country?

**James Wharton:** Anything that raises the profile of the work that is being done, and that draws attention to the engagement and approach that are needed, is certainly welcome. I will indeed reflect on the right hon. Gentleman's comments. I am sure that this debate is helping to raise the profile of what is indeed an important issue, but I acknowledge that he would like additional work to be done.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) spoke of the great work that is being done by a range of charities in his constituency, across faiths and across the communities that they serve, which even includes the use of the Conservative association headquarters—I welcome that innovative step. That work is making a real difference to the lives of people in Stafford. He spoke of the need for not just funding, but funding consistency. That sends an important message to central and local government departments, and the arms of the state that commission services, about what is needed by voluntary organisations which, by their very nature and the way in which they come about, are often more effective than any deliberately centrally designed arm of government is likely to be. Balancing the need to ensure that public money is properly protected and accounted for with the need to retain what makes those organisations special presents an important challenge, as does giving them the consistency and certainty that



they need to engage with funding streams and get the best from them. I will certainly take account of my hon. Friend's comments, and I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Civil Society, who is very involved with this issue, will be interested in what he said.

My hon. Friend also spoke about the value of training and the processes that are needed to ensure that people who are involved in these programmes continue to be trained and retrained so that they can get the best out of the good things that they want to do. His comments were welcome and pertinent, and I know that they will resonate across Government and in his continuing discussions with Ministers.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) made a powerful speech about the contribution of faith to public life. He spoke from his considerable experience, highlighting the historical context of that contribution and what it has done to build the society in which we live today. He gave the specific example of the value of the contribution of Christian volunteers to the society and communities of Cornwall. That contribution, it emerged, was worth £20 million a year, and that did not include the great work done by many other faith groups and groups in general. My hon. Friend rightly observed that when that figure is multiplied to cover the whole country, it becomes clear that a significant contribution is being made to our society.

The quick and practical response of faith organisations is often unparalleled. As has been pointed out, in the event of floods and other disasters, of whatever type and wherever they occur in the world, it is often faith-driven communities that are sufficiently fleet of foot, motivated in the right way, and adequately engaged and connected to ensure that help reaches those who need it most rapidly. Governments always try to be quick to respond to emerging challenges, but they are not always the first to respond or the first on the scene, and they are not always the fastest in providing help where it is needed. Faith organisations often fulfil that role, and the work that they do in that respect is incredibly important.

My hon. Friend also challenged me to recognise, on behalf of the Government, the importance of the contribution of faith to our society and what we do. I hope that I have already made clear the Government's support for faith organisations, but I will restate it for the avoidance of any doubt. Like the Prime Minister, and like many Members who have spoken in the debate, I recognise—the Government recognise—the important contribution that faith makes to our society and the incredible value that it adds to our country. However, my hon. Friend was right to ask for that recognition to be put on record again today because it is important to all of us and the communities that we represent.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), touched on many comments that hon. Members have made. She also made a specific point about the Charity Commission's work in regulating this area. The commission does a difficult job. It deals with a range of charitable organisations and has to ensure that they do not use the freedoms that we rightly give them and the support that the state offers them for purposes that are not charitable. It has to work hard to get the balance right, and the shadow Minister is absolutely right that we should look into any concerns to ensure that that job is being done appropriately.

The Charity Commission must be free to make investigations when appropriate, but it must also be accountable for any decisions it makes and investigations that it carries out. I welcome the shadow Minister's comments about the need to get the balance right regarding the sort of organisations that are chosen for investigation to ensure that every community and every faith, the depth of whose contributions we have heard about today, will feel able to engage fully with the freedoms that exist and the opportunities to contribute to our society.

This has been a positive, informative and well-informed debate. It has without doubt highlighted the breadth of the work that faith and charity organisations do. It has touched on many aspects of Government policy and many areas of support in our society, and drawn on examples from right across our great country. The charitable sector is a great and wonderful thing. It is one of those things that we should be proud of and that makes this country great. A large part of the charitable sector is supported by those motivated by their true and deeply held faith and convictions, which is to be welcomed and encouraged. The comments made by hon. Members today underline the significance that we in this House attach to the work that they do.

12.46 pm

**Fiona Bruce:** I thank the Minister for his wholehearted and heartfelt support in applauding the work of the many organisations of faith that have been referred to in the debate. I also thank all Members who have spoken and I join them in applauding the work of the organisations to which they have referred. I also thank the Minister for his offer to meet me, because there are four issues that he did not touch on in his response, although I accept that the content of the debate has ranged across several Departments.

First, will the Minister write to me in response to my point about how central Government could work with local authorities to promote religious literacy across our communities, which in turn would promote community cohesion? Secondly, how can our Government explore the concept of reasonable accommodation? Other countries have looked at that, so it would be helpful if we could do so, too. Thirdly, it might have come as a surprise to the Minister to hear that the top concern expressed by evangelical Christians was that policies should promote liberty and freedom of expression. Will he examine the considerable concern that certain policies are having a chilling effect, which I am sure that the Government would want to deter, on free speech on the part of people of faith? Finally, I would appreciate it if he would give a written response to the concerns I expressed in the last part of my speech, which others have touched on, about proposals on out-of-school settings. The consultation was held many months ago and tens of thousands of people across the country are awaiting the Government's response to the contributions that they spent a long time submitting.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the contribution of faith organisations to the voluntary sector in local communities.

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (9 MAY)

*Ordered,*

That, at the sitting on Monday 9 May, the backbench business set down for consideration may be entered upon at any hour, may continue for two hours regardless of the moment of interruption, and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of.—(*Kris Hopkins.*)

### SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (12 MAY)

*Ordered,*

That, on Thursday 12 May—

(1) there shall be no sitting in Westminster Hall; and

(2) the Speaker shall not adjourn the House, if a Message from the Lords Commissioners is expected, until that Message has been received.—(*Kris Hopkins.*)

### Human Rights (Burundi)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Kris Hopkins.*)

12.49 pm

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): I am pleased to see the Minister in his place to respond. I thank the Speaker for granting this debate; it is a privilege to raise in the House the human rights situation in Burundi, which I had the privilege of visiting in 2013 and 2014 and where I received a welcome from the Burundian people that could not have been warmer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and I jointly called for this debate, so we are dividing the allotted speaking time between us. I acknowledge with great respect the work that he has already undertaken, including the debate that he secured last December, to which the Minister also responded. It is unfortunate that the matter must be revisited so soon, but the human rights situation in Burundi has deteriorated further since. Indeed, the day after last December's debate, more than 100 individuals were murdered by Government security forces on the worst day of violence in Burundi since the crisis began.

The crisis started a year ago after President Nkurunziza contentiously announced that he would seek a third term, triggering an unsuccessful coup followed by presidential elections in July 2015 that were declared by the UN as neither free nor fair. As I mentioned, there were major disturbances in December, including fighting on the streets by armed opponents of the President, both Hutu and Tutsi. They mounted an attack on a barracks, after which Government troops moved through the neighbourhoods of the capital that were thought to have supported rebels, reportedly killing as many as 700 people and subsequently transporting them to mass graves in state vehicles.

Since then, while there has fortunately been no repeat of fighting on that scale, killings continue on a regular basis. Weekly reports are coming in of new violence and killings and of the Government adopting a strategy of eliminating their opponents. Grounds for suspicion have been described as razor thin. A scared 15-year-old was killed while simply running away from the police. A cameraman and his family were killed, seemingly in the wrong place at the wrong time. Another victim was a teenage boy selling eggs. Other killings seem not so random, with reports of young men who had opposed the Government being hunted down in a refugee camp some distance from Bujumbura to which they had fled. Of most concern are the reports that people are now being targeted for their ethnicity as well as for their political affiliation, with a disproportionate number of the minority Tutsis being sidelined from Government institutions and with the army, which has recently considerably increased in size, being divided into Hutus and Tutsis. Such reports have increased concern in the international community, and it is right that the House discuss this issue now so that we can add our voices to those calling for help to achieve stability and justice for the Burundian people.

Burundi was already one of the poorest countries in the world before the crisis began. It has the second-lowest income and is highly dependent on external aid, with almost half of the state budget externally financed.

However, the suspension of aid flows over the past year mean that the share of the budget accounted for by aid is projected to fall by a third this year. Further economic decline and the redirection of funds by the Government from social programmes to the army have combined to produce a humanitarian emergency that has resulted in severe malnutrition. There are reports that people are beginning to starve. The price of rice has trebled in some areas. Farmers who used to sell vegetables to people on the road can no longer do so, saying that their customers have disappeared, fearful of being out and about. Medical supplies dwindle. Children, who make up half of Burundians, suffer disproportionately as a result of violence, exploitation, and family separation. More than 230,000 people have fled in the past year alone, and that number is increasing. Most have gone as refugees to Rwanda and Tanzania, but some have gone to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda.

In Burundi, people cannot freely move around, given a proliferation of police roadblocks and the chance of being arrested if caught in the wrong place. Alarming, there have been reports of hundreds of Burundians, perhaps more—they are often young Burundians; those between their mid-teens and mid-20s—having disappeared or been tortured, reportedly with gun butts, electric cables, bricks or metal rods, with some having even been required to sit in acid. There are reports of girls being raped in front of their parents and of mutilations, such as the removal of genitals and even of hearts. UN human rights records show 600 cases in 2015 and more than 340 during the first four months of this year. Private media outlets have been shut down, and civil society organisations have been closed or banned. Perhaps worst of all, Burundi has become a place of fear. In cities, people fear abductions, torture and murder; in the countryside, they fear hunger, as the economy collapses. Even among the Government's higher ranks there is a constant fear of assassination, a reality in evidence all too clearly only a couple of weeks ago when a major general in the Burundi army, who had returned to Burundi just three weeks earlier, after a two year-peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic, was shot in his car while going to work with his wife and four children, whom he was going to take to school.

Perhaps the biggest fear of all is that this conflict, which has so far been fought on political lines, could divide Burundi on ethnic ones, between Hutus and Tutsis, and lead to new massacres. History has shown that such events can happen swiftly, as in Rwanda in 1994, with the outside world barely noticing until it was too late. To prevent that, above all, is surely why we in this place must sound an alarm and call on our Government to call on the UN and others in the international community to do all they can to step in to secure peace and stability for the people of Burundi.

I know that this Minister and other Foreign Office Ministers understand the severity of the crisis in Burundi, as he has been good enough to speak with me and my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford on a number of occasions. But in the light of the continuing deterioration of the human rights situation in Burundi, may I urge that Ministers press the United Nations to consider the deployment of a substantial UN force to Burundi, as outlined in a letter of 15 April from the UN Secretary-General to the UN Security Council? That would help to monitor the security situation, improve respect for

human rights and advance the rule of law. We hope that it would stem any further human rights deterioration and facilitate dialogue toward a political settlement with the Burundian Government, to be conducted free of a climate of violence or reprisal. We hope that this would, in turn, help stem the increasing humanitarian crisis and perhaps facilitate the reinstatement of aid, suspended by some members of the international community following the commencement of these disturbances, as soon as possible. I would appreciate the Minister's specific response on those points.

I also welcome last week's statement by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on opening a preliminary examination into the situation in Burundi over the past year. That shows how grave the human rights situation is there. What further support or contribution can the UK offer to help promote peace, stability and a restoration of human rights for the beleaguered people of Burundi?

Finally, on UK aid, the Government have already provided substantial support for refugees from Burundi, and that is appreciated and acknowledged. In view of the numbers involved, which continue to increase, will the Minister use his influence to ask the Department for International Development to encourage other donors to add their support, and to ascertain what further UK support can be provided? Will the Government confirm that they will also look, on the basis that if the UN deployment that I have referred to achieves its objectives, at the reinstatement of bilateral UK aid to Burundi, which was suspended some years ago? Those of us on the Select Committee on International Development have been calling for that for some years.

I look forward to responses on these points from the Minister, if need be after the debate, given that some of them refer to areas where DFID has authority. I do not wish to sound more alarmist than current circumstances indicate, but they are grave. For those of us who have spent time in the past few years in both Burundi and Rwanda, and know how close these countries are, geographically and in other ways, there is deep concern to ensure that our Government and the international community do all they can to ensure that there is no chance of a repeat of the haunting occurrences in Rwanda in the 1990s.

1 pm

**Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** I am most grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to say a few words in this debate.

We had a debate on this subject on 5 December. The reason for bringing it back is that, although there are, in one or two respects, some improvements or signs of light, things have deteriorated substantially in the most important respects.

I will, if I may, start with the positive. There is in Burundi, a country about which many of us care deeply, a huge amount of work going on behind the scenes by faith groups—again, we are talking about faith groups—and others who are really trying to bring relief to people and to calm things down. There has also been great progress in the engagement of the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development. I give huge credit to the Minister for that, as he has taken personal responsibility



[Jeremy Lefroy]

for the matter. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) has said, the terrible situation continues.

Let us remind ourselves of what UN Security Council resolution 2248 says. It condemns abuses,

“including those involving extra-judicial killings, acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman and/or degrading treatment, arbitrary arrests, illegal detentions, harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and journalists”.

That was last year, but all those things continue. As my hon. Friend has said, there are alarming first-hand reports that the violence has taken on an ethnic dimension. I have come across one or two cases—they include one that is quite close to me, the details of which I cannot go into—that indicate that that is so.

The original Arusha agreement, under which settlement was reached 15 or so years ago after the terrible civil war and partial genocide in Burundi, was designed to tackle ethnic tension and to achieve balance between the communities. For some years, that balance did indeed prevail, and Burundi was held up as an example of the agreement working, but the agreement is now not being respected in so many areas. I urge the Burundian Government and President Nkurunziza to go back to those years when it was respected.

Finally, what can we do? We can support the people of Burundi, as we are doing, through the DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. We can support the African Union’s peace work and the former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa who is now in charge of that work. He is a man whom I had the honour to meet several years ago, and who is absolutely committed to this matter. We can urge the acceptance of a proper peacekeeping force. Above all, we can urge the people of Burundi, especially the Government of Burundi, to pull back from the brink.

1.3 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge):** It is indeed a pleasure to be here at a slightly earlier time than billed. Before starting on the substance of this very important debate, may I pay enormous tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce)? For me, today marks 11 years since I entered this House; for others, it is election day. Going forward, we should name today Congleton day. Looking at the Order Paper, I can see that my hon. Friend had questions for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for the Church Commissioners. I cannot see on the Order Paper whether she raised anything in business questions—hopefully, at that point she had a short break before having debates on faith organisations and Burundi. It should be Congleton day from 5 May to celebrate this active and effective campaign. I look forward to receiving a copy of her local paper with that quote in next week.

I also pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy). I thank both he and my hon. Friend for phoning me, emailing me, bending my ear in the Lobby, and providing important information from their friends and colleagues in Burundi and from others in the world who have a particular interest in Burundi.

At the outset, I would like to say that I am answering on behalf of the whole of Her Majesty’s Government. The Under-Secretary of State for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), and I work incredibly closely on this and all issues. We are one Government, one HMG.

The United Kingdom is playing a leading role in trying to build a strong and coherent international response. I visited Burundi in December 2015 and have consistently urged the Burundian Government, in the strongest terms, to end the violence and engage in inclusive dialogue. We have suspended development aid, as was mentioned earlier. We have also imposed travel restrictions and frozen assets of those who have undermined democracy and fuelled conflict.

In June 2015, the UK appointed a special envoy to the great lakes, Danae Dholakia, who is very active in delivering our messages on Burundi. In fact, I spoke to her yesterday when she was in Stockholm, working with other special envoys. Through the conflict, stability and security fund, we will be increasing our efforts on the ground. These will include deploying a Burundian co-ordinator in Bujumbura. I know that hon. Members present today, and those on the Select Committee, are keen for us to do more on the ground in Bujumbura, and that message is very much understood.

DFID offices in both Kigali and Dar es Salaam have significantly stepped up their analysis and coverage of the crisis, to ensure that they can respond to an evolving situation and increasing humanitarian need as necessary. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has visited the refugee camps in Tanzania, where we have consistently provided support to refugees, and in fact increased that support. When I was in Uganda, I spoke to UN non-governmental organisations and DFID, which is providing refugee support in that country, as well as looking at the political relationships across the region.

I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton that when I was in Burundi, I met both the UN and human rights organisations in private to hear their detailed concerns, which are not dissimilar from those that hon. Members expressed. In March I addressed the UN Security Council and regional leaders of the great lakes, highlighting the need for urgent action in Burundi. When I visited Rwanda and Uganda last year, I stressed the importance of the countries in the region playing a constructive role. I also met the African Union’s peace and security commissioner, Smail Chergui, in the margins of the African Union summit in January. The African Union is continuing to lead the international response to the crisis. The British ambassadors and high commissioners across the region continue to lobby their host Governments on the importance of taking action to resolve the situation in Burundi, using all parties, be they regional or international.

As this debate has highlighted, the situation in the country remains extremely fragile. The UN estimates that nearly 500 people have died in the past 12 months, and that 280,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries, although you will appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it is very difficult to monitor precise numbers, and actual figures may well be higher. The International Criminal Court has opened a preliminary examination of the violence committed in Burundi to

date. We will continue to work with our partners, including the UN Security Council, to promote accountability through every means available.

Burundi was rightly identified as one of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 30 priority countries in our 2015 human rights report, published last month. The report makes it clear that the human rights situation in Burundi

“poses a threat to the stability of the country and wider region”.

We are extremely concerned about a further deterioration, which is one reason why I welcome this debate and a continued dialogue around the actions that we can take that militate against further deterioration in that conflict.

In recent weeks, there has been an alarming increase in assassinations, with about 30 in April, compared with nine in March. There seems to be a move from indiscriminate to more targeted killings. Most recently, Brigadier General Kararuzza and his wife, to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton referred, were assassinated on 25 April with their family on the way to school. I thank my hon. Friend for showing me those photos, along with our hon. Friend the Member for Stafford. As harrowing as the photos are, we have a responsibility to see the reality of the atrocities in order to understand what is happening in Burundi. I condemn these killings unreservedly and call on the Government of Burundi to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice. I will be writing again to the Foreign Minister and, I hope, speaking to the Foreign Minister of Burundi next week to make these points yet again.

Looking beyond the individual tragedy of each death, we are concerned that these events indicate that, far from abating, the cycle of violence fuelled by the Burundian Government is getting worse. Some of that violence is, I think, directed by the Burundian Government and some is conducted by people outwith the direct command and control of the Burundian Government. It does appear that the nightly violence that was a feature of the conflict has subsided. However, this is no cause for optimism, as more and more people have left the country, are not coming out at night or have gone into hiding.

The Burundian Government continue to encourage a climate of fear and intimidation with abductions, disappearances and arrests still commonplace. Some of those people are taken into police custody, but many are being held by the intelligence services in secret detention facilities, without access to due process. Families fear that they will never see their disappeared loved ones again. Recently there has been a small but significant increase in reports of sexual violence—systematic multiple rape organised as a way of punishing and subduing a community.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has indicated that many detainees show signs of torture. There is an increase in torture in Burundi, over and above the initial killings. Reports suggest that torture and ill treatment are not limited to the capital, where the majority of arrests have taken place. A pattern of abuse is emerging across the country. That may be a result of a time lag in our finding out what is happening outside Bujumbura. The Government of Burundi claim that the security forces are arresting only those suspected of serious crimes. I do not believe that that is true, but

even if it were, there is no justification for the ill treatment of prisoners, who have the right to expect the state to protect them, and certainly not to pass them on to the Imbonerakure or other third parties who may be responsible for the torture and killings.

I know that many Members are concerned at reports that the violence is increasingly ethnic in nature, and that the spectre of ethnically driven mass violence is hovering over the conflict. Although I share those concerns—there are some indications that ethnicity is an increasing factor—we must steer clear of assuming that the whole conflict is racially motivated. The conflict was primarily political and remains so. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton explained the history of President Nkurunziza's attempts to cling on to power for a third term. That was the origin of the conflict. It was not primarily a Hutu-Tutsi conflict. Hutu opponents of Nkurunziza are also being targeted, and initially were targeted in larger numbers, both by the state and by the Imbonerakure, the youth militia, but there is an increasingly ethnic tone to the conflict, which makes the neighbours of Burundi deeply worried and the international community even more worried than we would otherwise have been.

I want to see an end to the conflict and an end to the human rights abuses in Burundi. When I spoke to former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa yesterday, we agreed that the only route to a lasting solution lies in an inclusive political process. I give him my full support in his role as the facilitator of the dialogue established by the East African Community. It is right that we let that dialogue take place, and Benjamin Mkapa is the right person to lead it.

I was disappointed by the postponement of the Burundi dialogue, which was due to take place in Arusha this week. Following my conversations, however, I am encouraged by indications that talks will begin on 21 May. President Mkapa is using the intervening period to bring more people to the talks and to have more bilateral talks before the talks themselves happen.

It is essential that all parties, including people who have taken up arms or who have now left Burundi, are part of the engagement and peace process, because a peace process without all the participants is not a proper peace process and will not lead to peace in Burundi. Everybody needs to be included, and by not engaging in an inclusive dialogue, the Government of Burundi are actively obstructing the national reconciliation process. In my phone call to the Burundian Foreign Minister next week and in my letter to him, I will call on the Government of Burundi to come together with all participants and to allow them in some way, shape or form to be in Arusha for the week of 21 May so that the talks can commence.

It is essential that the talks are based very much on the Arusha accord, but I am flexible about the details of how they take place. Like the rest of the international community, I will follow the lead of President Mkapa when he agrees a strategy for the talks.

We are working with our partners on the UN Security Council to agree a deployment of UN police to Burundi. The force will be tasked with monitoring the situation, promoting respect for human rights and advancing the rule of law—all with the aim of creating conditions that will allow a political dialogue to go forward.

[James Duddridge]

The UN Secretary-General has brought forward three options for the police force. The first is a protection and monitoring force with around 3,000 personnel in uniformed units. The second is a monitoring operation with over 220 officers. The third would involve more of an assessment mission, with 20 to 50 officers working with the Burundian police force to increase its capacity.

The UK Government are trying to seek UN agreement on what should happen, but we want the UN police to work with the African Union's deployment of 200 military and human rights observers. The monitoring mission will have to go across the whole of Burundi and have an authoritative way to report back to the UN Security Council. Once the mission is in place, there will be the opportunity to scale it up, but it is important that we get individuals on the ground as soon as possible to assist with the mission.

The protection and monitoring option is desirable, but, to be frank, highly unlikely to get the support of the Government of Burundi or, indeed, the agreement of the UN Security Council as a whole. Although this option would be tempting for the British Government, it would take a lengthy time to recruit 3,000 French-speaking officers, and we really need them on the ground now. However, discussions are ongoing in the UN Security Council, and I am more than happy, through parliamentary questions or any other method, to keep the House updated.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford has raised with me specific cases of detention and of people who have died in Burundi. I thank him for doing that, because it has been very helpful. He discreetly did not go into details of those cases, but we are working on them, and we will continue to do so. For anyone listening to the debate who knows about those cases, let me say that Her Majesty's Government are actively pursuing them. People should find some comfort in that, although it does not immediately provide the certainty that I would like them to have.

Let me assure Members that I am as concerned as they are about the human rights situation in Burundi. The UK Government and our international partners want to end these dreadful abuses and find a peaceful way forward. Only then will the people of Burundi be able to live freely without violence and without intimidation. As I said, I visited Burundi last December. I also visited it way back in 2006, when I met President Nkurunziza. Burundi can be a great country again. It needs our help now, but it has the help and attention of the UK Government.

*Question put and agreed to.*

1.20 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Thursday 5 May 2016

[VALERIE VAZ in the Chair]

## Great Northern Great Eastern Upgrade: Compensation

1.30 pm

**Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con):  
I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of compensation for residents affected by the upgrade of the Great Northern Great Eastern railway line.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz, for what I think is the first time. Let me begin by defining what we are dealing with. The Great Northern Great Eastern line runs through my constituency, as well as those of many right hon. and hon. Members, on its way from Peterborough to Doncaster. Self-evidently, it passes close to the homes of many of my constituents.

The line has, of course, been in daily use for a long time and those who move next to railways lines know—it is not unreasonable—that some noise and vibration can be generated and is expected. However, decisions about where people live and where their homes should be are based on existing use, and what is at issue here is the increase in frequency and speed of traffic along the line following Network Rail's recent upgrade and the measures that should be taken to ameliorate the effects of that, which is something that to date Network Rail has been intransigent on with regards to both measures to deal with increased noise and vibration and compensation for those affected.

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), formally opened the upgraded line in March last year. That huge project was a substantial investment in the infrastructure of Lincolnshire and the east midlands. Network Rail apparently spent £280 million on improving the line, including the upgrading of 61 level crossings and 57 bridges and the renewing of more than 80 miles of track to increase line speed to 75 mph for passenger trains and 60 mph for freight trains.

New electronic modular signalling systems mean that the line can be kept open 24 hours a day, which is obviously a problem for residents given that that was not previously the case. Moreover, the upgrade has increased the number of freight trains as part of plans to free up slots for more passenger trains on the east coast main line route between Peterborough and Doncaster.

Everyone appreciates the need for investment in our railways and I understand the benefits of the upgrade: better and faster services, reduction in the need for heavy maintenance over the next decade and a decrease in delays owing to infrastructure faults. Moving freight traffic on our railways also reduces the number of polluting heavy goods vehicles, which helps us all with congestion and is a welcome move for anyone who has been stuck behind a goods lorry on a Lincolnshire A road, as I all too frequently am.

However—here is the thing—since the upgraded line came into full use, serious problems have become apparent that Network Rail is at present failing to address. In particular the Minister should be aware that, as a result of the upgrade, my constituents and those of other right hon. and hon. Members who live beside the line are now subjected to a level of traffic that they never could have reasonably anticipated when they moved into their homes. These trains—both passenger and freight—are now more frequent, faster and heavier than before. There are more trains during the evening, night and early morning. As one of my constituents, Mr Scrutton, pointed out to me in an email late last night, Network Rail told those who live along the line that the use of continuous rail would improve noise disruption, but the experience of those who actually live along the line is different. Noise and vibration have got worse and, of course, far more frequent.

Those issues were first drawn to my attention some time ago by the Surfleet and Joiner families who live in the beautiful village of Helpringham and who are watching this debate keenly. They are neighbours and their properties both lie alongside the line. They have been subjected to increased noise and vibration from the upgrade and they have been assiduous in trying to find an amicable solution with Network Rail to the concerns they have expressed.

Over recent months, I have also been contacted by more and more constituents from Helpringham and from other affected villages who tell me of sleepless nights, structural damage to their homes and an inability to sell their properties. One mother wrote to tell me that her young daughter now cannot sleep through the night, which is affecting her school work. However beneficial to the nation's infrastructure the upgrade is, it should not, I venture to suggest, have come at the cost that it has to those families, with few or no ameliorative measures put in place. The parish council in another village, Metheringham, one of the worst affected, held a public meeting last year. Residents expressed serious concern about the noise and speed of the trains along the line, and the council pleaded with Network Rail at least to reduce the speed of trains as they go through the village, all to no avail.

I have to tell the Minister that we have come up against the same point again and again. In renewing the track, Network Rail has used continuous welded rail, which it says reduces the noise and vibration and lessens the old clackety-clack noise that could be so infuriating to residents. That is cold or no comfort, because even if it is correct, it simply does not address the additional noise, vibration and nuisance that result from more trains, faster trains and heavier trains.

To show the House just how arrogant the unaccountable Network Rail is, I can do no better than offer its own words to one of my local newspapers last year:

“The line was already in daily use for both passenger and freight rail services and there is therefore no automatic obligation to introduce noise or particulate mitigation measures for increases in service levels.”

That not only displays the attitude that I have faced in trying to raise this issue but neatly summarises the problem: there is seemingly no obligation for Network Rail to mitigate those problems or to deal with me or local residents. If it were a new line or if the line had been substantially changed, there would have been such

[*Stephen Phillips*]

an obligation and residents would have been able either to claim compensation or to get noise mitigation measures installed to improve their individual circumstances. However, we are repeatedly told that in this situation there is no such obligation, so nothing is being done. “Deal with it and get lost” is the clear message that I am receiving.

I well appreciate that Network Rail cannot provide compensation to everyone who lives alongside a railway line, but its response when I have raised individual cases has been that residents can apply for compensation on an individual basis, but the burden of proof falls on them to show that they are suffering from increased noise and vibration. Network Rail seems to think that everyone affected should have to pay for noise monitoring, structural surveys and so on, which are frankly beyond the means of most of those people. Worse still, even if they are successful in claiming compensation, those costs are not covered or taken into account. Although I am not asking Network Rail to pay for a survey every time someone comes along with a complaint, it is surely right, given the volume of people who were misled into thinking that the upgrade would actually improve their lives, that Network Rail should take up the burden and either pay compensation or take steps to improve the lives of those people.

The Minister will know that I have raised this issue in the House before with the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes, who has responsibility for this area, and she has met me to discuss it. She kindly promised to write to Network Rail to encourage it to engage with me and the problems and to do what it can. I have yet to see a copy of that letter, but perhaps he will in due course tell me and the whole House the current state of play.

In truth, despite their welcome sympathy for my constituents, I suspect that the Department and the Government have not yet given this issue the focus it demands in their dealings with Network Rail, which seems unaccountable to Members of Parliament and Ministers without some sort of adverse publicity, which I hope this short debate will provoke. We can push, we can plead and we can shame, all of which I have sought to do, but in the end it simply seems that none of us can push past the brick wall and make Network Rail address problems if it does not want to.

Colleagues across the House will know how difficult it can be to engage with Network Rail on difficult issues, but the problems that I have experienced in communicating with it pale in comparison with those faced by members of the public, parish councils and others. I would like to hear from the Minister about what more he can do to improve the responsiveness and accountability of Network Rail on this issue. I appreciate that he may say that his power and that of the Department to intervene in this case is limited, but I would say that is precisely the problem. It is a problem that needs to be addressed and one that I intend to keep pressing on behalf of all my affected constituents. It simply must be dealt with.

1.39 pm

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North

Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) on securing this debate. In passing, I also commend his courageous stance on child refugees. He made a powerful statement on behalf of his constituents today, and I look forward to the Minister’s response to the important points raised in relation to Network Rail and compensation for local residents.

The Opposition support investment in rail freight. There can be no doubt about its economic and environmental benefits. More than £30 billion-worth of goods a year are carried by freight, generating £1.6 billion for the wider economy. Each freight movement produces 76% less carbon dioxide than the equivalent lorry journeys would produce. I should mention briefly that the loss of coal and steel traffic is a matter of deep concern in the industry, and should be in this House too, especially as the trade in biomass has not met expectations due to the policy decisions made by different Departments.

We can support freight by investing in dedicated infrastructure and upgrading existing routes to free up space on our main lines. Such was the intention behind the Great Northern Great Eastern joint line. I am proud that in government, Labour spearheaded the development of the strategic freight network. It is welcome that some investment has been made in freight, although it is worrying that other projects, such as freight electrification schemes, have dropped by the wayside. However, we must take proper account of the impact that such projects have on local communities. I am sure that all hon. Members sympathise with the position of the hon. and learned Gentleman’s constituents.

Many areas of the country are not well served by rail, and Lincolnshire’s passenger services are certainly inadequate. It is famously home to the Brigg line, which I am told operates passenger services only on Saturdays. Rail funding in the east midlands is proportionately the lowest in the country at just £34 per head, down from £45 per head in 2010. In other words, investment in the region has fallen by a quarter, while fares have risen by the same percentage. It is no wonder that residents and passengers feel aggrieved when they face increases in noise, and yet passenger services are not up to scratch.

In the last 24 hours, freight trains were scheduled to run along the line in question at least once an hour between midnight and 6 o’clock this morning. We have heard today from the hon. and learned Gentleman about the impact of those movements on local residents. He told us that Network Rail was not offering local residents compensation, but compensation is partly a matter for the courts if material loss can be demonstrated—an issue that I know is top of the Minister’s to-do list in relation to diesel emissions. I am sure we all hope it will not come to that.

I would like to make a few points in relation to Network Rail’s position. Network Rail’s actions have perhaps been referred to in isolation so far, but its spending plans for 2014 to 2019 are part of a plan specified and approved by Ministers in the Department for Transport. Indeed, the completion of the joint line upgrade is commemorated by a ministerial plaque at Ruskington station. The financial consequences of decisions taken in 2012 are well known, after the costs of some projects escalated, and I will return to that.

It is worth emphasising that in September 2014, Network Rail became a full subsidiary of the Department for Transport and is now directly accountable to Ministers in a way that was not previously the case. Conversely,

Ministers are also directly accountable in this place for the actions of Network Rail. The Secretary of State has a personal representative on the company's board, in the form of the Department's special director. With the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Devizes (Claire Perry) chairing the monthly meeting of the Department's performance delivery group, which brings together Network Rail and train operators, there is no shortage of channels for Ministers to make their opinions known. The Minister present may reasonably say that it is not his or his colleagues' place to interfere in operational matters, but they can speak about Network Rail's corporate policies, and I hope he will do so today.

It is clear that the issues raised by the hon. and learned Gentleman could affect the constituency of any Member with a railway line in their patch. I am sure we all want assurance that if our constituents were to raise reasonable requests for compensation or mitigation, Network Rail would give them a fair hearing. When this issue was previously raised, a spokesperson for the company said:

"I do appreciate the concerns of local residents but Network Rail is not funded to offer any form of compensation for carrying out our statutory obligations in maintaining or enhancing the railway."

Something important might have been said there. We know that Network Rail is facing a serious budget shortfall. Essential projects have been delayed by up to four years in relation to the electrification of the midland main-line and the trans-pennine route, which were euphemistically paused last June and then mysteriously un-paused a week before the Conservative party conference.

The cost of the great western main line electrification programme has increased from an estimated £548 million in 2011 to £2.8 billion last year. As a result, the company is selling £1.8 billion-worth of assets, including some of our best-known stations, and assuming an extra £700 million of borrowing. Maintenance works are being pushed back, which, according to the regulator, has contributed to the 65% increase in temporary speed restrictions on the national rail network over the past year.

There is a certain irony in the fact that freight sites that were acquired by Network Rail at a cost of £220 million just two years ago are now back on the market as part of the wider fire sale, at a potential loss to the taxpayer. We need clarity. Is Network Rail unable to offer compensation or fund mitigation measures because of some point of legal principle, or is the more prosaic explanation that the company simply cannot afford it? If that is the case, I hope the Minister will enlighten the House, because it is clear that there is more to come into the public domain in relation to Network Rail's financial position.

The hon. and learned Gentleman has raised an important issue that is clearly of acute interest to his constituents who live adjacent to the line. While we want to see more freight on the rail network, his description of Network Rail's interactions with the local community gives cause for concern, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to those points when he sums up.

1.45 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill):** It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I thank my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham

(Stephen Phillips) for securing this debate on the upgrade of the Great Northern Great Eastern railway line and the impact on the residents of his constituency and beyond.

I will first say a few words about why the Government have chosen to invest in our rail network. We are undertaking the biggest transport infrastructure project in Britain since the coming of the motorways, because we have chosen to invest for the future. We are making journeys simpler, better, faster and more reliable, and we are making transport safer and more sustainable. The investment we are making today will help prepare our country for tomorrow. Our plan will support jobs, enable business growth and bring the distant parts of our country closer together. We are supporting a record £70 billion investment in rail, roads, ports and airports. For our railways, we are undertaking the biggest rail modernisation project since Victorian times.

Building world-class infrastructure is vital if we are to build a stronger economy. We are ensuring that every part of Britain benefits from the growing economy and that everyone who works hard gets the opportunities they need to succeed. That includes, for example, High Speed 2, which will connect London Euston to Birmingham, Leeds and Scotland, as well as new, British-built intercity express trains for the east coast and great western rail routes and the electrification of the midland main line. Indeed, on Monday, I will be in Doncaster to mark the start of the building of the HS2 college, which will ensure that we have the skills to deliver such projects.

Rail passengers today are already seeing the fruits of our labour following the renovation of many of our busiest stations, including Manchester Victoria, Birmingham New Street, and the landmark stations at King's Cross and St Pancras International. We have truly entered a new age of the railway, which will leave a lasting legacy for future generations. Our railway and its supply chain contribute up to £9.3 billion in gross value added per year. It employs 212,000 people and provides tax receipts of up to £3.9 billion. The sector is succeeding in winning custom and investment on a level that was unthinkable just a few decades ago.

The strategic purpose of the GNGE upgrade was to provide high-quality freight paths between Peterborough and Doncaster, via Lincoln, on a 24/7 basis. Modal shift of freight from road to rail is good for the country. Rail presents a faster, greener, safer and more efficient way to transport loads across Britain. It has been said that for every freight train operated, 60 lorries are removed from the road network—lorries that thunder past people's homes. The upgrade will allow for up to two freight trains an hour to be diverted away from the east coast main line, thus freeing up capacity for more long-distance passenger services, which will be needed when the new intercity express trains start operating on that route.

The upgrade complements other vital work that is helping to unlock major bottlenecks at York, London King's Cross, Peterborough, Nottingham, Hitchin and North Doncaster. For example, passengers from Cambridge no longer have to cross the east coast main line, increasing the reliability of that route and making journeys better. The significant upgrade between Peterborough and Doncaster via Spalding and Lincoln was one element of a wider package of work to improve the region's railways.

Another strategic objective of the upgrade was to improve safety and to make the railway more sustainable.



[Mr Robert Goodwill]

It now delivers significant operational cost savings through the abolition of 16 manned signal boxes, estimated at £1 million per annum. It has allowed for the replacement of 26 level crossings, as well as lower maintenance costs through the replacement of old jointed rails with continuous welded track, which is designed to reduce noise and vibration for neighbours, while dramatically extending the major maintenance intervention period to 15 years. In fact, comparative analysis between continuous-welded and older jointed track indicates that noise and vibration are reduced by up to 60% as a result of re-railing.

Across the country, Network Rail is developing a range of techniques to reduce rail noise. They include rail grinding, which provides a smoother contact surface, leading to less noise when trains run over it; noise barriers along the side of the track; track dampers fitted to the rails to reduce vibration and noise when trains run over them; and composite brake blocks, which reduce noise significantly compared with previous cast iron ones. The vast majority of the UK rolling stock fleet now has these fitted.

Since completion of the upgrade on the GNGE route, freight traffic has increased as services have been diverted from the busy east coast main line. This obviously represents a change in usage of the line, which previously had a limited day time passenger service. I am aware that there was extensive consultation about this upgrade, including numerous community exhibitions, drop-in sessions, public meetings and presentations to parish councils. Network Rail also held a comprehensive schools engagement programme to help to raise awareness about safety matters associated with the railway.

My hon. and learned Friend will be delighted to hear that the work to specify the next east midlands franchise is under way. We will be seeking views from stakeholders and passengers later in the year about what they would like from the new franchise, including the GNGE route.

Turning to the specific matter of compensation, I thank my hon. and learned Friend for continuing to raise the issue, which I know is important to him and his constituents. I will liaise with the Rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), to address the points he made, particularly the correspondence he referred to.

Passengers are at the heart of what we do in the Department, and the Rail Minister has written to Network Rail to encourage it to take an active interest in noise

and vibration on the GNGE line and look into conducting studies of any increase in them caused by extra freight traffic.

1.52 pm

**Stephen Phillips:** I am extremely grateful to the Minister and to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who speaks for the Opposition, for contributing to the debate.

The problem that has not been grappled with is twofold. Yes, the Minister says that extensive consultation took place before the upgrade of the line and that there was a programme with schools, but the difficulty, as adverted to in the email that my constituent Mr Scrutton sent me overnight, is that the case presented to local residents, parish councils and everyone else was that the upgrade, with the continuous welding of the track to which my hon. Friend refers, would improve their lives by reducing the noise and vibration to which they were exposed. That might well be the case, and the figure of 60% that he gives for the reduction in noise and vibration from using continuously welded track might well be right, but it is only right if the frequency, speed and weight of the trains are the same, and that has not been the case.

The track, signalling and infrastructure have been improved, but as a consequence, the line is used more frequently, including, as the Minister accepts, through the night, and it is used by trains that are heavier, faster and more frequent. The result is that the case that Network Rail presented during the consultation period, to which he adverts, does not represent the reality to which my constituents and those of other right hon. and hon. Members, who unfortunately are unable to join us today, are subjected. That is the issue with which Network Rail needs to grapple. I am talking about whether it can offer compensation and whether funding should have been put in place, when the project was announced, to ameliorate the fact that the trains are causing real concerns to those who live along the line and are affecting not only their property values but, much more important, their quality of life. That is what needs to be addressed. My hon. Friend says that he will talk to the Minister with responsibility in this area; I hope that that is the message that he will take back.

*Question put and agreed to.*

1.55 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## EU Immigration

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

3 pm

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered immigration from the EU.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) for attending; this is a bigger audience than I normally get, and I will do my best to cope with it. EU immigration is a very important issue for my constituents, so I am most grateful to Mr Speaker and the Chairman of Ways and Means for granting me permission to hold this debate. I am sure that its timing is appreciated by everyone present this afternoon.

Immigration is an important issue for my constituents—it is the number one issue on the doorstep. It is now, in the run-up to the EU referendum on 23 June, but it has been for many years. Simply put, the problem is that the number of people coming into our country, both from outside the European Union and from inside it, is simply too great for our country or indeed my constituency to cope with.

Hon. Members will recall that when we joined the European Union on 1 January 1973, immigration from the then Common Market was not an issue. We joined an association of trading partners. That was the decision taken at the time, rightly or wrongly, but the number of Common Market citizens coming to the United Kingdom was relatively small and easy for the country to cope with. Indeed, the flow of United Kingdom citizens into the Common Market area was also small. But we are now in a different world, in which our membership of what was then the Common Market morphed into the European Community and now the European Union—if we stay in, no doubt, it will become the united states of Europe. Immigration is happening on a simply unprecedented scale and we are not able to cope with the numbers coming to our shores from the European Union. That is a big problem, because we have absolutely no control over it.

Immigration has been a big issue for some time, but my attention was drawn to the scale of the problem when it was revealed just a few weeks ago that, although official figures from the Home Office state that 257,000 EU migrants arrived in our country last year, 630,000 EU citizens were issued with British national insurance numbers over the same period. My alarm at the scale of those numbers was intensified by the disparity between the two. My constituents and I are extremely worried that the official Government statistics on the number of people coming to our shores from the European Union are simply not true. If the discrepancy between the two figures cannot somehow be reconciled, we are underestimating the numbers coming into this country by a significant margin. The number of migrants living in the UK may have been undercounted by a quarter of a million over the past five years. If that is true, the British public need to be told. Unless we have some faith in the official statistics given by Her Majesty's

Government, widespread alarm could grow that the scale of the problem we are facing is far bigger than we had estimated.

Migration Watch, which is the respected body of choice for the independent analysis of migration figures, has done a report comparing the migration figures with population estimates for migrants born in the group of eastern European countries known as the A8 nations—the nations that joined the European Union in 2004. The report shows that between 2010 and 2015, the population born in the A8 countries and living in the UK increased by an average of 90,000 a year, but during the same period estimated net migration and the official statistics from the A8 countries averaged only 40,000. That is a difference of more than 50,000 a year. The chairman of Migration Watch UK, the respected Lord Green of Deddington, said:

“This analysis casts serious doubt on the accuracy of our immigration figures.”

The row over the numbers has been stirred by the fact that Her Majesty's Government refused freedom of information requests at the end of last year that would have clarified the situation. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that some 919,000 EU migrants have arrived in Britain since June 2010, but in that same time—over the past six years—some 2.2 million national insurance numbers have been issued to EU migrants. That official figure, 919,000, is worth dwelling on for a moment. The spokesman for Her Majesty's Opposition, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), might like to note that when the Labour party was in government and the A8 countries were admitted to the European Union, we were reliably told by the Minister at the time that only 13,000 A8 migrants were expected to come to our shores. We are now approaching 1 million and counting.

The gap in the numbers is extremely disturbing. I understand that, having resisted for several months, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs agreed in April to pass information to the Office for National Statistics to examine whether the numbers might be reconciled, and that the Office for National Statistics is now processing the information and plans to release a reconciliation on 26 May. Will the Minister confirm whether that is his understanding of the process and that we can expect the reconciliation numbers to be published on 26 May? It is important that the numbers are released before the referendum on 23 June; otherwise, the British people might make the decision on our ongoing membership of the European Union without all the requisite information.

Of the national insurance numbers issued, I understand that some 209,000 were given to Romanians and Bulgarians, yet officially only 55,000 Romanians and Bulgarians settled here last year. Those numbers are extremely worrying for my constituents and for the country. We may now have reached a total of some 450,000 Romanian and Bulgarian nationals living in the United Kingdom. When we debated the number of Romanians and Bulgarians expected to come to this country after their countries' accession, we were told that projections of half a million people coming from those two countries were simply fanciful and scaremongering and that we should know better. We have had debates in this very Chamber in which those dangers were highlighted.

[Mr Philip Hollobone]

If it is true that we now have 450,000 Romanians and Bulgarians in this country, an apology from Her Majesty's Government would be most welcome, because those of us who have been trying for some time to alert the Government to the dangers of the scale of migration have frankly been ignored. The British people will not put up with this for much longer. Also, it is a breach of a key Government promise that EU migrants coming to this country must have a job offer, because, in November 2014, the Prime Minister said:

“We want EU jobseekers to have a job offer before they come here”.

EU migrants are coming to this country without a job offer and getting national insurance numbers, yet our official statistics are not recognising those people properly.

**Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): It occurs to me that the Prime Minister actually said the people from overseas would be here for up to six months when they were looking for work. Which was correct? Was it the people overseas telling me that or was it the Prime Minister?

**Mr Hollobone:** I would like to know the answer to that question as well. I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for posing it. Perhaps the Minister will clarify when he responds at the end of the debate, because my hon. Friend makes an extremely important point.

We have had an attempt to reform how Britain's membership of the European Union works. The Prime Minister has concluded some form of minor renegotiation of our terms of membership, which, surprisingly and increasingly, members of the Government do not seem to talk much about, but apparently this reform has given us special status in the EU, despite the fact that in the official communiqué about the supposed renegotiation, the term “special status” is nowhere mentioned. It is my contention that the proposed minor reforms to benefit entitlements for EU migrants will not slow the intake of EU migrants to our shores at all.

A report this week says that only 6% of such migrants would be affected by the proposals, and I would suggest that the very welcome increase in the national minimum wage and the new national living wage will act as a far greater magnet for workers to come here from other European Union countries. Increasingly, even more than now, the United Kingdom will be seen to be the land of milk and honey with not only the strongest growth rate in the European Union, but now a national living wage well above what many could hope to earn in their own poorer countries within the European Union.

My concerns on behalf of my constituents about the dodgy statistics being used by the Government to count the number of people coming here and about the inadequacy of the supposed renegotiation that the Prime Minister has concluded were added to by further talk about the future admission of Turkey to the European Union. The more I have researched this subject on behalf of my constituents in Kettering, the more alarmed I have become. Yesterday, perhaps anticipating remarks that might be made during this debate, the Prime Minister told the Liaison Committee:

“I would say very clearly to people, if your vote in this referendum is being influenced by considerations about Turkish membership of the EU, don't think about it... It's not an issue in this referendum and it shouldn't be.”

He went on to say that it would not happen for “decades”. I contend that that is simply not the case. Indeed, it is official Government policy to encourage Turkish membership and accession to the European Union. Were Turkey ever to join, the concerns we have now about the present level of immigration to this country from the European Union would be magnified several times over. Perhaps I can give the House some figures that demonstrate the scale of the potential challenge we face.

The A8 countries that joined in 2004 comprise Poland, with 38.5 million people; the Czech Republic, with 10.5 million; Hungary, 10 million; Slovakia, 5.5 million; Lithuania, 3 million; Slovenia and Latvia, with 2 million each; and Estonia, with 1.3 million. Mr Pritchard, you are probably the only person in this room to have visited all those countries, given your reputation for wanting to see international issues at first hand. I know that your reputation precedes you in many of those nations. If we add up all the A8 countries, the figure comes to 72.8 million people. That is the number of people who joined the European Union when the A8 countries joined in 2004.

There are 75 million people in Turkey. The figure is slightly smaller than Germany's population of 80 million and bigger than the populations of France with 66 million, ourselves with 65 million, and Italy with 61 million. In addition, Turkey would be the poorest member of the European Union. Its GDP per capita is \$9,500 per year compared with Poland's—the biggest of the A8 countries—\$13,400 per year and our \$43,800 per year. Those 75 million Turkish people are more numerous than us and poorer than us. Most of them are Muslim and they have a different culture. Were those people to emigrate to our shores at the same rate as people from the A8 countries have done, it would transform communities in this country up and down the land, yet it is the official policy of Her Majesty's Government to actively encourage Turkey to join the European Union.

In Kettering, there are 74,000 registered electors; 4,000 of them are EU citizens, most of whom come from the A8 accession countries. Were Turkey to join the European Union—given that it is poorer than any of the A8 and more numerous than all the A8 combined—we can expect, within five to 10 years of Turkish accession, 4,000 Turkish people in Kettering. I am sure you know many Turkish people, Mr Pritchard; I know several, some of whom live in Kettering and are a great asset to the local community. They are hard-working, diligent, family people. The problem is not their ethnicity, their language or their culture; it is the number that could come to our shores.

If a little borough such as Kettering can expect to have 4,000 Turkish people in short order, imagine what would happen in some of our larger towns and cities. There would be an influx with which we would simply not be able to cope. We are finding it difficult to absorb 1 million migrants—that is the official statistic. It could be double that once the true figures are revealed from the accession A8 eastern European countries. Were we



to get immigration on a similar scale from Turkey, this country would be transformed and, I would suggest, not for the better.

London is currently the biggest city in the European Union, with 8.5 million people. Istanbul has 14 million people, and only 3% of Turkey is actually in Europe. Turkey's accession would extend the borders of the European Union to the borders of Syria, Iraq and Iran, and we know that Turkey's borders are not secure, which is one of the reasons why we have the troubles that we do with ISIS in Syria. Imagine if Frontex, the EU border force, were put in charge of the Turkish border with Syria, Iraq and Iran. I suggest that there is simply no way that Britain's future would be safer and more secure as a member of a European Union with such external frontiers.

The Prime Minister said in his remarks to the Liaison Committee that he did not expect Turkish accession for decades, yet Her Majesty's Government are providing millions of pounds to Turkey to help it to prepare for entry to the European Union. Other accession countries are also in the queue: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia; and the EU has agreed to an instrument for pre-accession assistance to pay money to those countries to facilitate their becoming EU nation states. The UK's share of that money is £1.2 billion between 2014 and 2020, which is a rate of £170 million each year. That annual sum is the equivalent of half the NHS cancer drugs fund managed by NHS England. It would pay for child benefit for 157,000 children. It would pay for 27,000 state pensions. I know that this will interest my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis): it would treble the UK Government's dedicated pothole action fund. Those are very large sums of money, which we are giving to the accession states, yet the Prime Minister tells us that accession will not happen for decades. Well, both sides of the argument cannot be right. Either Turkey is not going to join—in which case, why are we spending all this money?—or it is going to, in which case the British people are not being told the whole truth.

We are giving each year for this fund £9 million to Albania, yet Albania has some of the nastiest criminals in the whole European Union. I am afraid that, along with lots of immigrants from the EU to this country, we are also importing a wave of crime. There are 472 Albanian nationals currently serving time at Her Majesty's pleasure in our prisons. Albania is in fifth place in the list of countries that have exported their criminals to this country. Albania, with 472 people in our jails, has a population of 3 million. Poland has a population of 38 million, and there are 951 Polish nationals in our prisons. Albania in particular has a problem with organised crime, and it has come, and is coming, our way. Albanian mafia gangs are believed to be largely behind sex trafficking and immigrant smuggling, as well as working with Turkish gangs that control the heroin trade in the United Kingdom. I am sure that the Minister will want to help the House by giving us more details about the extent to which crime from Turkey and Albania is already on the streets of London.

Vice squad officers estimate that Albanians now control more than 75% of this country's brothels and that their operations in London's Soho alone are worth more than £15 million a year. They are said to be present in

every big city in Britain, after fighting off rival criminals in turf wars. Hon. Members will know from the number of Romanians and Bulgarians in our prisons and the number of arrests made of Romanians and Bulgarians that we have already imported a wave of crime from EU-entrant countries. I and my constituents are worried about that wave of crime being magnified with new entrant countries if they include Albania and Turkey.

We are giving £2 billion to the accession countries to encourage them to join the European Union. On top of that financial assistance, which would be better spent on health services in our constituencies, we now have a visa-free area all the way from Calais to the Syrian border, because the EU Commission in its wisdom has proposed visa-free access for 75 million Turkish citizens, to the Schengen area. That is part of a co-ordinated, accelerated move towards Turkish accession to the European Union. The Commission has also proposed visa-free access for Kosovo. The problem with Schengen is that, although it makes it easy for people to travel across the Schengen area without having to show their passports, criminals can now pass from the Syrian border to the French coast at Calais without being intercepted. Ronald Noble, the former Secretary General of Interpol, has said that the Schengen system

“is effectively an international passport-free zone for terrorists to execute attacks on the Continent and make their escape... Leading up to these latest attacks, none of those countries systematically screened passports or verified the identities of those crossing borders by land or at seaports or airports. This is like hanging a sign welcoming terrorists to Europe. And they have been accepting the invitation”.

With the wave of immigration, we now have visa-free travel for citizens of non-EU-member states across the Schengen area, all the way to the English channel. I suggest that that endangers our security.

The Lord Chancellor, who is a wise man and who has been ahead of the curve on the issue, has said that the wave of immigration hitting our shores, which is set to get worse if we stay in the European Union, is a direct and serious threat to public services in the United Kingdom. To give one example, GP registrations have increased in this country by 1.5 million in the past three years alone.

It is commonly assumed that the crisis in our accident and emergency departments is caused by new migrants not actually registering with their GPs at all, but going straight to A&E whenever something goes wrong, thus clogging up the system for everyone else. That is just one example of the pressure on our public services. Another would be schools. It is not now uncommon for primary schools to have lots of children whose first language is not English. That puts a great strain not only on the number of school places but on the resources that schools must find to provide the requisite education for our youngsters.

Not only has the EU bent rules to create a visa-free zone from Syria to the English channel, but I contend that many of the people in that zone will end up as migrants to these shores in the fullness of time. It is all very well for the Germans to grant asylum to 1 million Syrians, but in five years' time those 1 million Syrians will be able to get EU passports and to come to this country, with London in particular acting as a magnet. While we remain in the European Union we have no control on the numbers coming to our shores.

[Mr Hollobone]

Frontex, the seriously discredited EU border force, which is clearly struggling to maintain the security of Europe's borders, has said that the expansion of the visa-free area will increase the pressure on our borders. A recent Frontex report noted:

"The number of persons aiming to get to the UK with fraudulent document significantly increased (+70%) compared to 2014. This trend is mostly attributable to the increasing number of Albanian nationals often misusing Italian and Greek ID cards followed by Ukrainian nationals abusing authentic Polish ID cards".

There we have it. Members do not have to believe me: Frontex, the EU's border force, says that there has been a 70% increase in the number of people using false documentation to try to get into the United Kingdom.

**Mr Andrew Turner:** Will my hon. Friend repeat what he just said about the ability of people with no UK passport to come into this country because they have a German passport, which they can become a holder of very quickly?

**Mr Hollobone:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight that issue. Many other EU countries do not have the rigorous rules on the issuance of passports that we have. For example, in Romania, there are lots of Moldovans. Moldova is not in the European Union; it is next door to Romania and used to be part of Romania, but it is no longer. Lots of Moldovans qualify for EU passports because they are the grandparents of Romanian citizens. They are not EU citizens, but with their EU passport they are able to waltz into the United Kingdom and we are unable to do anything about it. Were we a free, independent and sovereign nation once again, we could say, "No, you're not allowed into this country," because we could set new rules. While we are a member of the European Union and the European Court oversees our border policy, we do not have that right.

The migration crisis is already having an impact on the forces that we have at our disposal to control our borders. The UK Border Force runs five seaborne cutters to protect Britain's shores from immigration from the European Union. At any one time, one is under repair, which leaves four others. Two have been sent to help out with the migration crisis between Greece and Turkey, which leaves just two to patrol Britain's territorial waters. Members will be as shocked as I am to learn that official Home Office statistics show that 67,500 small planes and boats enter Britain each year unchecked. At least, that is what the Home Office tells us. That is an alarming number of incursions into British airspace and British territorial waters. Reducing the number of seaborne cutters available to intercept such vessels clearly weakens our borders.

This week, the situation relating to our borders and to people coming to this country from the EU was made even worse by new European Union rules on the Dublin regulations. The Dublin regulations say that, if a person claims asylum in an EU nation state and then goes to another EU nation state, the second country can send them back to the first. That is the way the system is meant to work, except that it does not work with Greece, because its system is meant to be so badly run that sending an individual back to that country after they have been intercepted here breaches their

human rights. That is despite the fact that tens of thousands of our citizens go to Greece on holiday every year.

Under the Dublin regulations, we have been sending back only 1% of the asylum seekers who reach our shores. That is pretty pathetic, but the European Commission is now changing the regulations and will give us no guarantee that Britain will be able to maintain even the current regulations should we decide to stay in the European Union. I seek further clarification from the Minister on that point, because my constituents are concerned not only about the volume of legal immigration to this country, but about people abusing the asylum system to come to our shores.

**The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire):**

As I said on the Floor of the House yesterday, the Commission has said that the UK would be able to maintain the Dublin regulations as they currently exist should we decide not to opt in to the new proposals. It is important to make that point clear.

**Mr Hollobone:** The Minister places more reliance on the European Commission's word than my constituents and I do. There is nothing to stop it changing its mind once we have voted to stay in the European Union. Indeed, in the draft proposals, it threatened the United Kingdom with financial consequences should we not co-operate with its decision. Although I take careful note of what the Minister says, I am afraid I do not have as much faith as he has in what the Commission tells us.

**James Brokenshire:** On that point, my hon. Friend has highlighted the issues relating to the new regulation but, as he knows, the UK has an opt-out: we have to positively opt in to new measures with a justice and home affairs base, of which this is one. Therefore, the UK has that protection, which goes much further than anything the Commission says.

**Mr Hollobone:** Again, although I admire the Minister's confidence that what the European Union tells us will in fact be the case, I simply do not trust it, because it has gone back on things before and I expect it will again. The reason why I think it will go back on its word is that the asylum problem in the European Union is out of control. The EU has decided that it is simply not possible for the existing Dublin regulations to work effectively. Now it wants a quota of people from non-EU countries who come to Europe claiming asylum to be allocated to other member states. My great fear is that, if we vote to stay in the European Union, we will be lumbered with some of those asylum seekers, especially because we would remain under the control of the European Court, which would ultimately decide what our asylum policy should be. If we decide to leave the European Union, we will be able to decide our asylum policy for ourselves. I am sure it would be free and fair, but it would not be the free-for-all that we have at the moment.

The consequence of all this immigration from the EU, in whatever form it takes, is that we are losing control of our country. I asked the Transport Secretary for his transport projections, and I was given three sets of figures. The road traffic forecast for England suggests that traffic will increase between 4% and 20% by 2020;

between 11% and 38% by 2030; and between 15% and 52% by 2040—that is before Turkey joins the European Union. Can hon. Members imagine 50% more vehicles on our roads by 2040? Those are not my figures, but Her Majesty's Government's official estimates of what is happening to roads in every constituency in our country.

Increasingly—I am sure we all have constituents who have had this experience—job vacancies require people to speak Polish, Romanian, Bulgarian or even Russian. A recent report showed that dozens of vacancies on a Government-backed recruitment site called Universal Jobmatch stressed that it is important for people working in certain occupations, such as painting or decorating, to be able to converse in Polish. That is discrimination against our own people, and we all know it is happening in every constituency in this country. It is absurd to expect someone who was born and brought up in this country to speak one of those eastern European languages to secure a fairly menial job.

The pressure of all this immigration from the EU has caused the population of this country to rise to seriously unsustainable levels. As the chairmen of the cross-party group on balanced migration highlighted, official Government projections show that our population will grow by nearly 10 million in the next 25 years to more than 74 million people. Currently, we are at 64 million; they expect that to go up to 74 million.

If all immigration from the EU and elsewhere were to end tomorrow and were reduced to zero, the UK population would rise from 64 million today to almost 68 million by 2039, official Government statistics estimate. If we were to have net migration of just over 100,000 a year—just outside the commitment in the Conservative manifesto, on which you, Mr Pritchard, the Minister, the Parliamentary Private Secretary present, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton North, my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight and I were elected only a year ago—the population would rise to 72 million by 2039. If immigration were to rise at 185,000 a year, which is the central long-term estimate that Her Majesty's Government agree with and included in the infamous, dodgy Treasury document published a few weeks ago, our population would be set to rise to 74 million by 2039. If immigration were to rise at the high predicted rate of 265,000 a year, we could expect a population of almost 77 million.

Turkey has a population of 75 million. Its population is going down in number, and the people coming to this country will help to boost our population from 64 million today to perhaps 77 million by 2040. My contention is that this country will simply not be able to cope, in terms of infrastructure, public service provision or culture, if we agree to a wave of immigration on that scale.

When my constituents are thinking about how to vote on 23 June, I say, “This is it. This is going to be your one and only chance. Do you want your country back? If so, vote to leave. If you're happy to have a wave of immigration from Turkey, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and other new entrant countries, then either stay at home or vote to remain, but your country will not be your country in 2040.”

3.42 pm

**Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): I was going to limit myself to intervening on my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), but I want to make a couple of points as well.

I read in the analysis by Her Majesty's Treasury about the long-term economic impact of EU membership and the alternatives. On page 136, it states:

“In the principal projection, total net international migration to the UK falls from 329,000 per year in 2014 towards 185,000 per year from 2021 onwards.”

What did the Treasury mean by that quote? It went on to state:

“This is a stylised projection rather than a forecast.”

That tells me nothing. Perhaps you can explain that better than I can, Mr Pritchard, but if so we will have to converse about it later.

My staff and I have worked out that “stylised” must mean that the projection is artificial, mainly because it does not consider alternatives and is filled with uncertainties. The Treasury has considered no potential models in case of Brexit other than the two already available alternatives—for both we would have to accept free movement of people—and nor has it considered uncertainties such as future Government policies on immigration and student fees.

What did the Chancellor of the Exchequer say about that? He said that calculations based on the Treasury's projection mean that there will be 3 million more immigrants in this country, at a minimum, by 2030. He has made his position clear: through the renegotiations, he has received more powers for the country to deal with net migration; and we will have to accept free movement of people if we want access to the single market. I am very concerned about that. The Chancellor may have said that we are the people who want free movement, but that is something that I do not want. I especially do not want limitations on immigration from outside Europe and yet free movement within Europe.

The Treasury could have created potential Brexit models that do not include the Swiss or Norwegian alternatives. Two such potential models are a restrictive migration policy and a very liberal policy—both could have been offered, but neither of them were. The reason is that the Treasury wanted to use the analysis for political reasons, not for explaining anything. That was the policy of the Chancellor and, indeed, of the Prime Minister.

The 100,000 net migration pledge in the Conservative manifesto includes immigration from both EU and non-EU countries, but many more people have come to Britain from the EU than originally anticipated. In 2010, the Prime Minister pledged to reduce net migration into Britain to below 100,000—“no ifs, no buts”. He claimed that that was a promise, although it has been watered down to a mere ambition. Why was the target re-included in the 2015 manifesto if it was already known that he could not keep it and we as a nation could not keep it, and why did the Chancellor agree to it?

3.46 pm

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I will be very brief. There are important elections going on today and I for one want to rejoin my team in Holborn and St Pancras as soon as possible to play my part until the polls close at 10 pm.

I recognise the importance of the issue we are debating; it is important to the country and to the EU referendum debate. However, people could be forgiven in recent



[Keir Starmer]

days for thinking that this is the only debate that those who want to leave the EU want to have about Europe—even on a day when people in all four countries in the UK are going to the polls. I and the Labour party strongly support remaining in the EU and being at the heart of reforming it, not leaving it. Remaining in the EU is better for British jobs, for security and for our economy. It also equips us better to tackle complex cross-border issues such as the environment and global terrorism.

There are clear benefits to free movement and migration. There is the economic case: the ease of access to the world's largest market. There is the cultural and social case: migration has benefited the UK and made it a more diverse and confident country. It has helped to build our public services—for example, the national health service is reliant on migration—as well as businesses and universities. To take an example, one in five carers looking after our growing elderly population has come to Britain from the EU and elsewhere. It works both ways: about 1.2 million British people are taking advantage of free movement to work and live in other European countries. It is also important to remember that movement is not unrestrained; there are exceptions, we have border controls and we can deport individuals within Europe.

I acknowledge, and the Labour party acknowledges, the challenges that free movement can bring. I recognise that the sharp increase in migration in certain areas can cause cultural dislocation and pressure on services. I have seen that around the country—in the north-east and the north-west, in particular—and recognise that it is a challenge that needs to be confronted. We believe strongly that the answer is not to leave the EU but to reform it, to ensure that money and services follow people much more closely, for example through regional funds, and to look at how we can tackle issues such as low pay and protecting the going rate.

We also need to look at our own policies and regulations, rather than blaming the EU for everything. For example, we should be toughening labour market enforcement—that is dealt with in the Immigration Bill, which is in the final stages of going through Parliament—stopping gangmasters and introducing new laws on fair recruitment. There are UK solutions that I believe we can and should be introducing. For those and other reasons, I support staying in and leading in Europe, not leaving it.

3.49 pm

**The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) on securing the debate. Although the Chamber may not be well attended—no doubt other Members are elsewhere, fighting the elections that the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) referred to—my hon. Friend highlighted important issues and I welcome the opportunity to debate migration and Britain's place in the European Union. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) for taking part in the debate.

We remain committed to reforms across the whole of Government to create an immigration system that works in the best interests of our country and reduces net migration to levels that are sustainable for our public services and infrastructure and for communities across

the UK. My hon. Friends mentioned the pressures that migration brings to public services such as the health service, housing and schools. The Government take those issues very seriously, which is why I make my points in the way that I do. We seek to reduce net migration to a sustainable level—from the hundreds of thousands to the tens of thousands—and to exercise the control that the last Labour Government did not. We have sought to make those changes through a range of reforms to both EU and non-EU migration.

During the last Parliament, we introduced reforms that have cut widespread abuse of work, student and family visas. We also cracked down on illegal working and sham marriages, and legislated to make life in the UK difficult for illegal migrants by cutting their access to goods and services such as driving licences, rental accommodation and bank accounts, and by other means. The Immigration Bill that is before the House will continue that reform. It is important to underline the steps that have been and continue to be taken in cracking down on such abuses.

**Mr Hollobone:** I commend the Minister and the Home Office on their efforts in tackling the abuses of the immigration system that he inherited. I dread to think what the level of immigration would be if we still had a Labour Government—they simply would not have taken the steps that he has outlined—but how will he honour our manifesto commitment to get annual net migration below 100,000?

**James Brokenshire:** It is important to recognise the need to continue the reforms that we have made and take further steps to crack down on the abuses from both outside and inside the EU that I have highlighted. Strengthening our ability to crack down on abuses of free movement and related issues such as sham marriage was part of the Prime Minister's renegotiations, and we must ensure that European Court judgments are clarified so that we can take action on those issues. I will come on to address some of those broader themes.

During the last Parliament, we tightened the rules on EU nationals, demonstrating that the right to free movement is not unqualified. Since January 2014, we have made significant progress in tackling abuse. We have restricted access to a range of benefits for all those who are not economically active. Between January 2014 and December 2015, we sought the removal of more than 600,000 EU nationals who either did not have the right to be in the UK or had abused their right.

The reforms that the Prime Minister secured at the February European Council take us another step forward in our efforts to ensure that immigration to the UK is sustainable and maximises Britain's prosperity and security. The deal is legally binding across Europe and the agreement will come into force directly after the referendum if the UK decides to stay in the EU. In the future, no British Prime Minister will be able to give away further powers to Brussels without a referendum. That is an important agreement that the Government achieved in the previous Parliament, which gives further assurance on the concerns people may have about any ceding of further powers to the EU. We have put that lock in place and provided a referendum to give further assurance.

**Mr Hollobone:** We have the luxury of time this afternoon, and I am listening to the Minister intently—he is reading the brief he has been given extremely well. The independent

Office for Budget Responsibility, set up by the Conservatives, has said that from 2021 onwards net migration will be 185,000 a year, even after the Prime Minister's renegotiation and all the measures the Minister outlined. Do the Government dispute the OBR's forecast or will we be in permanent breach of our manifesto commitment?

**James Brokenshire:** It is important to underline that the OBR's numbers are a projection and not a forecast. Projections do not attempt to predict the impact of Government policy or changing economic circumstances at home or abroad. That is why I make the point about the policy changes we have made and continue to make and why we retain the focus on bringing net migration down to the sustainable levels that my hon. Friend and I recognise are important to reduce the pressures on public services.

**Mr Andrew Turner:** Does the Minister not realise that the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that we had to accept the prospect of 185,000 migrants a year to this country and that we could not argue about it? We cannot move the numbers.

**James Brokenshire:** I come back to the point I made about the OBR's projections. Clearly, numerous factors can affect migration flows. At any given point in time, the UK's position relative to where potential migrants come from and other places they could go will affect flows. Part of the Prime Minister's reforms at EU level are about competitiveness. Some of the challenges we have seen in recent years have stemmed from disparities in the economic development of one European country against another. That is why the competitiveness part of his negotiations is important.

We are looking at a number of factors. In terms of the skills agenda, my hon. Friends will very much welcome the approach that the Government have taken in creating apprenticeships—some in the previous Parliament and more in this Parliament. That is giving significant opportunities to reskill and providing our young people with opportunities to meet the needs of the employment market.

We need to look at this in relation to reform of migration rules: the steps we have taken for those outside the EU and through the EU renegotiation on factors that could draw people here. However, it is also about the overall competitiveness of the EU. We need the EU market to grow and to see countries' economies succeeding and creating jobs. There is also the skills agenda here and welfare reform more broadly, with people seeing that work always pays and taking up opportunities to work.

There are a number of factors at play, which is why the Government are looking at this from the perspective not only of Home Office migration policy but of other policy areas. That demonstrates our commitment to look at sustainability levels. We are acting across Government to reduce net migration and to establish a system that acts in the best interests of our country.

**Mr Hollobone:** No doubt the Minister will be promoted in due course, but if he is not and remains in post, how confident is he that by the time this Parliament concludes in 2020, net annual migration levels will be below 100,000 a year?

**James Brokenshire:** My hon. Friend and I were elected on the basis of a manifesto for the whole of this Parliament that set the ambition to reduce net migration to the sustainable levels that existed before the previous Labour Government came to power. That firmly remains the ambition and focus of this Government, which is why we continue to make reforms in relation to our migration policy and are taking other actions and approaches across Government. I am sure he would support this Government retaining that focus and taking such action.

I want to come on to the overall figures, to which both my hon. Friends referred. It is important to recognise that national insurance numbers and net migration statistics are two separate things. Obviously, national insurance numbers cover all those who register seeking to work, including those who stay for less than 12 months in the UK and short-term migrants, such as those who come to work for a short period or for seasonal work. In contrast, the net migration statistics are estimates for long-term international migration—in other words, those who intend to stay in the UK for 12 months or more for any reason, not just to work.

In order to inform Government policy and, most importantly, to ensure public confidence, it is important that our immigration statistics are robust and reliable. The numbers and data sets are complex, and I have explained the distinctions between the two different sets highlighted this afternoon. I want to correct my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering slightly; the data on net migration statistics are not Home Office data but data from the Office for National Statistics, which is independent of my Department. It is important to put that on the record. The Home Office does not seek to influence those data; we are very much at arm's length. The ONS produces net migration statistics based on the surveys it conducts and what it extrapolates from those.

There has been a recognition of the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend and others about the differences between datasets. A group of experts from the ONS, the Department for Work and Pensions, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Home Office and the Cabinet Office is in place to reconcile data sources, and a report of its findings will be published later this month. I hope he will be assured that that information is forthcoming.

With the measures that the Prime Minister secured in February on EU nationals' access to benefits, we are ending the culture of getting something for nothing. We think it is right to address the fact that people can come here and claim benefits from day one, and the changes we have introduced will allow us to do that. Once pulled, the new emergency brake on welfare will apply to EU nationals newly arriving in the UK, who will not have full access to our in-work benefits until they have lived here and contributed to our country for four years.

The European Commission has clearly said that the UK already meets the criteria for the implementation of the emergency brake. Reducing that pull factor will help us to control and reduce immigration from the EU. As I have said, the new settlement will also make the whole of Europe more competitive. We have new commitments from the EU to cut red tape, complete the single market and sign new trade deals. Boosting prosperity across the EU will play an important part in tackling some of the root causes of mass migration from one member state to another.

[James Brokenshire]

I want to emphasise a few points I made in my statement to the House yesterday on the Dublin regulation. The UK has an opt-out from justice and home affairs measures that we exercise by deciding whether to opt in to new measures. We are not bound to sign up to the proposals that the Commission published yesterday, and we will have three months to consider whether to do so. To be clear, that does not mean there will not be debate about or consideration of those matters in this House. We benefit from that time scale in deciding whether to opt in at the outset to a new measure published by the Commission. That acts as an important protection and safeguard, which the Government have carefully used in determining what is in the best interests of the UK when deciding whether to opt into new measures.

I emphasise the Commission's statement yesterday, which indicated clearly that under the new proposals, whether or not we decide to opt into them, the UK will continue to be able to operate the existing Dublin regulation, which sets out the principle that those who claim asylum should do so in the first country in which they arrive and that EU countries bearing the greatest responsibility in relation to asylum seekers are supported. That important protection was underlined by the Commission in its statements yesterday.

**Mr Hollobone:** Even if we keep the existing regulations, we are only sending back 1% of the asylum seekers who make it to our shores. That is negligible and pathetic. Has the Minister any other ideas about how we can send back to the first safe country they came to the thousands of asylum seekers who cross the channel and come to Britain?

**James Brokenshire:** I do not regard 12,000 people over the past 10 years as negligible. I agree that we need to see reform of the Dublin regulation. We continue to engage in that, while supporting the principles that the existing Dublin regulation clearly sets out. We think it is right to uphold those principles—a point we have made clearly at the EU level, and we will continue to do so—rather than undermine them and effectively set off in a whole new direction, which is not appropriate.

The UK does not agree with the concept of relocation. We have used our protections so that the UK will not be party to those arrangements. It is about reform, not about rewriting Dublin. That is the UK Government position, and it is one we will continue to advocate firmly at meetings with the Council and the Commission.

**Mr Hollobone:** I commend my hon. Friend for his undoubted efforts. It must be tortuous going to all these EU meetings and banging the table for Britain. I completely understand where he is coming from, but in the existing situation we have the absurdity where if somebody claims asylum in Greece—where most migrants are claiming asylum—and they make it to Britain, we are unable to send them back to Greece. What is the European Union doing to sort out the asylum system in Greece so that asylum seekers can be sent back there?

**James Brokenshire:** I am sure that my hon. Friend would welcome the support that the UK Government and others are giving through the European Asylum

Support Office, to enable the Greek system to operate in a cohesive way. Indeed, as part of the work through the EU-Turkey deal, the UK will be sending 75 experts to practically support the processing of asylum claims and co-ordination in the coming days and weeks, which is important. Other EU countries are taking similar steps.

My hon. Friend's assertion is seemingly based on the assumption that this would all be so much better if we were outside of the EU. I do not see it in those terms. There are structures, systems and processes that we are able to use and harness so that people can be returned. If we were outside the EU, we would obviously not have the benefit of those. He mentioned the issues and challenges. However, it may be even harder if we were on the outside rather than on the inside in dealing with a number of these important issues. The EU migration crisis is not going to go away. Therefore, we all need to make a judgment on how best we can influence the agenda and ensure it is appropriately focused to respond to those challenges.

We are not part of the Schengen agreement, but what happens in countries such as Greece and Italy is important in terms of migratory flows and our experience in the UK. We have more ability to influence that if we sit round the table. We have the protection of not being part of the Schengen agreement and the protection of the opt-out arrangements on justice and home affairs measures. We can seek to influence that agenda in a way that is in the best interests not just of the UK, but of the EU as a whole. Clearly, that is a debate and a consideration that we will all inform ourselves and others of as we look towards 23 June. No doubt that debate will continue in this House and elsewhere.

I want to touch on a connected theme: EU enlargement. We believe that no European country should join the European Union unless there is strong, credible and demonstrable evidence of the fulfilment of all political, economic and legal criteria, as well as country-specific conditions for full EU membership. The UK has and will use a veto to block any new country from joining the EU unless all membership and country-specific criteria are fully met. We acknowledge that for most EU-aspirant countries that means a challenging and lengthy EU accession process, but it is a process by which to ensure that all future member states are fully reformed and capable of taking on effectively all EU membership obligations.

There would be no alternative to preserving the credibility of EU enlargement in the eyes of the British and wider EU public if we were to take a different view. We do not believe in setting timetables for new EU accessions. Countries should join the EU only when they are truly ready, however long that takes. We believe in quality, not speed or automaticity, in the accession process.

**Mr Hollobone:** I understand what the Minister is saying, but when it came to the accession of Romania and Bulgaria there were serious doubts about corruption in those countries and the extent of criminality among some sections of those nations. I remember that because we debated it on the Floor of the House. Since those two countries joined, especially Romania, there has been a wave of crime on the streets of London particularly, but also elsewhere in the country, by Romanians and Bulgarians. The Home Office and the police have struggled



to get on top of that. Hundreds of Romanians and Bulgarians are in our prisons at the moment. What assurance can the Minister give me and my constituents that he is on top of the Albanian and Turkish criminality problem should those countries join?

**James Brokenshire:** I will make some general points about foreign national offenders before perhaps going on to the specifics. The Government are clear that they will seek to deport foreign nationals who pose a threat to the British public. All foreign national offenders who are given a custodial sentence are considered for deportation. We removed 3,310 European foreign criminals in 2015. That is more than triple the number deported in 2010. We also removed more than 2,250 non-EU offenders last year. Yes, we need to do more work, but I assure my hon. Friend of the focus and attention the Government give to seeing that foreign national offenders are removed from our shores. I undertake that work not just within the Home Office, but with Ministers in the Ministry of Justice and in the Foreign Office.

The deal that we secured for the UK includes important changes in international law that will give us greater freedom to tackle new and emerging threats to the UK and to crack down on abuse by subjecting EU nationals to stronger and longer re-entry bans. It adds important clarification to member states' powers to exclude or deport EU nationals who pose a threat to our security. The Commission is committed to reviewing criminality provisions when the free movement directive is next updated. As part of the Government's settlement for the UK in the EU, we have strengthened our hand so that EU nationals who genuinely pose a threat to the UK public, even without a conviction, can be deported.

**Mr Hollobone:** I am listening carefully to the Minister and that is all fine, but it seems to me and my constituents that, if a foreign national commits a crime in this country and is convicted of that, they should be deported from this country and banned from ever coming back. We are unable to do that while we remain a member of the European Union.

There is supposed to be an EU directive on compulsory prisoner transfers. That directive has been in place for some time. Why are Romanians not going back to Romania and Poles not going back to Poland? Also, can the Minister assure me and my constituents that he is on top of the Turkish and Albanian criminality problem?

**James Brokenshire:** I can tell my hon. Friend clearly that the precise purpose of the National Crime Agency, which the Government established, is to give much greater focus to organised criminality in all its forms, including cross-border criminality from a range of countries. We have also established the immigration crime taskforce, which brings together officers from the National Crime Agency, Border Force and immigration enforcement to focus on the trafficking and smuggling of people and attempts to trade in misery by exploiting people in that way.

I emphasise the steps we are taking to enhance our understanding of the picture and to disrupt and take action against cross-border criminal groups. Crime is becoming ever more international and my argument is that being party to measures in the EU, through Europol,

access to data and the European criminal records information system, helps and supports us. Having that detail and information helps us to fight criminality as it crosses borders. Being outside a number of these structures and not having access to that information would make that work much harder. That is why I judge, on balance, that it is right and benefits the UK to remain in the EU. Benefits arise from those mechanisms, structures and information. For example, foreign nationals who abuse our hospitality by committing crimes in the UK should be in no doubt of our determination to deport them. Initiatives such as Operation Nexus join up immigration enforcement and policing across police forces to focus on foreign national criminals, ensuring that we are doing the necessary checks and harnessing the available information.

**Mr Hollobone:** The Minister is being extremely generous, which is appreciated. The Prime Minister himself said yesterday in front of the Liaison Committee that the Government have not got on top of the issue of the compulsory transfer of foreign national offenders in our prisons to jails in their own countries. The relevant Government committee met only once every six months to review the issue. What more can the Minister do to put rocket boosters under the implementation of the EU directive?

**James Brokenshire:** As I have already indicated to my hon. Friend, the situation is not static. There is a continuing commitment and focus across the Government. The Prime Minister rightly and understandably takes a personal interest in the issue to put public protection foursquare in the work of this Government. I assure my hon. Friend on the steps we take and the discussions we have with the Ministry of Justice and the Foreign Office to energise and retain that focus on ensuring that criminals in the UK who have abused our hospitality are removed at the earliest opportunity, whether that be by way of removal that we undertake, or by way of using mechanisms such as prisoner transfer agreements within the EU or outside. I certainly assure him of the continued focus we have brought and will bring, knowing that, although the numbers have gone up, there is much more work we need to do.

Before I finish, I want to deal foursquare with Turkey. I cannot see Turkey joining the EU any time soon. Why do I say that? Well, Turkey has to negotiate 35 different chapters, decisions on setting benchmarks and agreements that they have been met and the closure of those mechanisms. All require a unanimous EU decision. Once those negotiations have been separately completed and closed, there has to be another unanimous decision on accession. Then all 28 member states have to ratify an accession treaty, and the European Parliament has to approve the accession. It should be recognised that France has said that it will hold a referendum on Turkish membership of the EU, and 75% of the French public currently do not want Turkey to join; Austria has said the same. Given that process and the views of other member states, Turkey's EU accession is not on the cards for many years to come.

There is also an important point about transitional controls. When new countries are admitted to the EU in the future, we will insist on economic convergence before their citizens can benefit from free movement. Therefore,

[James Brokenshire]

their GDP per capita, employment rate and income distribution should be close to the average across the EU. We will ensure that those issues are at the heart of any discussion on EU enlargement. We of course have a veto, which would block a new country joining the EU unless tougher controls were introduced.

As I said at the start of my speech, the Government accept European free movement as part of a functioning European internal market. We welcome those who come to work and contribute to a growing UK economy, but we must continue to focus on the scale and speed of immigration into the UK and must take action to tackle those who abuse free movement rights.

The Prime Minister has delivered on the commitment to renegotiate a better deal for Britain in Europe, and it is now for every individual to decide whether they want to remain in the European Union or leave, in the first referendum on the matter in more than 40 years. This is not the end of the process, but an encouraging start in reforming Europe. However, it is clear that the UK will be stronger, safer and better off remaining in the EU. That is the Government's view and my view, but I welcome the opportunity that we have had this afternoon to debate some of these very important issues relating to migration that are at the heart of the concerns of many people and many right hon. and hon. Members. I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering for giving us the opportunity to air these issues and debate them in a calm and considered way. That is what the debate should be all about, and what I hope will continue to set the tone as we look to the weeks ahead and the referendum towards the end of June.

4.22 pm

**Mr Hollobone:** You will know from your constituency postbag, Mr Pritchard, and my hon. Friends the Members for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) and for Northampton North (Michael Ellis) and the Minister and will know from theirs and even the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the spokesman for Her Majesty's Opposition, will know from his that immigration is a major concern for all our constituents. These concerns are not racist. They have to do with how this country will cope with a potential wave of immigration such as we have never seen before.

The central estimates predict that our population could go up from 64 million today to 74 million by 2040. The traffic on our roads could increase by 50%. Our GPs are under pressure; our hospitals are under pressure; and our schools are under pressure. Britain is groaning under the strain now. What will it be like if we have more migrants coming from Turkey, Albania, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro and perhaps even Ukraine in the future?

I am grateful to the Minister for his response and to Mr Speaker for granting the debate. My message to my constituents is this: "You have been warned: this is your one and only chance on 23 June; do not muck it up." I will vote to leave and I hope they do, too, because if we want our country back, it is the only sensible option.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered immigration from the EU.

4.24 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Thursday 5 May 2016

## BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

### Pubs Regulation

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry):** The Government have worked hard to meet the challenging deadline laid down by the Small Business Enterprise and Employment Act 2015, and bring the pubs code into force by 26 May 2016.

Good progress has been made. The Government published draft regulations and a consultation in two parts on 29 October and 4 December 2015. The consultation closed on 18 January, and Government published a response document and laid regulations on 14 April 2016.

Since laying the pubs code regulations, we have identified a small number of technical drafting errors.

It is important to get the pubs code right for both tenants and pub-owning businesses. Therefore the Government withdrew the regulations yesterday in order to deal with these errors. This means that the pubs code will not be in force by the 26 May as previously set out.

The Government will address the technical drafting issues with the regulations quickly and re-lay amended regulations as soon as possible, minimising the delay bringing the code into force. The regulations are subject to the affirmative procedure, and so Parliament will have an opportunity to debate the content and give the regulations full scrutiny.

[HCWS711]

## TREASURY

### Financial Services Update

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin):** I can today confirm that I have laid a Treasury Minute informing the House of the sale of NRAM plc to Cerberus, and the replacement of NRAM plc on the Government's balance sheet by a new company, NRAM (No.1) Limited ("StayCo"), which will continue to wind down the remaining legacy assets of the former Northern Rock.

The Treasury Minute concerns the transfer to StayCo of assets and liabilities of NRAM plc that were not included in the sale to Cerberus. The Government have also reissued, on a like-for-like basis, the guarantees for StayCo's directors, replacing the previous arrangements for NRAM plc. StayCo is also taking on NRAM plc's state aid commitments.

The Government have received the final £520 million from Cerberus as part of the conclusion of this sale. The Treasury's contingent liabilities have also reduced by £1.6 billion as a result of the withdrawal of the Treasury's undertaking to NRAM plc.

I will update the House of any further changes to NRAM (No.1) Limited as necessary.

[HCWS712]

## HEALTH

### Health Informal Council: 17-18 April 2016

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison):** An informal Health Council meeting was held in Amsterdam on 17-18 April 2016 as part of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council formation. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison) represented the UK.

#### *Innovation*

There was a discussion on innovation and pharmaceuticals and topics raised by participants included health technology assessment, pharmaceutical pricing, the joint procurement agreement and different regulatory mechanisms, including priority designation for medicines (PRIME). The UK stressed its support for regulatory work that helped to get effective innovative products to patients sooner. The UK also stated that some joint working on information sharing on pricing and horizon scanning could be useful but underlined that all work must be voluntary and fully respect member state competence.

#### *Healthy foodstuffs*

There was a discussion on initiatives member states are taking forward at a national level to encourage healthy eating. The UK said that national action was required on a variety of fronts, including partnership working with industry, and underlined the significant cost of type 2 diabetes and the need to focus on children.

The UK stated that it could not just be for consumers to act, and stressed that consumers would want further information, for example, through mobile apps. The UK also stated the importance of physical activity and explained the recent sugar levy announcement.

#### *Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)*

The Dutch presidency raised the issue of AMR as a top priority and stressed that a one-health approach covering human and animal health was vital. The UK underlined the cost of inaction, praised the presidency's desire for an ambitious outcome at the UN General Assembly, and supported their one-health approach. The UK supported an ambitious agenda on AMR which would lead to concrete progress, provided that member state competence was fully respected. The UK also flagged the importance of the current independent AMR review launched by the Prime Minister.

[HCWS713]





# ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 5 May 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>CHURCH COMMISSIONERS</b> .....	304	<b>DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—continued</b>	
Apprenticeship Levy .....	307	Brexit .....	299
ExxonMobil: Climate Change Policies .....	308	British Farming.....	293
Iraq: Christian Communities .....	306	British-produced Meat .....	298
Near Neighbours Programme .....	305	Broadband: Rural Businesses .....	297
Same Sex Marriage: Clergy .....	304	Great British Food Campaign .....	289
<b>DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS</b> .....	289	Hedge Maintenance .....	299
Air Quality.....	292	Milk Price .....	294
Badger Cull.....	290	Rural Payments Agency .....	296
Bovine TB.....	295	Topical Questions .....	300

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 5 May 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS</b> .....	5WS	<b>TREASURY</b> .....	5WS
Pubs Regulation.....	5WS	Financial Services Update.....	5WS
<b>HEALTH</b> .....	6WS		
Health Informal Council: 17-18 April 2016.....	6WS		

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned, and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than**  
**Thursday 12 May 2016**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE  
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.



---

**CONTENTS**

**Thursday 5 May 2016**

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 289] [see index inside back page]**

*Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*  
*Church Commissioners*

**Business of the House [Col. 309]**

*Statement—(Chris Grayling)*

**Backbench Business**

**Voluntary Sector: Faith Organisations [Col. 321]**

*General Debate*

**Human Rights (Burundi) [Col. 348]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Westminster Hall**

**Great Northern Great Eastern Upgrade: Compensation [Col. 157WH]**

**EU Immigration [Col. 165WH]**

*General Debates*

**Written Statements [Col. 5WS]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

---