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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 9 May 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Food Banks: Work Coaches

1. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the outcomes of his Department's trial of placing work coaches in food banks. [904877]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb): Work coaches in Manchester have been working with a food bank since October last year, and feedback shows that this service helps to signpost support for people to move into work and navigate the welfare system. I am particularly keen for all jobcentres to explore how they work with local initiatives in their communities.

Justin Madders: My local food bank, the West Cheshire Foodbank, has seen a 6% increase in usage in the past 12 months, including a disgraceful 13% more children coming to use the food bank over that period. Why has there been such an increase? Is that due to welfare benefit cuts, or does the Minister believe there is another explanation?

Stephen Crabb: I am happy to speak to the hon. Gentleman about the situation in his constituency, but the Trussell Trust recently found that there has been no overall increase in the use of food banks over the past 12 months. Indeed, the average price of food has fallen by 2.5% over the past 12 months, and average wages have gone up. We continue to spend more than £80 billion on working-age benefits to support those in need.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): When I visited my food bank in Rugby I saw advisers who were meeting people's individual needs and making a big effort to understand the circumstances of the people there, and to provide help, support and some direction. Is it not entirely right that that should happen?

Stephen Crabb: My hon. Friend is right. I have been a trustee of a food bank, and I know a bit about how they work on the ground. Effective food banks are those that partner other organisations, such as Citizens Advice

and Christians Against Poverty, to provide debt advice and other support to help tackle the underlying causes of why somebody might be at a point of crisis and dependency and need to use a food bank.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Latest Trussell Trust data show a 2% rise in food bank use over the past year. Is the Minister proud of that?

Stephen Crabb: The Government take this issue very seriously, and one thing I am proud of is that we are spending more than £80 billion on working-age benefits, which is the mark of a decent, compassionate society. At the same time, we are working hard to improve the benefit system, precisely to help those who are most disadvantaged and at the greatest distance from the labour market, to give them a much better chance of leading fulfilling lives.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to Department for Work and Pensions questions for, I believe, the first time. I am sure he will make a huge impact. He certainly did when I worked with him—[*Interruption.*] I do not know what Labour Members are shouting about. Does the Secretary of State recall that when the Labour Government were in power, the existence of food banks was more or less covered up? Since the coalition Government, and now this Administration, came into office, we have advertised and helped food banks to exist and to help those most in need.

Stephen Crabb: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I am not interested in playing politics. I am encouraging more than 700 jobcentres around the UK to explore fully how they work in partnership with local community initiatives, so that the third sector, working with work coaches, can provide the best possible support and advice to those who need it.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): When the Trussell Trust published the figures last month showing record food bank demand over the past year, it stated:

"In some areas foodbanks report increased referrals due to delays and arrears in Universal Credit payments."

What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that the introduction of universal credit does not drive food bank demand even higher?

Stephen Crabb: That is one reason why we are using such a careful and controlled timetable for rolling out universal credit. I am much more interested in it being rolled out safely and in a secure way, so as to avoid the kinds of problems that we had under the previous Labour Government, when tax credits were blasted out and huge numbers of people received overpayments and were required to pay back thousands of pounds.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What is the average length of time that a benefit recipient makes use of a food bank? Are we asking individuals who have successfully moved away from food banks what advice they would like to have received when they attended them?

Stephen Crabb: My hon. Friend makes a very good suggestion, and peer support and advice is one of the most effective things that can be provided for those who

are making that transition from worklessness into work. Using some of the experiences and insights of people who have had to rely on food banks is important.

Disabled People: Benefits

2. Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the effect on disabled people of changes to benefits since 2012. [904878]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): The Government set out on 20 July 2015 our assessment of the impact of the welfare policies in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, with similar assessments for previous changes. Spending to support people with disabilities and health conditions will be higher in real terms in every year to 2020 than in 2012.

Steven Paterson: Once universal credit has been fully implemented, severely disabled people with no adult to assist them will be entitled to about £58 less per week than under the current system. Is the Minister concerned that young carers are likely to face considerable additional burdens as a result of the loss of the severe disability premium from about 25,000 disabled single parents?

Justin Tomlinson: I did not quite pick up all the hon. Gentleman's points, but a number of exemptions are in place. We continue to review the best way to protect vulnerable people. Universal credit will be a far better, far simpler and far more supportive benefit. It will help people.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): Will the Minister provide an update on the progress of the joint work and health unit, which is a very sensible way to join up parts of the public sector?

Justin Tomlinson: This is a significant part of our ongoing work to bring the two main Departments together to help create additional opportunities and support for colleagues. We will bring forward further details soon.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The fact is that analysis by the House of Commons Library shows that £1.2 billion of support to disabled people is set to be cut in this Parliament. Is this what the Secretary of State means about having a new conversation with disabled people?

Justin Tomlinson: Let me challenge the hon. Gentleman back on that. In my area, spending on personal independence payment and disability living allowance will be £16.6 billion, as compared with £12.7 billion under the previous Government. Overall, we spend nearly £50 billion a year on benefits to support people with disabilities and health conditions. That is rising every year to 2020. Record amounts of money are being spent.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I recently met Nick Gregory and his team at Grimsby Jobcentre, which serves my constituency. They are doing excellent

work in getting disabled people and those with learning difficulties back into work. Will the Minister enlighten us on what further initiatives are planned?

Justin Tomlinson: It is great to hear about the fantastic work in my hon. Friend's constituency and I would like to meet him to discuss it further. We continue to upskill staff across the jobcentre network, increasing the number of disability advisers and making improvements to our Work programme and Work Choice programme.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): The Children's Society and Citizens Advice report that the families of about 100,000 disabled children, who currently receive support through DLA, are set to see that support halved under universal credit. That will have a real impact on their quality of life and longer-term life chances. With a new Secretary of State at the helm, Ministers have a chance to step back from the universal credit debacle. Will they look again at the impact on disabled children and look for fairer alternatives?

Justin Tomlinson: Again, I challenge the hon. Lady back on that. Any analysis of universal credit has to take into account the introduction of the national living wage, the extension of childcare, support for working parents and increases to the personal tax allowance. It is a simpler system. More generous childcare provision supports those who work for just a few hours and there will be a named contact. As we have previously set out, the PIP benefit system is far more generous than the old DLA system.

Dr Whiteford: The research of reputable organisations simply does not bear that out. The reality is that disabled children are not the only ones who will lose out under universal credit. A devastating report by the Resolution Foundation published just last week found that, even with tax allowances and the increase in the minimum wage, under universal credit half a million working families will be significantly worse off. Disabled people, disabled children and low-income working families—are these really the people the Tories want to target to pay for austerity cuts and tax cuts for the rich?

Justin Tomlinson: We are doing more to support working households. The proportion of people in relative poverty who live in a family with someone who is disabled has fallen since 2010. There are a number of exemptions to all our benefit cap and freeze announcements, including for those on PIP, DLA, industrial injuries benefit, attendance allowance and employment and support allowance. Following further talks, we will include carer's allowance and guardian's allowance.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Does the Minister agree that Disability Confident events can be crucial in this regard? I am holding my own event in Mid Dorset and North Poole, to which the Minister would be more than welcome to attend. Will he join me in encouraging all Members from both sides of the House to get involved?

Justin Tomlinson: So far, 22 MPs have held Disability Confident events, including a joint event between a Conservative MP and a Labour MP—there's a future coalition for you. Some 515 employers have registered

an interest in Disability Confident, up 169 since 23 March. We are getting over 100 registrations a month. This is all about creating additional opportunities for disabled people who are looking for work.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): What assessment has the Minister carried out into the £35 per week cut to ESA and its impact on levels of deprivation among disabled people?

Justin Tomlinson: When that was announced, a cumulative distributional analysis was also published that included the impacts of welfare spending, health spending, employment support and infrastructure investment, but let us not forget that only 1% of those on ESA were coming off that benefit—that was the case under our Government, the coalition Government and the former Labour Government. We have all tried to make changes but fundamental reform is needed, and that is what the Government will deliver.

Pension Schemes: Younger Workers

3. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What steps he has taken to increase the number of younger workers subscribing to pension schemes. [904879]

16. **Andrew Bingham** (High Peak) (Con): What steps he has taken to increase the number of younger workers subscribing to pension schemes. [904894]

18. **James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): What steps he has taken to increase the number of younger workers subscribing to pension schemes. [904896]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Shailesh Vara): The Government continue to roll out the programme of automatic enrolment of all eligible workers into workplace pensions. Of those eligible workers, approximately half are under 40, and the largest increase in pension membership in 2015 was among those aged 22 to 29.

Nigel Mills: I welcome the progress the Minister has outlined. Now that we have announced the lifetime ISA, will he consider allowing people, especially young people, to be auto-enrolled into a lifetime ISA, rather than a pension, to give them a chance to save for a house and have improved financial resilience while they are young?

Mr Vara: The lifetime ISA can supplement somebody's pension but is not a pension as such.

Andrew Bingham: Will my hon. Friend agree that the new state pension provides clarity for younger workers, who will now know what to expect from their state pension when they reach pensionable age? Will that not have a positive impact on how much they choose to save in a private pension, because, with this clarity, will come understanding and an ability to plan?

Mr Vara: I most certainly agree with my hon. Friend. The previous state pension system was extremely complex—it was difficult for people to know how much state pension they would get before they reached the

state pension age—whereas the new state pension provides clarity from an early age as to what they can expect. In future, they will know that they can expect over £8,000 a year from the state—a solid foundation upon which to plan their own retirement savings.

James Berry: Having spent time with charities and high street banks in Kingston, I have been surprised by the low level of financial literacy they report, even among people with secondary and tertiary education. What steps will the Government take to ensure that young people receive the high-quality information and guidance they need, particularly on pension planning, which often feels a long way off to younger people?

Mr Vara: I thank my hon. Friend for that very good question. He will be aware that last October the Department and the Pensions Regulator jointly launched a refreshed communications campaign entitled “Don't Ignore the Workplace Pension”, to help build on and maintain the success of the previous campaign in raising awareness of automatic enrolment. The campaign includes digital and social media advertising, as well as television and radio, and has helped to raise awareness and guide people towards further information.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): It was pleasing to hear the Minister say that predictability and clarity were important in pensions. Will he apply those principles to the 2.6 million WASPI women?

Mr Vara: We have applied clarity, as I have said at the Dispatch Box on many occasions during the course of many debates.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): The younger generation are more likely to be self-employed, and 15% of the workforce are now self-employed, yet only one third are saving into a pension pot. Will the Minister look at the recommendations from the Federation of Small Businesses, which is calling for incentives and support for self-employed pension provision?

Mr Vara: The hon. Gentleman raises a good point about a particularly important sector of our economy, and we will certainly look at anything put forward. I emphasise that the Government are keen to ensure that people, including the self-employed, think about and prepare for a better future in terms of their pension.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Pension saving has been undermined by the new lifetime ISA, a new gimmick from the Chancellor, which will promote ISA saving from taxed income over pension saving from pre-tax income—in other words, it is a convenient tool to increase tax receipts today. No employee will be better off saving into an ISA than through workplace pension saving. The Association of British Insurers has forecast that someone saving 4% of an income of £25,000 in an ISA would be £53,000 worse off by age 60. Will the Minister tell the Chancellor to stop his gimmicks, stop this nonsense and get back to pension savings? We need no more con tricks from this Government.

Mr Speaker: Order. The eloquence might be worthy of Demosthenes, but I think the length would not. Questions must be shorter.

Mr Vara: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman takes his usual hostile view to anything, without doing his research. Because of the auto-enrolment scheme pushed forward by this Government, there will be between £14 billion and £16 billion more in pension savings by 2020.

Long-term Youth Unemployment

4. **Chris Skidmore** (Kingswood) (Con): What recent progress he has made on reducing long-term youth unemployment. [904880]

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): Since 2010, long-term youth unemployment has halved, falling in the last year alone by 90,000. This Government are determined to support young people to improve their life chances and make sure that they do not slip into a life on benefits; rather, we will support them so that they are either earning or learning when they leave school.

Chris Skidmore: Since March 2010, with the help of organisations such as N-Gaged, a training provider that recently helped me find my first apprentice, long-term youth unemployment has fallen in Kingswood by 60%. Does my right hon. Friend agree that companies such as N-Gaged deserve congratulations on getting young people back into work? What more can be done to help training providers?

Priti Patel: That is a very good question, for which I thank my hon. Friend. He highlights the important role of training providers. They are the ones providing opportunities for young people to get their foot on the employment ladder and, importantly, to gain the skills and experience that employers are looking for. My message to him and to other employers is that I hope they will work in partnership with us so that we can encourage more of this activity.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): A young autistic constituent of mine was asked by his DWP work adviser what he enjoyed doing. He replied that he enjoyed being a DJ as a hobby. His reward was to have a demand for repayment of £7,000 in benefits, having been accused of working when he did the DJing as a hobby. Is that the type of understanding approach for autistic people that this Minister likes to see from people working for the DWP?

Priti Patel: First, I would be happy to look at the particular constituency case that the hon. Gentleman raises, but I would also say that our work coaches do a tremendous amount of work, supporting people in our jobcentres when it comes to employment and providing advice. I understand that he highlights a particular case, and as I have said, I would be happy to look at the details of it, and perhaps give some guidance and advice to his constituent to support him in securing an employment outcome.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): On the subject of long-term youth unemployment, I was curious to know what our work coaches are doing to help young people get the softer skills they need to get into the workplace—CV preparation and so forth?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. Our work coaches have a range of tools at their disposal, but they work with the individual and the young person to look at the skills they may not have but which they need to secure employment outcomes. Of course, we have extra adviser time to improve job-search skills, for example, as well as sector-based work academies and support to get people on to apprenticeship schemes. As I highlighted in an earlier answer, that means working with providers.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): The Prime Minister and Chancellor regularly tell us that the EU is good for jobs and prosperity. Will the Minister tell us about youth unemployment rates in the rest of the EU and whether or not the Government can learn anything from those other EU countries?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He will be aware, as will all Members, of the ongoing economic turmoil in the eurozone and the double-digit unemployment, which is really where the European Union is right now. The employment challenges that they face serve as a warning to us. I am delighted to say that the UK is a bright spot when it comes to employment, which is thanks to the long-term economic plan of this Government.

Mr Speaker: That was a very well informed answer, I am bound to say.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one way in which Members can help young people to find work is by hosting jobs and apprenticeships fairs? Does she look forward to the first-ever jobs and apprenticeships fairs in my Louth and Horncastle constituency on 2 September?

Priti Patel: I commend my hon. Friend for hosting that jobs and apprenticeships fair. She is absolutely right: such fairs provide a gateway for young people who are looking for work. I know that many Members on both sides of the House have been doing exactly the same, but I encourage all Members to bring employers together in their constituencies, and to give young people the opportunities that they are seeking.

Workless Households

5. **Andrew Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): What recent progress his Department has made on reducing the number of workless households. [904881]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb): The number of workless households has reached its lowest level since records began, and the latest figures show that it has fallen by more than three quarters of a million since 2010. That demonstrates that not only is our approach to the economy working, but, crucially, more families are benefiting from the security and dignity that work brings.

Andrew Griffiths: Does the Secretary of State agree that too many people are suffering as a result of drug and alcohol abuse, which is preventing them from returning to work? Does he agree that helping those people to become drug and alcohol-free is essential, and will he

visit the Burton Addiction Centre to see how we can transform lives, help people to become free of addiction, and get them back into work?

Stephen Crabb: My hon. Friend has asked an excellent question. As he probably knows, I visited the BAC O'Connor Centre in Newcastle-under-Lyme two weeks ago, and saw for myself a group of addicts in recovery who were making that difficult journey back into work. Many of those people are motivated by voluntary work placements and the goal of achieving a paid job when they finish. Their dream is getting into paid work, and the work of rehabilitation and recovery centres like BAC O'Connor Centre is crucial in that regard.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept that even in areas where unemployment levels are lower than they have been recently, high levels persist in some wards? Will he agree to work with Labour's newly elected Welsh Assembly, and to note the position in the Flint Castle ward in my constituency? The level of unemployment there is still high, but Welsh Assembly policies have helped to reduce it over many years, and Labour was rewarded with a good victory last Thursday.

Stephen Crabb: The right hon. Gentleman knows very well that I have a pretty good track record of working with the Welsh Government, whoever is in power. As for his important point about entrenched and persistent poverty, it is absolutely right for us to take account of that. We will shortly be launching a life chances strategy in which, for the very first time, the complex underlying factors that lead to persistent pockets of entrenched poverty in wards such as those to which he has referred will be genuinely addressed.

Older People: Employment

6. **Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con):** What steps he is taking to increase the number of older people in employment. [904883]

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): There are now 9.6 million workers aged 50 and over in the United Kingdom, an increase of 1.3 million over the last five years. The Government are, of course, doing much to support older workers. We have, for instance, removed the default retirement age, allowing people to choose when to retire.

Sir David Amess: Bearing in mind that the Leader of the Opposition and I both have a vested interest in the future of older workers, will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that the number of unemployed people in Southend has fallen by 37%, and will she ensure that we maintain policies to secure that downward trend?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that unemployment rates are plummeting in his constituency, among others. The Government are focusing on, and committed to, delivering first-class support to all age groups, particularly employment support.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Statistics published last month show that more than 600,000 people in their 50s and 60s are helped into work through the

tax credit system, which provides vital in-work support. How many of those 600,000 will be eligible to receive in-work support under universal credit?

Priti Patel: As the hon. Gentleman will know—because we have discussed the issue, and because it has already been raised in questions today—universal credit is a simpler benefit, which provides much more targeted support to help people into work while also securing long-term job outcomes. As I have said, when it comes to older workers, we are committed to delivering first-class support for people of all ages, including older workers, and working closely with them to secure employment in the long run.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: On the basis of that answer, it would seem that the Minister has as good a grasp of numbers as the Minister for Schools has of words. Let me try to give the right hon. Lady some assistance. Perhaps it would help if she read the Resolution Foundation report. The answer is that one third of working families on tax credits—that is 200,000—will not be eligible for any support under universal credit, and another 200,000 will lose £2,000 a year. Will the Minister tell us why this Government are so intent on attacking older people in work?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman is now speaking about older workers as well as working families. We need to look at universal credit in the context of the support that it provides. He also mentioned the Resolution Foundation report, which failed to take on board various factors such as childcare support for working families and the ongoing support that universal credit and our work coaches provide to working families.

Work and Health Programme

7. **Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab):** What recent progress he has made on the Work and Health programme. [904884]

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): Development of the Work and Health programme design is well under way, including engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. The Department has commenced the commercial process for the programme by releasing the prior information notice for potential providers on 28 April.

Melanie Onn: A constituent of mine was volunteering last year at Green Futures, a social enterprise. That was directly related to his degree subject. While he was applying for work, the jobcentre put him on the community work placement scheme, saying that a voluntary placement would be better for him if arranged through the jobcentre. A private company paid by the jobcentre then arranged a six-month unpaid placement at the very organisation he was already volunteering with. Does the Minister agree that this is an utter waste of taxpayers' money? How can she guarantee that this sort of incompetence will not be repeated under the new scheme?

Priti Patel: I would be very happy to look into that particular example. The hon. Lady has highlighted a practice that clearly needs to change. The Work and Health programme will be designed to support claimants with health conditions and disabilities who have been

unemployed for at least two years, but, as I have said, I shall be very happy to look at the case that she has raised.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): My right hon. Friend knows that one of the key challenges in supporting autistic people into work is ensuring that we identify what works. There are very few data on work outcomes for autistic adults. Can she assure me that the new Work and Health programme will record whether someone on the programme is on the autism spectrum, so that we can track whether the programme has been successful for this very important group?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend raises an important point. I would like to assure her that, in designing the new provision, we are working at local level on harnessing expertise as well as engaging with a wide range of stakeholders. By doing that, we shall be taking on board important lessons from the overall Work programme and Work Choice as well as looking at how we can achieve sustained long-term employment outcomes.

State Pension Reform: Gender Inequality

8. **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the effect of state pension reform on gender inequality. [904885]

20. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the effect of state pension reform on gender inequality. [904898]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb): Last month, we introduced a new simpler state pension as part of our wider package of pension reform. The combination of the new state pension, automatic enrolment, the triple lock, the protection of benefits and giving people power over their pension pots will ensure that pensioners, male and female, will have greater protection, security and choice in retirement.

Hannah Bardell: Protection is all very well, but introducing the new state pension in 2016 means that 350,000 women who were born between 1951 and 1953 will retire on the old system just before the new provisions come into force, whereas a man born on exactly the same day will retire slightly later but receive a pension under the new arrangements. Will the Minister please heed the Scottish National party's calls to establish a pensions commission in order to end these inequalities?

Stephen Crabb: The hon. Lady was not here in the last Parliament when we debated and voted on these changes. We debated them at enormous length and a clear decision was made by Parliament. As part of that, a concession of more than £1.1 billion was introduced to limit the impact of the rising state pension age on those women who would be most affected. Let us be clear: there is no party in this Chamber that has a clear and coherent proposal for unwinding the changes that have been made since 1995 to equalise the state pension ages. I therefore have no plans to bring forward further concessions or changes.

Patricia Gibson: I have listened carefully to what the Minister has just said. State pension equalisation has left 500,000 women born between 1953 and 1955 much

worse off, with some facing a financial loss of up to £30,000. When will this Government take responsibility for the severe financial impact on those women and, in the interests of justice, do the decent thing, relent and put in place transitional arrangements?

Stephen Crabb: In the last Parliament, we were clear about the reasons why the changes were happening, which included addressing the long-term, serious fiscal impacts of life expectancy increasing. Developed nations all around the world are having to take exactly the same kind of decisions. Let us be clear: unwinding any of the decisions that were taken would involve people of working age—younger people—having to bear an even greater share of the burden of getting this country back to living within its means. We need to take a broader perspective than that taken by the hon. Lady and her SNP colleagues.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Two weeks ago, the Labour Front-Bench team held constructive talks with the co-founders of the Women Against State Pension Inequality, or WASPI, campaign. We will work together to find a fair solution to the injustice that they and hundreds of thousands of women face as a result of the Government's state pension reforms, and my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State has suggested six of them. The Secretary of State said that he would meet the WASPI women, but he also said that there were no plans to change the policy. Why is the Secretary of State going into that meeting with a closed mind? By doing so, will he not just repeat the mistakes of his predecessor?

Stephen Crabb: I have to say to the hon. Lady and to Members across the Opposition Benches that there is a question here of responsible opposition. If they do not have a plan that is clear and fully costed—the Labour party's policies were not—they are simply playing those women along, pretending that they are in a position to unwind the changes while sitting there knowing full well that they have no serious proposal for doing so.

Personal Independence Payments

9. **Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that staff carrying out personal independence payment assessments act in a professional manner. [904886]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): The Department has set clear requirements regarding the professions, skills, experience and training of the health professionals that providers can use to carry out PIP assessments. We expect the highest standards from the contractors who carry out assessments on our behalf, and measure their performance against several targets, including quality and customer experience.

Christina Rees: My constituents have reported huge inaccuracies between the information that they provide against PIP descriptors and the conclusions drawn by Capita's staff, which causes great stress for people already in difficult circumstances. What is the Department doing to ensure that Capita's staff are trained to take the appropriate time and care over assessments, so that they are as accurate and as fair as possible?

Justin Tomlinson: All health professionals must be registered practitioners and must have met the requirements for training competence. They must also use their expertise in disability to provide advice on people's level of functional ability and the impact on their day-to-day lives. A team of experts provides additional support. We also work regularly with a wide range of stakeholders to help to advise on where further improvements can be made.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The Minister will be aware of the recent Public Accounts Committee report on the process of contracting out disability assessments. Does he agree that the recommendation to publish regular contractor performance data is one way of ensuring that assessments are professional and effective?

Justin Tomlinson: I know that that Committee did some valuable work in that area, which was partly why we had the extensive independent review of the performance and management of PIP that was carried out by Dr Paul Gray.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): The Minister's response to my letter and that of my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State following the shocking revelations of last month's "Dispatches" on personal independent payment assessments was complacent to say the least. Given the evidence not only from "Dispatches" but from the Public Accounts Committee in March and from the National Audit Office in January, all of which raised concerns about the quality of PIP assessments, when will the Minister investigate the matter and review Capita's contract?

Justin Tomlinson: I gave a crystal clear, comprehensive response in the Westminster Hall debate, and I am sorry that the hon. Lady was obviously somewhat distracted. It is crystal clear that the individual in that film, who acted disgracefully, has rightly been removed. Progress in training and policies is being reviewed weekly. We have zero tolerance of such behaviour.

People with Autism: Work

10. **Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op):** What steps he is taking to help people with autism find work. [904887]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): Working with the Autism Alliance, we are training a network of over 1,000 autism leads in Jobcentre Plus and developing an autism passport to record condition details and reasonable adjustments. In addition, Access to Work now has a hidden impairments specialist team to support people better, including those on the autistic spectrum.

Mr Sheerman: Will the Minister wake up and shake up his Department, because autistic people have a great deal of talent that gets wasted in this country? Only 15% of children on the autism scale end up working in a full-time job, so is it not about time that we took this seriously? I am a member of the newly formed Autism Commission, and we will help the Government, on a cross-party basis. Let us wake up to this tremendous potential, which is unexploited.

Justin Tomlinson: I agree 100% with the hon. Gentleman, who has a formidable track record of work in this area. The Department has put in place the Think Autism strategy and the autism taskforce, and we are working with the leading organisations. Only two weeks ago, I attended a constructive round-table meeting with the National Autistic Society, where there was a real focus on getting more employers to offer opportunities to take advantage of the huge wealth of talent that these individuals offer.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Does the Minister think that the closure of Remploy factories—every one of them—three years ago helped people with autism, and those with other disabilities, to find work?

Justin Tomlinson: The independent review stated that that move needed to be made. Through our specialist employment training programme, we will be offering twice as many job outcomes, which is what we need to do, as part of our commitment to halving the disability employment gap.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Following the success of national autism awareness month, it was good to see the Government announce a taskforce to explore access to apprenticeships for those with learning disabilities, which will be led by the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard). I am aware that there is not a formal consultation period, but the British Association for Supported Employment has been asked to provide evidence to the taskforce by 13 May. Does the Minister agree that as many people and organisations as possible should feed into the taskforce's work, to ensure that everyone has access to a life-changing apprenticeship?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Lady for the constructive engagement. I am keen to listen to as many experiences from different organisations as possible. This is an incredibly important area of work for me, and I would be very happy to have a meeting with her if she would like to contribute.

State Pension Age: Women

11. **Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab):** If his Department will introduce transitional protection for women adversely affected by changes in the state pension age. [904888]

12. **Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab):** If his Department will introduce transitional protection for women adversely affected by changes in the state pension age. [904889]

19. **Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab):** If his Department will introduce transitional protection for women adversely affected by changes in the state pension age. [904897]

21. **Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab):** If his Department will introduce transitional protection for women adversely affected by changes in the state pension age. [904900]

22. **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): If his Department will introduce transitional protection for women adversely affected by changes in the state pension age. [904901]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Shailesh Vara): Women affected by changes made in 2011 face a maximum increase in state pension age of 18 months, rather than two years, as a result of a Government concession, and will retire under the new state pension, which will be more generous for many than the previous system. No further transitional arrangements are planned.

Mr Cunningham: Will the new Secretary of State look again at these transitional arrangements? Will he also see whether or not the cost of this could be offset by some adjustments in his budget?

Mr Vara: The Secretary of State made it absolutely clear earlier in these questions that he has no intention of revisiting this issue.

Julie Elliott: Why has the Minister not used the opportunity of a majority Conservative Government to put right the wrongs of the last Government, which have had an impact on some 4,290 women in my constituency, by introducing proper transitional arrangements—or is this just compassionate Conservatism in action?

Mr Vara: During the debates in 2011, the then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the then Pensions Minister said on Second Reading of the Pensions Bill that they would go away, consider and reflect, and they did precisely that: on Report, they made a concession worth £1.1 billion and reduced the timeframe from two years to 18 months. Transitional arrangements were put in place, and at a substantial and significant cost, notwithstanding the very tough economic climate at the time.

Kate Hollern: Recently, the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise talked about how

“people have been working...for up to 30 years and paying into a pension fund in the expectation that...they will have a certain amount of money on which to live”.

She went on to say that

“there is an increasingly good case to be made for the right thing to be done by people”.—[*Official Report*, 25 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1183.]

Given the sudden change in the retirement age for women, how can the Government justify this rank hypocrisy from one Minister to another? Will the Secretary of State bring fairness for those women? In his new role, he has an opportunity to show that he will consider things fairly and support the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise.

Mr Speaker: From the context of her question, I think that the hon. Lady was levelling the charge of inconsistency as between one Minister and another. I know she would not accuse a Minister of behaving hypocritically to another.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): She was talking about the Government.

Mr Speaker: Well, if the reference were to the Government as a collective, that would be another way—

Mr Skinner: Exactly.

Mr Speaker: That would render it orderly. I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) for proffering advice, especially from a sedentary position.

Mr Vara: With permission, Mr Speaker, I will take the hon. Lady's reference, “from one Minister to another” slightly broadly and remind her that, following the passing of the Pensions Act in 1995 there were 13 years of Labour government during which a succession of Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions and pensions Ministers did absolutely nothing to try to alter the system that she and her colleagues now seek to change.

Barbara Keeley: While Ministers do nothing, my constituents and other people are really suffering. My constituent, a woman born in the 1950s, told me:

“I feel anxious and distressed about how I am going to manage without an income in what has been, for my generation, the expected retirement age.”

It is six months since we had our first debate on this, so will the Minister and the Secretary of State now commit that civil servants will assist with costing the various options for transitional arrangements that have been put forward by Labour?

Mr Vara: The hon. Lady asks for a costing. During the 2011 debate the cost was calculated to be £1.1 billion, and there is no intention to revisit the issue.

Paula Sherriff: Does the Minister accept that there were significant failures from his own Department to communicate the changes to the state pension age, and does he think it unacceptable that some women found out about the changes only months before they expected to retire?

Mr Vara: In 2012, a survey compiled by the Department for Work and Pensions found that only 6% of women who were due to retire within 10 years thought that the pension age was still 60. Moreover, in 1995, people were able to ask for an estimate of when they were likely to retire, and in 2011 more than 5 million people were sent a letter to the address that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs then had informing them of the changes.

14. [904892] **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): With an all-party group on the WASPI campaign being set up later this week, will the Secretary of State confirm that he is willing to meet a cross-party group of MPs and some members of the campaign to discuss the matter further and to open up some good communication?

Mr Vara: I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is more than happy to meet the all-party group. I know that he, like the rest of us, has met some members of the campaign in his constituency, but he is certainly keen to meet the all-party group.

Disabled People: Work

13. **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): What steps he is taking to assist disabled young people into work. [904890]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): Last year, Access to Work supported record numbers of young disabled people to start or retain work. In partnership with Volunteering Matters, the DWP has supported the implementation of job-shadowing work-placement opportunities for young disabled people. The programme encourages employers to see the many benefits of employing disabled talent.

Luke Hall: Will the Minister update the House on what action is being taken to help disabled people into work, specifically through apprenticeships?

Justin Tomlinson: Following my visit to Foxes in Bridgwater, where a staggering 45.6% of its young adults get into paid sustainable employment, I now recognise that vocational pathways are important for many young disabled people, especially those with learning disabilities. Therefore, I and the Minister for Skills have asked my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) to lead a joint Department for Work and Pensions/Department for Business, Innovation and Skills taskforce to increase access to apprenticeships for young people with learning disabilities. In addition, in recognition of what the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) said, the taskforce will in future look at opportunities in apprenticeships for people with autism and other hidden impairments.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): My constituent has had her higher rate of disability living allowance removed, leaving her effectively housebound, which makes it almost impossible for her to find work. Until she exhausts all her appeal rights, she has had her Motability car taken away. Will the Minister agree to meet her to discuss what transitional support may be available to her and to the many people whom this will affect across the country?

Justin Tomlinson: We have seen 22,000 more people access the Motability scheme since PIP was introduced. There is an opportunity for a mandatory reconsideration and then an independent appeal. Those who are not successful do get to keep the car for a further seven weeks and have up to £2,000 to put towards buying that car or making alternative arrangements.

Universal Credit

15. **Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): What estimate his Department has made of the number of families in which one or more people are in employment who will receive less support under universal credit after moving from tax credits. [904893]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb): Universal credit is transforming the welfare system so that work always pays. For the first time, we are providing tailored support to help people to get into, and make progress in, work. Anyone being moved to universal credit from tax credits will receive transitional protection, so that they are not a cash loser.

Neil Coyle: A single parent on universal credit who works full time will be up to £3,000 worse off than someone in the same situation on tax credits, as a result of cuts that are taking effect from April next year. How many single parents working full time—doing the right thing, in the Government's vernacular—in Bermondsey and Old Southwark does the Secretary of State expect his cuts to affect, and by how much does he intend to make them worse off?

Stephen Crabb: I will repeat the point that people being moved from tax credits to universal credit will have transitional protections. The hon. Gentleman is making the mistake that so many of his colleagues have made of trying to compare the present position, falsely, with the previous situation under tax credits. Let us not forget that when tax credits were set up, there was no national living wage, child care support was not at the same level, and there were not higher rates of personal allowance. We are transforming the landscape of support for people on lower incomes.

Benefit Claims

17. **Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to increase the accuracy of decision making during the initial assessment and mandatory reconsideration phases of benefit claims. [904895]

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): The Department has a range of quality measures to drive improvements in the accuracy of decision making. Of course, we are committed to getting our decisions right. There will always be more opportunities to learn when decisions are overturned on appeal. We feed back on every single case.

Colleen Fletcher: The latest figures show that 75%—75%—of PIP appeals heard by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service were decided in favour of the appellant in Coventry. These figures clearly demonstrate the flawed and draconian nature of the original refusal decisions made by the Department for Work and Pensions. Will the Minister assure me that further improvements will be made to the DWP decision-making process to increase accuracy and prevent more vulnerable people from being forced to go through the appeals process needlessly?

Priti Patel: I would make two points to the hon. Lady. First, the Department has a range of quality measures to drive improvements in the accuracy of decision making. Secondly, I understand from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People that only 2% of decisions on PIP claims are changed, and that is on the basis of new evidence being submitted.

Topical Questions

T1. [904902] **Andrew Bingham** (High Peak) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Stephen Crabb): As part of our reforms to give people greater confidence and certainty about what they will receive in retirement, we are improving the help on offer to people

with keeping track of their previous workplace pension pots. I can inform the House that our new online Pension Tracing Service goes live today. This new service will make it simpler and quicker to reunite people with information about their lost pension pots; it will take a matter of seconds, rather than days, as under the old system.

Andrew Bingham: I welcome enabling people to find their old pension pots, but what more can the Secretary of State do, and we do, to enable people to understand how much they are likely to receive from those pension pots, when they have found them?

Stephen Crabb: My hon. Friend asks a good question. Many of our reforms of the state pension are designed to make things simpler and less confusing for people. Since the new state pension was introduced in April, everyone has been able to get a personalised state pension statement, based on the new rules, and there is a new online service, “Check your State Pension”, which offers a quick and accessible way for people to access information about their state pension.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to his first DWP questions. He has started today by trying very hard to strike a different tone from his predecessor. He said in an interview last week that he wanted his Department and his Ministers to understand the “human impact” of their policies. What does he think the human impact will be of his plans to cut £1.2 billion from disabled people throughout the next Parliament? What does he think the impact is for the 500,000 people who are set to lose £1,500 a year in employment and support allowance?

Stephen Crabb: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the kind words with which he started his question. He obviously was not listening to the earlier questions on this subject, because at the end of this Parliament we will be spending more than at the beginning of this Parliament on supporting disabled people. We will be spending around £50 billion supporting disabled people—far more than was ever spent under the previous Labour Government.

Owen Smith: The Secretary of State seems to have forgotten already that in his very first speech he said that behind all those statistics are human beings. Disabled people will be disappointed that today he hid behind statistics once more and that he will not reverse the ESA cuts. Others will be disappointed that he refused today to address the concerns of women born in the 1950s, and still others that he has refused to address the cuts to in-work benefits under universal credit. In what way is the Secretary of State different from his predecessor?

Stephen Crabb: We are a Government who have helped deliver the changes that have seen a huge fall in workless households. Nearly half a million more children are growing up in a home seeing a mum or a dad go out to work. There is no reason to change policies that are changing things for the better for those who have least in our society.

T4. [904905] **Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con):** Last week I had the honour of attending the national Young Enterprise tenner challenge final where two students from my local school, Mangotsfield school in my

constituency, Archie Kenway and Joel Vadhyanath, received an award for turning £10 into a staggering profit of £3,289. Does my right hon. Friend agree that initiatives for young people such as the tenner challenge could help ensure that young people acquire valuable skills for the future in the workplace?

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend, who highlights not only the entrepreneurial spirit of those two young people but what we are doing in government through, for example, the new enterprise allowance, which has seen more than 80,000 businesses start up over the past five years.

T2. [904903] **Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab):** Changes to the walking assessment have led to nearly 14,000 disabled people across the country losing access to their Motability vehicles. That has caused some of my constituents to lose their jobs and their independence. Why is the Secretary of State punishing disabled people in this way?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): Since PIP was introduced 22,000 more people have accessed the Motability scheme, so I do not recognise the hon. Lady’s account.

T6. [904907] **David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con):** The business case for universal credit identifies savings of £80 million a week in steady state after implementation. These come both from IT simplification and from the removal of barriers to getting back into work quickly. Will the Secretary of State confirm that there is a focus not just on delivering the technology, but on ensuring that those benefits will be delivered when the time comes?

Stephen Crabb: Since I was made Secretary of State for Work and Pensions I have made a number of changes to the way in which the roll-out of universal credit is overseen in the Department, stressing the importance of a careful and controlled roll-out. The one outcome that matters for everyone is that people get their benefits paid on time and correctly, and our approach is making sure that that happens.

T3. [904904] **Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP):** The Resolution Foundation has calculated that universal credit could leave 2.5 million families on low pay worse off by more than £3,000 a year. Does the Minister agree that universal credit is abjectly failing to provide incentives to work and lift families out of low pay, which we were told was its intention?

Stephen Crabb: As I said to David Willetts from the Resolution Foundation, the author of the report, and as I say to every Member who seeks to criticise universal credit, “Go to your local Jobcentre Plus, go and sit with the teams of work coaches who are rolling out universal credit, and you will see the enthusiasm and the motivation as they see universal credit transforming people’s lives for the better.”

T7. [904908] **Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con):** In anticipation of the White Paper on disability, will my hon. Friend embrace Leonard Cheshire’s Change100 programme, which allows disabled graduates to gain paid employment with major employers?

Justin Tomlinson: That is a fantastic initiative. I work very closely with Leonard Cheshire. It is exactly the sort of programme that should help shape our plans to help disabled people access work.

T5. [904906] **Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): I recently asked a written question about the equality analysis that was carried out on the PIP consultation documents, and I was astounded to find out that the Department has only to pay due regard to the equality aspects of decisions, and that it was up to the Department to decide whether to publish that analysis. Does the Secretary of State agree that in the spirit of full transparency equality analyses must be published and made publicly available?

Justin Tomlinson: We also have the independent reviews. The previous one was carried out by Dr Paul Gray and we will be looking to do a further review. Let us not forget that under PIP 22% of claimants access the highest rate of benefit, compared with just 16% under disability living allowance.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): A constituent of mine has multiple sclerosis and, for the past nine years, acting on the advice of her council, she has used her disability living allowance to pay the mortgage on the family's adapted bungalow. She has now been informed that, with PIP, she will no longer be able to do that, and she and her family risk losing their home. The change could have a devastating impact on many families up and down the country. Will the Minister look into the matter and ensure that this scenario does not happen?

Justin Tomlinson: I would be happy to look into the details, but local authorities do have access to the £870 million for discretionary housing payments. We have also regularly updated the guidance for local authorities to help such individuals.

T8. [904909] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): The Government intend to replace the current statutory child poverty measures with new measures of life chances. Researchers at the London School of Economics analysed responses to the Government consultation on child poverty measurement and found that 99% of respondents believed income and deprivation should be included. Does the Minister agree or disagree with them?

Stephen Crabb: What we are focused on—more than any previous Government—is tackling the underlying causes of poverty. One of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues talked earlier about entrenched poverty; if we are going to tackle entrenched poverty, we need a coherent, integrated life chances strategy that focuses on the underlying causes and on some of the measures and indicators that track them.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Rugby was in the first group of jobcentres to introduce universal credit for single people, and it is now introducing the benefit for families. Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to staff at Rugby jobcentre for their hard work and flexibility in implementing this important change?

Stephen Crabb: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: staff at Rugby Jobcentre Plus have done a brilliant job, as have staff in jobcentres all over the country, in rolling out universal credit. They are achieving some really important things.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not want to keep our VIPs waiting too long—and they are our VIPs today—but there are a couple more Members whom I wish to accommodate.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The latest analysis shows that the young people referred to in Question 3 stand to lose between £30,000 and £20,000 over their retirement, as a direct result of Government policy. Will the Minister explain how that contributes to intergenerational fairness?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): The whole purpose of the auto-enrolment system is to make sure that people can supplement the state pension. At the moment, 10 million people are eligible for auto-enrolment, and we expect 9 million of them to take up that offer. Those 9 million people will end up saving and, in many cases, saving more than they do at present.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware that he will be assessed on how far he is willing to stand up to the Chancellor over cuts that hit the most vulnerable? His predecessor was not willing to do that until the last moment. Has the Secretary of State got more courage and guts than his predecessor?

Stephen Crabb: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to try to focus on divisions between the Treasury and the DWP. When a Department such as the DWP spends between a quarter and a third of all taxpayers' money, we need to make sure that it is working closely aligned with the Treasury to achieve the things we want to achieve as a Government.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I have a constituent, Lisa, who has spina bifida; she suffers constant pain and balance problems, and she needs a walking stick. She was forced to struggle 25 metres from the reception area to an assessment room for PIP. Surprise, surprise, she was then classed as mobile enough to walk more than 20 metres. How can the Minister convince us that that was a fair and just assessment? When will he end this ridiculous 20-metre rule?

Justin Tomlinson: First, any claimant who has difficulty attending an assessment centre can request a face-to-face assessment in their own home. Secondly, with regard to how far somebody can travel in an assessment, this is not just a black-and-white issue of 20 metres; it is about whether they can do that safely, repeatedly, to an assessable standard and in a reasonable time. If a claimant is unhappy with a decision, they can ask for a mandatory reconsideration or an independent appeal.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): One of my constituents who works 16 hours a week and is a carer for a disabled relative has discovered that because of the living wage she no longer qualifies for carer's allowance, leaving her with a substantial shortfall. Why on earth have this Government forced her and thousands of others into this desperate situation?

Justin Tomlinson: We as a Government spend £2.3 billion a year in supporting the invaluable work that carers do in this country. The impact of the national living wage will always be reviewed.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): One hundred and forty thousand pensioners who paid into occupational pension schemes, including those of Allied Steel and Wire in my constituency, have been done a historical injustice by losing out on the full amount they paid in and are entitled to. Will the new Secretary of State meet the Pensions Action Group and representatives of those pensioners to discuss their concerns?

Stephen Crabb: I have met the action group on previous occasions. We continue to look at all these issues. The hon. Gentleman is aware that other very high-profile cases are currently looking for the support of the Pension Protection Fund.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Physical inactivity costs the UK some £8 billion. I had an excellent meeting with the Secretary of State's predecessor before he decided to leave the job. May representatives

from Leeds Beckett University, which does wonderful work in this area, and I have a meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss this?

Stephen Crabb: I would be very happy to meet them.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): The Secretary of State is reportedly set to reduce the benefits cap by up to £6,000 per year. Who does he think will miss out most from this? Does he think that private landlords with out-of-control rents will just accept £500 a month less, or that children, who have no control over any aspect of their lives, will be the ones to suffer yet again?

Stephen Crabb: The changes to the benefit cap have already been legislated on and passed by this Parliament. I urge the hon. Lady to look at the results of the earlier changes to the benefit cap, which have had really positive outcomes in encouraging and supporting more people into work.

NEW MEMBERS

The following Members took and subscribed the Oath required by law:

Gillian Furniss, for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough
Christopher Philip Elmore, for Ogmore.

Safety in Custody and Violence in Prisons

3.39 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*):
To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will make a statement on safety in custody and violence in prisons.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): Before I move on to the substance of the question, I would like to update the House on events that occurred at Her Majesty's Prison Wormwood Scrubs over the weekend. On the morning of Friday 6 May, prison officers refused to enter the prison, citing health and safety grounds. Later that day, an agreement was reached between the National Offender Management Service and the Prison Officers Association. All officers have returned to work, and the prison is running a normal regime. The National Offender Management Service and the Prison Officers Association are jointly committed to resolving any outstanding health and safety concerns at HMP Wormwood Scrubs. On Sunday 8 May, two members of staff at Wormwood Scrubs were assaulted and taken to hospital for treatment. We do not tolerate any violence against our hard-working officers. The alleged perpetrator now faces a police investigation that could lead to criminal charges.

Moving on to the wider question, I take safety in prisons very seriously. Reducing the harm that prisoners may cause to themselves or to others is the Government's top priority in prisons. The most recent statistics on safety in custody show that levels of self-inflicted death, self-harm and violence in prison are too high. The figures demonstrate the very serious challenges facing the prison service. There is no single, simple solution to the increase in deaths and violence in prisons. Those trends have been seen across the prison estate, in both public and private prisons and in prisons both praised and criticised by Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons.

We have already taken a number of steps to address the problems. We have recruited 2,830 prison officers since January 2015; that is a net increase of 530. We are trialling the use of body-worn cameras in prisons. We are strengthening the case management of individuals who risk harming others. We have introduced tough new laws under which those who smuggle packages, including packages containing new psychoactive substances, over prison walls will face up to two years in prison. We have reviewed the case management process for prisoners who are assessed as being at risk of harm to themselves, and we are implementing the recommendations.

It is, however, clear that we must do more. We need to reduce violence and prevent drugs from entering prison. We must do better at helping prisoners with mental health problems. We must ensure that prisoners can be rehabilitated so that they are no longer a danger to others. That is why the Government are committed to fundamental reform of our prisons. We have secured £1.3 billion to modernise the prison estate, and we will give greater autonomy to governors so that they are truly in charge. I look forward to setting out our plans in greater detail shortly.

The problems are deep-seated, and there are no easy answers. However, I assure the House that the Government will not waver in their determination to reform our prisons, so that they become places of decency, hope and rehabilitation.

Andy Slaughter: I thank the Minister for that response, but I fear that it was exactly what we have heard time and time again at the Dispatch Box. I hope that he will concede that the situation in our prisons on the youth estate is very serious, and that the recent incidents are part of a pattern of unacceptable conditions and unacceptable violent behaviour. It cannot be right that prisoners, staff and, ultimately, the public are at risk from the Government's failure to get a grip on the crisis in our prisons. That makes it all the more surprising that the Secretary of State is not here today. We are all, whatever our view, engaged in the referendum campaign; that is no reason for him to neglect his responsibility as Secretary of State.

Yesterday, as the Minister said, two prison officers were hospitalised after being assaulted while they were on duty at Wormwood Scrubs prison in my constituency. Our thoughts are with them and their families. That is a reminder of the difficult and dangerous job that officers do every day, often hidden from the public gaze and without the acknowledgement that they deserve. The attack was entirely predictable—so much so that two days earlier, as the Minister acknowledged, 70 members of staff at Wormwood Scrubs had walked out because they did not feel safe. Although Tornado officers were sent into the prison on Saturday, they were withdrawn on Sunday, which was when the attacks happened. What specific steps are being taken to ensure safety in HMP Wormwood Scrubs? I am told that drugs, phones and even knives are being thrown over the walls because of insufficient patrolling of the grounds and cell searches caused by insufficient staffing numbers. Will additional officers be provided to undertake these basic tasks until order is restored and a review of staffing at this and similar prisons is undertaken?

What happened at Wormwood Scrubs is not an isolated incident; it is typical of the dangers and problems across the prison and youth estate. In the past few days, reports on Lewes and Leeds prisons have told a similar story. Last week, it was revealed that the Department is about to take over the management of Medway secure training centre following the "Panorama" exposé of the appalling conduct of G4S and some of its staff in running that institution, including allegations of serious violence against children.

Fourteen prison staff are assaulted every day. There were 4,963 assaults on staff by prisoners in 2015, compared with 3,640 in 2014, which is a 36% increase in attacks. Prisons are now violent and dangerous places. Serious self-harm and suicides are at record levels. We have heard for a year that the Government wish to transform our prisons, but words are no longer enough. Now is the time for action before more prisons become ungovernable and there are more serious injuries or—God forbid—the death of an officer on duty.

Andrew Selous: This Government are not in denial about the situation, we have not been idle in seeking to address it and we do not lack vision or political will on the issues that the hon. Gentleman has quite rightly raised. I assure him that the Secretary of State takes this issue extremely seriously, and it is our top priority as far as prisons are concerned.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that the work that prison officers do—day in, day out—across our country is, by its very nature, hidden from public

view. They are outstanding public servants who do amazingly good work, which, unfortunately, is not seen or perhaps not as fully appreciated by most of us as it should be.

The nature of the offenders in custody has changed. Today, about 30% more people are sentenced to prison for violent offences, and prisoners often act more spontaneously and more violently to achieve their objectives than they did in the past.

On recruitment, I repeat what I said: we have been recruiting at full strength for the past two years. We have recruited an extra 2,830 officers since 2015, and we are continuing to recruit at that level to make sure that our prisons are adequately staffed.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The Minister knows that we are gradually understanding more and more about the violence that affects our prisons. Violence can sometimes be due to the inappropriate handling of prisoners with mental health problems or, indeed, those on the autism spectrum, and just small changes can make a difference to the behaviour of such individuals. Does the Minister welcome the National Autistic Society's initiative for some of our prisons to have autism awareness accreditation, particularly Feltham young offenders institution, where it is making a difference, and will he assure me that he will look at fully rolling out this programme across the prison and custody system?

Andrew Selous: First, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for her extensive knowledge of this issue and, indeed, for the legislation that she initiated in this House. It was a great pleasure to visit HMP Feltham with her. I can tell the House that Feltham is now the first autism accredited prison in the whole world, which is something I am extremely proud of. This good work must not stop at Feltham: we need to spread it across the prison estate. She is absolutely right that this is one part of reducing violence across the estate.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Inspectors have warned of "Dickensian squalor" inside Wormwood Scrubs, following a scathing report that revealed that the jail is rat-infested and overcrowded, with inmates spending up to 22 hours a day locked in very squalid cells. Overcrowding and poor conditions exacerbate the risk of violence not only to staff but to other prisoners. It is clear from a recent statement from the Prison Governors Association that understaffing is still an issue. Will the Minister assure us that the ideological drive to cut public services and to shift to private sector provision will not further jeopardise staff and prison safety?

Will the Minister also look to the example of the Scottish Government? Their approach of recommending a presumption against shorter sentences of three months or under has led to the numbers of such sentences plummeting, and the reconviction rate is at a 16-year low. Will he take steps to follow their lead in creating a presumption against short sentences and investing instead in robust community sentences in order to address the underlying causes of crime more effectively?

Andrew Selous: I visited HMP Wormwood Scrubs a week or so ago. We have an excellent new governor in the prison, who has a good record and I believe has the

best possible chance of making sure that it improves on those issues. There are 15 officers over and above the benchmark level within Wormwood Scrubs. The drive to greater governor autonomy will help to deal with a number of the issues. The Government are currently consulting on sentencing issues.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for the interest he has in prison security, and, indeed, for the action he has taken on it; the Justice Committee shares his interest. Today I met the prisons and probation ombudsman, who told me that on current estimates 61% of inmates take psychoactive substances. What consideration has my hon. Friend given to enlarging smoke-free zones in prisons, and to what extent does he feel that that might help with the problems?

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend, who is very knowledgeable on these issues as a member of the Select Committee, is absolutely right to point the finger at the terrible damage caused by new psychoactive substances. I agree that rolling out smoke-free prisons across England and Wales will help us to reduce that damage—we know that those psychoactive substances are sometimes smoked openly, with prisoners pretending that they are smoking tobacco. I am with her in wanting to see the roll-out progress, but we will only do that in a measured and safe way.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The independent monitoring board for Leicester prison published a damning report about conditions there this morning. The report pointed to all the matters that the Minister has raised—rising levels of violence, use of drugs and mental health issues. This issue is about increasing staffing. Although the Government have increased the number of prison officers, there are clearly not enough. What further steps can be taken to help the officers at Leicester prison?

Andrew Selous: My commitment to the House is to carry on recruiting at the increased level of activity that there has been for the past few years. It is proving successful. It is a challenge, at some specific sites in London and the south-east more than at others, but we are managing to make progress. There is the budget to carry on employing prison officers and I am determined to carry on with our recruitment objectives.

Mr Speaker: I call Alex Chalk.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): My question was already ably asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis).

Mr Speaker: What an extraordinary and novel development—an hon. Member who does not indulge in superfluous repetition. The hon. Gentleman is in danger of winning a medal. It is an extraordinary development, and very welcome, I am sure.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): The Minister mentioned the importance of dealing with mental health in prisons. On Friday I met a justice of the peace in my constituency who talked about the good work done by the liaison and diversion services. He encouraged me to encourage the Minister and the Secretary

of State to extend those services and ensure that more community orders have as a condition that people get the help they need.

Andrew Selous: My hon. and learned Friend, who is also extremely knowledgeable on these issues, is absolutely right. The Government are committed to making sure that there is universal access to a mental health assessment from the moment that anyone encounters the criminal justice system. I also point her to the co-commissioning that is going to happen between governors and NHS England on mental health and drug abuse services. That will also be very beneficial.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I have no doubt that the Minister wants to sort this problem out, and his account of a passion for reform, decency and hope was compelling, except for the fact that it has not worked. Since 2012, the number of assaults in prisons has doubled, as have the number of assaults on staff. Although he talked about recruiting more staff recently, total numbers of staff have fallen. Those staff are frightened—brave prison officers are scared to go to work. What can the Minister say to stop them feeling frightened?

Andrew Selous: The right hon. Lady is right to say that confidence is an extremely important commodity as far as the day-to-day work of prison officers is concerned. She has been involved with these issues for many years, and she will know that the Prison Service has been affected in a major way by waves of drugs. In the early 1990s, and before that, such things had serious implications for prisons, and led to riots and serious assaults in high numbers. We have a two-year violence reduction project. It would not be helpful now to give the House a shopping list of individual measures, but detailed, serious work is taking place across the estate, including the violence diagnostic tool and many other measures to help back up hard-working prison officers. The body-worn camera initiative is also proving valuable, and we hope to say more about that soon.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the prevalent use of lethal highs, in particular “spice”, in HMP Northumberland in my constituency, is one clear cause of the increase in violence and unpredictable behaviour among our prison population? What are we doing to try to reduce dramatically the numbers of those goods?

Andrew Selous: It was a great pleasure to go round HMP Northumberland with my hon. Friend not long ago, and I commend her for calling these terrible drugs “lethal” highs. From 26 May they will all be completely illegal when the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 is enforced. That is very welcome, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right. We will not waver in our determination to crack down on those substances.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): I thank the Minister for an amicable meeting last week about HMP Northumberland. The common denominator throughout the whole prison estate across the country is simply a lack of manpower. That is causing the violence—whether it be prisoner on prisoner or prisoner on staff—mental health issues and the problems with alcohol, “spice” or

[*Ian Lavery*]

whatever. The Minister has said that this issue is challenging. What extra measures can he take to ensure that plenty of staff are employed in prisons to maintain a safe environment for everybody on the prison estate?

Andrew Selous: My door is always open to the hon. Gentleman, and if he has further concerns about HMP Northumberland, he is welcome to come and see me again. If we analyse what has happened across the prison estate, we see that the increase in violence has taken place in prisons where there has been an increase in the number of officers and in prisons where numbers have stayed the same, and where there have been reductions. He is right to say that we need adequate levels of staff, which is why I give him the commitment that I have already given the House that we will carry on recruiting at our current level, which included a net increase of 530 officers last year.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I have asked the Minister to come and visit young offenders at Portland, and I hope he will do so shortly. There was an unpleasant riot the other day, and prison officers were put in danger. I pay credit to all prison officers who work like a forgotten army behind the scenes. Portland is a fairly old structure, and the number of floors—there are four or five—is a particular concern because there are not enough officers to man them all at the same time. That puts those officers at risk, and allows prisoner free rein where they perhaps should not have it. Will my hon. Friend look at that issue and increase the number of prison officers at the young offenders institution as fast as we can?

Andrew Selous: It would be a pleasure to visit HMP-YOI Portland with my hon. Friend in due course and I note what he says about the design of that particular prison. The £1.3 billion commitment provides the Government with the opportunity to get the best design knowledge from around the world to ensure that the new prisons we build are as safe as possible. That will also enable us to cease to operate some prisons where assaults and bullying take place in part because of poor design.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): In the first five years of this Government, the number of prison officers fell by 41%. In the sixth year of this Government, assaults on prison officers rose by the same percentage—41%. The Minister mentions that prison officer numbers are increasing, but he uses a figure based on the past couple of years. Will he tell me how many prison officers there were in 2010 and how many there are today?

Andrew Selous: I do not have those particular figures to hand for the right hon. Gentleman, although my memory is that he has asked me that question before and that I have written to him with the answer. I will dig out the letter I sent to him; maybe it went astray. Speaking as a current prisons Minister to a former prisons Minister—I know he cares as deeply about these issues as I do—he will know that these issues are not easy. He knows that his own Government faced considerable difficulties on exactly the same issues. What is

not in doubt is this Government's utter determination, through the prison reform programme, to get on top of them.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman was chuntering repeatedly from a sedentary position that he knew the answer to his own question, which is probably very wise and knowledge of which will enable us all to sleep much more soundly in our beds tonight.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for his work as prisons Minister. He takes his role extremely seriously. I think my constituents will be very surprised to hear quite how much stuff is being thrown over prison walls: mobile phones, drugs, lethal highs and knives. Surely in 2016 we have the ability to stop this happening, or at least to minimise it? What plans does the Minister have to tackle this issue?

Andrew Selous: These issues are not easy. Our prisons are not like the Eden Project: they do not have a dome over the top of them. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to get things over a prison wall, as I saw when I went around HMP Rochester last Thursday morning. My hon. Friend raises an important issue. All of us, particularly as Members of Parliament, have a role in getting the message out in our communities that new psychoactive substances are lethal. They do terrible harm to the loved ones of families who inadvertently bring them into prisons. We need local communities to work with us and the police to try to stop the terrible flow of evil drugs over prison walls.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Minister is absolutely right: prison officers do an exceptionally difficult job. They need and deserve our fullest possible support. That has to be more than a platitude. For that to be the case, staffing levels have to be addressed. The other issue that has to be addressed is prison overcrowding. The prison population is now in excess of 90,000 inmates. In the past 15 years, the length of sentences has gone up by 33%. Can the Minister assure me that, as he tackles this issue, he will look at it in the round; that he will look not just at prisons in isolation but at how they interact with police, prosecution and court authorities?

Andrew Selous: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his praise for the work of our outstanding prison officers. We are consulting on sentencing issues, which have a bearing on overcrowding. We are also determined to bring down reoffending. Our success in reducing reoffending will help to reduce overcrowding.

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I thank the Minister for his comments today and for his support with regard to our concerns about HMP Rochester and the Medway Secure Training Centre. I also thank him for his very speedy meeting with me and the governor of HMP Rochester earlier this year. The Minister will know that Medway Secure Training Centre was at the centre of abuse allegations. Will he confirm when the Medway improvement board report will be published? My constituents want reassurance that action and improvements have taken place, so that young people are safe in Medway.

Andrew Selous: I commend my hon. Friend for her serious interest in and support for the three prisons in her constituency. I was in HMP Rochester on Thursday morning, and I commend, in particular, the outstanding work of its governor and head of security to combat the constant pressure of drugs coming into the prison. On Medway STC, about which we will be saying more shortly, the Secretary of State and I have met Dr Gary Holden and the Medway improvement board, which was appointed by the Secretary of State. We will be making further announcements on its findings in due course.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): A constituent came to see me this weekend to express her fears for her son. He is in prison and every day she expects to get a phone call saying he has been murdered. What reassurance can the Minister give my constituent that prisoners, while serving their time, do not live in fear of their lives?

Andrew Selous: The whole prison reform agenda speaks directly to the issue of violence. Our vision for prisons is one where prisoners engage in meaningful, relevant education and in skills training that is linked to skills needed in the local community and which will help them to get a job. Our vision also includes a commitment to keeping family relationships strong. If we can do those three things, we will reduce frustration, levels of violence and the number of assaults.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Wormwood Scrubs has been described by the Prison Officers Association as

“flooded with drugs, mobiles phones and weapons”

and by the chief inspector as having cells so bad you would not keep a dog in them. Does the Minister still think that this prison is fit for purpose?

Andrew Selous: HMP Wormwood Scrubs is an older, Victorian prison facing various challenges. I went around it recently, and as I said, I have confidence in its very good new governor. The hon. Lady mentioned mobile phones, which we have not talked about much so far. As the Prime Minister announced on 8 February, we are committed to working with the mobile network operators, which also need to rise to their responsibilities to help us fight the scourge of mobile phones in prisons.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): In the last four years, there has been a rise in levels of violence against prison officers owing to understaffing and the fact that there are not enough rehabilitation programmes. Is it not time to re-evaluate how we decide who to send to prison and, when we do send them to prison, to make available proper rehabilitation provision?

Andrew Selous: Decisions about who goes to prison are obviously for our independent judiciary, but the hon. Lady is absolutely right about the need for better rehabilitation. We are determined that time in prison is not wasted but is productive, relevant and beneficial to prisoners and to the wider community in terms of keeping us all safe when they come out.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Parc prison in Bridgend has an excellent reputation for its rehabilitation work, including its drug rehabilitation work, but it needs the support of the local police force, South Wales

police, if it is to tackle the smuggling in of drugs and the throwing of drugs over the wall. It gets that help. What is the Minister doing to make sure that police forces across the UK work with their prison forces and officers? The number of attacks on prison officers and by prisoners on prisoners is increasing, and unless prisons work with police forces to arrest those guilty of smuggling drugs into prisons, we will be wasting our time.

Andrew Selous: I thank the hon. Lady for praising the work of HMP Parc in her constituency—in particular, I would praise the outstanding family work done by Corin Morgan-Armstrong—and I am grateful to her for raising the issue of good co-operation with the local police. I am pleased it is working well in her area, but she is right that it varies across the country. It is an issue that I take extremely seriously and about which I have regular conversations with the policing Minister.

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is no mystery why assaults on prison officers, assaults between prisoners and suicides have increased in prisons. Only last week, a report came out showing that every factor had gone up. It is no surprise when staff are cut by a third. I was very pleased to listen to the Secretary of State and I applauded him, but I am disappointed that he is not here today. The vision for the future is good, and I support it, but we cannot wait for jam tomorrow. We need more action now. We are still 7,000 down on staff numbers. We need an increase in the number of officers now. It is not safe for them to go into work now, and it is not safe for the prisoners themselves. We need more action today. I ask you what you intend to do now as a matter of urgency?

Mr Speaker: I intend to do precisely nothing, other than to ask the Minister to tell the House what he and the Government will do.

Andrew Selous: The hon. Lady is a member of the Select Committee, is very knowledgeable and takes these issues extremely seriously. One issue not yet mentioned today is that we are significantly improving prison officer training. It has increased from six to 10 weeks, and we are providing officers with the additional skills they will need to be able to cope. Training on its own, of course, is not enough, which is why I reiterate to the hon. Lady the commitment I have made several times today to carry on recruiting at the rate we are recruiting to get up to the benchmark level. In December 2014, the number of vacancies for prisoner officers was 5%; it is now 2%, and I want to see it at 0%.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): I have heard these sort of remarks from the Minister so many times—too often to have any confidence that he is going to do anything at all about this problem. It is a problem of this Government's making, when they let far too many officers go in the first half of the last Parliament. Now the Minister's problem is not just about numbers; it is about the experience of staff. We now have experienced inmates and inexperienced staff—and this is what happens as a result. What is the Minister going to do not just to get the number of officers in, but to ensure that they are properly trained, supported, mentored, developed and assisted in their early years of learning jail-craft? If he carries on as he is now, these problems will never be resolved on his watch.

Andrew Selous: The hon. Lady is right about the importance of jail-craft. I point her to the recent chief inspector's report on Glen Parva prison, in which it was noted that the new officers were treated as an asset because of their enthusiasm and the new skills that they brought, rather than being viewed as in their probationary period and thus not able to add very much. If establishments get the right attitude and use the enthusiasm of the new recruits, it will be helpful.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): This is an interesting debate, particularly when we discuss how people on all sides are affected, whether they be people working in prisons, prisoners themselves or their families who are worried about the conditions within the prisons. In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), I have had constituents coming to see me to make representations about Strangeways prison in Manchester. They fear that the culture is not in place to ensure that mental health is something to be dealt with positively by the prison rather than simply being controlled because of the Minister's targets.

Andrew Selous: I recently visited HMP Manchester in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and I would like to pay tribute to the outstanding work of prison officers there, facing some challenging prisoners. We are absolutely committed to improving mental health in prisons. NHS England is taking on an extra 20 case managers this year for adult secure services. We have co-commissioning coming up, and we take mental health issues extremely seriously.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The Minister is well aware of the Justice Select Committee's inquiry into prison safety, which addresses the issue of violence. Members might have noticed that on Friday, the news slipped out that the Medway Secure Training Centre, which was mis-run by G4S, has now come into Ministry of Justice hands. The next day, a report came out on Rainsbrook, showing endemic use of force and restraint. Surely the logical conclusion is that the MOJ should now take over Rainsbrook private youth prison.

Mr Speaker: Order. I have a strong sense that Members will be approaching the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee to seek a debate on these matters. I say that because quite a lot of what we have heard has been nearer to debate contributions than to questions. I hope I can make that point gently.

Andrew Selous: No Governments comment on leaks, wherever they come from. We will have more to say about Medway in due course, and, indeed, about all three secure training centres, because, as the hon. Lady has said, some of the issues that apply to Medway are clearly relevant to all of them.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) mentioned "spice". Officers at Holme House prison, which is in my constituency, have ended up on sick leave

because of the effects of smoke from this substance. Others have been injured while trying to deal with violent prisoners, some of whom are taken to hospital after using the substance, thus putting officers and health staff at risk. When will the Government put the right systems in place to stop such substances getting through security and into prisons?

Andrew Selous: We are investing in new technology, and we are trialling a full body scanner to detect "spice", "black mamba", and other types of new psychoactive substance which are concealed within the body. I believe that the smoking ban will help in time, once it has been rolled out to prisons in the hon. Gentleman's area and throughout the country. Unfortunately, as he will know, "spice" is often smoked openly by prisoners pretending that it is tobacco.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Prison officers at HMP Lancaster Farms, in my constituency, will have observed the events at Wormwood Scrubs over the weekend with trepidation, because the situation there is reflected across the country. The situation at Lancaster Farms was so bad that prison officers went to the local paper to expose the issue of drugs in prisons and the need for more officers. Will the Minister commit to putting more money into prison staffing so that staff can go to work and feel safe?

Andrew Selous: I should point out to the hon. Lady that the Prison Officers Association reached an agreement with the National Offender Management Service. We will definitely keep all the issues at Wormwood Scrubs under review, and, as I have said, we are continuing to spend more money on prison officers in order to recruit up to the benchmark. We are continuing to recruit at the rate at which we have been recruiting for the last few years.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I share the concern expressed by many other Members about prisoners with mental health issues, the risks that they pose not only to themselves but to others and the effect of staff cuts on that situation.

I have corresponded with the Minister about a constituent of mine who has endured a lengthy bureaucratic process relating to his potential transfer to a secure mental health unit that would be more adequate to his needs. I am sorry to say that his family received a call this month telling them that he had killed himself, only to be told half an hour later that he had not. That is an extraordinary situation. I should like the Minister to investigate it fully, and also to look very closely at the case that is being made for my constituent to be transferred from HMP Birmingham, where he is currently being held.

Andrew Selous: I apologise to the family, through the hon. Gentleman, for the fact that they were given such terrible news, which clearly was not true. If the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me again about the issue, or even to come and see me about it, I shall be more than happy to discuss it further with him.

“Educational Excellence Everywhere”: Academies

4.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan): With permission, Mr Speaker, I shall make a statement on all schools becoming academies.

In our White Paper “Educational Excellence Everywhere”, published in March, I set out the Government’s vision of continuing the rise in educational standards in England during the rest of the current Parliament. We are committed to building on the reforms of the past six years, which have led to 1.4 million more children being taught in good and outstanding schools. However, we are not content to stop there: 1.4 million children is a start, but it is not enough. We must ensure that we deliver a great education to every single child, because we owe it to the next generation to give them the tools that will enable them to realise every ounce of their potential.

The White Paper was called “Educational Excellence Everywhere” for a reason. As I have said before, for me the “everywhere” is non-negotiable. In the White Paper, for example, we set out our plans for “Achieving Excellence Areas”, where we will focus specific resources on tackling entrenched educational underperformance. The White Paper also sets out how we want to see the teaching profession take responsibility for teacher accreditation, tackle unfair funding, build leadership capacity and set high expectations for every child, with a world-leading knowledge-based curriculum in a truly school-led self-improving system learning from the best from across the world and preparing the next generation to compete on the global stage.

It is the vision of a fully academised system that has attracted the most attention. Over the course of the last few weeks, I have spoken to many hon. Members on both sides of the House, as well as to school leaders, governors, local government representatives and parents. It is clear from those conversations that the strength and importance of academies is widely accepted. There is a clear recognition of the case for putting greater responsibility for the school system in the hands of school leaders. Let me be clear: we firmly believe that schools becoming more autonomous and more directly accountable for their results raises standards. Academies are the vehicle to allow schools and leaders to innovate with the curriculum, have the flexibility to set the pay and conditions for their staff and bring about great collaboration with other schools.

We still want every school to become an academy by 2022. We always intended this to be a six-year process in which good schools should be able to take their own decisions about their future as academies. However, we understand the concerns that have been raised about a hard deadline and legislating for blanket powers to issue academy orders. That is why I announced on Friday that we have decided it is not necessary to take blanket powers to convert good schools in strong local authorities to academies at this time.

In March, a record high of 227 schools chose to apply for academy status, showing clearly where the momentum lies as school leaders, parents, governors and teachers across the country embrace the benefits that being an academy brings. Since then, we have also issued more than 104 academy orders to underperforming

schools, meaning that the young people in those schools will soon benefit from the strong leadership provided by expert academy sponsors. That is why those who took to the airwaves this weekend to crow about a victory in their battle against raising standards will find themselves sorely disappointed. There will be no retreat from our mission to give every child the best start in life and to build an education system led by school leaders and teachers on the frontline, running their own schools as academies.

The Education and Adoption Act 2016 already enables us to rapidly convert failing schools and schools that are coasting, where they can benefit from the support of a strong sponsor. As a result, it is now easier to respond swiftly and effectively when schools underperform. Schools will not be allowed to languish unchallenged for years. As we set out in the White Paper, and as I have subsequently argued, the most pressing need for further powers is to boost standards for those schools languishing in the worst performing local authorities and to provide for schools in local authorities likely to become unviable. So instead of taking a blanket power to convert all schools, we will seek powers in two specific circumstances where it is clear that the case for conversion to academy status is pressing. In our worst performing local authorities, we need to take more decisive action so that a new system led by outstanding schools can take their place. Similarly, because of the pace of academisation in some areas, it will become increasingly difficult for local authorities to offer schools the necessary support, and there will be a need to ensure that those schools are not dependent on an unviable local authority.

We will therefore seek provisions to convert schools in the lowest performing and unviable local authorities to academy status. In some circumstances, that might involve the conversion of good and outstanding schools when they have not chosen to do so themselves. However, the need for action in those limited circumstances is clear, because of the considerable risk to the standard of education that young people in those schools receive, as the local authority is either unable to guarantee their continued success or support further improvement. We will consult on these arrangements, including the thresholds for performance and unviability, and I am making a clear commitment that the definition and thresholds of underperformance and viability will be the subject of an affirmative resolution in this House.

I would also like to reassure hon. Members in regard to concerns about how we protect small schools, particularly those in rural areas. I have already made it clear that no small rural school will close as a result of the move to have more schools becoming academies. There is already a statutory presumption against the closure of rural schools, but we will now go further. Where small rural schools are converting to academy status, we will introduce a dual lock to ensure their protection: both local and national Government will have to agree to a school closing before a decision can be made. There will also be dedicated support to help rural primary schools during the process of conversion, and a £10 million fund to secure expert support and advice for them.

While we want every school to become an academy, we will not compel successful schools to join multi-academy trusts. In order to share expertise and resources, we expect that most schools will form local clusters of multi-academy trusts, but if the leadership of a successful

[Nicky Morgan]

school does not wish to enter a formal relationship with other schools, we trust it to make that decision and will not force it to do so. Small schools will be able to convert to stand-alone academies as long as they are financially sustainable.

I began this statement by saying that our goal has not changed. This Government will continue to prioritise the interests of young people and getting them the best start in life by having an excellent education over the vested interests who seek to oppose the lifting of standards and the rooting out of educational underperformance. Those very same vested interests allowed schools to languish for years unchallenged and unchanged until the launch of the sponsored academies programme by the last Labour Government.

Our work to improve our education system will continue apace. We will continue to empower school leaders and raise standards. We will continue to hold high expectations for every child. We will establish a fair national funding formula for schools, so that young people everywhere get the funding they deserve. We will continue to work towards a system in which all schools are run and led by the people who know them best, in a way that works for their pupils, as academies. The reforms will transform the education system in our country and ensure that we give every child an excellent education, so that they have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. I commend this statement to the House.

4.26 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for advance notice of her statement. It is good to see that, despite her best efforts, this U-turn is getting the airing it deserves today. What she announced on Friday was a significant and welcome climbdown. However she wants to dress it up, dropping her desire to force all schools to become academies by her arbitrary deadline of 2022 is a key concession. School leaders should take it as a clear signal that the foot is off their throat and that they should not feel they need to jump before being pushed. In achieving this welcome move, I thank the broad alliance who joined us in making the arguments: the head teachers, who made their collective voice clear last weekend, parents, governors, teachers, local government leaders, and hon. Members from across the House, who made thoughtful and important interventions over recent weeks. Given the scale and breadth of the opposition to her plans and the huge sense of panic and upheaval that they caused school leaders, the Secretary of State might have shown a little more humility in her statement today. If I were her, I would at least apologise.

After the Secretary of State's statement today, we are all left even more confused about what her policy actually is. She says that her aim remains the same, but without the means. Although she has conceded on the politically daft idea of forcing good and outstanding schools to become academies against their wishes, she still holds the ambition that all schools will become academies, but she failed to make a single decent argument as to why that ambition is desirable in the first place. Perhaps this is because, despite her claiming to be in listening mode, the Secretary of State has her fingers in her ears and is out of touch with heads, parents and teachers.

The Secretary of State has failed to address the serious concerns that have been raised. Where is her evidence that academisation is the panacea for school improvement? Where is the choice, autonomy or innovation in a one-size-fits-all approach? Is there sufficient capacity and accountability in the academies system to ensure that best practice, not poor practice, is being spread? Those questions remain as she seeks further powers to speed up the pace of academisation.

On school improvement, the Secretary of State must now take stock of the evidence. The Education Committee recommended that she do just that. Sir Michael Wilshaw found serious concerns in many chains. Research by the Sutton Trust found a mixed picture of performance in academy chains. There is no evidence at all that academisation in and of itself leads to school improvement. Indeed, analysis published today by PwC shows that—*[Interruption.]* Government Members might want to listen to this. The analysis shows that only three of the biggest academy chains got a positive value-added rating and—this is quite startling—just one of the 26 biggest primary sponsors achieved results above the national average. While there is much excellence, the Secretary of State must not continue making dubious arguments about cause and effect without the evidence.

The concerns about a "one-size-fits-all" policy, as expressed by Councillor Paul Carter, chair of the County Councils Network, still apply, as do those about "distant, unaccountable bureaucracies" expressed by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady). As Lord Kenneth Baker said, there are real issues on the capacity within multi-academy trusts to take on a new wave of academies. Today, the Secretary of State also failed to answer the key question of parents and their right to remain on governing bodies of academies.]

Perhaps the biggest concern we all have is about the Secretary of State's direction and her fixation with structures not standards. While chaos reigns all around her, and while heads are dealing with what they describe as "very challenging times", she wants to put all the energies of her Department into more structural change, for which there is little evidence, insufficient capacity and inadequate accountability. Would she not be better advised sorting out the utter chaos besetting primary assessment and standard assessments tests, ensuring the massively behind-schedule new GCSEs are delivered well and on time, dealing with the chronic teacher shortages she has caused or getting a proper strategy for local place planning? Alternatively, instead of simply doing the Chancellor's bidding, perhaps she could fight for some school budgets, which are facing real-terms cuts for the first time in 20 years. We all want to see educational excellence everywhere, but the Secretary of State is presiding over a chaotic mess, dragging schools backwards, and her ambitions for further structural change are at best a distraction—at worst they will damage standards.

Nicky Morgan: The shadow Education Secretary was as constructive and positive as always, but let me deal with some of the issues she raised. She asked about the support for academies. She will know about this, if she has read the evidence I gave to the recent hearing of the Select Committee on Education, where we went through this in great detail. I am sure she has also seen the very long letter I sent to the National Union of Teachers

about the international evidence, but let me just give two statistics: primary sponsored academies are making substantial gains, with the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level in reading and writing and maths at the end of key stage 2 having risen by four percentage points last year; and those academies open for just one academic year having seen their results improve by five percentage points. She asked about the views of the chief inspector—[*Interruption.*] I am sure that if she has—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I say to Members on both sides of the House that there is far too much noise. Both sides and every Member must be heard. It is very simple.

Nicky Morgan: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It is extraordinary how some people do not want to hear any arguments against them, for example, from Sir Michael Wilshaw. The hon. Lady will have seen the letter from Ofsted in which he said:

"As you know, I fully support the government's ambition to create a more diverse and autonomous school system. As I said in my latest Annual Report, academisation can lead to rapid improvements and I firmly believe that it is right to give more autonomy to the front line."

The hon. Lady mentions the Education Committee report from 2014, published last year, which said:

"Academy sponsorship has encouraged and facilitated the contribution of individuals not previously involved in education provision and laid down a challenge to maintained schools to improve or face replacement by the insurgent academy model."

It is extraordinary that it took until the hon. Lady's final sentence for her to talk about standards. As usual, there was no mention of pupils, of standards or of aspiration. She has had nine months to set out a vision of what a strong, consistent education system looks like. I have set out ours very clearly in this White Paper and she now needs to do the same if she is to have any hope of office.

We know what today's Labour party is all about—it is about taking sides. That is what Labour told us in the local elections and it is what its leader is all about. Today, Labour has picked its side: the side of vested interests in the status quo; the side of no change; the side of those who want to push back the tide of progress and return to Labour's bad old days. I say no. We pick the other side: the side of parents, teachers and, above all, pupils; the side of higher standards and aspirations; and the side of progress and reform—the side of educational excellence for all.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): The chief inspector of schools has already been cited this afternoon. I draw the attention of the House to his report of 2013 in which he referred to the "long tail of underachievement". He cited the big problem of having too many primary schools coasting and not delivering adequate teaching in maths and English and in other subjects, and many of those schools are in local authority areas that could improve generally. It is absolutely right therefore to focus on those local authorities and make sure that we do deliver for our young children, most of whom do not go to academies at primary school, because there are not enough primary schools in that category. I welcome this statement to focus on the schools that really matter and, above all, on the local authorities.

Nicky Morgan: I thank the Chair of the Education Committee. It was a pleasure to visit a school in his constituency of Stroud recently. I know that he is absolutely committed to the lifting of educational standards for all young people. Is it not telling that, rather than working with the Chair of the Education Committee, the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) just tries to shout him down?

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for today's statement. Many school communities will also welcome today's announcement. Although I, like many teachers across these isles, would love to think that the Government do listen to teachers, the reality seems to be that this embarrassing U-turn on a centrepiece Budget announcement has been brought about by a handful of the Government's own Back Benchers. Those who have the greatest impact on the success of a school are teachers, and a first-rate headteacher can turn a school around regardless of whether it is an academy, but there is no doubt that this grand plan has caused great anxiety, and teachers who are already struggling with severe workload issues have had an additional burden placed on them by the academisation plan. The Secretary of State says that academies allow schools the freedom to innovate with the curriculum—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Austin, you are as noisy now as you were in the debating chamber of the University of Essex student union where you noisily, belligerently and discourteously heckled me 30 years ago. [*Interruption.*] Order. The hon. Lady—and all Members—must be heard with courtesy. May I gently say to her that her chance of getting a courteous hearing will be increased if, rather than making a statement, she asks a question?

Carol Monaghan: The ability of schools to set their own pay scales will raise questions around teachers' pay and recruitment, and there is concern that the long-term impact of academies will mean higher salaries and better terms and conditions in some better-funded academies. What consideration—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray!"] I am glad that I amuse the House. What consideration has the Secretary of State given to teacher recruitment in poorer areas in terms of being able to attract the teachers they need to raise attainment? We in the Scottish National party are firmly committed to national bargaining in the public sector. How will she ensure that, by abandoning nationally agreed pay scales, this will not affect recruitment and retention in more challenging schools?

Nicky Morgan: I thank the hon. Lady for her long question. I agree that the most important thing we can do in our classrooms is to ensure that the quality of teaching is at its absolute highest, which is why we have more teachers in our schools than we have ever had before.

On recruitment, let me say that, if the hon. Lady has the chance to read the White Paper, she will find a lot of answers to her questions. There is the introduction of "Achieving Excellence Areas", the introduction of the National Teaching Service, the setting up of career progression for teachers, and the support for a college for teaching. Let me also say to her that, in Scotland, there are now fewer teachers than there were when the SNP came to power and a bigger gap between the

[Nicky Morgan]

advantaged and the disadvantaged. With the election of Ruth Davidson as an MSP and the fact that our party came second in the polls, her party will now be held to account.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Members who came into the Chamber after the statement started—there were quite a number of them—should not expect to be called. In pursuit of a question, with a question mark at the end of it, I turn to the éminence grise of the Government Back Benches, Sir Alan Duncan.

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Very grise, Mr Speaker. It is a matter of regret that on such an important issue, the shadow Secretary of State rather let herself down this afternoon. Those of us involved with this issue have expressed concerns—about compulsion, of course, but also about planning for school places, transport across changing catchment areas, and what happens when a failing school has no suitable academy to take it over. The House is grateful to the Secretary of State for having listened, and we urge her to look at what might be described as the final pieces in the academisation jigsaw. We very much appreciate the tone and the constructive nature of her statement.

Nicky Morgan: I thank my neighbour and right hon. Friend for his question. He raises important issues that we have addressed in the White Paper, in the sense that we highlighted that there are difficult issues around place planning and transport, and that we need to work with local authorities, the Local Government Association and others to make sure that we get this right. Ultimately, if schools are autonomous, we have to trust the frontline to deal with those difficult issues.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): How much scope is there for local government or community involvement in new multi-academy trusts?

Nicky Morgan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. The answer is: a lot. In the White Paper, we set out the plans by local authorities—two, certainly—for multi-academy trusts. Many of them are already exploring spinning out their services, as well as setting up multi-academy trusts. There are limits on the ownership that they are able to take. A lot of local authorities are exploring the option of setting up a trust in which the heads of the schools own part of the trust. That is a strong model, and it builds on the great collaboration that we already see in our education system.

Mr Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the very constructive approach she has taken throughout this debate. I particularly welcome her recognition that stand-alone academies, or small multi-academy trusts, can have the benefits of autonomy, while keeping schools in touch with the communities they serve.

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for the conversations that we have had. I know that he is absolutely committed to high educational standards.

He is extremely fortunate to represent a very high-performing local authority. He and I both want all children in the country to have the same opportunities as children in his constituency.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State might know that in the early days of the idea of academies, I was of some help to the then Government in refining their method, and it was a good method: where schools were failing, we used academies to make sure that we ended that quickly. The method that the Secretary of State is extolling is a perversion of the academy model that we introduced. I say in sorrow rather than anger that the model of education that she is giving this country is doomed to fail.

Nicky Morgan: This model of education is giving 1.4 million more children the opportunity to be in a good or outstanding school. We want to go further.

Mr Speaker: I call Chloe Smith.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. [*Laughter.*] I am delighted to be picked from among the serried ranks of excellent Back Benchers. Evidence such as the social mobility index sadly shows that my constituency has some of the poorest opportunities for the poorest children. May I urge the Secretary of State to stick to her guns, and to ensure that her focus is on standards for those who need it most?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend. She is absolutely right to say that this is about higher standards for all, but particularly for those for whom education is the great life transformer that will set them up for life. If we do not get this right, we are losing out as a country, and children are losing out. She and I have discussed the opportunity for her area to take part in the "Achieving Excellence Areas" pilots, and I look forward to discussing that further.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Some colleagues have a quaint idea about time-keeping. One hon. Member who was six minutes late has still not taken my hint. I do not wish to embarrass the poor fella, but he should not be standing. It is pretty straightforward.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I am pleased that the Secretary of State is not sticking to her guns, and I welcome her change of heart and the U-turn that she has announced. Will she reconsider another ill-advised proposal in the White Paper—the abolition of the requirement for schools to have parent governors?

Nicky Morgan: The right hon. Gentleman and I discussed this when I gave evidence to the Education Committee. We have been very clear that there is a role for parent governors. We expect trust boards to have parent governors, but we also think that that is not the only way for parents to be involved and that much better, more meaningful engagement can be achieved.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): Following on from that, I thank my right hon. Friend for listening to the arguments for not compelling academisation, but

because parent governors are so vital to the excellence of schools—I have worked with some brilliant parent governors—how will my right hon. Friend ensure that parental input continues? That is part of excellence.

Nicky Morgan: We are making it an expectation that parents will be heavily involved, not just through being governors, but through, for example, parent councils, as my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) set out recently, and the parent portal. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) is right to say that parent governors make a huge contribution to schools. I happen to know that because I am married to one of them.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): I feel rather embarrassed for the Minister as the Government tried to sneak through this U-turn during one of the most racist campaigns that we have ever seen in the capital. Toby Young admitted that he had been arrogant and regretted criticising teachers, state schools and local education authorities. Will the Minister acknowledge that the teachers, the Labour party, the students and the parents were right, and she was wrong?

Nicky Morgan: I think the hon. Lady rather let herself down by that patronising question, if I may say so. I have been very clear all the way along, since the first day of my appointment, that the most important people in our education system are the teachers. The quality of teachers is the single most important thing that attracts and helps young people meet standards. If any Minister puts forward any proposals, we are likely to hear comments, but that does not mean that we should not put proposals forward. That is not the kind of person I am. I said last week that I was not going to leave the job half-done; I am not going to leave the job half-done.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's comments on the support for small rural schools, and her commitment to a funding review. Does she agree that a funding review delivers the opportunity to address the deep unfairness in the funding system that has left schools in places such as Cornwall underfunded for far too long?

Nicky Morgan: We remain committed to a national funding formula review. It cannot be right to have 152 different local formulae operating across the country. As I have talked about having a strong, consistent education system across the country, that must mean that we have a strong, consistent funding system too.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Can the Minister specify why she objects to the line put across in *The Times* today by PricewaterhouseCoopers—presumably, a vested interest—who argue that academisation is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for school improvement, or is evidence utterly irrelevant?

Nicky Morgan: Plenty of evidence can be cited in favour. I point the hon. Gentleman to the PISA and the OECD evidence, which I have already talked about, which sets out clearly the benefits of autonomy in our school system.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for listening to Back Benchers on this issue. She knows that I have been a vocal critic, but I found her willingness to engage with us on the issue most refreshing and I am grateful to her for that. Can she confirm that she will continue to engage with parents and teachers as she pursues our vision to improve education for every child, regardless of background?

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend raises an important point. It has been a pleasure to talk to him and all colleagues on both sides of the House. I look forward to continuing that conversation.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I am proud to represent a town that has some of the best schools in the country. My concern about the Secretary of State's announcement is that it does not answer the questions that schools of all kinds—academies and local authority schools—and parents ask me. What parents say is, "How can we guarantee that there is a school place for my child nearby?", and what schools say to me is, "How can I guarantee that there is a good quality teacher in front of every class?" We have not heard a solution to either of those problems. What does she offer?

Nicky Morgan: I think the right hon. Lady needs to read the White Paper. Let me also point out that we have the highest number of teachers ever in the profession, and we have created 600,000 more school places since 2010. When the Labour party was in power, it took 200,000 places out of the system at the time of a baby boom.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): May I join colleagues—

Fiona Mactaggart: Give us an answer!

Graham Stuart: I think you have had your question. May I join colleagues in congratulating the Secretary of State on her statement and on the way in which she has engaged with colleagues on both sides of the House? The Education Committee described the healthy tension between local authority schools and academy schools, which has contributed to 1.4 million fewer children being at weak schools. Does the Secretary of State agree that if local authorities that do manage to deliver outstanding schools and excellent overview and intervention, they can continue?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for the conversations we have had. Yes, of course—this is all about lifting standards and making sure no child is in a school that is failing or underperforming. Of course, if a child is in a good school being supported by a strong local authority, I want the authority to get on with doing that.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): The chief inspector said he looked forward to a more diverse system, but how will changing all schools to the same system, as in the Secretary of State's vision, make things more diverse? How will killing off the alternatives—our local education authorities, which are being denied the funds to provide the services that have improved schools in boroughs

[*Ian Mearns*]

such as mine—facilitate improvement in the future? Lastly, what will happen to schools that are languishing in poor, failing academy trusts?

Nicky Morgan: I think there were three questions in that one question, but I will give the hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the Education Committee, the benefit of the doubt. First, let me answer his last question. We take swift action in any academies that are failing. Regional schools commissioners have already brokered over 100 schools and issued 94 warning notices. However, the hon. Gentleman's question shows a worrying lack of understanding of what we are doing. There has been a one-size-fits-all system—and that was local education authority control. We are now saying that there will be freedom for schools to decide the right future for them; that could be continuing in a strong, supportive local authority, but it could also be converting into a stand-alone academy or joining a small local cluster, a bigger multi-academy trust or a diocesan trust. Schools are free to make the decision that is right for them and their pupils.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): May I also welcome the Secretary of State's readiness to listen to colleagues? An Ofsted report earlier this year on the standard of provision by the local authority in Portsmouth is damning, with generations of children having been let down. The Conservative-led city council has made some important changes, and a new director of children's services is beginning to make a difference, but does my right hon. Friend agree that she must have the powers to intervene where local authorities are failing?

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we cannot stand back where local authorities are not providing sufficiently strong and effective school improvement. She is right to talk about the generations of young people who have been failed. It would be utterly irresponsible for the Government to let that continue on our watch.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Opposition Members are absolutely committed to high standards in schools, and the Secretary of State does not aid the debate by turning it into an unnecessarily partisan attack on the Opposition. The title of her White Paper is "Educational Excellence Everywhere". Does she really believe that a one-size-fits-all approach is best for education everywhere? Is it not time to follow the example of other parts of the Government and to look at devolution, so that more decisions are made at city region or county level, and fewer in her Department?

Nicky Morgan: The second half of the hon. Gentleman's question was a lot more constructive than the first. I go back to what I said to the hon. Member for Gateshead (*Ian Mearns*): we are not having a one-size-fits-all system—we had one, and it was called local education authorities. We now have a system where schools can decide their future, either on their own, or working in clusters or with the diocese. I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is on our side on raising standards, and I hope he can speak to other Opposition Members about that.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and for listening to colleagues on academies. After all, the purpose of a White Paper is to listen and to debate. Does she share my disquiet about the approach and language adopted by some of the teaching unions and Labour Members in railing against all academies, despite the clear evidence that, in the main, they work?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend. I well remember visiting an excellent academy in his constituency that was full of innovation, vigour and creativity, and absolutely on the side of the pupils there. Yes, I am concerned that some people so want to talk about structures that they have completely missed everything the rest of the White Paper says about teaching, leadership, standards, curriculums, and funding.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Just two weeks ago at Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister confidently declared that forced academisation would be in the Queen's Speech, and yet today we have this U-turn. Why has it taken the Government so long to listen to education professionals, teachers, parents, the Labour party, and even their own Back Benchers?

Nicky Morgan: At Prime Minister's questions the Prime Minister talked about academies for all and education for all, and that is exactly what we are going to see.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): The shadow Secretary of State said that there is no evidence that academisation, in and of itself, improves performance, but does the Secretary of State think that the increased autonomy that is inherent in the structure of academies does improve performance, as set out not only in the PISA report that she mentioned but in the McKinsey report of 2010?

Nicky Morgan: I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend. We have been very clear that just calling a school an academy does not automatically raise standards, but academies are the vehicle by which those working in them have the creativity to innovate with the curriculum, to set flexibility for pay and conditions, and to collaborate more freely with other schools. That is exactly what academy schools are doing, and that is why standards are going up.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah—I call my University of Essex contemporary, Mr Ian Austin.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. The PISA figures actually show that we are going down the international league tables as standards among our competitors rise much more quickly than here in the UK, so it is an absolute tragedy that the Secretary of State spends so much of her time on partisan bickering and a dogmatic obsession with structures. The best way—the quickest way—to improve standards in our schools is to focus on leadership, and that is what she should be giving all her attention to. Will she take the £1 billion that she was going to spend

on forcing every school to become an academy and use it to recruit and train a new generation of brilliant headteachers?

Nicky Morgan: May I suggest that the hon. Gentleman read, or re-read if he has already done so, chapter 3 of the White Paper, entitled “Great leaders running our schools and at the heart of our system”? We do not need to divert money because we have already set aside money for training headteachers and supporting their great leadership. If he wants to talk about our rankings in the international league tables, he might like to consider that between 2000 and 2009 England’s 15-year-olds fell from seventh to 25th in reading, eighth to 27th in maths, and fourth to 16th in science. If he thinks that performance when his party was in power was good enough, he should have another think.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State for her statement. There is nothing ignoble about a Secretary of State coming to the House to make changes based on legitimate concerns raised by colleagues, including my local LEA, Conservative-controlled Peterborough City Council. In the new dispensation, will she bear in mind two particular issues: first, the statutory role of the LEA in respect of school place planning and special educational needs; and, secondly, the fact that there still remain capacity issues for academy chains in dealing with the very serious problems of failing schools, some of which are in my constituency?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for making those points. I congratulate him and his local councillors on taking control of Peterborough City Council, which was a fantastic result. He raises two very important issues. Of course we will continue to work with Members and local authorities on place planning, but also on building capacity. In the White Paper, we talk about the money that we have already set aside and the ability to grow strong, multi-academy trust sponsors, including existing good and outstanding schools, which can often be the most effective sponsors.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): If the Secretary of State is serious about the concept of excellence everywhere, she needs to deal with the real challenge caused by the pressure put on schools to take students who are most likely to help with league tables, at the expense of students who are perceived to be less likely to do so. In doing that, she should listen to the principal of Passmores Academy, Vic Goddard, who has made the point that if something is not done about that pressure, a two-tier education system will be created to the detriment of many thousands of children who will, throughout their lives, never recover from the damage that is done to them.

Nicky Morgan: I have met Vic Goddard, and I have had the pleasure of visiting his school and seeing just how committed and dedicated a headteacher he is. My first point, in answer to the hon. Gentleman’s question, is that the admissions code makes it extremely clear that schools cannot screen out or not take on certain pupils. If there is evidence of that, it needs to be reported. My second point is that, as I am sure he knows as a former member of the Select Committee on Education, we are moving towards the progress 8 measure, under which

we will move away from looking at children on the C-D borderline and look instead at the progress that all students make over the course of their schooling. Schools such as Vic Goddard’s will be particularly good at making sure that that is done well.

William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): As a former teacher, I welcome my right hon. Friend’s decision to reconsider compulsory academisation. Does she recognise that it is vital to engage with the teaching profession as she seeks to implement the other important measures contained in the White Paper? I encourage her to press ahead with those, despite the low-level disruption that she faces from those in front of her.

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend very much for what he has said. He is, I am sure, an expert at dealing with low-level disruption. On a more serious point, engaging with teachers is something that I take very seriously and enjoy doing. One of the best things that I do is to get out of Westminster to visit schools and take part in the “teacher direct” sessions that I arrange.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Secretary of State has talked about the many conversations that she has had in recent weeks, which have apparently convinced her that blanket powers for forced academisation are no longer necessary. In order to avoid a period of uncertainty and worry for school communities, would it not have been better to have had those conversations before announcing such a flawed policy?

Nicky Morgan: I have lots of conversations all the time, but one thing I was being asked for before the publication of the White Paper was a very clear statement about where we were going and whether we wanted schools to become academies. That is exactly what the White Paper offers.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I, too, thank the Minister for her statement and for listening not only to Back Benchers and Members on both sides of the Chamber, but to teachers. I sense that they have concerns, but that they are willing to work with us. Will she assure me that, throughout the process, she will continue to focus on raising standards and raising aspirations, which are really at the heart of this?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend very much for her comments. She is absolutely right to say that high aspirations and raising standards must be at the heart of our education policy. Education is the greatest investment that we can make in the future of our country, and it has to be about making sure that all our young people fulfil their potential and are set up for the world of work. We will absolutely keep that as the focus of all our reforms.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Although it was welcomed, many parents and teachers in my constituency fear that the Secretary of State’s announcement was merely a tactical retreat, and that the Government are still committed to exactly the same ends by other means. With those concerns in mind, will she provide me with some more details about the point

[Matthew Pennycook]

at which a local authority will be judged to be unviable, and how the minimum performance threshold will be defined?

Nicky Morgan: If the hon. Gentleman was listening to my statement, he will know that I said that we would be consulting on that, and that those measures would be subject to an affirmative resolution in the House. At all stages since the publication of the White Paper, our goal has been to raise standards for all children. That has not changed.

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for engaging so constructively on this issue. The statement that she has made today will be most welcome in Somerset. I have recently visited a number of good and outstanding local authority-controlled schools in my constituency, which see the attraction of academisation but are nervous about the transition. Will the Secretary of State set out how her Department will work with schools and local authorities to facilitate that transition at a time of a school's choosing?

Nicky Morgan: I absolutely understand the worry about the unknown—about what becoming an academy means and how much time it will take—which is why we have set out that small schools will have a specific fund to support them and that each school wanting to convert will get its own adviser. I strongly urge my hon. Friend to speak to his regional schools commissioner, who has an important position in the local community in working with schools that want to convert and can raise any problems directly with me or the Minister for Schools.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): The Secretary of State is sending out mixed messages. If I heard her correctly, she has just declared that we will still see "academies for all". Does she accept that this whole episode has caused tremendous stress and anxiety to headteachers and staff up and down the country? Headteachers are now considering converting to academy status not to raise their standards, but simply to avoid being pushed. Will she give them some reassurance that they should focus not on their structures, but on their standards?

Nicky Morgan: We have been very clear—I do not think that I could have been clearer in my answers or in my original statement—that we want all schools to be focused on raising standards. However, I and we are very clear about the benefits of schools becoming academies, and about trusting those on the frontline to run their schools and to be accountable for the results they achieve. That is why we are very clear that we want all schools to become academies, but to do so at a time and in a way of their choosing, unless they are underperforming schools, the local authority is underperforming or it is no longer viable for the local authority to run them because of the numbers of schools that have converted.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I recently met school leaders and Hampshire County Council leaders who were keen to hear about the Secretary of State's direction of travel. I welcome the listening exercise for me and my colleagues, which has begun the process of truly

understanding the commitment and promise in our manifesto to lift the standards in our schools. Today's statement shows that the focus is on our children and on helping all of them to achieve. In relation to the White Paper listening exercise, will the Secretary of State fill in the gaps on parents' voices and links to the community?

Nicky Morgan: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work she has done locally in bringing schools together and in talking to parents and others in her constituency. It is incumbent on all of us to continue to do that as constituency Members of Parliament, but also to encourage people to visit schools that have converted, because that is often the best way to understand how the process works and what are the best decisions to take. That applies to parents, governors and teachers, and to headteachers as well.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): The situation is very confused at the moment: the Government seem happy to give Greater Manchester councils full health devolution, with £8 billion a year, but do not trust them to be given the same control of their schools. Will the Secretary of State explain that difference?

Nicky Morgan: Becoming an academy is all about the ultimate devolution—devolution to the frontline of the heads, the teachers and the governors.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's flexibility on this matter. Secondary schools in Gloucestershire were among the first warmly to embrace becoming academies, but that seems to have left a communication gap in relation to small rural schools. How can her Department, and indeed all of us, communicate with the parents, governors and teachers of such small secondary schools about the benefits of academies?

Nicky Morgan: In my statement, I set out some of the specific policies, and we will put together a package of information about them that hon. Members can circulate to relevant schools. I encourage my hon. Friend to do what others have done, which is to call together heads or chairs of governors for meetings, and to involve the regional schools commissioners, who will hold events to talk about becoming an academy and the sponsorship opportunities available if that is what such small schools want to pursue.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I am sure that the many good and outstanding schools in my constituency that are not academies will welcome this statement, but I am concerned that the Secretary of State's dogmatic ambitions remain the same and that she still intends to force every school to academise by hook or by crook. A few weeks ago, she said that

"we are going to finish this job."—[*Official Report*, 25 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1119.]

Does she still stand by that statement, or will she finally recognise the right of good and outstanding local schools to determine their own destiny and accept that if they decide not to become an academy, that right will be respected?

Nicky Morgan: That just shows that if hon. Members sit here and listen to a statement, they still do not necessarily listen to what I have actually been saying. I have talked about finishing the job—the job of lifting standards for all young people in this country.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for her measured and thoughtful statement, which I believe will address the legitimate concerns of many excellent but small rural schools in my constituency. Does she agree that in education, and indeed across all government, we must never let the outstanding become the enemy of the good?

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend and neighbour and I both know that we are very fortunate in Leicestershire to have many great schools, but we also know from our experience that not all young people have the opportunity to attend a good or outstanding school, whether in the midlands or elsewhere. That is why we cannot let up on the pursuit of reforms that lift educational standards.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): In one of the most affluent constituencies in the country I could find only six schools that were ranked as outstanding. That is the result of successive cosy relationships with the LEA under different administrations. What is my right hon. Friend going to do to make sure that that situation is improved?

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend raises a really important issue. A number of people have told me that they are in good local authorities with good schools, but we should compare those with other local authorities—whether similar local authorities or those in the most disadvantaged areas—where sometimes we see schools doing fantastic things for their pupils. That is why we introduced the Education and Adoption Act 2016, which tackles coasting schools—those schools that are okay, but that could be a lot better. That is what we intend to help them to achieve.

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s strength in her statement. In my constituency, and in Medway as a whole, most secondary schools and a large proportion of primaries are already academies. Some of those were compelled to become academies. It is true that home-grown academies have played a massive role in driving up standards within our authority, which has historically been an underperforming one. In my time as portfolio holder for education improvement, I saw adults’ positions being put before outcomes for young people in the schools those adults were charged with looking after. Will the Secretary of State confirm that she is committed to tackling underperformance, wherever it is?

Nicky Morgan: By the sheer strength and passion of my hon. Friend’s question, she has shown just how committed she is to this agenda. I well remember discussing it with her on the campaign trail when she was seeking election to this House. I absolutely assure her that we will have no let up and no reverse gear on lifting standards for all young people in this country.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her unswerving determination to drive up standards in our schools and her willingness to listen to suggestions on how the White Paper might be strengthened. Does she agree that Rowanfield Junior School in my constituency, which she visited recently, provides a powerful example of the great benefits for pupils and teachers that can come from multi-academy trusts but that good and outstanding schools in Cheltenham should be trusted to judge for themselves whether that structure suits them?

Nicky Morgan: Like my hon. Friend, I really enjoyed my visit to Rowanfield Junior School, with its two fantastic co-headteachers—frankly, I wish I could clone them and we could have more like them across the country. They were utterly inspirational. He is absolutely right that we want good and outstanding schools to be able to choose the right format for them. But we have to be realistic. If they are in a local authority that is underperforming or is not viable, that is not going to help them to get even better.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and her ministerial team for taking the time to listen to concerns raised, for strengthening this already fantastic White Paper and for providing a source of debate in my constituency as to whether the LEA model is in fact not the right one. To that end, will she consider the obstacles for local clusters forming multi-academy trusts because of the many Church schools in my constituency?

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend has raised the really important question of small schools, usually primary schools, deciding whether to join the diocesan academy trust, if one has been set up, or thinking about other options. On 18 April we published on the Department’s website two new memorandums of understanding, with the Church of England and with the Catholic Church, which provide more flexibility. I hope that they will be of use to him in his discussions.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for listening so constructively to Conservative Back Benchers about this issue. As I told her face to face, I have good local authority schools, good academies, and a really good co-operative trust in my home village of Honley. Will she continue to put parents and governing bodies at the forefront of determining the future of our wonderful local schools?

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend and I had a good conversation. As a constituency Member he is passionate about championing high educational standards in his constituency, and he is right to say that the voices of parents, governors, teachers, headteachers and, in many cases, pupils must be listened to. That is why it is incumbent on us to ensure that all options are out there, so that good and outstanding schools can make the right decisions.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): As the Secretary of State will be aware, the majority of schools in Torbay have already converted to academy status, and schools such as Barton Hill Academy are making real progress with the flexibilities that such status provides. That

[Kevin Foster]

does, however, raise the issue of the viability of the Torbay LEA, and I was interested to hear the Secretary of State's comments. Will she confirm whether the thresholds for Government intervention will be based on the percentage of pupil numbers or the percentage of schools, or will that be subject to later consultation?

Nicky Morgan: That is a good question and something that we want to continue discussing when taking measures through the House, including with local authorities. The important thing is a local authority's ability to have the resources, experience and personnel to offer really good school improvement, and in my experience, most local authorities will be able to judge when they are struggling with that. We know that at least one local authority has already asked us to issue academy orders for its remaining schools.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and willingness to engage on what was, let us remember, a White Paper for discussion. Last Friday afternoon I was in a meeting with the leader and schools leader of Hampshire County Council, and it is fair to say that the first half of the meeting did not go as well as the second half once they had heard her announcement, and I pass on their thanks. My hope is that this compromise will allow us to get on in successful areas—94% of schools in my constituency are already good or outstanding—and allow her to focus ruthlessly on those areas where children do not enjoy the life chances that they do in my constituency. Do I have that right?

Nicky Morgan: The announcement on Friday was not timed exactly for my hon. Friend's meeting with Hampshire local authority, but he had made clear to me when he was having that meeting. He is right to say that in the White Paper and subsequent discussions it has become clear that children in some parts of the country are getting a great education, but that is not the case everywhere. I cannot say strongly enough how much I feel that we must ensure that such educational excellence is shared by all children in all parts of this country.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I had my concerns about compulsory academisation, but she has clearly taken the time to listen to all her colleagues and I welcome that approach. I also welcome the £10 million fund for small rural schools that need support in conversion, but when will that be made available? If a number of schools are looking to form a multi-academy trust, will the money go to the lead school or to them all?

Nicky Morgan: We still need to work out the details, but the idea is for the fund to be available sooner rather than later, and some small schools are already thinking about their future. The fund would be for things such as legal costs. I will not set out all the details, but it is important that the fund supports all schools, because they will all need that support, not just the lead school.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I do not share the rose-tinted view of some about local education authorities, and mine in Nottinghamshire has failed consistently to

provide good-quality education in Newark. At times, political parties and local education authorities in my town have been extremely complacent and ineffective. To me, the most important thing is the willingness to intervene when schools are demonstrably failing, and that has been neglected for too long. In her advice and guidance for regional schools commissioners, will the Secretary of State redouble the commitment to intervene, so that no child's education gets written off as has happened to generations in my town of Newark?

Nicky Morgan: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's commitment, as a local Member of Parliament, to driving up educational standards in his constituency. He is absolutely right to say that. We know there are local authorities across the country—he mentions his own—that have never issued a warning notice or appointed an interim executive board to run a school. We could not be clearer with the regional schools commissioners. They are an excellent team who know they need to intervene swiftly when there is educational failure. We have seen that with the re-brokering of sponsorships and with the sending out of financial and educational warning notices. That absolutely will continue.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): As the governor of an excellent academy, Hillview school in Tonbridge, which has done so much to maintain the ethos of arts education, I am very proud of the Government's work to support academies. I very much welcome the Secretary of State's comments and ask her whether she timed them for me to be able to write to Ightham Parish Council and thank it for its very useful intervention only last week, or whether it was timed for Four Elms Parish Council, whose intervention was on Friday.

Nicky Morgan: I am delighted to have assisted my hon. Friend and those parish councils, if that is the case. It was important that we made the announcement. I congratulate him on being a governor of the school. On the arts, I visited the fantastic Lings primary school in Northampton—I think I have mentioned it in the House before—which has embedded Shakespeare in the curriculum from reception to year 6. That shows what inspirational headteachers, with the support of an academy trust, can do to transform education in their schools.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for listening on both academies and fair funding. Will she or one of her ministerial colleagues meet me and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson) to discuss the situation in South Staffordshire, where schools are working really hard but suffering tremendously in comparison with neighbouring authorities on the question of funding per head?

Nicky Morgan: Yes, of course. The Schools Minister or I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend. We have made a very clear commitment, which was not taken up under 13 years of the previous Labour Government, to transform how fair funding works across the country. It has to be right that the same pupils with the same characteristics attract the same funding. That is what we are determined to see.

Points of Order

5.22 pm

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): On 28 April, the Leader of the House, in answer to the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), attempted to smear the prospective Labour party police and crime commissioner candidate for Humberside, Keith Hunter. The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole asked:

“As we are talking about the dodgy behaviour of police and crime commissioner candidates, may I say to the Leader of the House that a number of folk standing for election next week are ex-coppers trading on their record as police officers? Does he agree that the Government should bring forward proposals to ensure that ex-police officers standing to be PCCs make their police service record available for public scrutiny?”

The Leader of the House replied:

“My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am aware of allegations about the Labour PCC candidate in Humberside. If the stories alleged about that candidate are true, he is unfit for public office, and it is a matter of public interest that the truth should be known before election day.”—[*Official Report*, 28 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1564-5.]

I wrote to the Leader of the House requiring him to either explain the deliberately damaging remarks and the precise basis for them, or to formally withdraw them and apologise for the disgusting attempted smear. Mr Speaker, would you please advise me on what I can do, given that the Leader of the House is ignoring formal correspondence from elected Members, including formal correspondence from Her Majesty’s loyal Opposition, and deliberately misusing this place for divisive and nasty Tory party political campaigning?

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for his courtesy in giving me

advance notice of the thrust of it. The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that what is said in this place by any Member is the responsibility of that Member. It is not the responsibility of the Chair. Clearly, we should all think carefully before making accusations against individuals. The hon. Gentleman has made his point and doubtless this exchange will be relayed to the Leader of the House. The hon. Gentleman can seek to secure a written reply from the Leader of the House if he so wishes, but I cannot involve myself further. I will leave the hon. Gentleman to his own devices.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you know, there is a tradition of service in the House of Commons either to one’s constituents or to others, such as charities, and indeed, within the House, we serve on Committees. During the war, some Members did fire watching service over Westminster Hall. The reason for my point of order is that we learn today of the danger of war if the UK were to leave the EU. I wondered whether you, your staff or any Officers of the House had made provision for fire service or—I don’t know—missiles of defence, should war imminently break out upon our leaving the EU?

Mr Speaker: I confess that I have made no such preparations. I would not wish to be accused of tardiness or irresponsibility by the hon. Gentleman or any other Member, but I have been preoccupied with other duties in the House today, including in the Chair and listening to the hon. Gentleman’s mellifluous tones. I have embarked thus far on no such preparations, but I have a hunch that he was more interested in what he had to say to me than in anything I might have had to say to him.

Backbench Business

BIS Sheffield/Government Departments outside London

5.26 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern the Business, Innovation and Skills Department's proposal to close its Sheffield policy office, moving 247 posts to London; further notes that the Sheffield BIS office proposal runs counter to the Government's welcome commitment to create a public sector that reflects the diverse nature of the UK following the publication of the Bridge report and also to the commitment in Budget 2016 to move civil servants out of expensive Whitehall accommodation; and therefore calls on the National Audit Office to conduct a cost benefit assessment of the BIS Sheffield proposal.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting the time for this debate and right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House for their support for the application. The breadth of that support reflects the concern over the two issues central to this debate. The first issue is to underline the value of locating civil servants, particularly those involved in policy making, right around the country, in the regions and nations that make up the UK. That is something on which I think we can all agree and which has been reflected in the approach of successive Governments, including this one, in many of the things they have sought to do. The second issue is the seemingly perverse decision by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to centralise policy work in Whitehall and close its Sheffield office. It is a decision that runs counter to the general thrust of Government policy.

On 28 January, the BIS permanent secretary announced plans to close the St Pauls Place office in Sheffield, which is part of the Government's national policy function, and to relocate those jobs to London, in order to centralise all departmental policy functions in Whitehall. In justifying the decision, he explained that the Department needed

"to modernise the way we work, reduce operating costs and deliver a simpler, smaller department that is more flexible and responsive to stakeholders and businesses."

Those are fine, legitimate goals, but a decision to move policy functions from Sheffield to London does not tick any of those boxes. As Members, we asked the Department for figures explaining how a move from Sheffield to the most expensive city in the country could possibly reduce operating costs.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making the central point of our argument. I would like to make the point that it is not just jobs in Sheffield that are at stake. Although the numbers are smaller, jobs in Darlington are being moved to London, too, which makes absolutely no sense.

Paul Blomfield: I very much share my hon. Friend's sentiment that there are many benefits derived from locating jobs outside London. These include cost benefits and the enrichment of decision making by involving people located around the country in administering government and advising the Government. My hon. Friend made a very important point.

When we asked the permanent secretary for a cost-benefit analysis, we got no answer. A cost-benefit analysis of moving a departmental office is not commercially sensitive and, so far as I can see, it is not a matter of national security. Why, then, right from day one, has the Department refused to provide the evidential basis for this proposal? Members have asked for this analysis in a Westminster Hall debate, in oral questions, in an urgent question, in written parliamentary questions, in over three separate evidence sessions of two Select Committees—the BIS Committee and the Public Accounts Committee—and in written correspondence. Yet we are still to see this information.

We can only assume that the reason for that is that the decision does not stand up to scrutiny. Such information as we have managed to wheedle out through written questions and other ways seems to confirm that. The answer to parliamentary question 33917 tells us that each year it costs £3,190 on rent, rates and maintenance to have an employee in the Sheffield office, compared with £9,750 in the London office. The Department rightly offers the London salary weighting of £3,500 a year, so we are already up to more than £10,000 per employee in London in comparison with Sheffield. That is before we even consider recruitment issues in London, where a more competitive jobs market inevitably drives salaries up further, which was acknowledged by the permanent secretary. When questioned on the issue, the permanent secretary told the Public Accounts Committee last month:

"We have not sought to put a price"

on those additional costs. That is extraordinary, and it is not good enough.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent financial case to show why this change should not happen. The BIS office at Billingham in my constituency is not a headquarters, but it lies three miles from the constituency of the Minister responsible for the northern powerhouse. What kind of message does my hon. Friend think is being sent about the Government's commitment to a northern powerhouse when they close down offices even in the constituency of the Minister who is supposed to be responsible for it, as well as next door?

Paul Blomfield: My hon. Friend makes a very important point, and he will not be surprised to learn that I shall come back to the point a little later in my contribution.

The Government say, quite understandably, that they want to save money, but we have done the maths from the limited information that we have managed to get. This decision will cost the Department in operational costs an additional £2.5 million a year, every year. I shall press the Minister further on the figures. When we tried to get a proper cost-benefit analysis, the permanent secretary told the BIS Select Committee:

"I do not think I can point to you one specific document that covers specifically the Sheffield issue."

Furthermore, when the Minister for Universities and Science drew the short straw in having to defend the seemingly indefensible at a Westminster Hall debate back in February, he was clearly briefed by civil servants to respond to the repeated requests we made for a cost-benefit analysis, by saying:

“I am unable to provide a disaggregated breakdown of that figure because we are talking about a system change.”—[*Official Report*, 24 February 2016; Vol. 606, c. 138WH.]

That is not so. I have it here in an internal BIS management document on a page entitled, “Potential Savings from Sheffield Office Closure”.

I think that there are some serious issues here relating to the hand that Ministers have been dealt by senior civil servants in their Department. Indeed, when answering an urgent question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) immediately after the announcement, the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise said:

“We are confident that many of the workers will choose to take new jobs down in London.”—[*Official Report*, 29 March 2016; Vol. 605, c. 562.]

I am afraid that that is not the case, according to the leaked internal document, which states that

“90% of the potential savings are dependent on how many jobs are retained and moved to London.”

In other words, the more people reject the non-offer to up sticks, try to find a house in London’s hugely overheated housing market and move their children to different schools, the more money will be saved—and, to make sure of that, no relocation package was offered to the staff.

That takes me back to the obfuscation that we have encountered throughout the months during which we have debated this issue. In response to my most recent attempts to obtain the figures via written parliamentary questions, I was referred to a letter from the permanent secretary and the Chairs of the Business, Innovation and Skills and Public Accounts Committees. It sets out quite exaggerated costs for the Sheffield office, and some incredulity was expressed in the Public Accounts Committee when the issue was discussed there. Unless none of the functions being carried out in Sheffield—relating to the higher education White Paper and higher education in general, to apprenticeships, and to further education funding—is to be replaced in London, the letter provides only one side of the story, because the costs will be incurred in the replacement of the posts of people who do not move in London.

Is this simply a case of cutting 247 posts because they happen to be in Sheffield—posts which, because they are in Sheffield, are by definition, as I have said, £10,000 cheaper? A decision was made without regard for costs, without regard for the policy areas in which the people involved were working, and without regard for the expertise that would be lost. Indeed, the former—and highly regarded—Conservative special adviser in the Department, Nick Hillman, who is now head of the Higher Education Policy Institute, has lamented the loss of institutional expertise that this move will involve, and has condemned the decision for that reason.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Many of my constituents work for the Insolvency Service. At a time when there is a steel crisis, BHS has collapsed and other businesses are becoming insolvent, one would think that the Government would want to retain staff with expertise in insolvency, yet 153 jobs are at risk. Does my hon. Friend agree that that does not seem to be a sensible policy approach?

Paul Blomfield: I do indeed, and I think that other Departments are recognising that problem. For example, the Department for Education is trying to take some of the Sheffield-based BIS staff into its headcount because it is so worried about the loss of institutional expertise in respect of the programmes and the policy agenda that they share. The loss of that institutional experience and expertise is a really worrying issue, and it prompts concern about the Government’s ability to deliver their agenda.

What this begins to look like is a lazy decision, easily taken by top managers in the Department, and based on a prejudice that policy people should be together in Whitehall. I have to say that it is not a prejudice shared by other Departments. Indeed, the Department for Education celebrates the fact that it has members of staff making policy in offices around the country, bringing the experience of their lives and work in the regions and nations of the United Kingdom to those policy decisions.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. As he will know, not only has the Department for Education made it clear that it does not think it is for the good of education policy to move all staff to London, but it shares a building with BIS staff. Alongside is a skills agency, which, when questioned by the Public Accounts Committee, confirmed that it had no problem with having good, bright staff based in Sheffield to do policy work. Is it not worrying that BIS feels that we should move all the policy jobs—many of them good, highly paid and highly qualified jobs—to London? What does that say to young people in south Yorkshire and other areas outside London?

Paul Blomfield: I thank my right hon. Friend for her question, and for her robust questioning of the permanent secretary at the Public Accounts Committee. She is absolutely right to say that this sends out the wrong message. When we raised this matter with the permanent secretary, he pointed out that there were many other BIS jobs around the country. It is almost as though BIS is happy to have administrative functions carried out around the country but policy people have to be together in London. This raises another point about silo thinking within Government. As my right hon. Friend points out, there is a synergy involved in having civil servants in policy roles in BIS and the Department for Education working together on a similar agenda. Taking them away and moving them to London will diminish their role.

Alex Cunningham: I am really interested in this idea of policy people having to be at the centre. The Department argues that the move will bring BIS policy operations closer to Ministers and contribute to the huge saving of £350 million of running costs. However, the “Government’s Estate Strategy” states:

“With modern IT, officials no longer necessarily need to be physically present, for example to brief ministers. Having offices on the periphery will also encourage local growth and regeneration.” That is the Government’s own strategy. Does my hon. Friend not detect a conflict there?

Paul Blomfield: I do indeed. I would simply reflect that this is the Department responsible for innovation. It is supposed to lead on creative thinking and thinking outside the box.

[Paul Blomfield]

I worry, as do colleagues, that proper consideration has not been given to better options. The Department set itself an ambitious cost-saving strategy in “BIS 2020”, but what is its thinking on how it is going to get there? Normally, faced with decisions such as these, big organisations would think about the resources they needed to achieve their objectives, look at the matter in the round, model how those resources should be most cost-effectively located around the country, then make the decisions. Decisions about office closures would naturally come at the end of that process, not at the beginning, as has been the case here. The Department is putting the cart before the horse.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. Should not part of the process he has just outlined involve proper consultation with the relevant trade unions?

Paul Blomfield: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We saw a process of consultation, which concluded on 2 May. The trade unions, working with the affected staff, have put in some substantial submissions and alternative proposals, and I shall be seeking reassurances from the Minister that they will be properly considered and their merits given the weight they deserve.

As a number of Members have commented, the “BIS 2020” review might result in some relocation of staff and in the concentration of policy staff in some areas. However, the idea that all policy functions need to be concentrated in London is simply absurd. It is even more ironic, given the wider Government policy that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) has just mentioned.

This year’s Budget committed the Government to moving out of “expensive Whitehall accommodation”. The Cabinet Office recently launched a raft of measures in a bid to diversify the civil service, after one of the Bridge report’s key findings was that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were “less likely to move” to London. One such measure that the Cabinet Office is recommending is to take graduate recruitment “outside of London by establishing regional assessment centres”. The most recent “Government’s Estate Strategy” expresses a commitment to

“turn around the prevailing tendency to locate head office staff in central London”.

That is Government policy.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree with me, a London MP, that centralisation and the relocating of staff presents a problem for London? It leads to congestion, more overheating, incredibly expensive accommodation, and so on. Most graduates cannot afford to rent in London, let alone buy their own property.

Paul Blomfield: My hon. Friend makes an important point. No one wants this to be seen as a north versus south issue. The proposal flies in the face of logic for both north and south. It makes no sense to add to the overheating in London, so we share a common agenda on that.

Colleagues commented earlier on the northern powerhouse agenda, which Sheffield and south Yorkshire have been deeply involved in and embrace. It is about encouraging the private sector to invest in the north, to build there, to relocate there, and to revive its economy, but if the very Department responsible for building the northern powerhouse wants out of the north, withdrawing 247 highly skilled jobs from the local economy with it, what message does that send?

Today’s debate came about because our key questions were not answered by the permanent secretary. Now is the Minister’s opportunity, so I want to conclude by asking four questions, to which Members and the hard-working staff of the BIS office in Sheffield have been seeking answers since January. I gave the Department advance sight of the questions last Wednesday to allow for full consideration and comprehensive answers. First, in reaching the decision to close the Sheffield office, what assessment has been made of the additional costs of moving the posts to London? That is the core question that we have been asking all along. Secondly, what assessment of the decision has been made against the Government objectives of moving out of expensive Whitehall accommodation, diversifying the civil service, and not locating head office functions in the capital? Thirdly, what assessment has been made of the impression created by the decision to move to London the functions of an office of the Department responsible for the northern powerhouse? Fourthly, aside from the proposals to centralise policy functions in London, what consideration has been given to the other options for achieving the “BIS 2020” objectives?

I understand that the decision, which was at one stage to have been taken by the BIS board tomorrow, has now been postponed and will be announced in the week commencing 23 May. I hope that that reflects a willingness to think seriously about the concerns that have been raised. I hope the Minister recognises that if the proposal goes ahead, the National Audit Office scrutiny we propose in today’s motion will find it flawed. I hope that she will therefore accept that it is the right time and in the interests of good policy making, effective use of public funds and confidence in the case for the north to exert ministerial authority and pull the plug on the closure of the Sheffield office.

5.48 pm

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield). He made a coherent speech, and I congratulate him on leading the charge on this whole issue.

Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not have a direct constituency interest in the matter. My interest came about because I was involved in the Public Accounts Committee’s questioning of the permanent secretary, and it struck me that the logic and reasons given for the decision were, unlike the speech we just heard, less than coherent and that they raised several potential issues about contradictory Government policy.

I am not against “BIS 2020” at all, but I do not think that we need this Sheffield closure to bring about its benefits. There are, however, potential contradictions between how “BIS 2020” is being rolled out and talked about, and the devolution, northern powerhouse and Government estate strategies. The latter came out most recently, in 2014, as a piece of analysis further to the

Lyons strategy and all the rest of it, with the general intention, apparently, of trying to get civil service jobs out of London. Since 2010, we have, unfortunately, found that the civil service has become more concentrated in London than it was previously.

I am addressing my remarks not only to you and the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, but to the BIS board, who have yet to make this decision, to Mr Donnelly, who has a chance to row back from some aspects of this, and to Mr Manzoni and Mr Heywood, both of whom have responsibility for consistency of the design principles of some of these initiatives across the civil service. As we have heard, some elements of what is happening in “BIS 2020” do not make sense vis-à-vis what is happening in the Department for Education, the Ministry of Justice and other Departments. If that is not an issue for Mr Manzoni and Mr Heywood, I am not sure what their jobs are.

On “BIS 2020”, I support the need to rationalise; Ministers have been given a target on saving money and if money can be saved, we should do it, if that does not affect efficiency and effectiveness. I have heard that there are 80 BIS sites across the country and that number is to be rationalised to eight, and I have no difficulty with the principle of that. We will come on to understand whether that figure of eight should be nine or seven, and the logic behind how that decision has been made. There are 45 partnership bodies in BIS, and there is clearly a need to change. As we heard in the previous speech, the permanent secretary often says that BIS is quite a distributed Department, and I accept that. I am sure the Minister will have statistics that allow her to discuss how much of BIS is outside London currently, but that is not a logical reason to bring more of it into London in response.

The permanent secretary used a phrase when he was talking about this, saying that a “hub and spoke” strategy is being implemented in “BIS 2020”. The principle of that strategy is that all policy has to be in one place—the hub—with all the other bits being the spokes. Apparently, we have one hub, in London, where the Ministers are—perhaps that is fair enough—and these seven or eight spokes, which is what the focus is going to be on. When I first heard that, I thought, “Okay, we are going to have all the policy in one place. There could be some logic in that. Does that mean 10 people doing policy and they all have to be in London, working together? That might be reasonable. Even 20 or 50 might be reasonable.” Apparently, the number of people who need to be in one place to do policy is 1,600, and that is not a rational approach, although the question is raised as to what is meant by “policy” and by “strategy”. This is based on the advice that McKinsey has given the Department, apparently based on a relatively small amount of input. I know that you don’t get an awful lot of days out of McKinsey for £200,000, and I accept that this is a BIS strategy and not a McKinsey strategy, and that the accountability for it lies with BIS, although the phrase “hub and spoke” does come from McKinsey. We will come back to that issue and to policy.

We have talked about the northern powerhouse and the need for devolution. There is a need in our country to bring gross value added per head up to the same level—as best as we can—as it is in London. If we were able to do that, it would be great. The difficulty is that no region in the UK has more Government spending

per capita than London, apart from Northern Ireland, where historical reasons are involved. We see that in the sort of decision that has been made here, and it is why we end up with a great concentration of civil servants in London and all that goes with that. At other times and in other places, we face the same issue in respect of the concentration of transport spend in London, which is partially due to London-centric thinking, resulting from the fact that so many of the civil service and top policy makers are here.

It is also true to say that cuts have been made right across the civil service since 2010. As I say, I do not oppose that, but 9% of those cuts have occurred in London whereas 20% have occurred in the regions, according to the Institute for Government. The consequence is that 18% of the civil service is now in London whereas the figure was 16% six years ago, according to the IFG, and I do not think that is acceptable. I do not think that is the right answer.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a very coherent case. When my constituents hear the phrase “northern powerhouse”, they ask what it means. We tell them that it means transferring powers, responsibilities and decision making out of London and to the regions, but they then say, “But why are you taking all these jobs from Sheffield and transferring them to London?” Is that not completely inconsistent with what the Government claim their objectives are?

David Mowat: It is not for me to answer that intervention, but I would say that the answer is yes. In all fairness, the northern powerhouse is about more than public sector investment and civil service jobs; it is also about private sector investment. When the time comes to say whether the northern powerhouse has worked, the judge and jury will be whether or not the gap in GVA per head has closed—we will see. Let me make a point in defence of Mr Donnelly’s position: he might well accept the analysis that we just heard from the hon. Member for Sheffield Central about cost, but his point would be that he gets more efficiency from having all these policy makers in one place. If he were here, he would make that point—indeed, that is what he did say to the Public Accounts Committee—but it is not a view shared by other permanent secretaries. The argument runs away when he is talking about 1,600 policy makers being in that one place as opposed to 100 of them—it does not bear thinking about.

We have talked about the estate strategy, which was published quite recently, in 2014. It contained a lot of sexy examples of how the Government are saving money through Departments rationalising and moving things out of the capital. It talks about the Ministry of Justice as a case study and about what is happening at the Ministry of Defence; one startling statistic was that the accommodation costs for somebody in Whitehall were £35,000 per annum whereas if we were talking about Croydon, which is still a relatively busy place, the cost would have been £3,000 per annum—goodness knows what the figure would be for Sheffield. Clearly, what we are talking about today is contradictory to that space strategy, which is another reason why Messrs Heywood, Manzoni and Donnelly need to get their act together on this.

[David Mowat]

I want to discuss three things in a little more detail. The first is the hub and spoke strategy and the need to have all 1,600 people in one place. Mr Donnelly has said, “Well, that is what Vodafone do.” He said that to the Public Accounts Committee. He has said, “That is what Google do.” I am surprised if that is the case. I accept what he says, but I can give other examples of organisations that do not take that approach—Accenture, Shell and many others. Many of these companies would take the view that having people who are doing strategy in different geographic locations helps formulate that strategy, particularly if it is being applied across those locations. I do not feel that the argument being put forward is coherent. But if that is the policy of the civil service, why does it apply only to BIS? Why does strategy in the Department for Education not all have to be in one place, whereas in BIS it apparently does? Why does strategy in the Ministry of Justice not have to be in one place, whereas it does in BIS? At the very least it would be reasonable if the people charged with running the civil service would address that question and tell us the answer, because I have some difficulty in seeing it.

In addition, a design principle is involved there, because lots and lots of civil service rationalisation is coming up in the next decade. If a considered position of the civil service is that all policy is done in one place, let us make sure that everybody knows that when they are doing this. If that is the position, the Department for Education is doing it wrong and the Ministry of Justice is doing it wrong, and I think Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs may be doing it wrong, too.

We have heard a great dealing about the costing of this proposal. Let us remember that “BIS 2020” has not been published and is not in the public domain. I am not going to charge, as McKinsey did, a couple of hundred thousand pounds for what I am about to say, but I am going to say that although the hub and spoke strategy may well be worth thinking about, there is a Mowat variation to it—it is the double hub and spoke strategy. It could be a model, in the same way as all these consultants have models. Given that we have a starting point with all these people in another hub, it does seem rather odd that, in the context of reducing the size of everything anyway, we have to impose this single hub strategy on the whole thing. Therefore, if the BIS board do get a chance to go through *Hansard*, I would like it to think about the double hub and spoke strategy and reflect on the fact that, almost certainly given the analysis that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Sheffield Central, it will save money as well as being equally effective.

Finally, there is a policy point about the civil service and the role of London. We have mentioned the fact that it is the major location of civil servants, especially the more senior ones. It is not an entire coincidence that the consequence of that is that current public spending in London is significantly higher per capita than any other region of the UK. This sort of decision will exacerbate that issue. As I said in the Public Accounts Committee, it just does not smell right.

I say to the BIS board that, before it signs off this proposal, it should ensure that it has asked some of the same questions that have been asked today and that will be asked later on this afternoon. Similarly, I say to

Mr Manzoni and Mr Heywood that there are points of coherence in BIS vis-à-vis other Departments here and that they need to satisfy themselves that they are happy that rational decisions are being made across the wider civil service. Mr Donnelly, who is the owner of all of this in terms of the civil service, needs to reflect on whether the hub and spoke system is worth dying in a ditch for, or whether a double hub and spoke strategy, which would save money, would be a much more sensible system. If, in order to achieve design purity, we have to go through a NAO audit of costs and sensibleness, then so be it.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I hope that we will not need a formal time limit, but this is a short debate and if Members who wish to speak keep their remarks to under 10 minutes, everyone will have a chance to make their views known.

6.2 pm

Mr Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): I, too, am very grateful to the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) for securing this debate, and I strongly support him—albeit from a different constituency in Sheffield and across party lines—in his and our shared endeavour to have the National Audit Office look at a decision that remains wholly unjustified and entirely opaque in the way it has been reached.

I am grateful to the Minister for being here. To be fair to her, she will not be in a position to undo the origins of this eccentric and unjustified decision. In the time since that decision was originally announced, what happened has become more obvious. In the Whitehall scrum that takes place, in which the Treasury cracks the whip and demands lots of savings and obliging Departments are told to jump ever higher and to cut ever deeper—I discovered that for myself over the five years I was in government—BIS took the political decision, the wrong decision in my view, to offer up far, far greater cuts than was either justified or necessary compared with other Whitehall Departments. That decision affected not only many of my constituents who work in the BIS office in Sheffield, but many other BIS projects that have been cancelled in this cull.

Once that high-level decision was taken that BIS should offer up far greater sacrifices in the Whitehall race to make savings for the Treasury, the Department then lurched, as the hon. Gentleman has said, into a panicky and lazy response to create the impression that a number of savings had been made. That duly had the political effect of creating noise, anguish and controversy, but, as we are discovering, the Department did not produce any material savings whatsoever. It is important that we understand the genesis of all of this as we seek now to ask the NAO to cast an expert light on the decision.

What is the evidence for that analysis of what has gone on? First, it is worth comparing the savings that BIS has offered up to the Treasury in this Parliament with those that it offered up in the last one. In the last Parliament, over that five-year period, the BIS savings amounted to about 18%—I remember well that they were an agonising 18%—of the total departmental budget, which meant that BIS was roughly in the middle of the

table of Departments offering up savings to the Treasury. What is striking is that that 18% has gone up to 26% in this Parliament, which means that BIS now leaps from mid-table for savings offered up to the Treasury to enduring the second largest cut of well over £4 billion. That was a choice taken by BIS and accepted by the Treasury. It was an extremely unwise choice given BIS's important role in trying to foster dynamism and investment in our private sector to support our challenged manufacturing sector, and to reform and support further education and higher education, which are so important to the long-term prosperity of our nation. It was that decision that led to this rather desperate attempt to try to gather together lots of savings in a hurry to meet that headline and somewhat draconian cut of 26%, which in turn led to the announced closure of the Sheffield office.

The hon. Member for Sheffield Central quite rightly referred to the opacity of the Government's pronouncement on exactly how much this closure will save. In response to a parliamentary question on 14 April 2016, the Department estimated that the current annual cost of the Sheffield office is as follows: £500,000 on travel; £890,000 on rent; and £150,000 on hotel stays. It said:

"These savings would be independent of any decision on headcount reductions, on which we are still consulting."

The only concrete saving figure that I have been able to get is £1.54 million—a risible, almost microscopically invisible, amount when it is set against total Government expenditure. It is about 0.005% of BIS's annual expenditure and, by my rough calculations, it is 0.0002% of total Government spending. It is a tiny amount given the loss of expertise, the disruption that will be incurred and the other relocation costs that have not been factored into those figures.

When I was walking through Portcullis House, I asked, by way of comparison, how much the fig trees cost. I was told that renting 12 fig trees costs £32,500. By my reckoning, what BIS is saving is the equivalent of renting just over 550 fig trees. That is such a piffling saving compared with the cost to BIS's expertise in a very, very important area of policy.

The decision also flies very directly in the face of stated Government policy, and very recently stated policy. As the Bridge report of 2 February 2016 has confirmed, the London-based nature of the civil service fast stream, emphasised by much of the fast stream literature featuring London landmarks, is a deterrent for many students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The Budget document of 2016 stated that the Government are working on an

"ambitious strategy to move civil servants out of expensive Whitehall accommodation and into the suburbs of London, delivering substantial savings for the taxpayer".

This decision therefore has at its origin an excessive zeal on the part of BIS to satisfy Treasury demands in this somewhat self-harming manner at the time of the comprehensive spending round of last year. All the evidence that has been presented to the House so far suggests that the savings, if there are any savings, are of an almost invisible nature and that the decision is damaging not only to my constituents, but to the knowhow and expertise and collective memory of BIS. The decision flies in the face of the Government's stated affection for the northern powerhouse agenda and other stated policies. When we bear all of that in mind, the least that this House can do—and the least that the Minister who is

busy chatting from a sedentary position can do—is seriously reflect on what is an uncontroversial request that the NAO cast an objective and dispassionate eye on this decision.

6.10 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg); some might say it makes a change for a Conservative to follow him, rather than the other way round.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) on securing this debate on a worthwhile subject. Obviously, my focus will be more on the principle of moving Government Departments out of London, but it is welcome that a matter that affects his constituency has brought this debate to the Floor of the House. Although she has disappeared, it was welcome to see the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) in the Chamber at the start of the debate; the former Member for that constituency would almost certainly have been here, had he been able to.

We are looking at why it is right to move Government Departments out of London—and the wider south-east; if we are candid, some of the issues and difficulties to do with locating in London that were outlined so well by the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) apply to many locations close to London. I look particularly at the success of the Met Office's relocation to the constituency of the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw). It managed not only to relocate itself and its work successfully, but to help provide a boost to businesses all around by taking its very high-skilled, intensive activity to Exeter. It provides in the far south-west the types of jobs and opportunities that we too often say are available only in the large metropolitan areas, or around London.

As we look increasingly at opportunities to take Departments out of London, I hope that places such as Torbay will be considered. The plan for a public service hub in Torquay that the Torbay Development Agency has been promoting for the last couple of years is an opportunity to regenerate a site around the Riviera International Centre; staff at that centre would have the opportunity to live in one of the best places in the country, with some of the best schools. There would also be a huge cost saving to the Government if it located jobs there and not in central London. It is worth remembering that when we free up office space in central London, it does not mean that jobs are lost there; in many cases, within a short period, those buildings in London have more people working in them, at a higher salary, because of the huge pressure for development and office space in London.

I do not intend to get into the details of the issue in Sheffield, given that speakers who are much more knowledgeable on this subject have already spoken on it, but I have always had the concern that too often we review the issue of departmental offices in London or the south-east only when a lease is expiring, a building needs to be sold, or the Treasury is putting the pressure on. It is in some ways welcome that BIS has been slightly more proactive in reviewing its office estate. It is important to remember that a consultation on the proposals is ongoing. I am sure that the Minister will take on board all the comments that have been made. It is important that we do not have reviews only when a

[Kevin Foster]

lease expires and there is an absolute need to think about what should be moving out; we should do that proactively.

Speaking as an MP from the south-west, I think that locating people outside London gives them more of a feel for the regional policies being delivered, be that in the north-west, the north-east, the midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, or the far south-west. It is right to continue that drive. Some functions will always remain in London, mostly those directly related to supporting the Government. The same can be said of debates about the future of this place, given the need for major refurbishment. I do not think that anyone will seriously suggest that the core functions of Government, and Parliament, which holds Government to account, could be moved away from the capital, but there are more opportunities that could be explored, such as the one that I highlighted in my constituency.

Crucially, we can use skilled jobs to help generate the sort of training courses, and stimulate people's aspirations and opportunities, without them having to incur the cost of moving to the capital. I grew up in a family who were rich in love, but not in money, and one of the first things that I encountered when starting to think about a career in the legal service was the fact that my only relative who lived within commuting distance of central London had passed away about six years earlier. That meant that the option of staying in the spare room had disappeared, and with it the likelihood of sensibly being able to take up opportunities in London. Owing to the costs, I ended up spending a year commuting from Coventry to London. With a young person's railcard, it worked out cheaper to commute over 100 miles daily than to live in the vicinity of where I was taking the Bar vocational course.

That challenge applies to many. I am sure that many other right hon. and hon. Members in the Chamber will think of special training courses or experiences that are available only in the capital, and that it is difficult for people to take up unless they have a granny, aunt or uncle with whom they can stay. That is a separate challenge that the Government could look at in the context of this debate.

I welcome the fact that this debate has been brought to the Floor of the House. I am sure that the Minister will respond to the specific points brought up about the Sheffield office, but I hope that she will also reflect on the wider opportunities presented by relocating Government Departments out of the capital, and in particular to the far south-west. We have seen the successful move of the Met Office; more bodies could follow it.

6.16 pm

Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): May I, along with the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) for getting this debate, and the Backbench Business Committee for giving it time? I start with the response that the Minister, who I am pleased is here, gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) when she posed an urgent question on this issue earlier this year:

“We are having to ensure that we spend public money wisely. Unfortunately, that means that we have to reduce the number of people who are working for us.”

The question of whether cutting jobs is necessarily wise is a debate in itself. It might be a few years before we know whether the decision was wise. The Minister went on to say:

“We must make sure that we use the money to best effect, which is why we considered the decision so very carefully, as I hope that she understands we would.”—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2016; Vol. 605, c. 562.]

Most of us would like to know whether the Government took the right decision. The sad fact is that, on this subject, there are many things that we just do not know. The so-called McKinsey report that the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) mentioned, costing some £200,000, has not yet been published, yet we are all this way down the road towards a decision that we think will be taken. Why can we not have that report, so that we can see whether the decision stands up to proper scrutiny?

Indeed, do we actually have a report? When the permanent secretary gave evidence to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central said, at question 72,

“If there was more than one paper, we could probably look at them all, so if you could share those with us it would be helpful. Can you also share the McKinsey report with us?”

The permanent secretary replied:

“The McKinsey report was about a set of actions to validate internal calculations, both quantitative and in terms of the strategic vision.”

He contradicted himself two questions later; in question 74, my hon. Friend said:

“So you will share those papers with us.”

The permanent secretary said:

“There is not such a thing as a McKinsey report, but there is McKinsey input into a set of different aspects of the work that we were doing. I will see what further information we can usefully share, because the process is one where we have come to a very clear business conclusion in terms of a sustainable model for the Department delivering”.

That is as clear as mud. The proposal, which will affect my constituents and those of many other Members, is beyond the pale.

We have to look at the proposal against the backdrop of a recent *Financial Times* report that 20% of civil service jobs had been lost in the regions since 2010, as opposed to only 9% in London. That is an extraordinary figure which seems to go against the main thread that we have had—or should have had—in Government thinking, not for the past five or six years, but for decades. I well remember when the Labour Government built the advanced manufacturing park near Sheffield—it is actually in Rotherham, but it is often said to be in Sheffield—and it is a glowing example of what Governments can do if they have the will. It is a centre of excellence now. Minister go there every other week, smiling for the cameras and saying how wonderful it is.

On the Sheffield BIS closure, I was contacted by a person now in their third decade in the civil service, who said:

“I've worked in the civil service 10 years in London and the rest in Sheffield. For the majority of that time, I have worked in teams that have been split between Sheffield and London. To my knowledge, there has never been any issues regarding the quality of work or negative impact on policy decisions/policy work due to operating split site teams.

Aside from the obvious impact on me personally with respect to having to find another job, I am concerned about the effect this

decision will have on the City of Sheffield and surrounding areas. I am still trying to understand why the Department for Business would take such a step.”

Not only will the closure be devastating for south Yorkshire, but it will lead to a huge loss of expertise for the Department—for example, the person I have just quoted, who has been in their job for decades. It is difficult to imagine that such people could uproot themselves and come down to work in London, even if they could afford to buy a property in London. The absence of any relocation programme speaks volumes about the intention behind the closure, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central pointed out. The intention is to get rid of those staff and not to relocate them to London. Surely a package would be presented if the Government’s intention were to relocate them.

My hon. Friend spoke about Nick Hillman who, as we know, was a special adviser to David Willetts during his time as Universities and Science Minister. Nick Hillman has described the closure as

“a genuine tragedy for good public policymaking”.

He says that the Sheffield civil servants

“hold BIS’ institutional memory on HE and often know more than the policymakers who are nominally closer to the centre of power”.

The staff in Sheffield work closely with external organisations, such as employers and education providers, visiting them to explain policies on funding, deregulation, further and higher education, and Government strategy on rail, as well as listening to their issues so as better to inform policy. A purely London-based staff will mean additional costs, particularly as a result of pay differentials, and a less prompt service for organisations based in the midlands and the north. Gone will be the knowledge and understanding of localities, sectors and industries that can make a difference to effective policy making and allocation of funding.

Sheffield staff are responsible for applying ministerial policies and strategies on the ground. BIS sites such as the one in Sheffield ought to be in the vanguard, helping the Government to rebalance the economy and supporting rebalancing in the sectors based in the regions. It seems particularly strange that BIS, with its supposed ambition to create more geographically balanced growth, should take this decision, when other Departments, such as the Department for Education, plan to remain in Sheffield. It is nonsense and the concept of a northern powerhouse is weakened by such decisions, which undermine what this Government and previous Governments have said for years—that Government Departments should be relocating out of London.

The people who deserve to see the information that is largely absent from this debate are the 247 people who have a cloud hanging over their heads. As I stated previously, the Government must publish all the facts. I support the motion calling for the National Audit Office to conduct a cost-benefit assessment of the BIS Sheffield proposal, so that we can properly review the decision. I hope that when the Minister replies, she will respond to that call and to the four questions posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central.

6.25 pm

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): I am conscious of the time so I will try not to regurgitate too many of the points that have already been made.

I welcome the debate and the manner in which the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) opened it.

In my constituency I have officers of Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, Companies House and the Department for Work and Pensions, to name but a few, so I am mindful of the “BIS 2020” programme. I wholeheartedly support the Public Accounts Committee and the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee in their requests to the permanent secretary, and I hope those reports are forthcoming, as I look forward to an evidence-led debate. I look forward also to the Minister’s response today.

From talking to some of the most energetic, determined public servants in Cardiff, I know about the project. Twenty jobs in the Companies House policy and analytical unit will be moved to London. Staff feel insulted by the lack of consultation and they are conscious of the cloud over their heads, which the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Kevin Barron) referred to. The lack of engagement with the staff at Companies House is extremely worrying to me. Given that the BIS board is looking more broadly at the position, I hope a conclusion will be reached soon and that it can be seen in the context of the reports that we have asked for.

I would like to emphasise what I have been told by constituents who work at Companies House. The staff affected have never been on poor performance measures and it has never been suggested to them that being based in Cardiff has affected the policy advice that they gave to civil servants and Ministers. The rationale for the decision has never been explained to them. They have been left bemused and seeking answers. I hope that this debate and my contribution will help to elicit some clarity that I can share with my constituents.

I welcome the double hub and spiral strategy that my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) came up with on the hoof, provided the second hub is Cardiff. I am sure hon. Members from across the United Kingdom have different ideas. The Government’s estates strategy is welcome in Cardiff because the new Government hub will reinvigorate parts of the city. When HMRC moves in with other Departments—we do not quite know where in Cardiff, but we have that commitment to Cardiff—we will see more civil service jobs coming to our great city.

The Government hub is welcome, but the BIS announcement is a cloud overshadowing the excitement in the public sector in Cardiff. People are seeing the estates strategy delivering for them, pulling more jobs to Cardiff, but the staff affected feel insulted by a decision whose rationale they do not understand, especially given their role in advising on policy.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Newport Public and Commercial Services Union members asked me to be present at the debate today to show their support for those who work in the BIS office, whom the hon. Gentleman mentions. Newport has benefited hugely over the years from the relocation of civil service jobs from the Office for National Statistics and the Intellectual Property Office, which will also come within the scope of “BIS 2020”. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although this debate is about Sheffield and he is speaking about Cardiff, it is well worth reiterating to the Minister

[Jessica Morden]

just how valued those jobs are across our country, including in Newport, and how important it is that we protect that principle?

Craig Williams: I agree entirely, and I hope that that came out of my contribution. Like me, the hon. Lady will welcome the fact that the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General came down to south Wales to announce that the ONS was safe in Newport. South Wales has a great cluster of UK Government Departments, and their offices make an incredible contribution to the Government in terms of policy analysis and other instruments.

That is why I wanted my contribution to strike a note of caution, and I hope we get some clarity on the issues that have been raised. I again commend the hon. Member for Sheffield Central on securing the debate and on leading it in the manner that he did.

6.30 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I, too, thank the Backbench Business Committee, as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) and the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), who have worked hard to secure the debate and the cross-party support it has gained. I hope the Minister is starting to understand that we are not going to go away on this issue.

This decision has been extraordinary: in one fell swoop, BIS Ministers have delivered a thumbs down to the northern powerhouse, a thumbs down to the taxpayer and a thumbs down to their ministerial colleagues who wax lyrical about the benefits of having key staff outside Whitehall.

Crucial board meetings are scheduled for this month, following the end of the consultation. I urge the Minister to go into them with an open mind and to relay the points that have been made here today. First and foremost, I hope she understands that, for people in our city, a decision to close the Sheffield office would be highly symbolic; it would be a signal of the London-centric contempt for the north and for the skill and perspective of northerners—a contempt that has prevailed for far too long. The “BIS 2020” plan appears to reinforce that contempt for a regional perspective, with the London headquarters strengthened while regional posts carrying out vital work are threatened.

We would have expected the Department to support such a significant decision—to move all policy-making expertise from a northern centre into a London HQ—with some reasoning. When I was granted my urgent question, the debate on which has been widely quoted today, the Minister assured me that the decision was part of a cost-saving programme, but officials and Ministers have told us time and time again that a cost-benefit analysis for this decision does not exist.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central and others have said, the admitted cost is far, far higher in London than it would be in Sheffield, Bristol, Cardiff, Darlington or Salford. As the Minister well knows, taxpayers will continue to foot the bill for the office space in Sheffield anyway, as the entire building is leased by the DFE. Furthermore, BIS is one of the few

Departments in Whitehall without enough space to accommodate staff adequately, so further centralisation will mean that a rent review is almost certain to hike up the rent yet again.

And for what purpose? So far, the only possible reason we have been able to ascertain is the benefit of London water-cooler conversations. Well, those conversations at BIS must be very good indeed. However, there has been no individual analysis of exactly why they outweigh the unique perspective and institutional memory of staff in Sheffield. Instead, we have seen more tired old thinking from senior Whitehall officials, who, when asked what they wanted the Department to look like in 2020, came back with the same old Whitehall answer: all employees should be within eyesight and earshot of the permanent secretary and the Minister. It is astonishing that, in place of evidence, we seem to have a seriously consequential decision that is costing taxpayers money and reversing Government policy but that is based on lazy assumptions and flimsy justifications.

In the months since the decision was announced, there has been no sense from Ministers or departmental officials that they recognise the exceptionalism of the Sheffield BIS office. Research excellence in the Sheffield region is second to none, with two fantastic universities at the cutting edge of innovation. That work is supported fantastically by BIS’s multibillion pound budget, which is directed from Sheffield. Just a few months ago, researchers from Sheffield University helped to confirm Einstein’s theory of relativity, which will unlock the secrets of the universe—not a bad record.

Sheffield is also the only office outside Whitehall carrying out high-level policy functions. A Government report from 2010 tells us why that matters. It said:

“power and career opportunities will only truly move out of London when significant parts of the core policy departments are moved.”

That is exactly what we already have in Sheffield and what we put at risk with this decision.

The Sheffield office could become the eyes and ears of the northern resurgence. Instead, we will have a centralised BIS, alongside a Department for Communities and Local Government with a northern powerhouse Minister whose entire staff is based in London, and a Treasury producing its template devolution deals exclusively from London, with no understanding of the geographical and socioeconomic challenges.

That gets to the heart of the reasons why moving civil servants out of London is a decades-old mantra: cost and perspective. The Smith report, which I just mentioned, wanted to move civil servants out of London to

“bring government closer to the people”

and “stimulate economic vibrancy”. The report was hardly groundbreaking; in fact, it was based on decades of movement away from Whitehall—something the Minister’s colleagues are encouraging as part of the March Budget. The Ministry of Justice has announced a large-scale move away from London, and the DFE is waxing lyrical about its regional base and is looking to expand it further. That is because doing that is cheaper, and having powerful civil servants in other regions can only be a good thing.

In trying to justify this decision, the Minister will no doubt be adamant that the plan will continue the existing arrangement, with more of her civil servants outside London than in it. Even ignoring the importance of

policy-making clout, the leaked report that has been referenced today has revealed that even that argument does not hold water: all the jobs under threat are distinctly regional, including those in places such as Lancaster, Cardiff and Bristol, to name just a few.

The Skills Funding Agency, with its vast majority of regional staff, who are working hard to deliver the Government's apprenticeship target, is set to be slashed. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills, which has been doing vital work in getting to the bottom of the slow-burning productivity crisis, is set to go entirely. Rotherham, a town where public sector jobs act as ballast, will be left counting the cost. The entire "BIS 2020" plan looks like a perverse counter to the northern and regional powerhouse agenda: slash jobs in the regions, take no account of the importance of local economies and centralise the Department's work in London.

If hon. Members think I am leaping to conclusions about the way in which BIS HQ in Whitehall instinctively adopts a London-centric approach that is totally at odds with the devolution of power to a northern powerhouse, they can look at the details of a seminar given to BIS employees early last year by McKinsey and Company—the same company that authored the report into this restructuring. An item on the agenda, which I and other hon. Members have seen, read

"how can London ensure it outstrips rival cities",

This is the same city whose infrastructure spending is more than every other UK city's combined, at £45 billion.

BIS's mission statement says the Department will achieve its objectives by having the

"right people, in the right place, at the right time".

How on earth does this strategy achieve that stated aim? The Minister and senior officials may not appreciate it, but there is a reason why an idea that few of their colleagues sign up to, that damages the northern powerhouse and that costs the taxpayer money is not such a good idea.

I urge the Minister to use the end of the consultation to think again. She should think about what message these proposals send and what damage they do, and she should put a halt to this decision, which will reverse a decades-long progressive trend of moving civil servants out of London.

6.37 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) not only on leading the charge in the debate, but on his quite excellent forensic analysis of why this is a deeply flawed policy decision.

The dispersal of Government offices has been argued for for many years—from as far back as the early 1960s. Although this is not a new debate, therefore, it may be wise to rehearse some of the reasons why dispersal can be forcefully argued for. I would like to focus in my short speech on just three.

First, on cost, it will be considerably more cost-effective to locate Departments in Sheffield or Kirkcaldy than in overheated London. A number of hon. Members have pointed to the fact that they cannot find, or cannot get released, any detailed cost-benefit analysis. Perhaps that is not surprising if no proper cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken in the first place.

Secondly, this is about not just the cost of dispersal but the benefits to the recipient regions. In particular, if dispersal happens in areas that have relatively weak economies compared with London, the benefit of even a few hundred well-paid and secure jobs can be considerable. Many towns in the north of England would benefit greatly if there was more dispersal out of London.

The third point I want to raise, which is much less talked about generally, although a number of hon. Members have raised it today, is the benefit to Government intelligence and decision making. It is unhealthy for all key decision makers and advisers to be based in one location, particularly if that location is out of character with the rest of the country. Dispersal provides an opportunity for better engagement. When we presented the case for this debate at the Backbench Business Committee, I argued that one of the problems is that this decision seems to reek of group-think by the Government. To put it in a slightly more academic fashion, it reminded me of reading for the first time the work of Kenneth Hammond on his cognitive continuum theory, with which I know everybody is deeply familiar. He argued that decision making can be on a continuum from highly intuitive, at one extreme, to highly analytic, at the other extreme, with a mix in between. It strikes me that the reason why a lot of evidence cannot be provided for this decision is that it reeks more of intuition than of detailed analysis of the true benefit.

In the Backbench Business Committee, I was asked why a Scottish MP would want to speak in this debate. Perhaps, without wishing to be accused of any arrogance, there might be one or two examples that could be brought from Scotland to show the benefit of dispersal.

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): Give us some.

Roger Mullin: Well, I will give the right hon. Lady 15. I was going to make it three, but because of her intervention I know she would like many more. The first, of many, is that of the five major buildings that house all the policy civil servants in Scotland, two are based well beyond Edinburgh. To give an example close to the functions of BIS, locating lifelong learning well outside Edinburgh in a place closer to the majority of higher education and further education institutions has given great benefit. When I talked to the principal of a college in Scotland who had originally been a principal in England, he commented that he found it so much easier to get access to senior civil servants in Scotland than south of the border.

Since the Minister kindly invited me to provide more examples, let me talk of Scotland's 34 executive non-departmental public bodies, the majority of which—some 19—are based outwith the capital, Edinburgh. This includes headquarters in such centres as Inverness, Grantown-on-Spey, Dundee, Stirling, Balloch, Hamilton, Newbridge and Paisley, in addition to Edinburgh—[*Interruption*—and Glasgow, of course. Some of these play a very significant role in supporting local economies, in addition to being cost-effective locations.

I can go even further, to satisfy the Minister, on to those whom one might want to influence in terms of policy-making advice—the cabinet, for example. Way back in 2008, my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) instituted a then fairly modest

[Roger Mullin]

initiative to take cabinet meetings, during the summer recess, to one or two different locations away from Edinburgh. This has developed over the years until, now, in mid-2016, 42 cabinet meetings have been held outwith Edinburgh. In the past year alone, cabinet meetings have been held in Dumfries, Aberdeen, Alloa, Inverness, Cupar, Ullapool, Oban, Coatbridge, Greenock, and West Dunbartonshire. Those meetings help with engagement because when they are over, public meetings are held so that the public can come along and question cabinet members. The benefit of that is that thousands of ordinary members of the public have been able to come along and influence decision making.

We should be debating not so much why 247 jobs are being moved from Sheffield to London, but why tens of thousands more jobs are not being located out of London into the regions and nations of the UK.

6.44 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I, too, begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) on securing this debate and on his introductory comments. Unfortunately, I only heard the second half of those comments because I was chairing a Select Committee at the time. I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to him for my lateness in arriving at the debate.

I want to concentrate on devolution. The Communities and Local Government Committee recently produced a report in which, on a cross-party basis, we welcomed the Government's commitment and general approach to devolution. We might have had certain reservations on detail or on the pace at which devolution is going, but nevertheless recognised that it is a key aspect of Government policy that we welcome. We said that devolution is a matter not just for the Department for Communities and Local Government but for all Government Departments, and we want to see all Departments signed up to the policy and contributing to it. It is welcome that economic development and skills are an integral part of the devolution deals in cities such as Manchester and my own city of Sheffield. Key responsibilities of BIS are part of these devolution deals.

We then move on to the use of the term "northern powerhouse" to cover the totality of devolution proposals for our northern cities. It leads to complete incredulity among my constituents and those of the wider Sheffield city region when the Government talk about the northern powerhouse over and over again and then take a decision to move civil service jobs out of Sheffield and back to London which seems completely contradictory to their own policy on devolution. People just do not get it. I mentioned this in an intervention on the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat). It was good to hear his excellent and well-thought-out contribution, which shows that there is real cross-party concern across the House about this aspect of Government policy, where it is going, and how it does not really fit in with the overall Government approach on devolution that we would want to see.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the location of civil service jobs is not the only reason for a totality of approach through the northern powerhouse. Indeed,

it is probably not even the main reason. The main reason is to try to secure a growth in GDP per head in our northern cities to get them up towards the national average, because currently not one single northern city has a GDP per head that is equivalent to the national average, and that is a matter of concern. It is also about trying to ensure that decision making takes place nearer to those who are affected by it, and that we recognise that different approaches and policies will be formed in different areas as part of the process of trying to improve public services and their delivery and to get the increase in GDP per head that we want to see. This approach is going to change the way in which our country is governed if we carry it through and onwards in the next few years.

What people see on the ground in terms of this policy is the Government talking about a grand design with the northern powerhouse but saying one thing and doing another. People do not understand the general direction of Government travel. They hear Ministers talking about the northern powerhouse and then see the reality of jobs being moved out of their home city and transferred down to London without, as far as they can tell, any good reason. If the Minister is intent on pursuing a policy that seems, at least at face value, to be contradictory to the overall thrust of Government devolution policy, there has to be a very good, explicit and clear reason why that policy is going to be carried through. The Minister has to be able to justify this to the House, as well as to my constituents.

Is the policy being followed through because of clear, demonstrable and provable cost benefits, with figures that can be laid before the House to show what those benefits are, or because Ministers can demonstrate that there is a clear policy benefit—that policy will be unequivocally better and Ministers will be better advised—to having all their civil servants located in one place? Could it not work just as well with two hubs as with one, if Ministers want a concentration of policy making? If Ministers cannot demonstrate that there will be either a clear and explicit cost saving or demonstrable benefits in policy advice to Ministers, why on earth are they pursuing a policy that seems completely contradictory to the overall thrust of Government devolution policy?

The Government have been given a challenge: produce the McKinsey report, the McKinsey papers or the McKinsey input into decision making—whatever it is—or produce some cost-benefit analysis. Ministers must have such analysis at their disposal. They cannot have taken this decision, or be about to take this decision, without having any figures before them. Will they share those figures with the House, or at least commit to making all the information available to the NAO so that it can conduct an audit into the decision? That would enable the NAO at least to advise Members of the House about whether Ministers have taken this decision, or will take this decision—I hope that it has not yet been made—on clear and credible facts and figures about the financial benefits of their proposals.

6.51 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I thank the Backbench Business Committee and the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), who has doggedly pursued the matter. He gave us a precise dissection of the numerous issues at the heart of this

decision, or proposal, and the many questions that are still to be answered. The hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), a colleague of mine on the Public Accounts Committee, provided a searching contribution, challenging the hub and spoke concept that BIS is apparently set on, as demonstrated by this peculiar decision.

The right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) gave us an interesting insight, as a former member of Government, into the inner workings of Departments. The hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), another colleague from the Public Accounts Committee, who is not in his place at the moment, made a thoughtful contribution in support of decentralisation, using his experience as an example. The right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Kevin Barron) raised the question of the McKinsey report, or papers, and whether it indeed exists. He called for the work that was done to be released to allow for proper scrutiny.

The hon. Member for Cardiff North (Craig Williams) made clear his support for the calls from the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and the Public Accounts Committee for clarity and for the proposal to be looked at by the NAO. He also raised the concerns of those who have benefited from the dispersal of jobs from London to his constituency. I am certain that Scottish Members await with interest clarification around the Minister's comment about initial centres of excellence in Glasgow, for example. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) made a thoughtful contribution highlighting the many benefits that were placed at risk by the decision, and she said that cost and perspective were important elements that needed to be looked at.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) made an excellent contribution, with a particular focus on how unhealthy it is to locate key decision makers in a place that is so very different from all other areas of the UK. He gave numerous examples of areas outside our capital city in Scotland that have benefited from Government dispersal policies. The hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) called for all Departments to sign up to the concept of devolution.

Offices and staff should be moved out of this overheated, overvalued and ridiculously overpriced city to take up residence in less expensive areas, which, frankly, could do with the Government investing in them for a change. As budgets are being slashed by this Chancellor, who seems to be channelling Sweeney Todd, why is the cost of concentrating offices and staff in London not becoming the major issue? As a number of Members have commented, the Chancellor's most recent Budget—at least, I think it was the most recent one; lately, a new Budget seems to come along every few weeks—showed that the Chancellor thought that moving offices out of London would be a good idea. Unfortunately, some of his colleagues and senior civil servants do not share his vision, and the shrinkage of Government continues. The Government are becoming smaller geographically, with a smaller workforce, but that will not save money.

I was pleased to take part in recent the Westminster Hall debate on this issue. To me and many others, the upshot seemed to be that Ministers wanted their civil servants close to them. Apparently, a bit of distance dilutes a civil servant's message. My staff are about 400 miles from here. I have already annoyed them twice today, and I am going to call them as soon as I get out

of here, just because I can. We use telephones; Ministers might have heard of them. It is quite amazing how I can talk to someone who is not nearby. With a bit of practice, I think Ministers could learn to use the telephone. If that does not suit them, there is another thing that my friends and I use. It is called the internet. That, too, would allow Ministers to communicate with civil servants in distant lands, such as Sheffield. Far better than the ridiculous situation of moving the offices of the northern powerhouse into the southern hothouse.

Quite how civil servants are expected to do their jobs when they are being held at such a distance from the subjects in which they specialise is anyone's guess. It smacks of the days when the UK Government thought that they could pontificate from a Whitehall office and tell large chunks of the world how to behave. The British empire attitude saw nothing wrong with a Whitehall Minister telling people on the other side of the world what to do, but surely we have moved on from that. For the sake of us all, and for the sake of good government, let us get offices and staff moved out of London. Let us spread them around the UK. If they have a geographical remit, let us base them in the areas that they are supposed to be helping. Surely, that is nothing more or less than common sense.

6.56 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I join Members in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) and the other Members who secured this important debate. We have had a good debate, and I am pleased to see the Secretary of State and the Minister of State in their places to listen to the advice they have been given, by Members from all parties, about what needs to be done. I sincerely hope that they listen to the comments that have been made, take them on board and go away after the debate and act on them.

On 28 January, the closure of the BIS office in Sheffield was announced, with the loss of 247 jobs. I remind the Secretary of State that he said at the time that the closure was to save money. The Minister of State told the House the following day, in response to an urgent question, that

“we take the view that this is the best way to spend public money more efficiently and more effectively.”—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2016; Vol. 605, c. 562.]

Yet Members from all parts of the House have challenged what both Ministers said at the time, because of a lack of evidence and a lack of any kind of business case. We have heard today some of the evidence about costs, including the fact that staff in Sheffield are employed at an accommodation cost of £3,190 each, while at Victoria Street in London the figure is more than three times as high, at £9,750. Adding London weighting takes the figure well over £12,000. That is hardly a case of saving money.

What is the reason for closing the Sheffield BIS office? A number of suggestions have been made. Is it so Ministers can have water-cooler conversations with staff in Whitehall? Is it part of a desperate scramble for cash to plug the Chancellor's black hole, as the BIS proposal for the privatisation of the Land Registry appears to be? Or is it because the Government know that many staff will leave and costs will be reduced as a result? Whatever the reason, the Minister and the Secretary

[Bill Esterson]

of State really should tell us. They should tell us what the strategy is and how the plan will work, because, so far, what BIS has come up with does not seem to add up in any way, shape or form.

As we have heard, in the Budget, the Bridge report and the estate strategy, there is a cross-government move to recruit high-calibre staff outside London and to move Departments out of London to continue a trend that has been going on since the 1960s. Other Departments recognise the benefits of a diversified civil service, so why is BIS moving in the opposite direction? Staff in BIS have been told that Ministers need their advisers closer to them, but why do other Departments take the opposite view? Why, after the initial announcement, were staff later told that the move was due to computers and phones not working properly? I know that the quality of our broadband service is one of the poorest of any major economy, but even so we might be forgiven for thinking that the IT systems could be fixed even by this Government. To give an example elsewhere in Government, the Department for Education says on the subject of the benefits of a regional approach:

“We benefit from maintaining sites around the country—we get alternative perspectives on our policy issues, we can draw from a wider recruitment pool, and employing people in sites outside London helps to keep costs down.”

That says it all, does it not?

The many experienced staff who do not wish to relocate to London will of course leave a gap at BIS at a time when it faces serious challenges wherever we look, such as in the steel crisis and the need for significant support for manufacturing, and in the delay announced by the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise to the introduction of the pubs code and in setting up the office of small business commissioner. All those important and demanding policy areas will need the expertise of experienced civil servants. In Sheffield, there is a need to support our universities and the ambitious plans for a mass expansion of apprenticeships. Such a need for experienced staff to give top-quality advice to Ministers could not be more important; yet BIS is taking a big gamble with its ability to do its job as many of those experienced staff will leave. That point made has been made in the House of Lords by the BIS Minister, Baroness Neville-Rolfe.

I want to pay tribute to hon. Members who have spoken in this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central spoke with great expertise, and from his experience of talking to staff who are his constituents, about the benefits of regional offices. The hon. Member for Cardiff North (Craig Williams) made some excellent comments about the importance of the work that goes on in his constituency, including in the Insolvency Service. He supported requests for proper evidence to be provided to support, and to help us to understand, the proposals made by BIS.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Kevin Barron), who secured the Westminster Hall debate, made the point that the success of BIS in its current location is crucial for his constituents and those of several other Members of the House. He mentioned the lack of relocation expenses, and he might have added the lack of extended travel cover as another reason why these experienced members of staff simply cannot do anything but accept redundancy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) talked about the apparent thumbs down to the staff in BIS by the Department’s leadership, which is in stark contrast to the excellence of the many people who work there. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) questioned the Government’s commitment to their own devolution agenda given their decision to move the centre for the northern powerhouse to London and away from the north itself.

We have had excellent contributions from Members on both sides of the House, including the hon. Members for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin), for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) and, indeed, for Warrington South (David Mowat), who pointed out the contradiction between this move and the northern powerhouse and the contradiction between the “BIS 2020” document and the estate strategy.

So much has been made by Ministers of the so-called northern powerhouse. Having a network of Government offices and key staff in the regions is a vital part of understanding the needs of the whole country and avoiding the sense that all policy is solely about the Westminster bubble. It is therefore baffling, at the very least, that BIS of all Departments might even consider withdrawing from the regions, given the importance that Ministers say they ascribe to the northern powerhouse. BIS should be the eyes and ears of Government out and about in building key local relationships with business, universities, colleges, local government and, of course, trade unions. Why are the trade unions saying that they have not been allowed to have discussions with management about the proposals? There is also of course the message received by the private sector and local communities that the Government just are not serious about supporting the north. I am afraid that actions speak louder than words, and the term “the northern powerhouse” is more and more becoming just a set of words, and meaningless ones at that.

It strikes me that the way the Government are going about their reorganisation has not exactly been business-like. For a start, a forward-looking business would use technology to communicate. Video conferencing is available at the touch of a button and is a very cost-effective way of working, because it saves travel costs and time. I do not know whether the Secretary of State has ever used video conferencing. When he was in Australia at the time of the Tata Steel debacle, he could have used it to speak to people in Mumbai at the annual general meeting that he should have tried to attend to look after our steel industry. [Interruption.] If he turns around to talk to someone behind him, he should perhaps expect me to make such comments. [Interruption.] I am sorry; it was a board meeting. I appreciate the Secretary of State correcting me about the meeting in Mumbai.

Video conferencing and other technologies allow staff to work around the country, closer to home and to family, and to be more productive. Simply put, it is common practice for national and international businesses to have a strong regional presence and to use technology where possible. Should the Government not be at the forefront of using technology? Of course they should.

In any restructuring, would not business produce a sound business plan? Such a plan would evaluate the costs and benefits of the current arrangements set against those of the alternatives. Yet we have not been given a

business case by the Secretary of State or the permanent secretary. Two Select Committees were not given a business case, and even the recall of the permanent secretary to give evidence only confirmed the initial suspicion that there was no case for the defence, as he admitted he had not sought to put a price on the changes.

Questions therefore remain about why BIS proposes to close the office in Sheffield. One clue can be found in the single departmental plan to disclose that capital receipts are expected to be achieved from the sale of the many sites around the country that BIS plans to close. Such sales suggest that they are savings for short-term gain. In the case of the Sheffield BIS office, that is at the expense of massively higher annual costs in Whitehall and significantly reduced expertise in supporting business and the economy. The businesses that rely on BIS, including the universities and colleges that rely on BIS in Sheffield, do not operate without proper business plans and neither should the Government or Departments. They will be concerned that the Government do not follow best practice in the way they operate. The sad reality is that BIS Ministers and senior management are developing a reputation, but it is not the reputation they should have. It is a reputation not for competence but for being a complete shambles. That cannot be good news for Sheffield or for the country.

We have been told that the decision has been suspended for two weeks. When the Minister responds, will she tell us that in those two weeks she will find the business case for these decisions and make sure that it is in the public domain, so that it can undergo proper scrutiny, including by the two Select Committees and through consultation with the trade unions, and decisions can be taken on a full evidence base? We need to know whether this is a cost saving, an improvement in policy, or a combination. Whatever it is, the evidence will show. The Minister needs to put that evidence in the public domain and show us, either way, so that proper decisions can be taken, and full public scrutiny of those decisions can show whether the Government are right.

7.10 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) on securing this debate through the Backbench Business Committee. It has been a very good debate. A number of hon. Members from both sides of the House have raised a number of very good points. I know that the clock is against me—that is the rule of Parliament. The last time I said that people seemed to think it was my choice. It certainly was not. I will of course write with an answer to all those hon. Members whose questions I do not answer in my response. That may include the hon. Gentleman, in this respect: his questions were quite long, and I do not have time to answer them all at length. I will deal with the points he made, but in the time allowed to me I will not be able to answer them all in the sort of length that I would like.

It is very important that we have as the focus of this debate the 247 people who currently work in the Sheffield office. I make the point that, yes, we have put forward the proposal, but a final decision has not been made. It has been out for consultation, and I very much hope that a number of hon. Members took part in that

consultation. A final decision will not be made until 23 May. Everyone on both sides of this House will know that Governments of whatever colour have at times to make very difficult decisions, but we have to be sure that we make the right decisions for the right reasons.

I also make this point, which is very important. Whatever the decision on Sheffield, 83% of the people who work for BIS will continue to work outside London. To some extent, I take a little exception to the suggestion that we in BIS are not in touch with what is going on in the rest of the country outside London. The Secretary of State and I do not represent London seats; as hon. Members might imagine, we return to our constituencies. Most importantly, we still have an exceptionally fine team of local BIS civil servants working throughout the whole country, who feed in—indeed, I have at least a monthly meeting with them—when they give me a round-up of everything that has happened across the country.

By way of example, the Green Investment Bank is proudly based in Edinburgh. UK Trade & Investment exists throughout the whole country. Today, I have been on a visit in Leicestershire, where I opened the marvellous new extension of an excellent business. Not only did I then meet the Leicester Asian Business Association, but, as I often do, I met the local enterprise partnership. I say to the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) that when I come to Sheffield on 23 May, it will be a pleasure to meet him and have him there at my visit to those steel mills. I will also meet the LEP, because getting that feedback is so essential.

I turn now to the reasons behind the proposal. It is really important to set this in the right context. That context is a mixture, of course, of the financial position that we are in and the decisions that we have rightly made to make sure that we have a budget that we can cope with and that BIS plays its part in reducing overall spend. But it is not just about cutting money. It is about making sure that this Department works as efficiently and effectively as possible. The situation that the Secretary of State and I inherited was the frankly historical problem of an abundance of sites. A decision has been taken, against that financial background—I hope that this answers the questions of the right hon. Members for Rother Valley (Kevin Barron) and for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg)—

Kevin Barron: It is cost cutting.

Anna Soubry: It is not as simple as cutting costs. The right hon. Gentleman, with his great experience in and out of government, should know that. It is a question of making sure that we have an efficient and effective way of working in BIS, set against the financial restraints that we have quite properly put upon our Department as part of our overall requirements with regard to the deficit.

Our current HQ office locations are based on the legacy I mentioned, and have resulted in a complicated map of management relationships, with work in policy teams spread across 14 different locations. We are committed to reducing our headcount by 2020. That will involve becoming more flexible and redeploying fewer staff quickly to new priorities. We need simple structures that allow staff to interact through quicker, less cumbersome means and stay close to each other in flexible teams. We

[Anna Soubry]

rightly put a strong emphasis on staff engagement, excellent management, visible leadership and developing and coaching our staff. Those are harder to achieve if teams are not collected together or are not working under the same roof. We believe that having a single-site BIS policy headquarters is the best way to preserve our effectiveness. Given that our teams serve Ministers in Parliament, those headquarters have to be in London.

I want to make this point absolutely clear. Whatever the decision, we will continue to provide good and full support to the 247 members of staff who have had this proposal hanging over them—we are very conscious of that—since 28 January. If the decision is made to close the Sheffield office, that support will continue, because this Department takes its duty of care to each and every one of our staff extremely seriously, as I hope hon. Members would imagine.

I have said that tough decisions have to be made. The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) and his colleagues on the Scottish National party Benches will understand that, for Governments of all colours, there are times, set against a difficult financial background, when tough decisions have to be taken. I make no criticism of the SNP's decision back in 2013 to close 10 sheriff courts and seven justice of the peace courts, with operations transferred to other locations. Those are the difficult decisions that have to be made. Of course, the SNP closures were justified as cost-saving measures, but, to be fair, as part of a wider reform of the justice system as well. We can all take away from that the fact that the SNP was not just cutting things for the sake of savings, but was doing so as part of a broader strategy.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP) *rose*—

Anna Soubry: Unfortunately, the clock is against me, and the hon. Gentleman has only just walked into this debate, so I am even less disposed to take his intervention.

Those are the difficult decisions that Governments have to make if they are to fulfil their duty, which is not only to make sure that we live within our means but to ensure that we act efficiently and effectively.

I will deal with the four questions that the hon. Member for Sheffield Central asked me—I am grateful for the email and attachment that he sent to my Department. Some of what he raised has already been dealt with by the permanent secretary in his evidence to the various Committees. I will take just the sharp end of the hon. Gentleman's questions. He asked what assessment had been made of the cost of replacing jobs and moving them to London. A full assessment has not yet been made, but, as he will know from the evidence of the permanent secretary, the total over time for the Sheffield office was thought to be some £14 million. As I have said, however, this is not just about costs. As for the assessment of the cost of replacing Sheffield jobs in London, the final decision has not been taken, and until it has been and we know all its ramifications it will not be possible to give that assessment.

The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members asked about the northern powerhouse, but I do not need to be told what a great and wonderful city Sheffield is. You do not need to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, about my

connections with Sheffield, or the fact that my family comes from there—[*Interruption.*] Exactly. Because I am from north Nottinghamshire, I spent a great deal of my youth in Sheffield. It was an outstanding city then, just as it is now and will no doubt be in future. In our devolution deal, we have put Sheffield at the heart of south Yorkshire, and we have delivered millions of pounds to Sheffield—[*Interruption.*] Which part of the Sheffield city deal do Labour Members not understand? The clue is in the name: Sheffield is at the heart of that deal, with all the attendant money and power that comes from it. That is to be welcomed, and I am surprised that Labour Members are not talking up that excellent deal, the outstanding city that is Sheffield, and the northern powerhouse. I hope that they will make the case for HS2 to have a proper station in Sheffield. I have a bias because I want an east midlands hub in Toton, as I am sure there will be, but we must now ensure that Sheffield plays its part in HS2.

David Mowat: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: I do not wish to be rude to my hon. Friend, but the clock is against me and Madam Deputy Speaker is urging me to conclude my remarks.

The final question from the hon. Member for Sheffield Central concerned what other options there are apart from the proposal. Full consultation has taken place with unions and staff, and several alternative proposals have been received. The BIS executive board will take full account of those when reaching its decision on the proposal, and I hope that goes some way to answering his question.

In conclusion, I wish to pay a full and handsome tribute to all staff in BIS. We take their future, work conditions, and the contribution they have made very seriously, but sometimes tough decisions have to be made. This is not just about saving money; it is also about ensuring that the Department works effectively and efficiently, and that is what we seek to achieve.

7.22 pm

Paul Blomfield: I thank the Minister, the shadow Minister, and all Members who have contributed to what has been a thoughtful debate, with a cross-party consensus in support of the central thrust of Government policy to devolve jobs, but with concern expressed about this decision. I acknowledge and am grateful for the Minister's frank reply in saying that no full assessment of the costs has been made. The motion simply seeks what other Members have called for, namely a proper cost-benefit analysis so that any decision can be made on the basis of demonstrable and provable facts, and the commitment that all that information will be available—perhaps through the National Audit Office, as we suggest—before the BIS board makes its decision. That is an important step, and I thank Members for their participation.

David Mowat: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Paul Blomfield: I am not sure that I am allowed to give way, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for all his support in this debate and the points that he has made, and I very much commend his double-hub strategy. I am grateful to the Minister for saying that no final

decision has yet been taken, and for acknowledging that no cost assessment has been made, which is frankly extraordinary. I hope that a decision will now be made, and I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes with concern the Business, Innovation and Skills Department's proposal to close its Sheffield policy office, moving 247 posts to London; further notes that the Sheffield BIS office proposal runs counter to the Government's welcome commitment to create a public sector that reflects the diverse nature of the UK following the publication of the Bridge report and also to the commitment in Budget 2016 to move civil servants out of expensive Whitehall accommodation; and therefore calls on the National Audit Office to conduct a cost benefit assessment of the BIS Sheffield proposal.

Energy Bill [*Lords*]

Consideration of Lords message

After Clause 79

ONSHORE WIND GENERATING STATIONS IN ENGLAND
AND WALES

7.24 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 7TB.

Here we are again to discuss this Bill, and in particular the delivery of our manifesto commitment to end new subsidies for onshore wind. The other place has seen fit yet again to try to overturn that manifesto commitment, and to seek to impose further costs on consumer bills, but this Chamber, and this Government, are determined not to put up with that. As I made clear on 20 April, the Government are intent on bringing forward the closure of the renewables obligation to new onshore wind in Great Britain. I therefore urge the House to support the Government's motion to disagree with the Lords amendment.

The Government signalled their intent well before last May's general election, so I will not repeat that evidence again. I remind the House, however, that even with cost control measures in place, our estimates show that we are on track to deliver 35% of the UK's electricity from renewables in 2020-21, exceeding our stated ambition of 30%. That is up from 9% in 2011—quite an achievement—and we simply do not need more subsidised onshore wind. The costs for this established technology continue to fall, so it is right that we should scale back support and let the industry stand on its own two feet. The Government's policy—a manifesto commitment—has now been agreed twice in this House, yet we now have an amendment from the other place that is similar to that previously rejected by this House, and relates to projects that did not have planning permission on 18 June last year.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am sure the Minister has seen the evidence because she will come before the Scottish Affairs Committee in the next couple of weeks, and we are currently undertaking a review and inquiry into the impact that this policy is having on the sector in Scotland. The evidence we have secured is dramatic and suggests that confidence has been sucked out of the sector. There is a lack of investment, no movement, and a sector that was growing, prospering, and delivering targets is now in real fear of being decimated by the Government's policy. What does the Minister say to businesses in my constituency that are dependent on that sector, and whose legs have been pulled from under them?

Andrea Leadsom: How does the hon. Gentleman feel about the bill payers and those in fuel poverty? How does he feel about a clear commitment to achieving a certain level of renewables deployment and no further? There must be a balance, and we believe that the right balance has been struck.

The projects that this amendment would allow to access the grace period did not have planning permission as at 18 June last year. Allowing such projects to access

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

the grace period would lead to an increase in deployment, adding more costs to consumer bills. The 18 June 2015 was set out as a clear bright line, and we have continued to maintain the importance of that as a clear cut-off date. Tampering with such an integral part of the early closure policy at such a late stage in the passage of the Bill is simply not on, and it is extremely disappointing that Opposition peers in the other place persist with an approach that will add to consumer bills. Conservative Members are on the side of the consumer. It is our duty as consumer champions to keep costs down, and that is what we will do.

Let us remember that this money comes directly from people's bills. While Labour Members oppose measures to control costs for families and businesses and to keep bills down, we are clear that we can only expect bill payers to support low-carbon electricity if costs are controlled. If we do not take action and we let subsidies spiral, families and businesses will suffer.

The Government's policy takes a balanced approach and we have a proven track record on renewable electricity. Last year for the first time ever, renewable sources provided more power over the year than coal, with nearly one quarter of the UK's electricity generated by renewables. The Government remain committed to the move towards a low-carbon economy in a way that minimises costs to consumers.

This Bill is a key part of the Government's commitment to the oil and gas industry on the UK continental shelf. At this very challenging time for the oil and gas sector, it is extremely disappointing that the persistent disagreement from the Lords on an unrelated issue is now risking timely implementation of these powers which enjoy the support of both Houses and are so crucial to the industry at this difficult time.

7.30 pm

Our oil and gas industry supports hundreds of thousands of working people and their families. It is vital that the Oil and Gas Authority gets the functions and duties it needs to maximise the economic recovery of the UK's remaining oil and gas reserves, while building its capacity and capability to attract investment and jobs, and helping to retain valuable skills in the UK. I received an email just this morning from the head of Oil & Gas UK urging me to ensure the safe passage of the Bill at what is a very challenging time for the industry. The need for an independent, robust and effective regulator for the North sea is greater than ever. We cannot afford the loss of confidence that delaying the establishment of the Oil and Gas Authority would generate among existing operators and the regulatory uncertainty it would generate among investors.

The Government and industry share the same ambitions, even if the actions of Opposition Lords have frustrated the timeliness of the OGA's implementation. The Government want to protect bill payers and ensure technologies stand on their own two feet, while meeting our renewable energy commitments.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): Let us be clear before we go any further: this discussion does not concern manifesto commitments in any way, shape or form. The Energy Bill provides within its terms

of reference a number of grace periods to mitigate the effects of the early closure of the renewables obligation on categories of schemes affected by that closure. That is a consequence of the original plan to close the renewables obligation early.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman says it does not concern a manifesto commitment to get costs down for bill payers. Is he willing to put forward the £7 million the amendment would cost the bill payers to whom we made that manifesto pledge?

Dr Whitehead: I believe we referred to the manifesto commitments the Minister mentioned during the passage of the Bill as something of a flexible friend. The Minister is quoting a manifesto commitment that was not actually in the Conservative party 2015 general election manifesto. The manifesto commitment was for no new subsidies for onshore wind. The Bill puts that in place, but provides for a number of grace periods for the consequence of that process. What we are therefore talking about in this debate is not that commitment but the grace periods that follow it. That, essentially, is what the Lords amendment is about. It therefore does not breach manifesto commitments in any way. To do that, the Minister would have to say that the grace periods themselves breach the manifesto commitment. Plainly, the Minister put those grace periods into the Bill. She must therefore accept that the grace periods are a part of the process and not the process itself.

Under the grace periods, if there is a delay in grid connection or a delay in clearance for Radar, then the schemes come into the fold. That is set out in the grace periods in the Bill. If you have been turned down by a planning committee, have appealed and the appeal comes through after the cut-off date, then you come into the fold. If investment facilities have been frozen because of uncertainty about what was going to happen to the Energy Bill and investment documentation could not be shown in time, that comes into the fold of the grace periods.

As matters stand, however, one cannot come into the fold if one has gone down the route of seeking local approval for the scheme, gaining that approval, getting the consent of the local planning committee and negotiating section 106 or section 75 agreements, as would happen once agreement is reached. If the final certificate, which is obtained after agreement has been reached, happens to fall after 18 June 2015, then one does not come into the fold. That is especially galling for the people going down this route, which they did not have to go down. A central part of the Energy Bill is that onshore generating schemes should proceed in future only if they have the support of the local communities in which they are to be sited, which might be determined by the grant of locally based planning permission. Clause 78 expressly removes the requirement for consent by the Secretary of State. If one has gone down that route and done everything by the rules that the Energy Bill wants to put in place, one is outside the fold if everything is not in place, even after permission has been granted, by 18 June 2015.

Let us imagine the scene when the managers of the Bill sat down to draft what was always clearly supposed to be a sequence of exceptions to the clear bright line as described by the Minister: the cut-off date and circumstances of the cut-off for new onshore windfarms.

The instruction to the team drafting the Bill—I commend the Bill team on a superb job in pulling together the multiple facets of the Bill into a coherent whole—would have been to work towards an overall instruction that the renewables obligation would be closed to all new applicants a year before its original closure date, a date to which developers, local authorities and those seeking to invest in wind farms had all been working. The Bill team was required to place that into a satisfactory legislative context. In doing so, there would have to be cut-off dates before the final date of closure of the scheme overall. It was always recognised, however, that there would have to be exceptions, which is why extensive passages of grace periods have been drafted into the Bill, allowing for exceptions where not to do so for various reasons would have looked particularly unjust, would have led to legal complications or even legal challenge from those affected.

I would have thought that projects about to be completely swept away by the imposition of the cut-off date—when they had done exactly what the Bill provides for, having previously thought the original cut-off date was March 2017—would have been first on the list for possible grace periods. Who knows, perhaps something might have been drafted early on to accommodate such a position? What we know, regardless of any speculation, is that someone decided—it looks to me that they may have done so on grounds of dogma, rather than on a fair analysis of what should go into an already agreed grace period—that those schemes would have the door firmly closed in their faces. That is a manifestly perverse outcome for projects whose approach to planning and investment was exactly by the book. On the other hand, others going through an appeal process—having perhaps been turned down by those very local concerns the Bill emphasises—will find they are on the guest list after all and can come in through the door.

The amendment from their lordships' House does not seek to alter the premise of grace periods. It does not seek to overturn the early closing date for onshore renewables, sad though that is. It does not seek to alter in any way the vast bulk of this well-crafted Bill, with all its important provisions concerning the North Sea oil industry. It simply seeks to put right one of the great anomalies in the grace period sections of the Bill, and, in that way, strengthen the proper application of those periods. As the Minister may have noted, it now does so in a way that it did not do in a previous amended incarnation. It places a specific time limit after the cut-off date of three months, reflecting the view that grace periods should be just that. This is now a very brief grace period window in which to put right the most difficult cases frozen out for doing the right thing.

We all want the Bill to pass now and it can do so today. We want the Bill on the statute book because of what we agree on. Overall, we want it to be on the statute book as a just Bill, even when Opposition Members consider the principle behind it—effectively retrospectively pulling an early plug on the renewables obligation specifically for onshore wind—is profoundly mistaken. It is mistaken because it will potentially replace onshore supply with more expensive offshore wind. As I am sure the Minister is aware, a study by the Royal Academy of Engineers estimated a while ago that if just one onshore turbine was replaced by more expensive offshore turbines, it could eventually cost taxpayers £300,000 per annum.

The amendment saves money, therefore, as well as placing equity back into the grace periods. It is of course down to the Government to get their legislation on to the statute books. We have supported most of the Bill, which can be passed today, throughout its passage. I trust that they will have the sense not to stand dogmatically in the way of its passage and allow us to sign it off and get going with the vast bulk of the provisions on which we all agree.

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): I will speak briefly given that we have been here before in this ping-pong process.

This was my first Bill Committee and Reasons Committee—I believe I am already coming up for my second, which is interesting—and we are now down to one key point: there is wide acceptance of the broader need for the Bill, but we are told that if it is so important, we need only accept one more wafer-thin amendment and then it can go through. Conservative Members take the view that a Government could not govern if they did that every time. There are, unfortunately, cut-off points in lots of Bills, and many are unpopular, and although I can understand why people who will lose out are aggrieved, we take the view that the wider principles are incredibly important.

Others have spoken about the Oil and Gas Authority. Every time I have spoken, I have referred to the oil price, which I think is now up to about \$49. There is still no sign of stability returning to the sector. Who knows where it will be in weeks if not days, given all that is happening in the world? The measures in relation to the OGA are not a magic wand for the oil sector but will bring an extra level of stability and demonstrate Government support at an incredibly sensitive and important time for what remains one of the UK's largest industries and one of Scotland's key industries. We should dispense with this process, move forward and pass the Bill, for the simple reason that it is about the fundamental strength of the UK economy.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): It is with an unfortunate sense of *déjà vu* that we return to debate an issue we should have put to bed months ago, if not longer. I struggle to recall when the Wood review reported, but it was well in excess of 18 months ago, and as has been said many times, including by me, it was a completely different time in the oil industry's lifespan. Up to a point, the Government have taken the action expected, but they did so at the time of the Wood review, when things were very different. Further delay should not have happened.

The Bill should have been on the statute books months ago and should not have conflated the OGA with onshore wind. It might have seemed like a neat parliamentary ruse at the time, but it is causing potentially significant damage. The last time we dealt with this—a week or so ago—the Minister told Opposition Members that we should be ashamed of ourselves. The most unedifying aspect of all this is that we are now talking only about projects in Scotland—four Scottish wind farms—and the OGA, which will largely deal with the oil industry in Scotland, and yet this House and that House cannot get their act together to protect two vital Scottish industries. That, for me, is utterly shameful and unacceptable.

[*Callum McCaig*]

Not content with decimating the wind industry in Scotland, the Tory party, supposedly in the name of public opinion, is twisting the knife in the face of public opinion. The four projects affected by the Bill all got planning permission from the local council. That is the definition of public support, which is what this should be about. There is public support for wind farms that would have significant community benefit. We have talked about the £7 million cost. I wonder how much we would have saved had we not delayed in establishing the OGA and provided it with the teeth it should have had months ago. We are squabbling over a relatively small figure, in the grand scheme of things, compared with the colossal amounts of money the Government will waste on the white elephant at Hinkley Point C. That sticks in my craw and that of folks in Scotland.

The Lords have compromised—good on them—because they want to get a deal done. I am no expert in parliamentary procedure, but the Minister talks about wanting to pass the Bill. It could be done very simply by accepting the amendment. We run the risk, before we prorogue for the Queen's Speech, of the Bill falling. If that happens, it will be a shameful betrayal of the entire cross-party process over the establishment of the OGA, the development of its agenda and the provision of the tools it requires to help our oil industry. That cannot be allowed to happen. The risk is that we sacrifice the OGA on the altar of Tory party dogma on onshore wind. That is utterly unforgiveable.

7.45 pm

What is the solution? It is surely a simple one. It is to recognise that, although the manifesto contained a commitment not to have any more onshore wind and to end new subsidies, it did not have an arbitrary date, cast in stone, that no more should happen after that. These schemes all have public support and all got planning permission within six months—I believe—of the election, which is a pretty reasonable timescale to allow for sensible interaction between Government and business. But no. These schemes are to be sacrificed, regardless of the consequences.

I do not know what will happen after this. No doubt we will lose the vote. I do not know if the Lords will continue to fight—they would have every right to—but we need to bring our minds back to the bigger picture. Tens of thousands of jobs are at stake if we do not get the oil and gas support correct.

Pete Wishart: I am loth to interrupt my hon. Friend, who is making a powerful case in defence of the Lords amendment, but I am sure he has seen the evidence submitted to the Scottish Affairs Committee and how the energy has been taken out of the sector because of the Government's arbitrary decision. He is right that they made a manifesto commitment, but it is totally unacceptable to do this in a year and leave these four plants in a state of limbo. There is a simple way the Government could solve the issue this evening and get the Bill through: accept the amendment, get on with it, deliver the Bill and make sure we do our best for both sectors.

Callum McCaig: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I agree 100% and commend the work of the Committee he leads in shedding light on this issue.

Most countries would be proud of the wind industry that has developed in the last decade or so. It should not be seen as a burden, as it apparently is; it contributes massively to jobs, to reducing our carbon emissions and to tackling the great threat of climate change. But—again—no, because it upsets a few folks!

Pete Wishart: Tory ideology.

Callum McCaig: It is. It is an ideological attack, and despite the potential consequences for wider industry sectors, they are happy to see it happen. We have this squabble over an issue in Scotland between the unelected House of Lords and a Government who, with their sole Tory representative, might as well be unelected in Scotland. We are talking about grace periods. Thus far, the Government have acted completely and utterly without grace. It is not too late to change that.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): This is a vital Bill, and there have been plenty of opportunities in this House and the other place to give it proper scrutiny. Having spoken on Second Reading and sat on the Bill Committee, I feel that I am nearly as familiar as the Minister with some of the debates.

I have a particular local interest in the wider issue. A proposed new electricity interconnector facility linking France and the UK comes ashore at Chilling in my constituency. The development, called IFA2, will provide the capability to export or import more than 1,000 MW of power and provide benefits to consumers through increased flexibility of supply and downwards pressure on prices. It is because I want the Bill enacted that I share the Minister's frustrations at the continued blocking by the Opposition in the other place. It also defies long-held conventions such as the Salisbury convention, which is that a manifesto commitment of a party elected with a majority of support from the people should be enshrined in law—without opposition from the other place. And we should not forget that the other place gains its majority from Members who come from the Liberal Democrats or other parties that are not elected and do not reflect the political make-up of this elected Chamber. This undermines parliamentary democracy and the will of the general public.

This amendment addresses one of the narrowest aspects of the Bill—and the issue of the cut-off date and potential grace period has become the sticking-point. Debate on the merits of the arguments have been exhausted by now, so I shall not dwell on them too long. We can all appreciate the concern of those directly affected, who understandably want changes in the rules to benefit themselves. They have the right to lobby the Government and put their case. In the end, however, a decision has to be made, and a line needs to be drawn somewhere. Every deadline is arbitrary in some sense because it draws such a line. Some will be on one side and some on the other side. The fact of setting a deadline itself, however, cannot be considered unfair—otherwise we would be unable to set them at all.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) put forward a proposal for a grace period, but where will it end? Some people will benefit; others will not. The Government have made a very clear commitment to this policy in their manifesto, and I support it.

Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 7TB.

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 260.

Division No. 264]

[7.51 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartlidge, James
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinéage, Caroline
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver

Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John

Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather

White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wilson, Sammy

Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
George Hollingbery and
Margot James

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Barron, rh Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Boswell, Philip
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Cherry, Joanna
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Cox, Jo
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne

Day, Martyn
De Piero, Gloria
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Ffello, Robert
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendry, Drew
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart

Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Kerevan, George
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Leslie, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCaig, Callum
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGarry, Natalie
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
Meale, Sir Alan
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morris, Grahame M.
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
O'Hara, Brendan
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Albert
Paterson, Steven

Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Starmar, Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Michelle
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Stephen
Vaz, Valerie
Watson, Mr Tom
Weir, Mike
West, Catherine
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Corri
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Jessica Morden and
Vicky Foxcroft

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 7TB disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment 7TB.

That James Cartlidge, Andrea Leadsom, Holly Lynch, Callum McCaig, Paul Maynard, Julian Smith and Dr Alan Whitehead be members of the Committee.

That Andrea Leadsom be the Chair of the Committee.

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—(*Julian Smith.*)

Question agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Housing and Planning Bill

Consideration of Lords message

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Before I call the Minister, I wish to repeat what Mr Speaker said on 25 April about Lords amendments and financial privilege: designation of such amendments is not a matter of choice, and it has no bearing on the freedom of the House to debate and decide on them.

I must also tell the House that, as Mr Speaker then said, he has asked the Procedure Committee to inquire into the so-called privilege reason, and the Clerk has prepared a memorandum for its consideration.

I draw the House's attention to the fact that financial privilege is engaged by Lords amendments 47B and 47C. If the House agrees to them, I will cause an appropriate entry to be made in the *Journal*.

I must inform the House that five of the motions relating to the Lords amendments are certified as relating exclusively to England and one both to England and to England and Wales, as set out on the selection paper. If the House divides on a certified motion, a double majority—or, in the latter case, a triple majority—will be required for the motion to be passed.

Clause 4

PLANNING PERMISSION: PROVISION OF STARTER HOMES

8.5 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 10B.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Lords amendments 47B and 47C, and Government motion to disagree.

Government motion to insist on Lords amendment 97A and disagree to Lords amendment 97B.

Lords amendment 108, Government motion to disagree, and amendment (a) in lieu.

Lords amendment 109B.

Lords amendment 110, Government motion to disagree, and amendment (a) in lieu.

Brandon Lewis: Let me begin by informing the House that I am placing in the Library today the Department's analysis of the application of Standing Order 83O in respect of the Lords amendments.

We find ourselves here again, and, enjoyable as that may be, and while I thank those in the other place for not insisting on their amendments relating to a number of issues, I am very surprised that they have chosen again to oppose one of our most important manifesto commitments, namely the commitment to ensure that more homes are built: homes that we need, and homes that young people are crying out for. Last week we heard from many Members, in the Chamber, about the people who had asked them when starter homes would be available. We need to get on with helping those people to fulfil their dreams and get on to the home ownership ladder. Some 86% of our population want to be given a chance to do that.

[*Brandon Lewis*]

Lords amendment 10B allows local authorities to meet their starter home requirement with other low-cost home ownership products. The amendment would again totally undermine our manifesto commitment to build 200,000 starter homes by 2020.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): Is my hon. Friend, like me, struggling to remember a case in which a policy that was the subject of a clear manifesto commitment, and had received the assent of the elected House by more than 100 votes, was struck down and circumscribed by the unelected, unaccountable panjandrums in the House of Lords?

Brandon Lewis: I have certainly not heard the position put so eloquently before. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am used to seeing the Labour party trying to stop people's aspiration to own their homes, but it is beyond astonishing that the upper House should try to amend a measure that has received such a clear message of support from this elected Chamber, and in respect of which we have an election mandate to help young people.

If Lords amendment 10B were passed, the requirement for starter homes would become something entirely different: at best, the amendment shows a lack of understanding, and at worst it seeks to wreck important Government policy. That is unacceptable, not only to me but, I trust, to the House of Commons. The Joint Committee on Conventions made its view clear in its 2006 report "Conventions of the UK Parliament", which states:

"A manifesto Bill is not subject to 'wrecking amendments' which change the Government's manifesto intention as proposed in the Bill."

The noble Lords have done this not once, but twice. As was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson)—whose party, I note, was successful last Thursday—we sent a clear message, with an overwhelming majority, to the other place last week. We want our young people to have the chance of full home ownership, allowing them to move onwards and upwards over time. That is what the starter homes policy is all about, and we have a clear manifesto mandate to deliver it.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a clear and compelling case. Does he not agree that, at a time when the average age for people to buy their first home is 37 and rising, it is imperative that we get on with the job of supplying homes that people can purchase and live in as a family unit?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point that goes to the heart of what we are seeking to do. With starter homes, shared ownership and other areas of Government policy, we are seeking to deliver homes for people who want to be part of the 86% who aspire to home ownership. Labour Members have often voted against and regularly outlined their opposition to that. We want to support those people; that is what the Bill is about.

Let me make it clear that the starter home requirement will not prevent councils from delivering other forms of affordable housing and home ownership products. For example, shared ownership and other home ownership products are part of the diverse and thriving housing

market that we enjoy in this country. They help those who aspire to home ownership but who cannot afford even a discounted purchase. We have published a prospectus in the past couple of weeks that invites housing associations and other providers to bid for £4.7 billion of funding to deliver 135,000 shared ownership homes and £200 million to deliver 10,000 rent-to-buy homes as well.

The Bill focuses on starter homes, creating that new product and kick-starting delivery. We strongly believe that this is the most effective way to meet our manifesto commitment. Let me remind the House that we promised in our manifesto to deliver 200,000 new starter homes exclusively for first-time buyers under 40.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am still a little confused about the position that local authorities will be put in if this amendment falls. They will, I think, still be entering into section 106 negotiations with a developer, part of which will involve a requirement to provide starter homes, but will they also have an ability to provide shared ownership properties and, presumably, affordable homes to rent as well? How will the balance and proportion of those homes be determined? Will that be a matter for local discretion?

Brandon Lewis: Yes, there is no change to the position that has always pertained. It will be for local authorities to negotiate with developers over what they do beyond the requirement for starter homes. We will have a requirement for 20% starter homes, but what the local authorities do beyond that will be a matter for them. My experience of talking to developers is that in some areas where they have negotiated lower levels of affordable housing, the local authorities will be able to deliver more under the starter homes requirement.

Mr Betts: So let me be clear: there will be requirement for 20% starter homes but if, as is the case in most of my constituency, the maximum requirement on sites for affordable housing is a total of 10%, does that mean that there would be nothing other than starter homes on those sites—that is, no other affordable housing?

Brandon Lewis: That will be a matter for the local authority to negotiate. I know from talking to developers in my own constituency, where we have had similar levels of affordable housing, that we will be able to have more affordable housing as a result of the starter homes requirement. Local authorities will be able to deliver more affordable housing through this programme. We will not allow anyone to prevent us from meeting our commitment to deliver those new homes for first-time buyers.

I also want to defend another of our manifesto commitments. Our manifesto made this very clear, and I will quote from it again as I did last week. It stated:

"We will fund the replacement of properties sold under the extended Right to Buy by requiring local authorities to manage their housing assets more efficiently, with the most expensive properties sold off and replaced as they fall vacant."

We are discussing this again today because the Lords have yet again chosen to send our proposals back, in spite of the overwhelming majority in this House which overturned their last attempt to undermine our election mandate. I am shocked and disappointed by their action. I commend the noble Lord Lisvane, who has a wealth

of knowledge and experience of procedural matters and who chose not to press his amendments any further, recognising the primacy of this, the elected House. I just wish I could say the same about other noble Lords. Lords amendments 47B and 47C, which have been offered in lieu of amendment 47, with which this House has disagreed, are more or less identical to earlier incarnations.

8.15 pm

Let me turn again to the report from the Joint Committee on Conventions. In paragraph 252, it states:

“If the Commons have disagreed to Lords Amendments on grounds of financial privilege, it is contrary to convention for the Lords to send back Amendments in lieu which clearly invite the same response.”

I remind the House that this was a report from a Joint Committee, so it would be reasonable to expect both Houses to respect its conclusions. However, the other place has again tried to block the Government’s ability to negotiate agreements with councils that will deliver value for money for the taxpayer and ensure that housing is delivered, requiring the Government to enter into agreements even where the local authorities have no acceptable plans or track record of delivery. Their proposals would also significantly reduce the funding available for the voluntary right to buy, again preventing this Government from fulfilling their manifesto commitment. Let me be very clear: this is a wrecking amendment.

I have already said that we will give local authorities with particular needs the opportunity to reach bespoke agreements where they can demonstrate a need, plans that offer good value for money and a strong track record of housing delivery. We need new homes to be built in this country, and we need local authorities working with us to ensure that the right mix of housing is delivered as quickly and efficiently as possible. These amendments would not help to deliver that; in fact, they would hinder it.

This House also unanimously agreed to remove a neighbourhood right of appeal from the Bill. However, the other place has decided to press the issue. I recognise and fully understand the wider support in the other place for a neighbourhood right of appeal and for amendment 97B. However, as I have made clear, the Government cannot support amendments that risk introducing the principle of a third-party right to appeal against a grant of planning permission. That would add more complexity and unpredictability to the planning system, significantly delaying sustainable development and housing delivery. Communities can already request that any local decision to approve an application should be considered for call-in by the Secretary of State.

We have been extremely clear about how strongly we as a Government support neighbourhood plans, having brought them in, and I am always keen to explore further improvements that strengthen a community’s role in local planning—after all, neighbourhood plans are delivering more houses—without sacrificing simplicity or slowing down delivery of the housing we need.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I accept that the Government have reasons for again rejecting the neighbourhood right of appeal—on which I originally tabled an amendment—but would the Minister accept that there are real concerns about the integrity of neighbourhood planning? It is an important policy, and

I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is particularly keen to promote it. Such neighbourhood plans are undermined by speculative developments, and there needs to be a mechanism to ensure that those neighbourhood plans, once agreed or when close to agreement, are not subverted. It would be in no one’s interest to end up with a developer-led process rather than a plan-led process. Will the Minister agree to introduce more robust measures at some future opportunity?

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have shared platforms and spoken about the strengths and benefits of neighbourhood planning. I know that he feels passionate about this, and I share his desire to ensure that communities have the confidence that, when they draw up a neighbourhood plan, it has weight in law and will be respected by the local authority and by the planning inspector. The call-in process is partly aimed at ensuring that that will be the case.

I am happy to make it clear that I want the law to be strongly in favour of neighbourhood plans. I want them to become the norm everywhere in England. We are well on our way to achieving that, with a record 18 referendums being held last week and hundreds more communities due to complete their plans soon. This makes it even more important not to have amendments coming forward that could carelessly introduce change. We need to ensure that we get this right, and I am happy to tell my right hon. Friend that we will work with him and other colleagues to ensure that we give these neighbourhood plans the confidence and primacy that the Government always intended for them. We must ensure that neighbourhood plans are respected by the decision makers.

I do not believe we should be routinely reopening debate on locally made decisions, which is effectively what this Lords amendment would enable. Those decisions are locally and democratically accountable and they already take into account neighbourhood plans. I ask this House to send the amendment back, while reaffirming my commitment to work with colleagues to ensure that neighbourhood plans enjoy the primacy that we intend them to have in planning law.

I will now turn to Lords reasons 108B and 110B, our disagreement to Lords amendments 108 and 110, and our proposed amendments in lieu of those Lords amendments. As I have said previously, I am not convinced that amendment 108 will help to house those who are desperate for a new home. New homes built in England must currently meet tough energy efficiency standards. As I have said, those standards were strengthened by 30% in the previous Parliament, saving £200 on energy bills compared with the standards prior to 2010. We should be proud of that. To meet those standards, homes have A-rated condensing boilers, double-glazed windows with low-energy glass, high levels of insulation and airtightness in their construction. They are very energy-efficient homes. The amendment would create additional construction costs, which could push some small builders out of the industry completely—at a time when we are trying to encourage more to come back in—by making developing much-needed homes totally unviable in some areas.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The last time the Minister raised this matter, I asked him a question, so I wonder whether he has had the time to swot up on it for this evening. I asked him how much

[Tom Brake]

people would save if the higher standards proposed by the Lords were implemented and how much that would amount to over the lifetime of their homes, which one would expect to be perhaps a minimum of 50 years.

Brandon Lewis: Somebody who buys a home in this country lives in it for an average of seven years and the average cost, depending on the independent expert, could be £3,000 to £4,800. The cost would of course be cheaper on larger sites. On some of the small sites, of which we need more, particularly in rural areas that have a desperate need for housing, it could get up to almost £15,000 on the cost of a home. If somebody lives in a house for an average of seven years, that is a pretty high price to pay.

However, I propose today to place a statutory duty on Government to undertake a review of energy standards for new homes. It will seek evidence on the costs of energy measures and the benefits in fuel bill and carbon savings, which is the right hon. Gentleman's point. It will identify what is cost-effective to require, and cost-effectiveness must be key not just for developers, but for homeowners. We said in our manifesto that we will meet our climate change commitments and that we will do so by cutting emissions "as cost-effectively as possible". The electorate voted for that and the review will help to ensure that we can deliver it.

Likewise, I am concerned about the impact of amendment 110 on house building and our ability to bring forward the homes that people need. Flood risk is an incredibly important issue, and I fully understand the strength of feeling on the matter. The Government are committed to ensuring that developments are safe from flooding, and the delivery of sustainable drainage systems is part of our planning policy, which was strengthened just over a year ago. Our policy is still new, as I outlined in more detail last week, and I am willing to consider issues further as it matures. I am happy to review the effectiveness of current policy and legislation on sustainable drainage and to place that commitment on the face of the Bill, so I want to move amendment (a) in lieu of amendment 110.

In conclusion, I want to say something to all Members of both House as we consider a couple of key points. The issues that we are debating and voting on tonight and that the Lords will be considering shortly are about delivering on our general election manifesto and therefore delivering our general election mandate. They are about delivering new homes for the people across our country who are in desperate need of them. It is the democratic right of this House to deliver on the Government's agenda. We are determined to deliver on our promises to the British people and ask both Houses to respect that mandate.

Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): We began scrutinising this Bill last autumn, and it was bad at that point. After a string of concessions and 18 defeats, some of its harshest aspects have now been amended, but it still presents a missed opportunity to solve the housing crisis. Since 2010, homelessness and rough sleeping have more than doubled, house prices and private rents have risen dramatically, and the housing benefit bill has ballooned. The Bill does little to tackle

the housing crisis head on, and concerns have been raised by housing experts, leading charities, and MPs, councillors and peers from across the political divide, including Conservative council leaders, Conservative peers and Conservative MPs.

Lords amendment 10B would enable starter homes to be built while giving local authorities greater flexibility to deliver other forms of low-cost home ownership products to meet the need in their areas. The amendment seeks to expand the opportunities in the Bill for people to own their own home and gives serious consideration to other forms of affordable ownership. There is now a wide consensus that starter homes, which can cost up to £450,000, will be a big let-down and will be out of reach for young people and families on ordinary incomes—those who need a hand up on to the ladder the most. It is not just in my constituency that starter homes will be unaffordable. Research by Savills and by Shelter both found that starter homes will be unaffordable to families on average incomes in areas across the country.

We agree with the Local Government Association and want the Bill to provide for more affordable homes to rent as well as to buy. We agree that amendment 10B is a big improvement on the Government's plan to impose starter homes on local communities to the exclusion of other types of affordable homes to buy. The LGA has stated:

"The discretion for local authorities to determine the number of starter homes built locally, alongside affordable homes for rent"

is

"critical for ensuring new housing meets the needs of communities."

I was disappointed, but not surprised, to see that the Government will not be supporting amendment 10B. The Government's focus on starter homes puts at risk other forms of affordable housing, including other forms of affordable home ownership. The Government argued in their manifesto:

"Everyone who works hard should be able to own a home of their own".

Therefore, the Government will surely want to expand opportunities for home ownership by allowing other forms, rather than exclusively promoting starter homes, which could be unaffordable for many. If someone is over 40, they are excluded from the product altogether. If the Conservative party really does want everyone who works hard to be able to own their own home, there needs to be something for the over-40s. If we are serious about fixing the housing crisis and if the Government are serious about encouraging people on to the housing ladder, they must consider all forms of tenure and not just exclusively encourage starter homes. I hope that they will reconsider their opposition to the amendment.

Lords Amendments 47B and 47C would attempt to ensure that, where needed, council homes that are sold are replaced on a like-for-like basis. The Bill provides the statutory basis to extend the right to buy to housing association tenants paid for by the forced sale of council homes to the highest bidders, including buy-to-let landlords and overseas investors. The Government have still failed to commit to genuine, like-for-like replacements for homes that were forcibly sold, and we now see that they have marked the amendments as engaging financial privilege. If the Government do not accept the proposal for one-for-one, like-for-like replacements, they need to

explain why. Without that commitment on the face of the Bill, there will be a huge loss of genuinely affordable homes as this Government sounds the death knell for social housing.

The Government have said that they are simply honouring their election manifesto. Well, I checked the manifesto and the relevant passage commits to a replacement, something which this Bill does not effectively do. Any sensible meaning of the word replacement in this context would ensure that if a house is sold, it is replaced by one of the same type and tenure. The Bill and Government policy will make the delivery of new social rented and affordable rented housing near impossible. The new starter homes requirement will push social rented housing out of section 106 agreements. The 1% rent reduction over the next four years will make it harder for housing associations to deliver social rented housing in their schemes. Grant funding for new affordable rented properties by the Homes and Communities Agency will end in 2018. Those steps, without like-for-like replacement, will result in a huge loss of genuinely affordable homes. The Local Government Association has come out in favour of these two amendments, and it believes that

“as a minimum all councils should retain sufficient funds to replace each home sold on a like for like basis.”

It believes that negotiations between central and local government must allow councils to take into account the impact of wider housing reforms on the responsibilities of councils to meet housing needs. The cross-party Public Accounts Committee, too, has released a damning report on the Government’s plans, and no information has been provided on the impact of the forced sale. This policy will affect many people up and down the country, but the Government have failed to provide basic information to demonstrate how it will achieve its aims.

I will also touch briefly on amendments 97B, 108 and 110. Amendment 97B is a revised amendment to the one we debated last week, proposing a restricted, limited right of appeal in certain specific circumstances only in those areas where there is an approved neighbourhood plan. The amendment would empower local communities to have a greater say over their neighbourhoods, which should be welcomed. The Government’s counter-amendment only provides for a report to be written on neighbourhood plans when applications are permitted—we would already expect that of any good local planning authority.

Amendments 108 and 110 would ensure that all new homes built are carbon-compliant and have sustainable drainage provision. Although it would have been a positive step to see these issues covered in the Bill, it is welcome that the Government have committed to reviewing them. I hope the Minister will be able to provide further details, missing from the amendments themselves, about when these reviews are likely to commence; what a statutory review entails; when these reviews will be completed; and whether their findings will be reported to Parliament.

8.30 pm

The Government were forced to make a string of concessions in the House of Lords and were defeated multiple times, showing the extent of opposition to the Bill. Although there are many things in this Bill we

disagree with, I do believe that amendments 10B, 47B and 47C will improve it and will help towards combating the housing crisis, and I hope the Government will consider accepting them.

Nick Herbert: Neighbourhood planning has been one of the success stories of this Government and a flagship of the localism policy. I commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the work he did in putting that legislation through and in pioneering neighbourhood plans. They put communities in control and create a situation where they ask themselves what they want in their local areas rather than what they do not want. Neighbourhood plans have ended up producing more housing than was originally intended. As the plans are voted on by a local referendum, it is very important that they are respected once they are agreed. We tell local communities that their neighbourhood plan will apply for, say, 15 years, and that certain areas that they decide will be developed and that others—green spaces and so on—will be protected. It is therefore of concern to local communities that are about to produce a neighbourhood plan or have made one, and to other areas in the process of producing such plans or considering them, if developers appear to be allowed to come along, game the system, bang in a speculative planning application in the hope that they will get it through, arguing that there is some reason why it should be allowed despite a neighbourhood plan, perhaps because of the five-year land supply, and their planning permission is then upheld by the local authority or a planning refusal is overturned on appeal.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): That is exactly the position I face in my constituency, where a number of speculative planning applications are being put forward, often involving the argument that there is not a five-year supply. One case is now having to go to the House of Lords in order to uphold neighbourhood plans, which clearly is not what was intended by the Localism Act 2011 and neighbourhood planning.

Nick Herbert: I understand my hon. Friend’s concern. Indeed, a number of hon. Members are concerned about this issue, as the Minister knows. As I explained in my earlier intervention on him, the intention of the original amendment to introduce a neighbourhood right of appeal was not just to redress a perceived inequity that developers have a right of appeal but communities do not; it was to deal with this particular problem, whereby we cannot allow the whole policy of neighbourhood planning, or the democratic decision, to be undermined in the public eye, given that we accept that a local planning authority does reserve the right to make a strategic allocation. That is understood, but that is a rather different position from suddenly deciding that an area should be developed contrary to a neighbourhood plan.

Mr Jackson: My right hon. Friend is making an impassioned case on behalf of his constituents, but does he not see the other side of gaming? It might be possible for a local planning authority that has not produced a local plan to move a residential development on to the neighbourhood plan scheme and, with a right of appeal that would, over time, stymie the development of much-needed housing.

Nick Herbert: I think my hon. Friend has expressed the Government's concern about the particular amendment and the proposal for a neighbourhood right of appeal. He has shown why they were not willing to accept it as drafted, and why they rejected it and seek to do so again.

I understand the Government's concern in this area. I am seeking not to drive a coach and horses through the local planning system or to stymie house building, but to ensure that this very important policy, which is producing more housing than was anticipated and which reflects local needs, is not wrecked because local support for it is undermined. That is certainly in danger of happening in my constituency in West Sussex where neighbourhood planning was going very well, but people are now starting to say, "Well, what are neighbourhood plans worth if they can so easily be overturned?" That is why action in this area is necessary. The Government have taken a step towards it by seeking to insist on an amendment in lieu, which would require local authorities to identify where there was a conflict with the neighbourhood plan. That does not go far enough, because it merely reflects what happens in the planning system at the moment. I welcome the Minister's willingness to engage with concerned Members on this issue, his understanding of its importance and his commitment to look at it again, perhaps with a view to some future proposals that will ensure that the policy of neighbourhood planning is upheld.

Although I appreciate the reasons why the Government wish to insist on their amendment in lieu for the reasons that my hon. Friend the Minister set out about the specific right of appeal, I do hope that the Government will not dismiss the intention behind the amendment and will honour the commitment that they have made to Members to look again at this important issue. Where we have given local communities a say, we must stand by that commitment, particularly when they have voted democratically. It will damage the policy of neighbourhood planning if we do not. That is why future action, properly constrained in a way that does not stymie planned development, is so important.

Mr Betts: I shall speak to Lords amendment 10B, 47B and 47C.

The Minister is right to say that the Conservatives had a manifesto commitment to build starter homes. Although I may have some disagreements with elements of that policy, I respect it. It is the will of the electorate, and the Government have every right to put it into practice. However, what the Government did not say at the election was that, in large parts of the country, people who could not afford to buy a home would find it virtually impossible to find an affordable home to rent, or that, as a result of their policy, people's chances of finding that affordable home to rent would be substantially diminished and, in some cases, removed altogether. That is the impact of the policies that are in the Bill, connected with other Government policies as well.

When I intervened on the Minister, I raised the issue of section 106 agreements and the requirement that starter homes should make up 20% of homes on that site. I do not think that there are any sites in my constituency where there will be a 20% requirement. In fact, I cannot think of many sites throughout the whole

of the city of Sheffield. That is not because the local authority does not want affordable homes built as part of 106 agreements, but because market values are so low that the sites would not be viable if a higher level of affordable homes were insisted on. That means that the policy of the local council conforms with paragraphs 47 and 48 on viability and deliverability in the national planning policy framework, which are a key element of Government policy. Therefore, in complying with Government policy, the local authority would be in a position where, in order to conform with the requirement to have at least 20% as starter homes, there will be no other affordable homes built as part of 106 agreements in my constituency; they will be gone completely.

If that is put alongside the Government policy on spending on housing for the remainder of this Parliament, there will be no money for councils or housing associations to bid for to fund affordable rented housing—it will all go on shared ownership and starter homes. There will be no new building as part of the Government's spending grant availability.

On top of that, as a result of the rules about higher value council homes being sold off, every single vacant property in the slightly better off parts of my constituency is likely to be sold off, so there will be no vacant council properties coming up for rent. The Government have produced no figures whatsoever on how the money that comes in from the sales of those properties will add up to the replacement of the housing association property once the discount has been provided for. Then there is the contribution towards a brownfield remediation pot and a replacement council home. There is no possibility that the home sold off by the council will be replaced by a property that is for affordable rent.

The reality is that in large parts of my constituency no affordable homes for rent will be built through section 106, or through Government grant provision. Affordable homes for rent will be sold off in their totality in some parts of the constituency, with no like-for-like replacement. That adds up to one simple fact: where people are in urgent need of housing for whatever reason, their urgent need will remain, but there will not be an urgent offer of a property, because it will not exist. People in my constituency who have been on the waiting list for 15 years or more will wait not 20 or 25 years, but for ever, because a property will never become available under these policies.

The Bill and other Government measures effectively mean the end of social rented housing in large parts of my constituency, for the simple reason that there will be no social rented housing available to offer people on the waiting list or in urgent need.

Mr Jackson: I shall refer to most of the amendments. I reiterate my concerns about the amendment relating to neighbourhood planning. It would establish a dangerous precedent that would potentially end the neighbourhood right of appeal against conservatories and small-scale extensions. It would very much reduce the speed at which residential development could progress. There would also be an opportunity for sleight of hand by the more unscrupulous planning authorities that do not want any development in their area: they might move residential development on to a neighbourhood planning regime, in lieu of a local structure plan or district plan. With a third-party appeal, that development would be

held up for months and years. People who desperately need homes in high-cost, high-value areas would suffer as a result, so the Government are absolutely right to resist the amendment, although clearly I recognise the sincerity with which my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) represents his constituents' very legitimate concerns.

Antoinette Sandbach: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Jackson: Not at the moment, if my hon. Friend will allow. I am getting looks of admonition from the Whips, so I had better proceed. The amendment on the carbon compliance standard is precisely the wrong measure at this time. One of the endemic issues resulting from not delivering the appropriate number of homes is the attrition of small and medium-sized builders. Nothing could be designed to knock out even more of them, or to not allow them back into the market alongside very-sizeable-volume builders, than adding extra cost, so the Government are right to resist that amendment.

I now come to starter homes. This is an issue of social equity and fairness as much as anything else. I made the point when we debated this last week that a significant number of people are accessing finance for their new home through the bank of mum and dad—family money. That cannot be right if we want social fairness and equity. We want new owner-occupied properties to be available to young families in particular, and to working people, who do not have recourse to capital that is passed from generation to generation in a way that is inherently very unfair. Through the vehicle of shared equity and Help to Buy in particular, we are achieving that. As the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) will know, the Labour party made the same arguments about the affordable rent tenure in 2010 that it now makes about starter homes.

There is also the issue of constitutional propriety. I am afraid that I was rather rough on the House of Lords, but the fact of the matter is that we have a manifesto commitment to deliver starter homes. The Opposition would have a stronger point were every local planning authority run in an enormously efficient way, delivering residential development in a timely fashion, but they know—it is a cross-party issue—that very many local planning authorities have not even got round to producing structure plans or local district plans. They had the opportunity over many months or years to prepare varied tenure residential developments in their area and they have failed to do so. The Opposition can hardly then complain that the Government, who all of us agree are facing a significant housing crisis, should use primary legislation passed unequivocally by this elected House in order to ameliorate the effects of that housing crisis by saying that we should have a certain amount of starter homes.

8.45 pm

Although I have sympathy with the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) about land values—that is a valid point—he neglected to mention that very good regional registered providers and housing associations are already cross-subsidising by direct market sale, putting that money back into providing social rent. Some are also selling excess land, garages, community centres and shops that are extremely useful in providing homes for

people in great need. We understand that people who are working need social rented housing, but we also understand that other people will benefit by accessing shared equity, affordable rent and starter homes.

Bob Blackman: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the principal costs of developing new housing is the cost of the land that has to be acquired for that housing? Therefore, if low-cost land is available in an area such as Sheffield, low-cost housing will be provided on that site.

Mr Jackson: My hon. Friend, who has a great deal of experience in local government housing and planning, makes an important point. He is right to draw the House's attention to the anomalous nature of some of the comments from the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), the Chairman of the Communities and Local Government Committee, on which, I think, my hon. Friend also serves.

Mr Betts: Yes, the houses for sale in my constituency are much lower in price than in many other parts of the country, though higher than in one or two other areas in the north. However, the tens of thousands of people on the waiting list are on the waiting list primarily because they cannot afford to buy the houses, even though they are lower in value than those in the constituency of the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman).

Mr Jackson: I take the hon. Gentleman's point but local planning authorities like his in Sheffield have not been circumscribed by section 106 in the recent past or at all in developing the tenure that they choose. He will know, because the centre of his city has undergone significant regeneration over many years, that the capacity for section 106 payments to go back into social housing has been an issue in his city and others.

Antoinette Sandbach: I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving way. On section 106 agreements, one of the big concerns of my constituents is the impact on health and education infrastructure. That needs to be examined in future, particularly in the light of recent judgments by the planning inspectorate, which are being challenged through the courts.

Mr Jackson: I like to think I am an hon. Friend.

Some of us remember four or five years ago fighting the battles over the national planning policy framework. Some of us put our heads on the block and said that it was probably a good thing, and we were right to do so. I fear that sometimes discussion of infrastructure is a way of saying, "No residential development in our area."

There is a housing crisis. Those who hold housing and capital have a duty to release some of it to those who do not have that power and influence. That is a difficult balance. We have to think of quality of life, but that is one of the things that the Bill has addressed. That is why I stand four-square behind the starter homes policy, which has an election mandate, and I urge Members to support the Government policy and to remind the House of Lords politely that only one of our Houses is elected by the people, and that the other can oversee, scrutinise and improve, but not veto.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I wish to speak briefly about Lords amendment 10B and to urge the Government to support it. The amendment would allow local councils to decide the mix of affordable housing that is delivered in their area, based on their assessment of local need and demand.

The Minister speaks about manifesto pledges, and his point is understood, but I would like to quote the press release that accompanied the Tory manifesto launch:

“After funding replacement affordable housing on a one for one basis, the surplus proceeds will be used to fund the extension of right to buy”.

It is entirely untenable for the Government to include starter homes in the definition of affordable housing. A home to buy that requires a deposit of £90,000 and a salary of £77,000 and that costs up to £450,000 is not affordable to most people in London, and my constituents simply shake their heads in disbelief at the suggestion that it is. It is not the case that starter homes are replacement affordable housing, and it is entirely misleading of the Government to claim they are.

Amendment 10B would allow local authorities—the same local authorities that undertake housing needs assessments, that have statutory housing duties, that are democratically accountable to their communities and that know what is needed in their communities—to determine the type of affordable housing that is appropriate in their area.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): My hon. Friend raises the concept of subsidiarity—the organising principle that decisions are best made at the smallest, lowest and least centralised level. Does she agree that the Bill goes nowhere near that concept?

Helen Hayes: The Bill does not simply go nowhere near that principle—it contravenes it.

Amendment 10B would give local authorities the ability to decide the balance of starter homes and other, more genuinely affordable homes to be delivered in their area. By failing to support the amendment, the Government are breaking the commitment they made in launching their manifesto. More importantly, they are failing communities in London and across the country that need affordable housing.

It is important to point out what links an affordable, secure home and the aspiration of many people in this country to own a home: the ability to save. Someone who is spending too high a proportion of their income on private rents and on deposits for landlords every year because they have no security of tenure does not have the ability to save. The Bill does nothing about the private rented sector; it reduces the supply of genuinely affordable homes and, in doing so, it denies the aspiration of an entire generation to have an affordable, secure home and, ultimately, to own a home of their own. That is an ideological position, and it will deepen the housing crisis and be the shame of this Government.

Tom Brake: I want to start by associating myself with the comments made by the hon. Members for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) and for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), who is the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee. I hope the Minister will not seek to portray their views, or indeed mine, as

those of people who oppose home ownership. Clearly, that is not the case, and I hope the Government will have learned the lesson that fear tactics—certainly in London—do not work very well for them.

On Lords amendment 10B, the Government propose a review. From my brief period as a Minister, I know that when Governments look at what they can offer as a sop to the Opposition, it is a review that comes forward. I welcome the fact that a review is on the table. However, given the impact that zero-carbon homes would have and the positive contribution they would make, that is what we need to stick by. The Minister and other Conservative Members have referred to the Lords intervening in this. Of course, Conservative Members had their opportunity to reform the House of the Lords in the previous Parliament, and failed to do so.

The Minister may also refer to the Conservatives’ manifesto commitment to being the greenest Government ever. I assume that commitment is still in play for them, and hope they would therefore support the idea of zero-carbon homes and the highest possible environmental standards. Last time we discussed this, I asked the Minister how much people would save if these higher standards were introduced. I am afraid that he did not have a response, but he did refer to the fact that people generally keep their homes for seven years. That is another demonstration of a rather short-sighted approach, because these homes will be there not for seven years but for 50 or 100 years—who knows? The zero-carbon measures would have an impact over the duration of the lifetime of these homes—an impact that would benefit all future occupants, not just those who live there for a minimum of seven years.

In relation to extra costs, last time we discussed this, the figure of £3,000 was deployed, although that was disputed. The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead suggested that those costs had gone down to £1,500, and the Minister referred to £15,000; I am not quite sure where he got that from. In any case, long-term savings would clearly be derived from these higher energy standards for homes, and that would benefit everyone who lived in them thereafter.

It is legitimate for the Government to point out that amendment 10B would place additional burdens on smaller builders. It would therefore be appropriate for the Government to come forward with ideas about how to address that through training, advice and additional support from which those builders could benefit so that they could not only develop the sites that we want to be developed but develop homes to the highest possible standards to ensure that the Government meet their climate change commitments.

Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 10B.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I must inform the House that the motion relates exclusively to England. A double majority is therefore required.

The House having divided: Ayes 289, Noes 206.

Votes cast by Members for constituencies in England: Ayes 273, Noes 176.

Division No. 265]**[8.57 pm****AYES**

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Dinéage, Caroline
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick

Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea

Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire

Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig

Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wilson, Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike

Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Margot James and
George Hollingbery

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Kevin
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cox, Jo
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
De Piero, Gloria
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris

Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fleello, Robert
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Leslie, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve

McCarthy, Kerry
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
Meale, Sir Alan
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morris, Grahame M.
Mulholland, Greg
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz

Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Starmer, Keir
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Stephen
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Watson, Mr Tom
West, Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Mr Mark
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Jessica Morden and
Vicky Foxcroft

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 10B disagreed to.

9.10 pm

More than one hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Lords message, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, 3 May).

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

Clause 72

REDUCTION OF PAYMENT BY AGREEMENT

Motion made, and Question put,

That this House disagrees with Lords amendments 47B and 47C.—(Brandon Lewis.)

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I must remind the House that the motion relates exclusively to England. A double majority is therefore required.

The House having divided: Ayes 291, Noes 203.

Votes cast by Members for constituencies in England: Ayes 275, Noes 174.

Division No. 266]

[9.11 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Dinéage, Caroline
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick

Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard

Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew

Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John

Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wilson, Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
George Hollingbery and
Margot James

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Kevin
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cox, Jo
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
De Piero, Gloria
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim

Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiello, Robert
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Leslie, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry

McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morris, Grahame M.
Mulholland, Greg
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Stamer, Keir
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Stephen
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Watson, Mr Tom
West, Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Jessica Morden

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments 47B and 47C disagreed to.

After Clause 128

NEIGHBOURHOOD RIGHT OF APPEAL

Resolved,

That this House insists on its amendment 97A in lieu of Lords amendment 97 and disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 97B in lieu of that Lords amendment.—(*Brandon Lewis.*)

After Clause 143

PLANNING OBLIGATIONS AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Amendment (a) proposed in lieu of Lords amendment 108.
—(*Brandon Lewis.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 205.

Votes cast by Members for constituencies in England:
Ayes 276, Noes 175.

Division No. 267]

[9.24 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afrayie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Bacon, Mr Richard

Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Dinenege, Caroline
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael

Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea

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

Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Treddinick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggan, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Margot James and
 George Hollingbery**

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Anderson, Mr David
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Jenny
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 De Piero, Gloria
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Flello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Goodman, Helen
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kyle, Peter
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison

McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sherriff, Paula
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
John Pugh and
Tom Brake

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment (a) made in lieu of Lords amendment 108.

Resolved,

That this House insists on its disagreement with Lords amendment 110 and proposes amendment (a) in lieu.

Lords amendment 109B agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments 10B, 47B and 47C and for insisting on Commons amendment 97A and disagreeing to their amendment 97B.

That Andrew Griffiths, Brandon Lewis, Seema Kennedy, Grahame M. Morris, Teresa Pearce and Julian Smith be members of the Committee.

That Brandon Lewis be the Chair of the Committee.

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—(*Julian Smith.*)

Question agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Immigration Bill

Consideration of Lords message

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I inform the House that Lords amendment 87B involves financial privilege.

After Clause 30

DETENTION ETC. BY IMMIGRATION OFFICERS IN SCOTLAND

9.38 pm

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): I beg to move, That this House insists on its disagreement with Lords amendment 84.

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

Lords amendment 84, and Government amendment (a) in lieu.

Government motion not to insist on amendment 85B in lieu of Lords amendment 85 and to agree to Lords amendment 85C as amended by Government amendments (a) to (f).

Government motion to agree to Lords amendment 87B in lieu of Lords amendment 87 and Government amendments (a) and (b).

Commons amendments 84A and 85B, Government motion not to insist, and amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment 84.

James Brokenshire: The Government remain strongly of the view that specifying a maximum time limit for immigration detention would be arbitrary, would not take account of individual circumstances and would encourage individuals to seek to frustrate the removals process until the time limit was reached, so having a negative impact on our ability to enforce immigration controls and maintain public safety. In response to the concerns expressed by a number of Members here and in the other place, we accepted that there should be greater judicial oversight over detention, and we tabled a motion, the effect of which would be that individuals would automatically be referred to the tribunal for a bail hearing six months after their detention began or, if the tribunal had already considered whether to release the person within the first six months, six months after that consideration.

This House approved that motion but, although some peers accepted that the issue of judicial oversight had now been satisfactorily addressed, others remained concerned that six months was too long without that oversight. After careful consideration, we propose again a duty to arrange consideration of bail, but we are now reducing the timing of an automatic bail referral from six to four months. This earlier point of referral reflects the fact that the vast majority of persons are detained for fewer than four months.

Moving on to amendments (a) to (f), the Government have listened carefully to the concerns expressed in this House and the other place on the issue of detaining pregnant women. The motion agreed in the other place would maintain the 72-hour time limit agreed in this

House, extendable up to a week with ministerial approval. We have listened carefully to the points raised by the peers who have tabled these amendments. In order further to strengthen the safeguards, we have tabled amendments that will make it clear that pregnant women will be detained for the purpose of removal only if they are shortly to be removed from the UK or if there are exceptional circumstances that justify the detention. The guidance will also make it clear that they should be used in very exceptional circumstances, underlining our expectations in regard to the use of this power.

We have also proposed an amendment that would place an additional duty on officers making detention decisions in respect of pregnant women to have due regard for their welfare. These additional measures, alongside the 72-hour time limit, would act as statutory safeguards to complement the Government's wider package of reform, which includes the new adults at risk policy, a new gatekeeper function and new safeguarding teams. We also intend to ask Stephen Shaw to carry out a short review to assess progress against the key actions in his previous report.

I turn now to Lords amendment 87. The Government have always been clear about our commitment to identifying and protecting vulnerable refugee children, wherever they are. We wholeheartedly share their lordships' underlying intentions in this regard. We have a moral duty to help. Our efforts to date, both within and outside Europe, have been designed to do just that. Our commitment to help those in need stands comparison with any other country. The UK has been playing its part in supporting European neighbours to provide support to those who have arrived, by already providing nearly £46 million of funding to the Europe-wide response to help the most vulnerable, including infants and children. This assistance will support vulnerable people including children on the move or stranded in Europe and the Balkans. In addition, the £10 million Department for International Development fund announced on 28 January will support the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee to work with host authorities to care for and assist unaccompanied or separated children.

As the Prime Minister made clear last week, we will accept the amendment. However, we have always made it clear that, in implementing it, we must do nothing that would inadvertently create a situation in which more children put their lives at risk by attempting perilous journeys to Europe. That is why only those from Greece, Italy and France who were registered in the EU before 20 March will be eligible for resettlement, when it is in their best interest to come to the UK.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): Among the most vulnerable children are the 10,000 who have gone missing. Will the Minister clarify whether those children, who were probably not registered before 20 March, are to be excluded from the provisions he has just outlined?

James Brokenshire: I will come on to the issue of registration, which has been highlighted by a number of people, in a moment. To be clear, we are not seeking to impose an over-burdensome or legalistic requirement on children to prove that they have been formally registered, but we will need to see some evidence that they were

[James Brokenshire]

present in Europe before 20 March. This will avoid creating a new and perverse incentive for families to entrust their children to people traffickers. Our focus will be on reunifying children with families in the UK, but we will also consider cases of children at risk of exploitation or abuse.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I understand that the Government are in a difficult position, although I supported the Prime Minister's original stance on the matter. Are these children not already in safe countries? Are the Minister and the amendment's supporters suggesting that France, Germany and Greece are not safe?

James Brokenshire: We certainly recognise the pressures that Greece and Italy, for example, have been under, and I will come on to talk about that more specifically. Equally, on children who are looking to be reunited with family here, the measure will provide a further mechanism to support the best interests of the child, which is what the Government have said. Reconnecting children with family here in the UK underpins that important message.

9.45 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I have listened carefully to what the Minister has said and have looked closely at the amendments in lieu that he proposes. Will he be clear to the House about the number? I know that it is not in the amendment in lieu, but is he going to act within the spirit of the 3,000 figure? Will he also give us any indication about what will happen in the short term—perhaps before the new school year starts—and roughly how many children we will support?

James Brokenshire: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's point, and if he will bear with me I will come on to address it. It is important for the House to recognise that the reference to 3,000 children has been removed from the amendment, but we welcome the insertion of consultation with local authorities, which is important.

An arbitrary quota is not the correct approach. It has no regard to the existing pressures faced by local authorities, which last year alone took charge of 3,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who had made their way here. The burdens of taking on children are not evenly shared between local authorities, which is why we have made provision in the Bill to bring about a national dispersal scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. We agree that local authorities should be consulted to ensure that our obligations to those children already in the UK continue to be fulfilled and that any children brought to the UK can be fully supported. The nature of the amendment means that we must consult others before bringing final proposals on implementation.

Furthermore, the best interests of the child must be at the heart of any action. In addition to consulting local authorities, we will also continue to consult relevant non-governmental organisations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF and other member states, specifically France, Greece and Italy, on how best to implement the legislation, including which

children will most benefit from such action and how we can implement procedures and processes that protect the best interests of the child.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

James Brokenshire: I will give way to the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz).

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I warmly welcome what the Minister has said today. The Government have moved a considerable way as a result of what has happened in the other place.

It is so important that we do not send a message out to people traffickers that the floodgates will be open for them to profit more from what is being achieved. It is also important that we give local authorities the resources they need. They are already under huge pressure to house refugees, and it is important that we work with them. The Minister has done the right thing and I welcome it.

James Brokenshire: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making the point about the messages that we send out and the potential for exploitation by people traffickers. They have become adept at using social media and other techniques to ensnare refugees and children, who then make such journeys and put their lives in traffickers' hands, with all the horrific consequences that we have seen. He is right to underline that core message.

The conversations have already begun. I was in Athens on Friday for discussions with the Greek Government to explain the nature of the arrangements that we are contemplating. We will now urgently consult others prior to bringing forward more detailed proposals. A meeting with the Local Government Association is scheduled for later this week. Until further discussions have taken place, it is premature to speculate on the likely numbers that will count towards the new obligation set out in the amendment. I hope that my comments show that we are seeking to make progress and to get to a point at which we can report back to the House.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) mentioned funding. Is the Minister prepared to commit to adequately resourcing any new scheme for the resettlement of unaccompanied child refugees, many of whom will be particularly vulnerable? Local authorities in Scotland have already resettled 700 refugees and are pressed for funds at present.

James Brokenshire: Obviously, existing funding is provided for unaccompanied asylum seeking children; the Home Office funds local authorities in that way. We are carefully considering this in the context of the existing arrangements and will be discussing it with colleagues across government, as well as with local authorities. I would like to reassure the House that we intend to be flexible in our interpretation and approach when implementing this amendment, to ensure that it is practical and supports the most vulnerable children, as intended. We believe the amendment, as currently drafted, enables us to do that. The use of the term "refugee" can be interpreted to include certain asylum seekers and

avoid the requirement of a child having to go through a full refugee determination process before being admitted to the UK. Our Syrian resettlement scheme already operates in a not dissimilar way, and we do not believe any clarifications are necessary.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Does the Minister accept, however, that vulnerability does not necessarily end on a child's 18th birthday? We have already deported about 3,000 children to a number of countries, including Libya and Syria, since 2005. Will he assure us that the children who are allowed in will be allowed to stay here?

James Brokenshire: I do not want to conflate, as the right hon. Gentleman seems to be doing, those who claim asylum in this country and are then determined not to have a valid asylum claim—we would therefore seek to remove them on their 18th birthday—with the arrangements we are contemplating and which I am setting out to the House this evening. Obviously, we are looking carefully at the nature of the leave that will be granted. It is important to understand and recognise that where we are seeking to reunite children with parents here, the Dublin arrangements would normally mean that they would have the same leave as the person who was here. Equally, if we are looking at resettlement, different leaves may be involved. We are looking at this carefully with UNHCR and others.

I hope that colleagues will agree that accepting the amendment is the right thing to do. No country has done more than Britain when it comes to help for Syrian refugees. Accepting this amendment demonstrates the Government's approach of doing more for refugee children across the globe while upholding the principle that we should not be encouraging vulnerable people to make that perilous journey. We remain of the view that we can have the biggest impact by supporting refugees in affected regions and the countries hosting them. Those we resettle here are the exceptions and the vulnerable whom the UNHCR advise need to be resettled in a country such as the UK. That has always been the cornerstone of our policy and that should remain the case, but we recognise our duties, both in the EU and beyond.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Let me start by discussing unaccompanied refugee children in Europe and reminding the House that two weeks ago the Government voted against Lord Alf Dubs original amendment here in this House. Last week, they voted against this amendment in the other place. Obviously, I welcome the change of position, but it is just that. Whether voting against an amendment last week and accepting it this week is listening, as the Government would have it, or U-turning, as I would have it, is a matter for debate, but clearly there is a changed position.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I am disappointed to hear language of that nature, because the Government have not made a U-turn; they have been very carefully weighing up how on earth to mitigate the pull factor, which still remains a huge danger. They have taken their time to deliver proposals that will work and will not endanger children in the future.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. The fact remains that only last week the Government voted against the Lord Alf Dubs amendment, as it was then put in the other place, which was a change from the position the last time we saw it in this House. I welcome this change of position, which is a step in the right direction, but I wish to pay tribute to those who have got us this far. I pay particular tribute to Lord Alf Dubs and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), who has raised this matter on so many occasions, both in this House and elsewhere. I also thank Save the Children and the other charities and non-governmental organisations that have given their support. I pay tribute to those on the Conservative Benches who have urged the Government to reconsider their position. They have done so over several weeks and months and played an important part in getting us to where we are today.

It is important that actions match words. Citizens UK has identified 157 children in Calais with family connections here. Obviously, there are many children in equally appalling conditions in Greece and Italy. Although the Minister does not want to put numbers and a timetable to the proposed change to the resettlement scheme, the challenge for the Government is surely to take all those in Calais with valid legal claims for reunification notwithstanding the fact that they are in France—

Sir Gerald Howarth: Reunification in France?

Keir Starmer: Reunification with their family here under the Dublin arrangements. The Minister has made it clear on a number of occasions that he is seeking to improve the reunification rules under the Dublin arrangements. Some 157 children have been identified as falling into that category. This is the time for action, not words. We also challenge the Government to take 300 children most at risk in Greece and Italy before the start of the next school term. There is an urgency to this situation. The debate two weeks ago was dominated by a real and genuine concern about the missing children—those who are at risk of exploitation, trafficking and various other aspects of mischief. That is the challenge. I ask the Minister to say a little more to the House about the numbers and the timetable.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I also pay tribute to the Government for the immense amount they have done to help displaced Syrian refugees. Will the hon. and learned Gentleman also take on board the huge pressures that are already on children in care in this country? Some 70,000 children in England are in care, and there is a shortage of 10,000 foster carers. It is really vital that we are able to offer safekeeping to those children who are coming here and to do it sustainably and not to the detriment of the other children to whom we already have a responsibility.

Keir Starmer: I agree that if children are to come to this country under the proposal put forward in this amendment, it must be done properly with the relevant local authorities receiving full support.

I also supported the amendment that sought to enable movement and help to pass from one local authority to another. Kent, in particular, has provided a lot of

[Keir Starmer]

support. Although there has been voluntary support from other local authorities, the amendment proposed by the Government during the passage of the Bill put in place a provision to allow that to be more meaningful and effective, and I supported that for the very reasons that have been mentioned in this House.

I want to move on to immigration detention, because there are two substantive issues still before—

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Keir Starmer: On immigration detention? I have barely started. I really think that I should press on, as we have limited time.

On immigration detention, the Stephen Shaw report made it clear that there is now near universal acceptance that detention makes people more vulnerable, and disquiet has been growing. Lords amendment 84 tackles that issue head on, by sensibly providing a 28-day period of immigration detention after which the Secretary of State can apply to extend detention in exceptional circumstances. That amendment strikes the right balance and reflects both the cross-party reports by the all-party groups on refugees and on migration and long-standing Labour party policy. It also had cross-party support in the Lords. Amendment 84A in lieu provides for four months of immigration detention, with an ability to apply for bail at the end of that exercise. That is markedly different: it is four months rather than 28 days; it puts the onus on the individual rather than on the Secretary of State; and it is subject to a different test. It does not go far enough, which is why we will vote in favour of the Lords amendment this evening.

Let me move on to the position of pregnant women. I remind the House of an important finding of Stephen Shaw's report. As he put it, it is "obvious" that detention has harmful effects on both the mother and the unborn child. The Royal College of Midwives, in its evidence to him for his report, pointed to the special vulnerabilities of pregnant women and made it clear that appropriate care cannot be given in detention. Add to that the fact that until now, the vast majority of pregnant women have not been removed, and one can see why he concluded that the current policy was not working. He rightly concluded that the only move should be to absolute prohibition. That has been the Labour party position consistently, and that is why we voted as we did on 25 April.

10 pm

I recognise that the Government have moved on this issue to a position of not allowing detention beyond 72 hours, or up to a week with the Secretary of State's approval. That does not go far enough, but it is better than no limit. The amendment that was eventually accepted in the Lords reflected that concession and introduced other important safeguards. It is worth setting out those safeguards for the House. The first is the overriding principle that pregnant women should be detained only in the most exceptional circumstances. The second is that detention must be at a place where there are facilities for appropriate medical care. The third is that there should be provision for an independent family return panel. That is the amendment that the

Lords have put back before the House tonight: a limit of 72 hours, or up to a week with the Secretary of State's approval; the overriding principle of detention in only the most exceptional circumstances; appropriate medical facilities; and the involvement of an independent family return panel.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that we should move to not detaining vulnerable people at all? It is expensive and immoral. In this amendment, we see some movement on that, because after all, we consider pregnant women to be vulnerable, but given that two thirds of the women in places such as Yarl's Wood are victims of sexual violence in conflict, we really should not detain any of them at all.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. On vulnerable individuals as described, I agree. I state again that our position, particularly in relation to pregnant women, is that they should not be in immigration detention at all. However, this is a move in the right direction by the Government, and the limit proposed is better than no limit at all.

Unfortunately, the amendment in lieu undoes a lot of the good work, because it seeks to remove the overriding principle that there should be detention only in the most exceptional circumstances, and seems to remove the provision relating to medical facilities. For those reasons, we will not support the amendment in lieu, but will support the Lords amendment.

Sir Gerald Howarth: I quite understand the difficulty that the Government face. As I am sure that my hon. Friends will agree, the British Government have done more than any other Government apart from that of the United States of America to help those fleeing the torment in Syria and other parts of the middle east. I warmly welcome that part of the Department for International Development budget; that is a good use of its budget, though I may disagree with other parts of it. I accept that the Government face some opposition to their policy from Conservative Members, but the Government's original policy was absolutely right. The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), representing the new champions of the premier league—he is not wearing his scarf today; clearly he has deserted his—[*Interruption.*] Ah! The scarf is under there! He said that he hoped that the amendment would not exacerbate the pull factor, but I am afraid that all reasonable opinion in this country will conclude that it will do precisely that. If we agree to this amendment, we are sending out the message that Britain is a soft touch. Also, it is a cruel policy, as I have said to the *Aldershot News & Mail*—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) is being facetious about the *Aldershot News & Mail*; it is a very important organ of communication.

The policy is cruel because it will encourage desperate, tragic parents to send their children across the inhospitable seas of the Mediterranean in search of a better life. Who can blame them for wanting to do that? However, they are parents and their responsibility is to their children. It is not our first responsibility; it is that of the parents, and they will be encouraged by this measure to send their children across that dangerous sea and put

them at risk in the hope that they will be able to get not just to other safe countries—France, Greece or Italy—but to the United Kingdom.

If this House is saying, in the middle of a debate on whether Britain should remain a member of the EU, that—[*Interruption.*] Members on the Opposition Benches should not sneer. If this House is saying that Italy, France and Greece are not safe countries, why on earth are we members of that organisation?

Anne McLaughlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Gerald Howarth: If the Scottish National party would like to intervene, of course I accept that intervention, but if the SNP feels so strongly about this, it should not ask the British Government for money. Put up your own money to cover the costs.

Anne McLaughlin: Does the hon. Gentleman understand that in Calais tonight there are children sleeping in containers that sleep 12 people? They are sleeping alongside adults, strangers to them, and there is nobody supervising. Does he think that is safe?

Sir Gerald Howarth: The whole point is that they are in safe countries. The criticism should be levelled not at the British Government, but at other Governments. If the Scottish nationalists wish to take the children in and they have the capacity in Scotland, they should pay for it themselves and not ask the Minister to go to the British Treasury to fund it. Put your money where your mouth is.

I fear that the Lords amendment will send out a very dangerous message. It is also an insulting message to our continental partners, whom we all know, because we see it night after night on our television screens, are wrestling with the consequences of this tragic migration flow into Europe. The Lords amendment sends out a damning message to them that they cannot cope and that their conditions are inadequate to look after vulnerable people.

That is my first point. My second point is this: my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) rightly asked the sanctimonious hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who is parading his compassion—[*Interruption.*] We have free speech in this country. My hon. Friend made the point that there is a shortage of 10,000 foster carers in our country to look after our own children in need of foster care.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Gerald Howarth: No, I will not. The hon. Gentleman does not spend enough time in this Chamber for me to give way to him.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham is right that there is already a demand to look after our own children. As I have told the Prime Minister, in my constituency we do not have the capacity to take any more people and I will not give priority to those from overseas, however tragic, when my own constituents are suffering homelessness and vulnerable children cannot be catered for.

I quite understand the difficult position that my right hon. Friend the Minister has been put in, I suspect by some of my hon. Friends who have felt it necessary to parade their compassion. I do not believe the amendment to be a compassionate move. It sends out a very dangerous signal, encouraging parents to dispose of their children and put them at risk on the high seas, which is deeply dangerous.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Along with many others, we in the SNP have been arguing for months that the UK should take a fair share of refugees and asylum seekers from Europe in the face of the ongoing humanitarian crisis. We are therefore glad that the Government have now apparently accepted that principle, albeit up to a point. They have finally listened to the arguments from the different parties and from a host of campaign groups and charities, and we cautiously welcome that change of heart.

Indeed, last week, in Westminster Hall, the Minister himself made a persuasive case for a fairer distribution of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. That was in the context of a debate on children already in the UK and was a call for solidarity with the citizens of Kent, where many unaccompanied children have arrived. We on these Benches support that call for responsibility to be shared across the UK, but we want the same logic applied on a European level.

Like others across the House, we will monitor progress carefully to ensure that the new policy is implemented in the spirit of the amendment from Lord Dubs. For example, it is vital, as others have said, that the cut-off date does not rule out protection for the many children who have been in Europe since before that date but who have never been registered, and I welcome the reassurances the Minister has given this evening. Equally, as others have said, the support offered to local authorities must be sufficient to allow them to feel able to become involved in the new programme, so that the numbers taken on represent a genuine attempt to play our part. We will also look for the Scottish Government to be closely involved in overseeing the necessary processes in Scotland and for the Scottish Guardianship Service to have the support it needs to play its part.

However, as the Opposition spokesperson said—this is probably most important of all—it is essential that action is fast. As all hon. Members who have visited camps across Europe will know, the conditions these children are living in are horrendous. We need the Immigration Minister back in the House to update us within weeks, rather than months.

If implemented properly and generously, the Government's decision will be looked back on warmly and, indeed, even as a matter of pride—people will only wonder, “Why the delay?” However, there is a long way to go before we reach that point.

On the remaining, unresolved issues, the Government have come up short again. On amendment 84, their lordships are absolutely right to insist on a general rule that immigration detention should not last longer than 28 days. This is a modest amendment; as I said when the Bill was last here, it moves us towards a time limit, rather than creating an absolute limit, because of various exceptions. However, their lordships' reasoning for insisting on the amendment is absolutely right, because the

[Stuart C. McDonald]

Government's alternative is even further from being a proper time limit on immigration detention—it simply adds an automatic bail hearing after four months.

Every now and then, we have hints from the Government that they are waking up to the fact that policy and practice on immigration detention in the UK is draconian, unnecessary and expensive. There are occasional suggestions of a change in approach, but proposed reform is simply far too slow. Far from representing a brave new policy dawn, what the Government are asking us to put into legislation barely even reflects what is supposed to already be their policy—a presumption in favour of temporary admission or release and the use, wherever possible, of alternatives to detention.

In short, the right to liberty continues to be badly undermined—all for the administrative convenience of the Home Office. The Government have failed each time to explain why, in contrast to every single other EU country, the UK cannot operate within the confines of a proper time limit. We will continue to support the Lords amendment as a step in the right direction.

On amendment 85C, we are perhaps getting closer to a result we can live with. My colleagues and I continue to believe that the Government should implement in full Stephen Shaw's recommendation of an absolute prohibition on the detention of pregnant women. Such a policy would not put immigration control in peril; it would ensure that some pretty barbaric practices in UK detention facilities are brought to an end.

It is frustrating that we are still having this debate without the full facts at our disposal. When will the Minister tell us exactly how many pregnant women are detained, how long they are detained, whether they were released and whether they were removed? What information we do have does not impress. For example, we know that 90 out of 99 pregnant women detained in Yarl's Wood in 2014 were eventually released back into the community.

Lords amendment 85C does incorporate the 72 hours or one-week limit suggested by the Government, but it also contains alternative protections. Its inclusion of a general principle against the detention of pregnant women mirrors provisions on the detention of children in families set out in the Immigration Act 2014. As well as retaining that overriding principle, it sets standards for accommodation, for providing notice and for shorter journey times. If we have to compromise on our belief that there should be an absolute ban, then we are absolutely determined to see the full range of protections retained within the Bill. We cannot support what the Government propose in terms of amending amendment 85C and thereby watering down many of those protections. We will not support dawn raids on pregnant women, long journeys to detention centres, or inadequate facilities at those centres. If there is not to be the absolute ban recommended by Sir Stephen Shaw, then we must have the safeguards that prioritise antenatal care over Home Office convenience. The Government have their priorities absolutely wrong.

Amid all the gloom of this Bill, at least let us properly safeguard the right to liberty, and at least take action to properly protect pregnant women. That really is not very much to ask.

10.15 pm

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I want to deal with the amendment that has received the most attention, which relates to amendment 87B. I welcome last week's announcement by the Prime Minister.

I take issue with the suggestion made in last week's debate that there is any monopoly on compassion on this issue. Members in all parts of the House, with all their different opinions, can properly hold to a compassionate view. This is a practical and complex issue that needs a practical and complex response. The suggestion that by resisting the Lords amendments when they first came to this place we were in any way turning our backs on the lone children in Europe flies in the face of the practical reality of the Government's continuing commitment to those people. The Government had made an ongoing commitment of financial aid of £45 million, of which £10 million was directed to Save the Children and to the International Committee of the Red Cross, specifically to provide safety for those lone children.

We also have the Dublin III family reunion scheme, which was in effect before the discussion of these Lords amendments and will continue to be so, although concern has rightly been expressed about its adequacy and practical implementation. One practical outworking from the debates on the Lords amendment that will no doubt eventually be agreed to is that the scheme will have a practical reality, with the Home Office official who is now in Calais providing for four family reunion cases to be dealt with per week, so that the process is properly sped up and the care is being provided.

I praise the Government for not just talking but acting, as they have in relation to the vulnerable persons relocation scheme whereby up to 1,500 vulnerable refugees have been relocated. It is not just about the numbers; it is about having a proper, integrated scheme that provides properly funded support in this country. That is what we need for all vulnerable refugees, including the lone children who will now receive extra attention and support.

This debate and this Bill are not about sending a campaigning message—we have to ensure that they are based on practical reality. That is why the Prime Minister's announcement is very welcome in providing practical support and safety for more lone children, and why I tabled amendments (a) and (b). This is not about sending out messages—I do not think they would reach the traffickers or the smugglers, and certainly not the lone children—but about trying to ensure that following the Bill's passage we are able to provide the appropriate support. My amendments would ensure that the Prime Minister's announcement last week is fully aligned with the commitment in the press statement on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. I understand from the Minister's response that there is such an alignment. My amendments give the Government the opportunity to make it clear that last week's announcement is aligned with Lords amendment 87B. That is welcome, because otherwise we could be artificially seeking a distinction about child refugees reaching a threshold of being determined as refugees, which would no doubt lead to commitments from countries such as France, Italy or Greece.

We are making a particular commitment to those who have been registered. I welcome the Minister saying that this is about those who have been resident in this country and there is some flexibility on registration.

The Government's commitment on asylum-seeking children who come within the current family reunion scheme is aligned to the Lords amendment that will now have the force of law. That will lead to accountability and publication of statistics on how many children have been relocated and where they have been accommodated—settlements that must be dispersed much more fairly across the United Kingdom. We will thus be able to hold the Government to account on their commitment.

Heidi Allen: On that point about the language around registered children—I, too, welcome the Minister's response to that—I am interested in my hon. Friend's views on how we can work with NGOs to identify the children who were in Europe before the Turkey deal, because a lot of them will not be in the system.

Mr Burrowes: It has been somewhat lost in the debate, but we should welcome the Government's commitment to dispatching 45 experts to Greece to provide processing and registration. That does not make the campaign headlines, but it is of vital practical importance now. We are not turning our backs; we want to get the experts out to Greece now to improve the reception that some months ago, as my hon. Friend and her colleagues saw, was woeful. We will now be able to process those people and provide them with safety. Some of them will, no doubt, be able to come to this country in the scheme that the Government have announced, but others will be relocated to providers of children's services across Europe, because there are existing legal commitments to children.

I welcome the Government's commitments. I welcome the fact that the commitment made last week will, as I understand it, be aligned with the Lords amendment and will include asylum-seeking children, those who seek family reunification and children who are at risk of exploitation. We should not forget the Government's world-leading commitment to relocate from the Syrian and north African region children who are at risk. Just as we have campaigned for safe and legal routes, we must now encourage other countries to step up and join us in the scheme for children at risk. We are leading other countries in providing the international aid that will bring people to safety. Let us now get on the case of other European countries to make sure that they follow our lead across Europe and in the region.

I want briefly to mention the other matters that are the subject of consideration. In relation to Lords amendment 84, I welcome the Government's movement on the provision of a four-month automatic bail hearing. It is distinct from Lords amendment 84 in that it provides judicial oversight not of 28 days, but of four months. In addition, the burden of proof falls on the applicant rather than the Government to justify what is excessive detention. Stephen Shaw asked, in his 60-second recommendation, what was the Government's definition of excessive detention. One would certainly say that if detention extends to four months, it is excessive. I concede that this is part of a Government package, which includes the publication, for the first time, of an "adults at risk" policy and the introduction of removal plans. I would welcome the Government's commitment to timings for implementing that package.

Finally, I welcome the Government's movement on the issue of pregnant detainees. It is much more in line with the coalition Government's proud achievement—this

did not happen under a Labour Government—of outlawing the detention of children in immigration centres. That shows our practical commitment to a compassionate view of the human dignity of our most vulnerable people in detention. We need to align with that commitment, and the Government have come close to doing that. However, we still need to ask about the small word "or" in amendment (b) to Lords amendment 85C. Why does it make the distinction between

"the Secretary of State is satisfied that—

the woman will shortly be removed from the United Kingdom, or there are exceptional circumstances which justify the detention"?

Surely, pregnant women should be detained only if there are exceptional circumstances and they can be removed shortly. Why are we distinguishing between the two? If the aim of detention is to remove people and detention should be a last resort, given the new 72-hour limit on detention, when would detention not be exceptional and removal forthcoming? It is important that the Government clarify that. The intention is to align ourselves with the children and family regime, but I am concerned that the measure leaves the door open for the excessive detention of pregnant women. Having said that, I welcome the Government's movement in that regard, and I am sure that the end result of our deliberations will be that we show greater respect for human dignity and compassion to the most vulnerable.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I strongly welcome the Government's huge change in principle and acceptance of the Dubs amendment. I pay tribute to Lord Dubs, Citizens UK, Save the Children, Help Refugees, the Association of Jewish Refugees, countless faith groups, 70,000 people who signed the petition and Members from all parts of the House who have argued strongly for the measure.

I welcome the spirit of the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen), and I am glad that the Government have accepted it. I was saddened by the contribution made by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), and I do not believe that his views are representative of those of most Conservative hon. Members. I think the hon. Gentleman's point was that children in Europe are somehow not at risk and are safe, but we know that that is not the case: 10,000 child refugees have simply disappeared.

When the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) and I were in Athens last week, we went to a makeshift camp in a hockey stadium, where 1,200 people are staying in rigged-up tents and under blankets. In among them were children and teenagers with no one to look after them. The aid workers talked about the abuse, the risk of domestic violence and the cases of rape that there have been. Children need to be supported. We also met Greek Government Ministers—probably the same ones that the Minister for Immigration met last Friday—who said that they want help, particularly to resettle children quickly because they are at risk and are out of school.

By agreeing to Lords amendment 87B, we will be saying that we are prepared to do our bit. However, I urge the Minister for Immigration to move swiftly on the practicalities. I welcome the steps he has set out, but I urge him not simply to go along with the original

[*Yvette Cooper*]

objective of the Dubs amendment, which was to help 3,000 children—I hope he will still aim to achieve that by providing support for 3,000 child refugees—but to set a milestone by accepting the proposal put forward by UNICEF, Citizens UK and the group of bishops to help all those currently stuck in limbo in the family reunification system. In particular, we should help the nearly 150 children in Calais and the first 300 children from Italy and Greece to do our bit to speed up the process as rapidly as possible so that we can get them in place and resettled by the beginning of the school year. Some of those children have been out of school for far too long already, and we should do our bit to help. Of course, that will mean giving support to local authorities to enable them to do so.

Stella Creasy: My right hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech. She is right to say that this amendment is supported not just by Conservative Members, but by people across the country who think we should help such child refugees. Indeed, people in my own community were so inspired by her work and that of Lord Dubs that they raised over £1,000 in five days to pay for caravans for children to stay in in refugee camps in Calais while waiting to be resettled in this country. There is clearly support for this across the country. It is right that we look at the 3,000 figure as a milestone, but I hope she agrees that we can do a lot more.

Yvette Cooper: I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a lot of support and interest in this amendment, and we should be drawing on that. The Government have talked about working with the LGA, but I hope that they will also work with all sorts of other organisations. For example, I had an email only this morning from an independent boarding school local to my constituency that wants to offer two free places from September for child refugees. I will pass that offer on to Ministers, who I hope will take up not only that offer, but those of about 80 places from independent boarding schools across the country, as well as others from other community groups and organisations that want to do their bit to help—from faith groups to Home for Good, which wants to work with the Government to bring forward more places—

Sir Gerald Howarth *rose*—

Yvette Cooper: I will not give way because there is very little time and other Members want to speak.

Home for Good wants to involve foster parents who would be prepared to sign up and work with local authorities.

Kelly Tolhurst: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Yvette Cooper: I will give way to the hon. Lady, who has not yet spoken.

Kelly Tolhurst: Will the right hon. Lady outline the conversations she has had with her local authority about the number that it is prepared to take? When Kent was in crisis last year and we asked other authorities for help, very few came forward. My question is: how many, and what has changed?

Yvette Cooper: I think the hon. Lady makes an important point. In fact, among the points I was going to make was to say that the Government should not only work with local authorities—they need to make sure that local authorities have the funding—but, frankly, should not expect Kent to take more child refugees, because it has already done a huge amount and other local councils across the country need to do more. That support will need to be funded.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Refugees has done a great job in working with local authorities to make sure that funding is available for the existing programme for Syrian refugees. My local authority, Wakefield Council, has offered to take some of the families under that programme, but that offer has not yet been taken up. The council has come forward saying it is ready to help and it has offered places, but such places have not yet been forthcoming, because the Government have not yet brought them through the system.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Yvette Cooper: I will not give way because I am conscious that other Members who have put in a huge amount of effort want to make a quick contribution.

Sir Erich Reich, the chairman of Kindertransport, the Association of Jewish Refugees, said last week:

“The echoes of the past haunt many of my fellow Kinder and I whose fate similarly rested with members of the British parliament. I feel it is incumbent on us to once again demonstrate our compassion and human-kindness to provide sanctuary to those in need.”

For us, as Members of the British Parliament today, it is a fitting echo of the past that we can stand together to support the amendment in the name of one of Sir Erich's fellow Kinder, Lord Alf Dubs, and help a new generation of child refugees.

10.30 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Like many other Members of this House, I welcome amendment 87B, as a more thoughtful articulation of the widespread desire to help unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, one that takes into account the practical challenges of doing so and recognises that it will be on top of the enormous amount we are already doing to help refugees from Syria.

I have three brief points. First, I urge us to make sure that we take the most vulnerable young people, whether from camps in the region around Syria or from the camps in mainland Europe. Whatever we do, we must take the most vulnerable children, because our capacity to help is limited—although I believe it is greater than the numbers we have at the moment. But we should not have targets for a particular place. Let us simply make sure that we help the most vulnerable along with those who have connections to and family in the UK, and so will be more able to settle in.

Fiona Mactaggart: Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

Helen Whately: I am going to be very brief, because others want to speak.

My second point is that we must make absolutely sure that we avoid the pull. I know some Members are sceptical about that, but from my conversations with young men in Calais I am convinced that there is a pull factor, particularly for older teenagers—16, 17 and 18-year-olds. We must not encourage people smugglers to be paid to bring more of those people across Europe, so we must do this in a way that avoids a pull—as is, quite rightly, the plan.

My third and final point is we must make sure that we do it well. The Government are absolutely right to carry this out in consultation with local authorities. I represent a Kent constituency that is managing over 1,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and care leavers. It is a huge burden, and very few other local authorities have stepped up to help. I sincerely hope that more local authorities will now take on their fair share. As part of that, let us make sure that we make use of the upsurge in interest in fostering—many people have put forward their names to be foster carers—not only to look after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and refugees but to provide more homes for British children who are in care.

Tim Farron: Seven months ago I used my first Prime Minister's question as party leader to call on the Prime Minister to give sanctuary to 3,000 unaccompanied refugee children. The campaign has been cross-party and cross-community. Today we celebrate in particular the work of Lord Alf Dubs in pushing his amendment and being so utterly dogged with it. I also pay tribute to the Government's own Back Benchers, whose compassion and equal doggedness have brought the Government to the brink of this change.

We should understand, however, that although we are finally able to give hope to some of these children and although this is a victory, it is certainly not the end of the story. Even tonight we are hearing from No. 10 that the Government will not take a single one of the refugees for another seven months, will not help children who arrive after the arbitrary date and will not commit to a fixed number.

Fiona Mactaggart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Farron: I do not have time, sorry.

In January, the Government claimed to be supporting child refugees, and we became optimistic, but then it turned out that that was just a repackaging of existing funds to the region. Last month, the Government said that they would take 3,000 children, and we were ready to cheer, but it turned out that none would be the desperate children alone in the camps in Europe. Last week, on the eve of elections, the Government gave way and said that they would accept the Dubs amendment, but now we discover that although they may have accepted the letter of the amendment they continue to flout its spirit.

With depressing predictability, we again see that the Government view desperate refugees as a media and political management issue, and not as the greatest, cruellest humanitarian disaster to face our continent in 71 years. Better late than never comes to mind, but remember this: in the seven months since we first raised this matter, it is likely that hundreds, if not thousands,

of vulnerable children will have joined the 10,000 who have gone missing, into the hands of people traffickers, into forced labour and into child sexual exploitation. It keeps me awake at night that some of the children I met in Lesbos, in northern Greece and in Calais will now, I know, have shared that desperate fate, because of the Government's prevarication. Now, the clock is ticking. Every week that we delay taking these children, more will disappear into the hands of those who wish to exploit them. The Minister has the blueprint that we produced, together with the help of local authorities of all parties, Save the Children, fostering agencies, and Home for Good. He will see that with sufficient leadership and Government resources, we could take these children pretty much straightaway.

Throughout this ongoing debate, all that has hindered us from doing the right thing as a country is the lack of political will from this Government. Last month, I saw in northern Greece a razor-wire fence on the Macedonian side of the border. It was backed up with tanks every 50 yards, and it was built in 36 hours because when politicians want to do something quickly, they can. This Government could act quickly if only they had the political will.

I do not care whether this counts as a U-turn. As a result of this campaign, many of us know that hundreds, hopefully thousands of children will be granted sanctuary. That is a welcome change of position, but it is clearly not a change of heart. Taking these children is not the best that we can do as a country; it is the least that we can do as a country.

Kelly Tolhurst: I am actually quite sad tonight given what I have heard, because there is a clear sense and determination among Labour Members to suggest that the Government have not been doing enough. I spoke to the amendment two weeks ago, and the county of Kent has been rehoming unaccompanied minors and refugees for decades. Kent has been a gateway for people making their way to safety into this country, and this Government, and previous Governments, have been doing their bit.

As I have outlined previously, it is all very well making a simplistic argument—"We'll just put these young people with foster carers"—but the reality is, as my hon. Friends have said, that we have a shortage of foster carers in this country. What I have found saddest about this whole debate in the weeks leading up to it has been that, week after week, Opposition Members have stood up and spoken about unaccompanied minors. I do not know about them, but I do a hell of a lot of work with looked-after children, and since I have been elected to this House I have not heard Opposition Members stand up and champion the outcomes of young looked-after children in this country. Labour Members have stood up and talked about unaccompanied minors, but they have not made that point.

I have spoken to friends on the continent over this past week, and as has been said, they feel quite depressed about the debates that we have had in this House, the accusations that have been levelled at some countries on the continent, and the fear that this is unsafe. This Government and country are doing enough.

10.38 pm

Debate interrupted (Programme Order, 25 April).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83G),

That this House insists on its disagreement to Lords Amendment 84, does not insist on its amendment 84A in lieu, but proposes amendment (a) in lieu.

Question agreed to.

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

After Clause 31

DETENTION AND BAIL

Motion made, and Question put,

That this House does not insist on its amendment 85B in lieu of Lords amendment 85, and agrees to Lords amendment 85C with amendments (a) to (f).—(*James Brokenshire.*)

The House divided: Ayes 296, Noes 258.

Division No. 268]

[10.39 pm

AYES

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

Gibb, Mr Nick	Loughton, Tim
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl	Lumley, Karen
Glen, John	Mackinlay, Craig
Goodwill, Mr Robert	Mackintosh, David
Gove, rh Michael	Main, Mrs Anne
Graham, Richard	Mak, Mr Alan
Grant, Mrs Helen	Malthouse, Kit
Gray, Mr James	Mann, Scott
Green, Chris	Mathias, Dr Tania
Green, rh Damian	May, rh Mrs Theresa
Greening, rh Justine	Maynard, Paul
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	McCartney, Jason
Griffiths, Andrew	McCartney, Karl
Gummer, Ben	McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
Gyimah, Mr Sam	Menzies, Mark
Halfon, rh Robert	Mercer, Johnny
Hall, Luke	Merriman, Huw
Hammond, Stephen	Metcalfe, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew	Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Hands, rh Greg	Milling, Amanda
Harrington, Richard	Mills, Nigel
Harris, Rebecca	Milton, rh Anne
Hart, Simon	Mordaunt, Penny
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Morgan, rh Nicky
Hayes, rh Mr John	Morris, Anne Marie
Heald, Sir Oliver	Morris, David
Heapey, James	Morris, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris	Morton, Wendy
Heaton-Jones, Peter	Mowat, David
Henderson, Gordon	Mundell, rh David
Herbert, rh Nick	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Hinds, Damian	Murrison, Dr Andrew
Hollinrake, Kevin	Newton, Sarah
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Nokes, Caroline
Holloway, Mr Adam	Norman, Jesse
Hopkins, Kris	Nuttall, Mr David
Howarth, Sir Gerald	Offord, Dr Matthew
Howell, John	Opperman, Guy
Howlett, Ben	Parish, Neil
Huddleston, Nigel	Patel, rh Priti
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Jackson, Mr Stewart	Pawsey, Mark
James, Margot	Penning, rh Mike
Javid, rh Sajid	Penrose, John
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Percy, Andrew
Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Perry, Claire
Jenkyns, Andrea	Phillips, Stephen
Jenrick, Robert	Philp, Chris
Johnson, Boris	Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Johnson, Gareth	Pincher, Christopher
Johnson, Joseph	Pow, Rebecca
Jones, Andrew	Prentis, Victoria
Jones, rh Mr David	Pursglove, Tom
Jones, Mr Marcus	Quin, Jeremy
Kawczynski, Daniel	Quince, Will
Kennedy, Seema	Raab, Mr Dominic
Knight, rh Sir Greg	Redwood, rh John
Knight, Julian	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Kwarteng, Kwasi	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Latham, Pauline	Robinson, Gavin
Leadsom, Andrea	Robinson, Mary
Lee, Dr Phillip	Rosindell, Andrew
Lefroy, Jeremy	Rudd, rh Amber
Leigh, Sir Edward	Rutley, David
Leslie, Charlotte	Sandbach, Antoinette
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver	Scully, Paul
Lewis, Brandon	Selous, Andrew
Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Shannon, Jim
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Shapps, rh Grant
Lidington, rh Mr David	Sharma, Alok
Lopresti, Jack	Shelbrooke, Alec
Lord, Jonathan	Simpson, David

Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie

Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
George Hollingbery and
Simon Kirby

NOES

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

Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick
 Coker, Vernon
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris

Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Fuller, Richard
 Furniss, Gill
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glendon, Mary
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kyle, Peter
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana

Malhotra, Seema
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela

Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl

Twigg, Stephen
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Jessica Morden

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 87B in lieu of Lords amendment 87 agreed to, with Commons financial privilege waived in respect of Lords amendment 87B.

Business without Debate

NOTICES OF QUESTIONS

Ordered,

That, in respect of Questions to the Secretary of State for Wales for oral answer on Wednesday 25 May in the next Session of Parliament, paragraph (5)(a) of Standing Order No. 22 (Notices of Questions, Motions and Amendments) shall apply with the substitution of three days for four days.—(*Jackie Doyle-Price.*)

PETITIONS

Community Pharmacies

10.51 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I wish to deliver this petition of the residents of Scunthorpe to the House of Commons. The petition states:

The petition of residents of Scunthorpe,

Declares that local pharmacies are a vital frontline health service, forming part of the fabric of health communities across England; further that they may be forced to close as a result of Government proposals; further that this could deprive people of accessible medicines advice and other valuable support from trusted professionals; and further that it may also put more pressure on GPs and hospital services.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to reassess their proposed plans and protect local pharmacies.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001691]

Wellington Railway Station

10.53 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): The petition relates to a railway station for Wellington and has 402 signatures. The petition declares that

“a new railway station in Wellington in the constituency of Taunton Deane should be opened”.

Following is the full text of the petition;

[The petition of residents of Taunton Deane,

Declares that a new railway station in Wellington in the constituency of Taunton Deane should be opened; further that this project has a local support from residents and businesses; further that the rapidly expanding town is experiencing high volumes of road congestion and that a rail link could help alleviate this and improve local air quality whilst at the same time improving rural transport networks in the area; and further that Taunton Deane Borough Council have committed £40,000 to a feasibility study and pending commitment from the other involved partners we seek the support of the Department of Transport through the New Station Fund.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department for Transport to open a new metro style railway station in Wellington and support the feasibility study.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P001692]

European Convention on Human Rights

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Jackie Doyle-Price.*)

10.54 pm

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I am most grateful to Mr Speaker for giving me the opportunity this evening to raise the issue of the UK's membership of the European convention on human rights. I want to focus on the issue in the context of the referendum that will take place on 23 June—and let me say, as a Brexiteer, that it is good to know that a fellow Brexiteer will be responding to the debate.

I should, at the outset, set out my position on sovereignty and human rights. I want our Parliament to make the laws to which United Kingdom citizens are subject, and I want our independent judges to interpret those laws without fear or favour. I believe that if Parliament does not like a court's interpretation of the law, Parliament should be able to change that law, prospectively but not retrospectively. I also believe that supranational courts should not be able to legislate for us by judicial means. If the wording of a treaty is to be changed, it should be changed by an amending protocol and not by judges.

That is why I support the European convention on human rights, but am very uneasy about the way in which it has been extended by judicial activism into fields that Parliament has never approved—a prime example, obviously, is giving votes to prisoners, an issue which the Prime Minister told us made him feel physically sick—and that is why I am so keen for the United Kingdom to take back control over the making and interpretation of our laws. Currently, 60% of our laws are made by the European Union, and they can be changed at will by the European Union against our wishes, because even if all United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament vote in one way, they can muster fewer than 10% of the votes in that Parliament.

I applied for this debate because I am very confused about Government policy on UK membership of the European convention on human rights. I read the speech delivered by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to the Institution of Mechanical Engineers on 25 April, entitled “The United Kingdom, the European Union, and our place in the world”. In that speech, my right hon. Friend set out what she considered to be the principles for Britain's membership of international institutions. She said:

“We need...to establish clear principles...Does it make us more influential beyond our...shores? Does it make us more secure? Does it make us more prosperous? Can we control or influence the direction of the organisation in question? To what extent does membership bind the hands of Parliament?”

Having asked all those questions, she said that

“the case for remaining a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights—which means Britain is subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights—is not clear.”

She went on to say:

“The ECHR can bind the hands of Parliament, adds nothing to our prosperity, makes us less secure by preventing the deportation of dangerous foreign

criminals.

“If we want to reform human rights laws in this country, it isn't the EU we should leave but the ECHR and the jurisdiction of its court.”

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): If we want to have influence, we should bear in mind that tomorrow is the eighth anniversary of the imprisonment of seven Bahá'í leaders in Iran. They are prisoners of conscience, and were imprisoned as a result of their religious belief. That is an unquestionable violation of their human rights.

Outside Europe, the United Kingdom's membership of the European convention on human rights sends a strong signal of our continued commitment to upholding and advancing human rights globally. Is there not a good reason for our being a member of the convention when we can do something for those Bahá'í leaders in Iran who have been violated and persecuted because of their beliefs? That is one example.

Mr Chope: The hon. Gentleman has made his point very well. However, I am concentrating on what the Home Secretary said. She seemed to be announcing a Government policy that the United Kingdom should leave the convention but stay in the EU. Her speech led to an urgent question, which was granted by Mr Speaker, and I—and other people who were present on that occasion—could not understand how we were going to be able to deliver the Home Secretary's agenda on human rights if we remained in the European Union and subject to the EU charter of fundamental rights.

Questions were raised by Members during those exchanges, and it became clear that the Home Secretary—and, indeed, the Government—were indeed rather muddled about this. One of the questions that was asked was whether membership of the European Union required us to be a party to the European convention on human rights. The Home Secretary was not answering the urgent question. The Attorney General answered, as a Law Officer. He said:

“It is not...in any way clear that membership of the European Union requires membership of the European convention on human rights...there are considerable legal complexities”.—[*Official Report*, 26 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1291.]

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) then cited article 6.3 of the treaty on European Union, which states:

“Fundamental rights, as guaranteed by the European Convention...shall constitute general principles of the Union's law.”

He went on to refer to the fact that the Commission had said that any member country of the European Union that sought to disengage from the European convention on human rights might have its voting rights suspended.

Then, as so often happens in this House, my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) asked a really pertinent question. He said:

“Can a country remain in the European Union and still come out of the convention? What is his legal opinion on that?”

The Attorney General replied:

“As I have suggested, the legal position is not clear.”

He went on to say that he did not

“have the time to go into all the ins and outs of that particular question now, but I suggest it would also be wrong to say that it is clear in the opposite direction.”—[*Official Report*, 26 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1301.]

So that was what the Government were saying about this particular matter.

[Mr Chope]

This morning, I heard the Prime Minister chiding Brexiteers for having no clear comprehensive plan for life outside the EU, but that was a classic case of the pot calling the kettle black. As I have just said, the Prime Minister and the Government have no clear plan for life inside the European Union if there is a remain vote on 23 June. They do not know what will happen to their human rights agenda. There are many other examples beyond that.

It is a failure by the Government not to address this issue up front, and to leave it hanging in the air pending the referendum. We have had some quite clear advice from lawyers of great distinction. For example, Lord Woolf said:

“You can legally reconcile the doctrine of the sovereignty of Parliament with the European Convention on Human Rights. You cannot do that with regard to the European Charter, because the position there is that you can trump a statute.”

Lord Woolf was being quoted there in the House of Lords paper 139, which was published today. We now have a situation in which the Home Secretary seems to be arguing that we would be more secure if we left the convention on human rights but retained European law relating to fundamental rights.

I should like to give the House some examples of how EU law is undermining our security. In *The Sunday Telegraph* yesterday, it was reported that six Algerian terror suspects with links to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda were to be allowed to stay here after a 10-year battle in the courts. I think that the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab) has made the point that the number of people fraudulently trying to gain entry into the United Kingdom has almost doubled in a year. That is because those people realise that we do not have the power to turn them away at our borders if they are waving a European Union identity document.

I was speaking at a conference on European freight security last week, at which it became apparent that we are not allowed to X-ray lorries in Calais to see whether they contain illegal migrants because it might be damaging to the human rights and health of those illegal migrants. That is another example of how human rights laws undermine our ability to keep our borders secure. Another example is that we are not allowed to take DNA samples from migrants who refuse to give their fingerprints when they enter the European Union, which is expressly prohibited by the Eurodac regulations.

Then we have the example, which came out a couple of months ago, of Abu Hamza's daughter-in-law. We found out that she was his daughter-in-law only through a freedom of information request. An advocate-general in the European Court of Justice said that it was in principle contrary to European Union treaties to remove the lady from the United Kingdom, notwithstanding the fact that she had been convicted and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. It was subsequently revealed that she had been convicted of attempting to smuggle a Sim card to Abu Hamza while he was in a high-security prison, but even that grave crime was insufficient to allow the courts to remove her from the United Kingdom because of the intervention of the European Court of Justice, which exercised its powers under the EU's fundamental rights laws.

I cannot understand how the Home Secretary can consistently argue that we should stay in the European Union when the logic of everything she said in her speech was that we should be leaving the EU. It is potentially misleading for members of the public to think that they can have their cake and eat it by leaving the European convention on human rights while still remaining subject to the European Court of Justice.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Perhaps all these complexities explain why so little progress is being made on our manifesto commitment to leave the European convention on human rights. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will make it clear that the Government have not gone cold on that.

Mr Chope: I hope that the Minister will be able to respond to that. We had a debate towards the beginning of this parliamentary Session in which the Minister made it clear that the Government intended to bring forward a consultation document on this sooner rather than later. I think he envisaged that that would be before Christmas, but it then became after Christmas and now it is after the referendum. They were talking about a consultation document, so why can we not have even a discussion? I fear that it has been kicked into the long grass on the instructions of No. 10, because it was realised that it would lead to lot of awkward questions. The Government have demonstrated throughout the course of the referendum debate that they are quite happy to ask hypothetical questions and complain when people are unable to answer them, but they are unwilling to respond positively to the questions that people are asking them.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I am sorry that I missed the first part of my hon. Friend's speech; I very much look forward to reading it tomorrow. While the view of the general public is that infringements on the rights of Parliament are the result of the intervention of the European Court of Human Rights, will my hon. Friend confirm that even if we were to leave the European convention on human rights and remain in the EU, we would still be subject to the same kind of interference from the European Court of Justice?

Mr Chope: Yes. It would be not only the same type of interference, but graver. That is the conclusion of the House of Lords EU Justice Sub-Committee, the report of which I referred to earlier and came out today. The European Court of Justice has much greater powers and can effectively remove legislation from our statutes. The European Court of Human Rights is much more restricted and can deal only with individual cases, which then can be the subject of negotiation and we can ultimately exercise more discretion or have a greater “margin of appreciation”, to put it in legal language. As Lord Woolf was saying, the European convention on human rights may not be perfect, and we may not like the way in which it has been changed by judge-made law, but most people would agree with its actual wording.

The European charter of fundamental rights is anathema. You may recall, Mr Deputy Speaker, that when the charter was first brought forward and the then Labour Government were saying that it would have no application to the United Kingdom, the then Minister for Europe, the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz),

memorably said that it would have no more status in UK law than a copy of the *Beano*. That just illustrates the speed with which change comes about. One moment we think something has been passed which is not going to apply to us and now we find, on the highest authorities in the land, that we are indeed subordinate to the European Court of Justice and that the European fundamental rights agency and charter are supreme. My plea to the Minister is: can we get this sorted out? Will he confirm that the UK would be in an absurd position if it wanted to stay in the EU but denounced the European convention on human rights?

11.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) on securing tonight's debate and pay tribute to his recent work as chair of the UK delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. He is very knowledgeable in this field and he made a very powerful speech.

For all the contentious debate about human rights, few argue against the common-sense list of rights set out in the text of the European convention on human rights. The Government are and will remain committed to the protection of those rights. The United Kingdom was a founder member of the convention and was instrumental in its drafting. I have said on a number of occasions that those who suggest it was somehow an exclusively British creation are overegging the pudding or rewriting history. The negotiation of the convention saw an interesting contest of views between the common law and civil law traditions, as evidenced clearly in the travaux préparatoires of the convention, which are available online. The convention—the product of those negotiations—reflects the compromise between those two very different traditions and approaches.

Nevertheless, the concerns that have arisen about the convention are far less about being objections to the strict list of rights set out there; they lie more with its interpretation and application, which has been expanded and extended exponentially, well beyond what the original drafters intended. That is partly the result of judicial legislation by the Strasbourg Court, but it has been compounded by the design and structure of the Human Rights Act. It should be pointed out at this stage that serious criticisms have come from Labour Lord Chancellors, lawyers across the spectrum and senior British judges, as well as from Government Members. These problems have fuelled a rights inflation that has undermined this country's liberal tradition of freedom and its approach to human rights, which is founded in Magna Carta and in the thinking of great British philosophers from John Locke and John Stuart Mill through to Isaiah Berlin. We have shifted towards imposing more and more obligations on government that require it to provide, rather than merely insisting that it refrain from acting in certain arbitrary ways, which was very much the history and tradition of the liberal approach. These developments have exposed us unnecessarily to judicial legislation at home and in Strasbourg that takes decisions out of the hands of this House.

Sir Edward Leigh: The Minister is making a powerful critique of the convention, so perhaps he can now tell the House when we are going to fulfil our manifesto commitment to get out of it.

Mr Raab: I will come on to the manifesto commitment and resolve to deliver on it shortly.

I want to make this point very clearly: there are legitimate different views as to what we should include in a list of fundamental human rights. There are liberal models, Marxist models and a social democratic tradition, which informs an approach to human rights. There is even a shift from individual rights to collective ones, including environmental rights. We can take different views on that, and hon. Members will, but whatever our view, if we are a democrat, the legislation and the definition of that list of rights must be made by elected representatives who are accountable to the British people. That is the objection to a rights inflation through judicial legislation—whether it takes place at home or abroad. It corrodes the most basic principles of democracy, and that was a point that my hon. Friend made very clearly and powerfully.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I am very grateful indeed to the Minister for allowing me to intervene at this late hour. The Minister will know when he reads through the Belfast agreement signed on Good Friday—I am sure that he has studied it at length—that the European convention on human rights is an integral part of that agreement and that that agreement was voted on in a referendum in Northern Ireland and also in the Republic of Ireland and thousands and thousands of people supported that agreement. Where does the Minister think it would leave the peace settlement in Northern Ireland if this country were to withdraw—and I hope that it does not—from the European convention on human rights?

Mr Raab: I will come on to address that point very squarely in a moment. I hope to be able to give the hon. Lady the reassurance that she needs.

I will, if I may, return to some of the problems of the democratic deficit that have been created. One example that has been mentioned by Members on a number of occasions is the creeping extra-territorial extension of the convention. The negotiating record of the European convention—the travaux préparatoires—is very clear on that point. No one intended that those making military decisions on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan should or would be subject to the convention. That area was rightly left for the law of armed conflict, including international humanitarian law.

Another example, to which my hon. Friend referred, is the situation whereby increasingly elastic interpretations of article 8 rights to family life override the very clear public interest in deporting serious foreign criminals. The Government are clear that where there is a real risk of torture to an individual, they should not be deported, but the right to family life is an inherently qualified one and must be balanced against the rights of others. That balance, which should properly rest with Parliament, has been tipped out of kilter too much and by too great a degree by the courts. This is not to attack the ECHR. In truth, those making that point are being faithful to the convention, because paragraph 2 of article 8 makes it crystal clear that Governments should be able to qualify the right to family life to take effective law enforcement measures. In this regard, it is the judicial branch, which is, through creative extrapolation—that is the most generous gloss that can be put on it—departing from the convention. Those are two illustrations. There could be many more, but we have limited time this evening.

[Mr Raab]

There are two strong reasons why this Government will reform the UK's human rights framework, and with it, our relationship with the Strasbourg Court. The Government were elected with a clear mandate to deliver that reform, and I can confirm to my hon. Friends that we remain absolutely resolute about delivering on that pledge.

Our proposals will remain faithful to the principles in the European convention—I hope that the hon. Lady will be reassured on that point. Our focus will be on restraining and restricting the expansion of rights by the Strasbourg Court and the Human Rights Act, without proper democratic oversight.

Lady Hermon *rose*—

Mr Raab: If the hon. Lady will give me more of an opportunity to address her concern.

As the 2015 Conservative party manifesto pledged, the Government will repeal the Human Rights Act and replace it with a British Bill of Rights. Our aim is to protect fundamental rights, prevent the abuse of human rights law and restore some common sense to the system.

My hon. Friend asked for clarification—the hon. Lady did as well—on the Government's position on the European convention. Let me repeat what I and the Justice Secretary made clear at oral questions towards the end of last month. Although we cannot rule out withdrawal from the convention forever, that is not part of the proposals that we are finalising for consultation. We aim to achieve reforms while remaining members of the European convention. Our proposals will help restore a more balanced separation of powers between the proper role of the courts and greater respect for the Supreme Court in this country, and also the proper role of the Legislature and of Parliament.

Lady Hermon: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for giving way. Two points require clarification. The Minister appears to have completely contradicted the line taken by the Home Secretary, for whom I have enormous regard. She clearly stated in this House that it was her wish that we would withdraw from the convention. The Minister can confirm this evening that that is not Government policy—that there is no intention of this country withdrawing from the European convention on human rights. As for a British Bill of Rights, would that extend to Northern Ireland, or does Northern Ireland have to come up with its own formulation?

Mr Raab: On the position on the convention, I think the hon. Lady will find that the Home Secretary's remarks were made not in this House, but elsewhere. The Home Secretary is, of course, entitled to her view; there is a degree of licence and latitude in the current debate on the EU. What I have explained clearly to the hon. Lady is the Government's position on the ECHR. On the application to the devolved Administrations—I understand the hon. Lady's particular concerns relating to Northern Ireland—obviously we will consult fully, including with the devolved Administrations. We are mindful of the interrelationship of the convention with, and its effects on, the Belfast agreement, which she mentioned.

Critically, our reform agenda is not about eroding people's fundamental rights. The United Kingdom has a proud tradition of respect for human rights that goes back long before the Human Rights Act 1998, and long before the European convention. Our history of protecting human rights at home and fighting for them abroad stretches back over 800 years to Magna Carta, and even before that, in truth.

We will take no lectures from the Labour party on this front. It was the last Labour Government who introduced identity cards and proposed 90 days' detention without charge.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): How is that relevant?

Mr Raab: In stark contrast, the last Conservative-led Government scrapped identity cards and cut pre-charge detention. The reason why it is relevant, as the right hon. Lady should know, is that actions speak louder than words.

Fiona Mactaggart *rose*—

Mr Raab: I will not give way, because the time I have left is so limited. This Government also brought forward the Modern Slavery Act 2015. We have transformed the fight against sexual violence in conflict, persuading more than 150 states to agree for the first time that sexual violence should be recognised as a grave breach of the Geneva conventions. This is a record that we can be proud of, and are committed to building on. Our commitment will not falter or fail, but we need to restore some credibility to human rights, which many people in this country increasingly view as dirty words—an industry or bandwagon for lawyers, rather than a tradition to take pride in. We can do that by restoring common sense to the system. We are confident that we can deliver our common-sense reforms within the bounds and parameters of the European convention.

We have already sought and listened to views from practitioners, non-governmental organisations, academics and politicians right across the entire United Kingdom. We know there has been consistently strong public support for these measures. We will consult fully on our forthcoming proposals before introducing legislation, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch will, as ever, bring to bear his considerable expertise and experience at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe as we proceed with the Bill in the House.

Mr Chope: Does my hon. Friend agree that we will be much more able to implement his agenda if we leave the European Union?

Mr Raab: The relationship between the convention and the EU is complicated; we risk shedding more heat than light on the subject by conflating the two. It is certainly true to say that if we pulled out of the convention altogether, it would be something of an open invitation to the Luxembourg Court to fill the vacuum.

Question put and agreed to.

11.23 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 9 May 2016

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

EU Referendum Leaflet

4.30 pm

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 116762 relating to the Government's EU referendum leaflet.

The petition, which remains topical, had 219,535 signatures a few hours ago .

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The figure is now 219,553 and rising.

Paul Scully: I thank my right hon. Friend for bringing to my attention the extra 20 people who have been galvanised by the thought of this afternoon's debate. I want to read into *Hansard* the whole prayer of the petition, headed "STOP CAMERON spending British taxpayers' money on Pro-EU Referendum leaflets":

"Prime Minister David Cameron plans to spend British taxpayers' money on a pro-EU document to be sent to every household in the United Kingdom in the run up to the EU referendum. We believe voters deserve a fair referendum—without taxpayer-funded biased interceptions by the Government.

We, the petitioners, demand the Government STOPS spending our money on biased campaigning to keep Britain inside the European Union.

The Great British Public have waited since 1975 for a vote on our relationship with Brussels. No taxpayers' money should be spent on campaign literature to keep Britain inside the EU."

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Prime Minister could have learned something from Harold Wilson? Not only did he give a free vote, but the information that was circulated made both cases equally.

Paul Scully: I absolutely agree with the right hon. Lady. As Members will see as I develop my argument, it is important that we have a fair and level playing field for the important decision that we have to make on 23 June.

When an e-petition reaches 10,000 signatures, the Government must issue a response, and they have done so. I will read a brief extract, though I am sure that the Minister will expand on it when he responds. It states:

"This is a big decision for the country. The Government is determined that the public should be clear on what reforms have been agreed, and what EU membership means for the UK.

The Referendum Act requires the Government to publish reports that set out the outcome of the negotiation of our EU membership and the Government's opinion on that outcome and provide information on rights and obligations in EU law and on examples of countries that do not have EU membership but do have other arrangements with the EU."

The leaflet went to households across England between 11 and 13 April, but it is going to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland this week, to avoid the pre-election purdah rules in relation to last week's elections.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Does my hon. Friend hope, as I do, that it gets there before we disappear into a war?

Paul Scully: What can I say to that? I thank my hon. Friend.

The total cost of the leaflet and the website and marketing that go with it is £9.3 million of taxpayers' money. On top of that, the Treasury is publishing documents and the Government continue to have propaganda at the top of every gov.uk web page. At least that is not being posted to every house in hard copy at the expense of the resident receiving it.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I actually asked what the budget was for the entire campaign that the Government are conducting, and I was told that it was absorbed within other costs. That surely cannot be the case, and it certainly was not announced in the Budget.

Paul Scully: What worries me most about that answer is that the Treasury is projecting figures to 2030, but it cannot answer questions about Budgets now. That is of concern to me. Some colleagues have encouraged voters to return their leaflets to No. 10, but since that would mean even more cost to the taxpayer if they did it by freepost, I have not followed that line myself.

As might have been predicted, the publication of the leaflet has not been universally welcomed. Jonathan Isaby, chief executive of the TaxPayers Alliance, said:

"This is a disgraceful abuse of taxpayers' money. When cash is scarce and budgets are tight, politicians should not be wasting nearly £10 million of our cash on political propaganda.

The country is having an important debate about its relationship with the EU and it is essential that it is held on a level playing field."

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent introduction to the debate. Four hundred and seventy-six of my constituents were so outraged that they signed the petition. Is not the main point that the publication of the leaflet goes against the very British sense of fair play? We want a level playing field in the referendum, but the Government are trying to stack the odds in their favour.

Paul Scully: My hon. Friend is right, and I am glad that Mr Isaby said exactly that. It is important that people in the public eye who have the ear of the press have expressed that opinion.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): The TaxPayers Alliance is neutral in the debate. It is important to bear in mind the fact that it issued a statement only because of the waste of taxpayers' money; it is not taking a side in the referendum itself.

Paul Scully: Absolutely. As many such organisations find, its members are split either way, so it is right for it to take a neutral view on the main question. That does not mean that it cannot be concerned about the £9.3 million which, as Jonathan Isaby says, is

"not 'government money', it is all taxpayers' money".

He concludes by saying that

"it is deplorable that ministers see fit to use it to try and instruct us how to vote."

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Of course, my hon. Friend knows that that is happening in pursuance of a legal duty introduced into the House of Lords, which became part of our legislation through ping-pong. Is he also aware that I tabled an amendment calling for accuracy and impartiality in that information, which the Minister for Europe, who is here today, told me there certainly would be? Do we not expect a proper answer from him this afternoon?

Paul Scully: I am sure that the Minister has heard that, and I hope that he will respond in full to the debate.

Katie Ghose of the Electoral Reform Society expressed similar concerns, and after the referendum on Scottish independence the Electoral Commission warned the Government over taxpayer-funded propaganda, saying that it could give an

“unfair advantage to one side of the argument”.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Is this not a terribly easy case? No previous Labour or Conservative Government have ever thought they should spend taxpayers’ money on promoting Government policies ahead of a general election in the hope of getting a better result. Is that not exactly what the leaflet is doing, and is it not therefore a scandal?

Paul Scully: Absolutely. The Government are taking many difficult decisions across the five years of this Parliament, but we do not need to write in full to every household to explain why we are doing it. That is why the media and websites are there, and that is what Parliament is there for—we can report on that through our speeches and debates. I am not sure that the Government’s case for remaining is being helped, because it is likely that the contents of the leaflet will be long forgotten by the start of the purdah period on 27 May, but the £9.3 million price tag will still resonate with voters.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Since my hon. Friend mentions the content of the leaflet, does he find it strange that there is no mention in it of the existential risk of war and genocide? Does he think that is because a) the Government had not recognised that the risk existed, b) they recognised it but were unwilling to contemplate it, or c) it is a complete fabrication?

Paul Scully: I will come back to that, but that multiple choice question is interesting, because it reminds me of the website www.eureferendum.gov.uk, which goes with the leaflet. We are told that it will be up all the way through to 23 June. It majors on pro-Remain propaganda and contains a pdf of the leaflet. It also has an EU quiz, which I had a go at. I fared pretty well on how well I knew the EU. I got a pat on the back:

“You’re clearly well informed about the EU.”

Unfortunately, it is exactly for that reason that I will be voting to leave on 23 June. What worries me is that less informed people will buy the line that disaster will unfold if we leave. Surely that cannot be the case. A responsible Government would not go through the whole process of having a referendum when one of the two results would lead to the UK going to hell in a handcart, would they?

Ms Gisela Stuart: During the passage of the Lisbon treaty, the then shadow Foreign Secretary, William Hague, referred to the red card of national Parliaments only ever being invoked if something like the slaughter of the first born was proposed. As the red card was part of the Prime Minister’s deal, does the hon. Gentleman agree that that could be the next threat—one that is not mentioned in the leaflet?

Paul Scully: The right hon. Lady is absolutely right. It is interesting that the orange card in the Lisbon treaty has been replaced by the red card in the reforms secured by the Prime Minister, which sets a higher bar for reversing or rejecting legislation proposed by the EU.

As we have heard, back in February the Prime Minister ruled nothing out if he did not manage to succeed in securing reforms. Those reforms, meagre as they were, were based mainly on pull factors for migration and avoiding deeper integration. He and the remain campaign have gone as far as saying that we might be risking a war if we vote to leave. Is that really what this debate has been reduced to—cheap holidays or war?

I am pleased to see that the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), has taken a more measured view. He worked through the possible effects on our foreign policy of two positive options, in a report agreed unanimously by his Committee, before coming to his decision in favour of Brexit only today.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is right that the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee has done extraordinarily well. Has he seen the article in *The Daily Telegraph* today by the distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), who comes out very strongly indeed and says that what the Prime Minister is talking about with regard to war is complete and utter nonsense? Surely the Chairman of the Defence Committee must know better than the Prime Minister.

Paul Scully: I will leave my hon. Friend to be the judge of that. There is nothing in the leaflet about the actual option available to voters, which is between a UK able to take its own democratic decisions and an EU emboldened by our thumbs up to further integration.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I used my leaflet to light my fire on a cold Yorkshire night; it was a thoroughly useful use of taxpayers’ money. Is not a more important point that, if we vote to remain in by a very small margin—say, less than in the Scottish referendum—a large part of the electorate, including many in my constituency, will feel that the result has been fiddled precisely because of this wasted document that we have all been provided with?

Paul Scully: I really hope that we do not get to that. All Conservative Members in the 2015 intake, no matter what side of the debate we stand on, have signed a letter to say that, come 24 June, we will come together and abide by the result, because we have a Government to support, a country to help to run and difficult decisions to continue to make. It is important that we come

together. We do not want anything to push people towards a sense of unfair treatment on one side or another. My hon. Friend makes a good point.

The Five Presidents' report shows the direction of travel, should we vote to remain. It sets out plans for fiscal and political union, further pooling of decision making on national budgets and harmonisation of insolvency law, company law, property rights and social security systems. It makes it clear that those plans are to be pursued as single market measures applying to all 28 states. The Governor of the Bank of England admits there are risks of remaining in the European Union, in particular in relation to the development of the euro area. We have been roped into bail-out packages before, despite assurances that that would no longer happen. The latest guarantee, I am afraid, is no better. The *Financial Times* reports that it has seen the German draft White Paper pushing for progress towards a European army. That was due to emerge in June but is now being held back until July. Make no mistake: should we vote to remain, the European club will not be the same as the one we are already in for long.

The EU budget relentlessly increases. Only last month, Jean-Claude Juncker told my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) that he did not have to answer to her when she asked him what he was doing to bear down on the EU budget at a time when member states were having to bear down on budgets. That is not the answer of a man who cares much about greater accountability; that is the view of a man who wants to be left alone to get on with the project without interference from irritating ingrates.

Voting to stay in is not the same as voting to stay put. Despite the leaflet having positive headlines on each page, the body of the text suggests, in a number of ways, that the only way is Europe and that we are stuffed if we leave. Some are implied. For example, it suggests that many jobs might be lost, via the dubious claim that 3 million jobs are linked to the EU—a link described by the academic on whose study that figure was based as “pure Goebbels”. That link, by the way, first came about in around 2000 as a reason for joining the eurozone.

Some claims are more direct but simplistic and with little merit, such as the EU abolishing roaming charges. I can either wait until next year to use my EE phone in the EU at the same rate as I pay in the UK, or I can use my other phone, which is on the Three network, to travel today to EU countries, as well as Hong Kong, Indonesia, Israel, Macau, New Zealand, Norway, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and the USA, with absolutely no roaming charges. I do not have to wait for the EU to catch up with me.

That is another way in which the free market is far more agile than an unwieldy 1950s political project that is representing a smaller proportion of global trade over time as the rest of the world overtakes, despite the number of EU states tripling since we first joined. The economy of every continent has grown over the past decade except that of Antarctica and that of Europe. It is baffling that we should shackle ourselves to a political project with a limited vision to continue being a regional power, rather than looking further and using our attributes to be a global trading nation. Why are we paying to be a member of the world's only stagnant customs union?

The leaflet claims that, as the UK is not part of the EU's border-free zone, we control our own borders. We can certainly check passports at our border, and we can refuse entry to those without any valid identity documents. However, that is not the same as saying that we can refuse entry to anyone from other EU countries if they have valid documents, and it is certainly not the same as saying that we can control immigration.

Mrs Main: Following a recent answer to a question I asked on how many people are turned away from this country, it seems that 20 times more applicants from non-EU countries are turned away than those from EU countries. That shows that, unless people are particularly criminal outside the EU, we have only cursory checks and a cursory ability to stop people from EU countries coming in.

Paul Scully: My hon. Friend makes a good point. My father was born in Burma. I have seen the good side of immigration, but mass uncontrolled immigration has a major effect on our infrastructure and public services—the NHS, housing and school places. We cannot tackle that effectively with one arm tied behind our back. Even the Treasury report uses the assumption that the Government will fail in their policy commitment to reduce immigration to the tens of thousands, not just this year, but every year until 2030.

That is not the platform on which I stood last year, when immigration was such a huge issue on the doorstep in Sutton and Cheam, as it was around many parts of the country. The equivalent of the population of a city the size of Newcastle comes to the UK from the EU each year. Apart from the obvious lack of ability to control those numbers, those people join the queue in front of migrants from outside the EU who may have more suitable qualifications and skills that we need or desire in this country.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) mentioned the leaflets produced for the original 1975 referendum. Page 11 of one of those leaflets claimed:

“No important new policy can be decided in Brussels or anywhere else without the consent of a British Minister answerable to a British Government and British Parliament.”

Well, something has changed over the last few years, has it not? The reality 41 years later is that 65% of our laws, regulations and directives come from Brussels. The emergency brake on migration benefits is not applied by the UK; it is applied by Brussels. The red card system that is held up as a meaningful renegotiation success actually raises the bar for vetoing EU legislation, compared with the current orange card under the Lisbon treaty. Contributions to eurozone bail-outs are still a threat, despite assurances to the contrary, as we have seen before. We are contributing financially towards Turkey's pre-accession assistance, despite assurances that it will not be a member any time soon.

Enough is enough. We have the fifth largest economy. We have the fourth largest army. We speak the language of business. We have the ideal geographic location for world trade, and we have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Yes, there are risks on either side, but I am confident that we are big enough, bold enough and entrepreneurial enough as a nation to manage that risk and to thrive if we vote to leave.

[Paul Scully]

That vote to leave is a vote to take control, to bring decision making back to accountable people here in the UK and to decide how we spend up to £350 million per week here in the UK on the NHS, schools, housing and other vital services. It is that positive vision that I will be sharing with people. I perfectly understand the anger and frustration of the petitioners, who see their money—taxpayers' money, not Government money—spent on propaganda. Even some remainers are quietly dismayed and uncomfortable at that move. I hope that the circling establishment, led by the Government, will cut the hyperbole and exaggerated claims.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned the 1975 referendum, but there is a cautionary tale about that. In 1974, 36% of the population told pollsters that they were opposed to our membership of the then Common Market. The Government and the equivalent of the remain campaign outvoted the leavers by 10 to one with lies, innuendos and supposition. We should be aware, and the Government should be aware, that they can outvote us 10 to one, but there will be a tremendous sense of grievance about it.

Paul Scully: As my hon. Friend outlines, that grievance has lasted for 41 years. That is something we want to avoid at all costs. We must ensure that the decision that the British people take is taken freely and fairly, with as much information—unbiased, impartial information—as possible, and after listening to the two campaign groups. It is important that the Government do not continue to stack the decks on a vital constitutional question that will have long-term consequences far beyond the careers of any of us in this Chamber. That is why the question is rightly being put to the British people in a referendum. Let us make our cases fairly and freely and trust the people of Britain to make the right decision.

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): I call Kate Hoey.

Mr James Gray: On a point of order, Mr Evans. Would it not be normal in a debate such as this, having heard from a speaker in favour of the motion, to hear from a speaker opposed to it? Would that not be better? As I understand it, the hon. Lady is on our side. Is there not someone who would advance the opposite case?

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): You have been here long enough, Mr Gray, to know that we go from one side to the other. Kate Hoey caught my eye and therefore Kate Hoey has been selected to speak next. As we go back and forth, if other hon. Members on the Opposition side catch my eye, irrespective of whether they are for or against the motion, I will clearly be in a position to call them.

4.52 pm

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Evans. I will not take up my share of the time for the vast array of Labour MPs sitting here! I know that many hon. Members want to speak, so I will just say a few words. I am sorry that so few of my colleagues are here and that our Front-Bench spokesperson will presumably put the case that this leaflet is a wonderful way of spending

public money. I am clear that the people who signed the petition feel very strongly that it is a waste of public money and, indeed, that many of them, as I think has been said, were remainers. Many people just felt that this was not fair.

We went through the process and got legislation about referendums, and one aspect of that is that there is a campaign on each side. Each campaign is formally accepted, designated and can spend certain amounts of money and do certain things. They are the people who should be putting the arguments back and forth, apart from all the discussions that are going on anyway in our pubs and supermarkets. I think it is quite shameful that the Prime Minister has seen fit to go against what he would always personally argue about being fair and the British system of doing things—how we do things in this country.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con) *rose—*

Kate Hoey: Of course I will give way to the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

Mr Jenkin: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who is a fellow member of the Committee. Will she recall that, last summer, we fought valiantly to stop the Government taking powers to limit the application of section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, which would have allowed the Government to carry on campaigning in this manner in the last 28 days of the campaign? Is it not now clear that they were presenting excuses to us as to why they needed those flexibilities? It was simply so that they could carry on exploiting the system, as they are planning to exploit the system and possibly even breach section 125 by keeping up their websites for the entire campaign instead of taking them down for the last 28 days.

Kate Hoey: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. He and other members of the Committee feel so strongly about this matter that they are prepared to take very strong action if we do not get agreement from the Government to take the websites down. What is even more amazing to the public is this. When they talk about “the Government”, it is the Cabinet, and the Cabinet is actually split on this matter. If the Government were really being fair, two thirds of the leaflet would have been from one side and one third would have been from the Brexit side.

Andrew Percy: Is not the situation even worse than that? The official policy of the party of government is neutrality.

Kate Hoey: I do not normally look at the detail of Conservative party policy, but I am very pleased to hear and to repeat that. I felt very angry when the leaflet came out. I looked through it and saw all the so-called facts that we can go through and spend a lot of time pulling to pieces, but when it comes down to it, I have great confidence in the common sense of the British public. I think they will already have seen through the leaflet and seen it for what it is—full propaganda. Then, of course, we wake up literally every day to another shock-horror dreadful scare story. The stories become

more ridiculous every day, today's one being just about the most ridiculous possible—that we are threatened with war. In fact, it is absolutely shameful, because there are some people in this country who believe Prime Ministers and who will be slightly worried about that. It is absolutely shameful that the level of debate from the leadership of this country is so trivial and ridiculous that they come up with scare stories such as that.

Dr Fox: The hon. Lady should not believe that we have heard the worst—we have not yet got to plague and pestilence or the imminent asteroid impact that will happen if we vote to leave the European Union. Is this not more than a question of money or even fairness or the rubbish content of the leaflet itself? Is not the real importance here the fact that it may, if there is a very tight result, call into question the legitimacy of the result itself? Does the hon. Lady agree that those who believe that they should win the referendum at any price might want to consider what “any price” might look like?

Kate Hoey: That is a very important point. The one thing that we all said when we were debating the details of the referendum Bill was that the referendum had to be seen as free and fair. At the moment, I do not have confidence in its being free and fair, and I do not even have confidence that if, nearer the time, it looks like those who wish to leave are winning, something will not happen to make it even less free and fair. I genuinely have that concern, and it is a shocking thing even to be thinking as a democratically elected Member of this great House of Commons.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I refer hon. Members to my declaration of interest as a director of Grassroots Out Ltd. One thing that seems to be causing great confusion in the country is the statement on the back of the leaflet about needing to register to vote in order to participate in the referendum. Does the hon. Lady agree that Ministers need to do more to set the record straight? The fact is that if people are on the electoral register, they are registered to vote; it is wrong and misleading to suggest otherwise.

Kate Hoey: That is a very important point. I hope the Minister will clarify how the Government will do more to reassure people that they do not have to re-register if they are already on the register, because many people are worried about that.

While we are talking about all the different scare stories, I have been thinking about the way every time the Prime Minister speaks or some of the remainers speak, they challenge us on which international figures support our leaving the European Union. I just have this vision that the Prime Minister will do something so that one morning we will wake up and hear on the “Today” programme that President Putin has asked us to stay in the European Union. That is the level to which I think we have got.

Dr Julian Lewis *rose*—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): Order. Before we hear from Dr Lewis, let me just say that I am sure that each and every one of you has an interesting ringtone on

your mobile phone, but I do not want to hear them during the debate, so please check that your phones are in silent mode.

Dr Lewis: For a moment, I thought that that “Ride of the Valkyries” ringtone meant that the remainers were coming late to try to save the day. Has the hon. Lady not noticed a certain inconsistency in the Government's position? They try to frighten us with the fact that President Putin, evidently, would like us to leave, whereas it is regarded as praiseworthy that the President of communist China wants us to remain. It seems to me that there is an element of cake and eating it at the same time.

Kate Hoey: Fortunately, the people who will ultimately decide are our constituents. There is one vote for everyone. We are all equal here. Everybody will have their say and, I hope, we will not be relying on President Obama or on any other President.

Mr Jenkin: It is worth remembering that it is not the first time that the United States of America has misconstrued its own interests. President Roosevelt did not want Churchill to fight Hitler. He wanted us to make peace with Mussolini. Ronald Reagan pleaded with Margaret Thatcher not to take the Falkland Islands by military force but to do some kind of shared sovereignty deal with a south American dictator. Our allies may be our allies, but they are not always right.

Kate Hoey: Indeed, President Obama was quite wrong. When I was in Washington last weekend, we met a lot of senior Democrats and Republicans who said to us quite publicly, behind the scenes, that the UK leaving the EU would really not make any difference whatever to the United States. That is what the ordinary political person in America thinks. However, the vast majority of the American public do not even know what the EU is, so what President Obama said is not too worrying.

It annoyed me so much that one of the facts in the leaflet is:

“The UK has secured a special status in the EU.”

I have read a lot about that and have been through various documents, and I would love to see where that wording is actually included in the renegotiation document by the Heads of Government.

The renegotiation is not legally binding. The hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) has done a lot of work on that in the European Scrutiny Committee. We cannot be confident that the aim of ever closer union will, in any way, do anything other than to take the renegotiation into account. It is so ridiculous that that has been put in, and I want the Minister to respond to that point.

Ms Gisela Stuart: I raised that point with the Prime Minister and asked him whether he could cite a single occasion when ever closer union was the sole basis for legal judgment. He wrote back to me admitting that there was not an example.

Kate Hoey: That “fact” is therefore completely untrue. Although I do not want us to spend more public money, we really should produce another leaflet pointing out all the things that are wrong in this one.

Sir William Cash: It is a question not only of whether the renegotiation is legally binding, but of whether it is legally binding and irreversible. It is not.

Kate Hoey: I always bow to the hon. Gentleman's wisdom. I will not go through all the facts in the leaflet because I am sure that everybody would like to mention particular points.

When someone writes the history of this Administration and, particularly, of this Prime Minister, the way the Prime Minister has behaved on this matter will go down as very sad. It is eating into the kind of country the UK is. He should be ashamed of what he is doing. I just hope that, in some way, the response here and from the public will make him realise that he is clearly showing the country that he is deeply frightened about what will happen on 23 June. If that is the reason that all the scare stories are coming out, I am pleased. On 23 June, I want the Great British public to speak out, get out to vote and take us out of the anti-democratic EU.

5.4 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): My fellow European Scrutiny Committee member, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), so rightly referred to scaremongering. I simply say that there is nothing to fear but fear itself. Those words will haunt the Prime Minister in due course.

The leaflet arises from sections 6 and 7 of the European Referendum Act 2015. The words were only introduced, with a degree of connivance, I would suggest, in the House of the Lords, and came back to the House of Commons on ping-pong. We did not actually have an opportunity properly to look at the wording, which imposes a legal duty on the Government to provide information.

I tabled an amendment on the question of accuracy and impartiality. As the matter was drawing to a vote, I was besieged by various buzzing bees, who suggested that I should withdraw the amendment. I said, "No, I will not, unless I know that the Minister will answer the question I am putting to him." The question was like this: "Yes or no—will he accept that the information must be accurate and impartial?" The Minister replied, "Certainly," and said it would be "perverse" to do otherwise. He remembers that and knows perfectly well that I am saying exactly what happened.

When such a senior and highly respected Minister in the House of Commons replies on the Floor of the House specifically to the question of withdrawing an amendment, it is regarded by all of us on both sides of the House as being binding on the Government. I simply cannot accept that that has in any way been fulfilled. I am sorry to have to say that I regard it as disgraceful that this leaflet has been produced in those circumstances. It is not accurate and it is not impartial. In fact, a whole slew of White Papers have been produced in pursuance of those two sections of the Act.

To add insult to injury, when a White Paper is presented to Parliament—unlike the leaflet, which goes to all the households—by the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Europe, the ministerial code kicks in. In Prime Minister's questions, I asked the Prime Minister whether he accepted the White Papers were in breach of the accuracy and impartiality prescribed in the framework of the ministerial code, for which he has direct responsibility.

It is up to him to make certain that those are reviewed as the situation could even lead to resignation by senior Ministers and Cabinet Ministers. This is a very grave and serious matter. It is not just a question of whether we like it or not.

I entirely agree with and commend the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), who laid out many of the issues and the reasons for the petition. We ought to be 100% behind the petition for all the reasons that so many hon. Members are here today. A serious issue lies beneath the petition, which is that what has happened is a serious breach of the ministerial code. Nobody can argue that those White Papers fulfil the criteria.

With regard to the issue of war, the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) were extremely apposite. The reality is that none of that is in the documents, and nor is the catastrophic effect that the Chancellor of the Exchequer yesterday alleged would happen with regard to leaving the single market in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Jonathan Lord). The plain fact is that the omissions—to get this right regarding impartiality and to be anything other than economical with the truth—are of the gravest concern to the people of this country. They are being asked to go to the polling booths on 23 June on the basis of arguments to which they have a right, particularly as they are paying for it and for the running of the machinery of government, which is being thrown behind the referendum, despite the fact that we won the argument on purdah. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) said, it is atrocious that the machinery of government is being used to put such material on the Government website. That would be regarded as unacceptable in any democratic country.

I take the view of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) on what happened in 1975, and I was around in 1975—in fact, I have been around since 10 May 1940, so it is my 76th birthday tomorrow. As it happens, I was born on the day that Hitler decided to invade France and Holland, and Churchill became Prime Minister that evening, so I take particularly badly to the Prime Minister's references to what Churchill would think about all this. We were drawn into that war by unprovoked aggression and, with respect to the questions of defence and other matters contained in these documents, I do not believe for one minute that the people who fought and died in the war, as my father did, would ever have believed that we would be where we are now as a result of the sacrifice they made.

Dr Julian Lewis: My hon. Friend has just anticipated my intervention. I recently raised that point at Prime Minister's questions, because I know my hon. Friend does not normally touch on it. His father paid the ultimate sacrifice at the battle of Normandy, having won the Military Cross. He lies in France, having secured the freedom of the people of not only Britain but France to rule themselves. We now have a little video, timed to coincide with the Prime Minister's speech, showing four veterans of world war two saying that they were fighting for a united Europe, but I very much doubt that that is the view of the vast majority of people who fought and died in that campaign.

Sir William Cash: I endorse my right hon. Friend's intervention. It also made me particularly angry to hear Mr Juncker say that Eurosceptics should go and visit war cemeteries—people will understand the impact of that comment on someone like me—and I deeply resented President Obama's reference to the same matter with respect to both United Kingdom and American troops. My father fought with American troops, and I am absolutely certain that the kind of undemocratic, dysfunctional, authoritarian, centralised system represented by the European Union, which does not work, is the antithesis of what they fought for. I want to get that firmly on the record.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is a measure of the remain campaign's desperation that it has to invoke the memory of those who died fighting dictatorships in order to try to present its case as patriotic when, in fact, we know from all the language that the campaign uses that it wants to do the country down?

Sir William Cash: The hon. Gentleman is right. I would go further, with reference to the historical analogies that permeate these documents and what the Prime Minister said today, and say that the very idea that Brexit would create war completely turns on its head the reality that, for at least four centuries, this country was drawn into all the wars in which it has been engaged by the desire of those in Europe to create European empires. That started, for example, with Philip of Spain and the armada, and later there were the Dutch wars, the Napoleonic wars and the first and second world wars. Those are realities. We were drawn into those wars. If we leave the European Union, we will be able to stand alone and, as we did in 1940, remind people that we are not going to be part and parcel of this dysfunctional system, which has so much instability and insecurity built into it that it is bound to lead to deep disturbance. Our attempt to make sense of all that has led us to argue so strongly for so many years that this European Union is dysfunctional, which is why, ultimately, we have to leave it.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall referred to the European Scrutiny Committee's reports. She is an excellent member of the Committee, which I have the honour to chair. In the Liaison Committee's examination of the Prime Minister last Wednesday, I was asked to go first after the Chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie). I explained to the Prime Minister and to the Committee why I believe that the voters are being cheated on 23 June and, ultimately, a false prospectus is being offered to them. The reason is simple: the outcome of the question of whether there will be a full-on treaty change, which we were promised, cannot be guaranteed, if at all, until after the vote. When the voter goes to the voting booth and votes, they simply will not know whether, for example, there will be a treaty change, whether the European Court will intervene, whether there will be a change of Government or whether there will be a referendum in any other country on the basis of the changes that are made. The outcome of any one of those questions cannot be guaranteed under any circumstances, so I allege that requiring people to vote in such circumstances is cheating the voters.

I was most impressed to see the numbers on the petition, and it may be of interest to Members to know that the clip of my allegation that the Government and the Prime Minister are cheating the voters has now reached 175,000 viewings on Facebook, which is quite a lot. I strongly believe that that message is getting home to all the people who need to hear it.

The question of the single market seems to be so central to the economic case, the political case, the democratic case and the accountability case for why we should leave because it is in contradiction to what the people fought and died for in the last war. That is extremely important, but the Government also make an economic case in the leaflet, which talks about our having a massive single market:

“EU countries buy 44% of everything we sell abroad, from cars to insurance.”

What the leaflet does not say is outlined in a note I received from the House of Commons Library, and it is as simple as this. When we are trading with 27 other member states, the question of whether we have a deficit in goods and services, and in imports and exports, is the equivalent of asking whether we are making a loss in relation to those 27 member states. This is the answer from the House of Commons Library:

“UK trade deficit with EU countries: £67.8 billion”.

That is annual, and it is going up. That is a vast amount of money in our dealings with the single market, and it demonstrates that the single market does not work for us across the board. On the other hand—this is important—Germany has a £81.8 billion trade surplus with the 27 other member states. We make a loss of £67.8 billion, and they have a surplus of £81.8 billion. I do not have time to go into all the reasons, but it is a salutary lesson about the real value of the single market to us.

The UK's trade surplus with the rest of the world, in relation to the same goods and services on which we make such a monumental loss with the other 27 member states, was £31.1 billion last year, and it is growing. We have a bright future. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's accusation that leaving the single market would be catastrophic, the idea that we would end up at war if we do not carry out the diktat that the Government are issuing to the British people, and all the accumulated international bodies that are being brought in to support this flimsy argument that we should stay in, are all to be taken into account when people come to vote on 23 June.

I reject the manner in which the Government have gone about this. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam has done us a service in bringing this issue to the House, as have the petitioners. Jayne Adye deserves 100% credit for doing so. There is only one answer to this shambolic European Union, and that is to vote to leave it.

5.20 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Oh, the joys of email inboxes. I received an email about the leaflet; it had an attachment that I printed off. It looked much like the Government's leaflet, except that it was by “A British citizen”, who had written her own leaflet based on the Government's, called “Why I believe that voting to leave the European Union is the best decision for the UK”. I thought her leaflet made a darn sight more sense than the Government's. Given the

[Ms Gisela Stuart]

current debate about national security, I thought I would share what she wrote. The only reason why I do not name her is that I did not check whether it was all right to do so. She was happy for me to use the leaflet. Under “Keeping us safe”, she wrote:

“Our UK police and intelligence agencies do a fantastic job. There is no EU intelligence sharing arrangement, and there is unlikely to be one soon. Security and intelligence services are intrinsically secret organisations which share their information only with those they trust to keep their secrets. There are direct agreements between certain member states. These are not dependent on membership of the EU.”

Based on my impressions from reading the Sunday newspapers, she shows a greater understanding of how our intelligence services work than some of our former heads of MI5 and MI6, who put the facts in a way that suits their case.

Mr Jenkin: The Prime Minister discussed in his speech today the importance of sharing our intelligence with our European partners, but I am sure the right hon. Lady knows about the importance of our relationship with the United States, which spends \$52 billion a year on signals intelligence and gives us everything it has whenever we ask for it. It would not do that if it thought we would give it to the French and the Germans; it would cut us off instantly. That was its experience in the Kosovo campaign, when there were intelligence leaks to the French. It would simply not countenance supporting that intelligence relationship if we shared all our intelligence with our European allies, as the Prime Minister seemed to suggest we do in his ludicrous speech.

Ms Stuart: I could not agree more. The House is currently considering the Investigatory Powers Bill, and our intelligence services operate under strict democratic oversight processes that determine how they use data. Agreeing to European Union-wide intelligence sharing, or handing over data to systems when we are not even certain about the democratic scrutiny of those systems, is just not going to happen.

It is dangerous to distort historic events, given that the referendum has historic significance and that a whole generation of young people who have probably never experienced anything else will be voting. As it happens, tomorrow will be the 75th anniversary of the day when this House was severely damaged during bombing raids. Churchill made it clear that whatever happened, Parliament would have to go on. I see that I am getting a puzzled look; it was the night of 10 to 11 May. It was clear that the most important thing, even at the height of real attacks, was that democratic processes go on, because they were at the heart of this country.

There have been statements such as, “We have secured 70 years of uninterrupted peace in Europe.” Try saying that to the hundreds of thousands of Bosnians and Serbs who had to give their lives before the United Kingdom and the United States took action, without a UN mandate. When the European Union did get involved politically, it made a complete and utter hash of it. We must not lie to the young. I expect the old at least to be able to make up their own minds and have historical perspective.

I object to the final page of the leaflet. The Minister is looking at it; he needs to note this. People came up to me in my advice surgery saying, “Do I have to register to vote for the referendum?” I did not know what they were talking about until I looked at the back page, which says:

“If you’re aged 18 or over by 23 June and are entitled to vote, this is your chance to decide.”

So far, so good.

“Registration ends on 7 June. Find out how to register at aboutmyvote.co.uk and register online at gov.uk/register-to-vote.”

People are reading that to mean that they will have to register specifically for this vote. That is misleading.

It is also highly dubious to align the issuing of postal votes closely with the date on which purdah will kick in. The Electoral Commission is issuing postal votes very early on. In my understanding, the whole purpose of purdah is so that Government machinery will not unduly influence voters’ decisions. Electors are used to political parties taking sides, but they are not used to the Government, in their guise as the Government, taking deeply party political decisions. I want the Minister to show me that he has taken due account of that, so that purdah and the issuing of postal votes will not overlap and there will not be some Treasury report a day before the postal votes land on doormats telling us that we are all going to starve and start sending children up chimneys again. Will he have a word with the electoral registration officers about the misleading statement that has been made?

Similarly, we must put the costs of the leaflet into context. It has cost £9.3 million. The Electoral Commission was set up as an independent body to facilitate fair conduct of such a referendum. As part of that fair conduct, two organisations have been designated to make the case for and against. Those participating have strict financial limits. The Minister will have to explain to me why it is fair and proper to allow the in and out campaigns to raise £7 million each from individual sources, not Government money. There is a real misconception about that. People think that the campaigns have been given that money by the Government. They have not. They have been given permission to raise it. Yet the Government, in one mailshot, have spent more taxpayers’ money than they are spending on the whole process of facilitating the election. That kind of imbalance is simply wrong.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I have done some brief calculations on the back of an envelope. We have 650 MPs—let us say that each of us was entitled to £13,500. There are a couple of worthwhile projects in my constituency that I would have supported, including a new transport plan for St Teath. Does the right hon. Lady have any projects in her constituency on which she would have liked to spend that £13,500?

Ms Stuart: A couple of schools immediately come to mind, never mind hospitals.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): It might help the right hon. Lady to know that the Minister for Europe and I share a county in which the health trusts’ deficit this year is approximately the same as the amount of money spent on the leaflet.

Ms Stuart: The sad thing is that not only has that money not been spent more helpfully and usefully, it has been spent to undermine democratic processes. What worries me more than anything else is that this vote is meant to reinvigorate democracy and encourage participation, but it is causing increased mistrust and cynicism, which is not helpful.

Tom Pursglove: One thing that I know as a former local councillor is how much work local authorities and public bodies must do to prove value for money. Does the right hon. Lady think that the Minister will be able to set out for us what value-for-money steps were taken in the procurement?

Ms Stuart: I am sure that he could, but the problem is that it is a bit like spilt milk—once the damage is done, if we were to say that we wanted another leaflet putting the facts straight, that would simply compound the problem.

The only points that I want the Minister to respond to in his summing-up are how intends to redress the statement about voter registration and how he will deal with the situation with postal votes and purdah.

5.30 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The Government document is a disgrace. It is morally wrong, it is financially wrong and I think that it will backfire on them politically, which is the only good news in this otherwise rather sad debate. We should not need to do this. Any British democratic Government should understand that we want to have fair elections and referendums, and that we have a long tradition of not taking taxpayers' money to spend in promotion of party political purposes or other political purposes during an election or referendum. In my experience, no Government have ever taken taxpayers' money close to an election to propagandise for party policies. Nor should this Government be taking money from the many taxpayers who wish to leave the European Union in order to spend it on propaganda to try to thwart their wishes.

I was proud to stand in the general election on a platform of offering people a free choice and a free vote, after all these years when we have had no right to such a thing, and it is a great pity that it is being sullied by taking money from taxpayers and spending it in the distorting way that others have already mentioned.

I know that many other colleagues wish to speak, so I will concentrate on just two matters. This leaflet is extremely misleading and part of a very misleading campaign that is based on fear and misinformation about our relationship with the EU and what the EU is doing to us. The two claims in the leaflet that I wish to highlight go together in some ways. The leaflet says that we now have "a special status" and that often we can get our own way as a result of that special status. So I thought I would look at three crucial areas and ask, "Do we have a special status and are we getting our way?" Those areas are our right to choose our own taxes; our right to control our own borders; and our right to decide what benefits to give to which people who live in our community. All previous Governments who have negotiated treaties have always solemnly promised Parliament that we still had complete control over what taxes we raised, complete control over what benefits we

chose to spend our money on and complete control over our borders. I am afraid, however, that none of those things is true.

Let us take part of the negotiation—this special status. We were told that, as a result of the negotiation, changes would be made to the VAT system. It is clearly the settled will of this Parliament that the tampon tax should be abolished, and it is clearly illegal under European law to do so. It is also clear that last summer our European Union Commission took our Government to court and successfully prosecuted them for daring to set the VAT rate on green products—insulation, all sorts of boiler controls and other things that promote the green agenda—at 5% instead of at the full VAT rate, and of course the Commission successfully won that court case. So our Government are now under a legal requirement of the European Court of Justice to put our VAT up to 20%, although of course they have not done so before the referendum because it would be embarrassing and tedious for them to do so.

We were then told that this new special status means that that is going to change, so that we will not have to put up our VAT on green products and we will be able to get rid of the VAT on tampons. So I looked at the document that the EU has now issued following the negotiation to see whether that is indeed the case.

The first thing to note is that the consultation that the EU is holding on VAT reform is mainly about centralising and taking more powers to Brussels over VAT, not giving more powers to member states. The second thing to note is that the document makes absolutely no reference whatever to the EU-UK agreement, or to the special status that we asked for and we were told we had got on VAT. The third thing is that, in the talismanic last couple of paragraphs about whether it might be possible to offer more freedom to member states to choose their own rates of VAT, no mention is made of the rates that we wish to remove or keep low and no guarantee is offered that there will be any legislation forthcoming. Again, the document says that it is terribly important not to have tax competition within the single market and very important to have a central policy that has political support.

One has to read that document to understand that there is absolutely no agreement on special status and no agreement at all that the UK can choose its own VAT rates. That is a broken promise. Also, we are told by the Treasury that we will lose a series of court cases on corporation tax again in this Parliament. We lost many such cases in the last Parliament and it cost £7 billion of revenue, which the British Parliament wished to raise on corporations but had to give back, and the Treasury forecast is that we will lose another £7 billion in this Parliament in losing court cases in the ECJ. The Treasury has never suggested that this new special status will prevent that. Therefore, it is quite obvious that we cannot raise taxes from companies where we want to and we cannot cut taxes on consumers where we want to, and that we have no "special status".

If one then asks, "Is there a special status on borders?" the answer is, "No, of course, there isn't." We are governed by the freedom-of-movement provisions and that means we have to allow in anyone who can get a job or who is seeking work under the provisions of the freedom-of-movement clauses. The Government, who made a solemn promise to the electors to reduce the

[John Redwood]

number of migrants coming into the country—so that we can catch up with the need for more school places, more GP surgeries, more hospital capacity, more roads and more houses for people—are unable to fulfil that pledge in any way, and the Treasury has now admitted that that pledge is for the birds over the five years of this Parliament and all the way out to 2030. Goodness knows why the Treasury thought it could forecast to 2030, because it cannot even forecast for this year, let alone to 2030.

Mrs Main: My right hon. Friend has just made a fantastic point about the lack of transparency. Does he share my concern? An independent report states that 3.5 million people are expected to come in by that time—it will probably be considerably more than that—but there is no indication to the British people where they are going to go, and it is calculated that a quarter of a million acres of extra developed land will be required to provide the housing for those people coming in.

John Redwood: My hon. Friend is right—there is absolutely no proper provision for the very large number of people that the Treasury now admits are likely to come in. That is one of the few Treasury forecasts that I might believe. It is quite obvious that it could not forecast its own public spending, its own interest rates or anything in the recent Office for Budget Responsibility and Treasury documents. It had to make another revision again in the March Budget—it revised the forecast made in November—because it had found it difficult to grasp how the world might change between November and March. So there is this inability to forecast the economic numbers, but for once I think the Treasury may be honest in forecasting a substantial increase in migration. I suspect that the Treasury's estimate is an underestimate because it has been constantly underestimating these figures in recent years, and it proves that we have no control over our borders and no "special status" whatsoever.

The third area is benefits. The Prime Minister made a great deal about benefits in the renegotiation; it was one of the few areas where he really pushed quite hard to get reform in the way that Britain wanted. I think both major parties campaigning in the last election wanted, for example, to no longer have to pay child benefit to children who are not resident in our country, but apparently that is something that we cannot negotiate. There is no "special status" to allow us to decide that child benefit should go to children living in our country rather than to children living elsewhere. There is some kind of fudge whereby we could pay the benefit at the level that applies in that country, which means in some cases that we will have to pay a higher level of benefit, although in other cases it means we will pay a lower level of benefit. So there is absolutely no control there.

Again, both major parties wanted amendments so that people coming here to work under the freedom-of-movement provisions would not automatically get the full range of benefits until they had been here for a bit and made some kind of contribution. We were not able to get a guarantee on that, either. There is some sort of four-year clause as a temporary expedient, but the benefits have to be phased in over the four years and the negotiating aim was not met.

On the big three things, therefore, which all independent democratic countries control through their Parliaments and Governments, Britain is unable to exert control: we cannot decide what taxes to impose; we cannot decide what benefits to spend our money on; and we cannot control our own borders. So I have to submit that the Government are completely misrepresenting the position when they say that they have negotiated a "special status". They are completely wrong when they say that shows we can get our own way. They could not even get their own way on a very limited number of negotiating objectives at a point when they were threatening withdrawal and a referendum, so how will they ever get their way at all once the referendum is out of the way if, by any chance, the British people have not seen through this and voted to stay?

Sammy Wilson: Does the right hon. Gentleman find it strange that, although the Government claim to have special status on some issues—and he has proved they have not gained such status—they refer time and again to things that we have opted out of? They make a case for joining Europe, but they boast that through our special status, "We opt out of this, we opt out of the euro, we opt out of border controls—we opt out of a whole range of things." The Government are actually making a case for staying clear of the European project.

John Redwood: I agree. I always liken it to someone joining a football club and then announcing truculently that they have no wish to play football or watch football, getting cross when they go to club functions and people talk about football, and wanting to reduce the club subscription because, as they do not join in the football, they think they are overpaying. That is what the Government are doing to Europe. They do not want to join the single currency or Schengen, or the quota system for refugees. They do not like political union being talked about, although that is the EU's main purpose, and they think that the club subscription is too large. They are right about one thing: the club subscription is far too large for us because we do not believe in practically any of the club's purposes. Most of us would draw the conclusion, however, that the simplest thing to do would be to leave the club and spend the subscription on things we do like.

5.41 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) for an outstanding opening presentation and for taking so many friendly and supportive interventions. I also echo the thanks to the petition organisers, who have done a brilliant job. As of now we are at 219,560 signatories.

I have just one regret about the debate. It ought to have been held in the main Chamber of the House of Commons, because then we would have been able to have a vote at the end of it and put to the test the sincerity or otherwise of those who say that the Government have behaved decently, fairly and honourably, rather than deeply unscrupulously, over the production of this expensive leaflet. It was produced at the expense of taxpayers, most of whom—hopefully we will find this out on independence day, 23 June—do not believe the Government's argument.

I must make an observation on something quite striking here. I may be wrong, and I may have misinterpreted the voting intentions of some of the colleagues from various parties who are here today, but it seems that there is not a single right hon. or hon. Member here, other than the Front-Bench spokesmen for the Government, the official Opposition and the Scottish National party, who is likely to try to defend the production of the leaflet. If that is the case, it may well be that had a vote been possible, at least among Members in this Chamber, any motion deploring the Government's production of such a leaflet at such expense for the benefit of one side in a contested referendum debate would have been overwhelmingly carried.

There is something else I find deeply worrying about the whole process. It seems that the Government arrived at their conclusions first and are now scrabbling around ever more desperately for one new argument after another to buttress them. As right hon. and hon. Members have already asked, why were these terribly important arguments about war and peace not included in the leaflet that was sent out? Why, indeed, was the Prime Minister willing to threaten—during what appear, I am sorry to say, to have been sham negotiations in Europe—that if he did not get his way on whatever minor changes he was trying to get he would be prepared to leave the European Union? If war, pestilence, flood, boils, frogs and the rest of the 10 plagues of Egypt will descend on us—

Sir William Cash: The apocalypse.

Dr Lewis: The apocalypse as well. A future apocalypse, if not an immediate one. If all that is going to happen, why on earth was the Prime Minister ever willing to contemplate leaving the European Union in the first place?

Mrs Main: Does my right hon. Friend find it rather odd that we are so weak and pathetic that we cannot stand on our own, but are so strong that we are preventing all the other European countries from turning their arms on each other?

Dr Lewis: Indeed, and I will come to the question about war and peace a little further along, if I may.

It is a strange argument to suggest that out of something between 150 and 200 countries recognised at the United Nations, we, with the fifth strongest economy, are somehow deemed incapable of surviving outside the European Union. The vast majority of countries in the world do not, at least so far, belong to the 28-strong European Union network of nations. Who knows where the ambition will end? Perhaps one day half the countries in the world, or all of them, will belong to the European Union. One thing is clear, however. If countries are forced to integrate without the consent of the peoples concerned, the resultant political construct cannot possibly be run democratically.

Sir William Cash: Does my right hon. Friend accept that although we keep being told that we have to stay in the European Union because the other countries want and even need us for stability, democracy and accountability, the one thing that can be guaranteed to come out of the process of political integration is that we will be dumped into the second tier of a two-tier Europe, which I believe

will largely be run by Germany? The consequence will be that we will not have influence because of the majority voting system and the lack of democracy.

Dr Lewis: As in so many things, my hon. Friend is absolutely correct. Let us be in no doubt about this: if, heaven forbid, we vote to remain in the European Union on 23 June, other countries will know once and for all that our ability to assert any independence or influence within that organisation is done for.

Mr Jenkin: To pick up a refrain from the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), the entire construct of the document that we are discussing, and indeed of the Prime Minister's speech today, is that somehow we are withdrawing from Europe. We want to leave the European Union, which is a failing institution, but we want to remain an active member of NATO and remain engaged with our European allies and partners on all the matters that the European Union deals with. We just do not want to be told what to do as a member of the European Union.

Dr Lewis: Absolutely, and in which of the two alternative models can we more influence other European countries? We have one model in which we can express our view and, with a democratic decision of our own Parliament, pursue a policy to try to enact that view. Alternatively, we can take the view that we will have more influence by submerging our voting power in a collective pool of voters, with a construct made up of legislatures and commissioners appointed by the 27 other member countries as well as by Britain. We can be outvoted time and again by an overwhelming majority of other countries' Parliaments or commissioners and have our views totally disregarded.

It is understandable that people on the other side of the Atlantic who on two occasions, against their initial inclinations, have been forced into a conflict originating on the continent of Europe as a result of German militarism would prefer that Britain remain part of an organisation that they know can spell trouble for the United States of America in the future, just as it has in the past. However, they are making a fatal miscalculation if they think that we will be better able to keep the Governments of the remaining parts of Europe on some sort of track of common sense and reliable policy making by being outvoted by them at every turn. We need a system in which we can make our criticisms, and if those criticisms are not accepted we can go on making them and formulate policies to try to mitigate the effects of foolish policies that others might adopt.

I must say that the developments we have seen in the past couple of days are frankly very worrying. First there was the use of intelligence chiefs to say publicly that we would somehow be less safe in our intelligence sharing if we left the EU. At least one of the two intelligence chiefs concerned told me privately that we would be no worse off. We have seen that before—we saw the same operation when Downing Street tried to get a large number of retired military figures to sign up to a letter. Several of them did, but quite a lot of them refused. One of those whose signature was attached had not agreed, and Downing Street had to apologise to him. Another who had reluctantly agreed said that it

[Dr Julian Lewis]

was nevertheless unpleasant that he felt pressured to sign and that it was not the sort of letter he would have written himself.

Let not the Government turn around with innocence in their eye and say, “Good heavens, the very idea that we would try to manipulate senior figures or public opinion is outrageous.” The reality is that they have been caught doing it before. For that reason, they probably did not do it directly with the two intelligence chiefs, but we all know the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s official line on Britain remaining in Europe. No. 10 would not have to do a great deal to persuade a former senior diplomat—later the head of an intelligence agency—to put forward a line amenable to the Government’s standpoint.

Kate Hoey: Does the right hon. Gentleman think that many of the people who are being asked to do things on behalf of the Prime Minister—or indeed the Prime Minister himself—are looking towards a future job with the European Union, perhaps when they retire from whatever they are doing at the moment?

Dr Lewis: I would not like to attribute any particular motivation. It may often go no further than the fact that for someone with a long and honourable record of public service, who is used to serving democratically elected Governments, it is very difficult to refuse a request from high up in the political establishment—possibly from the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister’s representative—that they should speak out in support of Government policy. Let us put it this way: to refuse might be deemed ungrateful and against the ethos of civil servants’ obedience to Government rule. One does not have to look for base motives; one can simply say that it would take a special sort of independence of mind for someone to tell the Prime Minister or his representative that they were not going to help out in his hour of need.

It certainly seems to be an hour of need, because the reality is that the campaign seems to be getting more and more desperate and unscrupulous. Everything the remain campaigners do seems to be unavailing in shifting public opinion. The further they dig themselves into holes through dodgy tactics, the harder it becomes to defend them. I revert to what I said at the beginning: it appears that no Back Bencher is willing to attend the debate and speak up in favour of the Government’s tactics in producing this one-sided leaflet. These things do not happen by accident.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it goes further than that? Many Back Benchers—I include myself among them—feel desperately let down by the Government. We genuinely had an open mind. In my case, I am generally Eurosceptic, but we genuinely wanted to see what the Prime Minister came back with from the negotiations before we made up our mind. Now we discover that the Government had no intention of ever recommending that we should leave, and were completely set on the remain campaign from the very beginning.

Dr Lewis: Yes, it is absolutely clear that the Government are and always have been set on remaining come what may. The manoeuvres do not happen by accident. It is

no accident that there appears to be a total boycott of the debate by Members from the remain side of the argument, other than the Front Benchers who have to be here. It was no coincidence that we had the intervention from the retired heads of MI5 and MI6 just 24 hours before the Prime Minister made his speech today. Such things are orchestrated. I can only assume that the more questionable the Government’s tactics come to be, the less able they will be to find people to stand up and defend them.

I had better bring my remarks to a close, because many other Members wish to speak. I do not know whether the debate will go right to 7.30 pm, but although I will stay as long as I can, I apologise for the fact that I will not be here for the winding-up speeches if the debate goes to its full length.

The Government’s only defence of the leaflet, which they have produced at such great cost to the public purse, is, “We can only look at the facts honestly, and the facts as we see them all come down on one side of the argument.” If that were honestly the case, there would be no need for a referendum in the first place. There would not be huge disagreement among a large part of the population with the idea that Britain should remain in an organisation hellbent on doing away with the system of parliamentary democracies that has kept the peace and replacing it with an undemocratic supranational Government. That could bring about the tensions and conflicts that always happen when we do not have democratic Governments dealing with other democratic Governments. Who can name an example of a modern democratic Government of one country going to war with a modern democratic Government of another? No one, because it does not happen. The idea that breaking up our system of peace-loving democracies and shoehorning people into a supranational state will somehow keep the peace rather than undermine it clearly shows that the Government have entered into something of an “Alice Through the Looking Glass” existence.

I once again thank everyone who has contributed to the debate so far. I am sure that when the time comes, the country will seize its one and only opportunity. If the Government win, they will expect us to accept defeat with good grace, just as we would expect them to accept defeat with good grace if we win. In reality, by adopting one-sided tactics such as producing this propaganda leaflet at public expense, they are delegitimising the result, and no one will benefit from that.

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

5.59 pm

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) on taking up the e-petition. No doubt it probably now has nearly 220,000 signatures. My constituents often say, “E-petitions make no difference. No one is really listening. What is the point of signing them?” but this debate shows clearly that that is not the case.

When the leaflet dropped through the door, I got three copies. I am not entirely sure why.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I also received three copies, which seems extremely unusual, and it enhanced the irritation that I felt. Does my hon. Friend agree that the leaflet shows a lack of value for money for taxpayers?

Mrs Trevelyan: Indeed. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I think that value for money was not given a great deal of consideration when the document was published.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Two hundred and one of my constituents signed the petition, as did 214 constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson). The leaflet has not been sent to the people of Northern Ireland yet, and yet the anger grows. Since the arguments for the Government's proposition in the leaflet have been shot through so convincingly, does the hon. Lady believe that the Minister should at least take the honourable step of saying, "Enough is enough; we recognise we made a mistake and we will not send it to the devolved regions"?

Mrs Trevelyan: I hope the Minister takes note of that and perhaps saves the taxpayer a little bit of the money that the Government have so unscrupulously chosen to spend.

I want to look at one section of the leaflet—the wider issues have already been raised by other hon. Members and will no doubt be covered in more detail. The heading on page 7 is, "What happens if we leave?" That is clearly an open question—it sounds like an A-level question. One would expect the answer to cover both sides of the argument, presenting the for and the against, and giving a bit of detail and a concluding position, but it is clearly from one side of the argument. Apparently, voting to leave would create uncertainty and "potential economic disruption". "Potential" leaves a little uncertainty. I think we have had definite economic disruption forever. Economies go up and they go down. Anyone who suggests that staying in a particular bubble will maintain some kind of economic stability has not been looking out of the window much.

Richard Drax: On that particular point, the leader of the opposition, Mr Rose, said there would be no change at all.

Mrs Trevelyan: My hon. Friend is right. It is always a little confusing when leaders of opposing camps in any election start to talk about the other side's views. I hope that uncertainty and economic disruption will not be caused by Brexit. It is safe to say that we see much ahead of us that could cause that anyway.

The question of what happens if we leave is presented in the leaflet. What is not offered for those who have had the pleasure of having it through their door, or who have that pleasure still to come, is the question of what would voting to stay look like, since we know what would happen if we leave. It would ensure that we remain wedded with almost no influence, as several colleagues have already said. We are outwith the battered and struggling eurozone framework, but we are wedded to it. We are seeing Greek residents yet again put under unbearable financial strain so that EU bankers can circulate IMF money through Greece to ensure that the bankers do not come off too badly because of the euro chaos going on there. That is something we will definitely stay attached to in our uncontrolled sector outwith the eurozone, but that will cost us money. We will have to continue, as required, to bail out future eurozone crashes.

Jim Mellon, a successful entrepreneur who works across a large number of EU states, has made it clear—his forecasts, unlike the Treasury's, have often been accurate—that the likely next crash of the euro, possibly a complete crash, will be within the next three years. It seems to me that voting to stay in will almost certainly ensure that we are wedded to a big bill over which we have little control, watching nations around us suffer even greater debt. The reality is that France's and Italy's debt balance sheet is pretty unsustainable. The chances are that the bill will be a lot bigger than just Greece's costs. It is clear what will happen if we choose to stay.

The Government leaflet briefly suggests that we might strike a good deal in terms of trade with the EU if we were to leave, but it goes on to dismiss that as a pie-in-the-sky idea that is incredibly unlikely, because, somehow, there is no reason why a trade deal would be struck. The leaflet indicates that 8% of EU exports come to the UK and that 44% of UK exports go to the EU. That sounds terrible: 8% in, 44% out. That is a big imbalance, but let us look at that in real terms—my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) mentioned this earlier—and in the terms that businesses and those who make the exports and provide the services that we sell abroad would actually understand: the terms of money.

I am an accountant; percentages can be a useful way to present an issue, but also a useful way to create a level of dissimulation. There is a £67 billion deficit of goods and services this year.

Sammy Wilson: Does the hon. Lady accept that the argument about a trade deal is really a non-argument? The United States has no trade deal with the EU and yet sells billions of euros' worth of goods every year to the EU. Trade occurs because people want to buy the goods and because the prices are competitive.

Mrs Trevelyan: Indeed. The hon. Gentleman anticipates my words.

On the numbers, there is real cash—real money—involved in selling and buying goods. I am not willing to brook the scaremongering message that businesses that sell us their products—all £67 billion of them—will want to stop doing so. It is said that the EU creates jobs and makes us money. None of that is true. The reality is that hard-working businessmen put their houses on the line to set up a business and employ people. They make a great product that other people want to buy. That is how jobs are created and how business and growth happen. It has nothing to do with the EU. It is about people buying and selling goods. It is as old as the hills and will continue.

British car drivers will still want to buy BMWs and Mercedes, and I have no doubt that the Germans will still want to sell them to us. We will be in what is described as a free trade area, which goes from Iceland through to Turkey. The risk of dramatic and terrifying tariffs is not a real risk. That is not what can happen under WTO rules within a free trade area.

The leaflet is frustrating. Not only is it biased, but it is unable to explain the reality of what trade means and how it might work, for better or worse, if we were to vote to leave on 23 June. At best, it is simply scurrilous. One of the real problems with the message about exports being key is that only about 5% or 6% of our businesses,

[Mrs Trevelyan]

which are a very important part of our UK trade, actually export to the EU. In my constituency in north Northumberland, I have a large number of small businesses, very few of whom export at all. They mostly sell their goods to other UK citizens. Of those who do export, they export to all corners of the globe, not only to the EU. In fact, thanks to the Emirates airline that set up a Newcastle to Dubai route four years ago, many now trade in the middle east in a whole new world. We have opened up dramatic new markets thanks to one aeroplane that goes once a day. It has been a fascinating thing to see. The EU is not the be-all and end-all of trade.

Paul Scully: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Emirates airline is a really good example of a Dubai-based airline benefiting from the European open skies policy, despite, funnily enough, not being based in the EU?

Mrs Trevelyan: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. I agree entirely. The EU seems to have a propensity to believe that its status and existence is vital to everything else, but I am very pleased that business people around the world continue to override that and do what businesses do: create great new products and provide services that the whole world can reach and make use of.

My postbag has been heavily weighted by the views of businesses—before the leaflet arrived, but even more so after it arrived—overwhelmingly saying that being part of the EU has been hugely onerous, often adding enormous and unnecessary regulations that are not relevant or necessary because they do not trade in the EU. They add to costs, reduce productivity and often create frustrations in the day-to-day life of the businesses. Farmers, mackerel smokers, drone engineers and pastry producers are under more and more pressure from the EU, which has brought them unbelievable packaging regulations—and the weight of extra costs—that they would not need if we were not in the EU. They could trade with UK businesses and overseas global traders under a set of regulations that were sensible and financially viable, which would help their productivity to grow. If they continued to trade within the EU, no doubt they would be perfectly comfortable to meet whatever packaging and other requirements were needed for those markets.

In conclusion, the thing I found most frustrating about the leaflet—other than the fact that it was deeply depressing, presented only one side of the argument and managed to skew information in a way that anyone sitting an A-level would be chastised for because they were not presenting the facts as they should—was that £9.3 million is a lot of money in anyone's book. I currently do a great deal of work with military charities. Combat Stress has been struggling to persuade the Chancellor to maintain funding for the incredibly important veterans services it provides. It received £6.3 million from the Government in 2014, but that was brought down to £4.6 million last year, and the charity is fighting to maintain that level for this year. I consider it wholly unacceptable, as do many of my constituents, that the Government have chosen to spend £9.3 million on this leaflet rather than finding one of the many ways to spend it to support those who put themselves in harm's way to protect our nation. To suggest that war and

genocide are the likely outcomes of voting to leave is insulting to our soldiers, sailors and airmen, and to every member of the British population who had to read such rubbish. I am sad for those yet to receive the leaflet who will do shortly.

6.10 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) on such a brilliant introduction to the debate, and thank the many Members who have already spoken so well and so clearly. I shall not speak for long.

I have a copy of the leaflet—I sent mine back to the Prime Minister personally. As I said in an intervention earlier, I am delighted that I have the opportunity to speak about it before war breaks out and I am summoned. I am an ex-serviceman, my uniform is still hanging in the cupboard and I am ready to serve again, but I hope that we do not have to use armed force against our European allies. If they are allies and the EU state is so wonderful, as the Prime Minister and others believe, it is simply beyond me as to why one country's leaving should cause war and genocide. The argument just does not stack up. As the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and others have said, it is shameful that the Government are using such language.

When we hear from the Minister later, I am sure we will hear what we have heard from him before: a lot of—well, I cannot think of the appropriate word because he and I so fundamentally disagree. I wish this could be a light-hearted debate, I really do. I wish a sense of humour could be injected—although occasionally it is because the arguments for staying in are so farcical—but this is all about our country and its future. It is not about individual politicians or political legacies; it is about the future of our country and the freedom of the people who live in it. It is as simple as that. It is about our right to our own destiny and to guide our country in the direction we wish her to go.

On the back of the leaflet it says, "Protecting jobs", and next to it is a tick. Tell that to half the members of the EU. They have huge rates of unemployment and are crippled by the euro and bankrupt. Italy was run by bureaucrats for a short period. Could that happen to us? The same people advised us to sell off the pound and join the euro. What an absolute disaster that would have been! One of the main reasons why our economy is potentially strong now is because we retained the pound. The leaflet also says, "A stronger economy", with a tick. Again, tell that to the millions of people who are struggling to find work. It says, "Providing security"—security! Look at the evidence: civil unrest, terrorism, uncontrolled immigration and the rise of the left and the right. That is just what everyone feared all those years ago and, as has been mentioned, why so many millions died to keep us free. The EU is creating that same fear again because none of this makes sense.

I am staggered. I find it very difficult to comprehend how my party is in league with left-leaning parties, except for a few honourable exceptions. That is not to defame anyone for being on the left, right or centre, but it seems to me that the socialist-leaning parties want the EU to survive because it is a bureaucracy. Bureaucrats

run it and are paid God knows how much money, with pensions, huge offices and secretaries—the cost is astronomical—and they are unaccountable.

Kate Hoey: The hon. Gentleman mentioned EU pensions, which is something that really bugs me. There are all those Members in the House of Lords who have worked for the European Union as commissioners and so on and now have big pensions—really, they are signed up to never bringing the European Union into disrepute. Does he agree not only that should they have to declare an interest, which they do not, but that they should not be allowed to take part or vote in anything to do with the European Union? They are deeply committed to it because of their huge pensions and if they say anything wrong they might get that taken away.

Richard Drax: I agree with the hon. Lady. It certainly seems from those who have contributed to the debate so far that people are easily manipulated, or bought, or whatever. If the allegation is one of corruption, perhaps that is a bit strong, but certainly for ex-servicemen to speak out as they did is most unusual. Generals and highly respected people who have served this country should not be politicised. They should never have been asked to write that letter on behalf of the Government. It was an absolute disgrace. I have since spoken to one of the signatories, who shall remain nameless, and I have to say that I do not think he is particularly proud of signing that letter.

Let me return to the document. Interestingly, it has seven pictures. It does not have very many pages, but it has seven pictures: a calendar; a gentleman working on a bit of engineering; a basket of food; a ship; a “UK Border” sign; a family in the kitchen, washing up the breakfast, lunch or dinner; and a family walking down the street with a baby. You could not make this up. If the argument to stay in is so strong, why are these pages not full of facts trying to persuade people to stay in? The fact is that the Government do not have sufficient facts to fill this tiny, shabby leaflet.

Mrs Main: Is my hon. Friend as surprised as I am that there is no real image of what staying in looks like? There is absolutely no mention of the accession of Turkey. There is no mention that 70-odd million Turks will soon be able to be part of the European Union or that it is our official position to welcome and support that. We have not resiled from that and it should be in the leaflet.

Richard Drax: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend about the potential mayhem that could be caused by uncontrolled immigration continuing. We have seen the evidence now: people are dying trying to cross seas to get to us. I do not blame them; if I were living in terrible conditions and I looked at my telephone and saw Dorset, I would say, “Darling, children, we’re off!” but we cannot allow uncontrolled immigration to continue. Turkey is a classic case.

Nor does the leaflet refer to the defence of our country. In a letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, I warned that staying in the European Union would inevitably lead a Government—I suspect a socialist Government more than this one—to look at the European army, navy and air force and say, “We’ve got all these ships,

planes and men and women in uniform. Why do we need 80,000 British soldiers, 12, 13 or 14 squadrons, or whatever we have, and 19 warships? We don’t need to spend billions of pounds on our defence, because we are being defended by the Europeans.” The temptation to cut our armed forces to pay for other socialist agendas will be enormous.

Let me talk about the Falklands briefly. I was serving at the time. Friends of mine in the Welsh Guards and the Scots Guards were sent down there, and some lost their lives. Where was Europe during that war? It was nowhere in sight. We stood alone again until the Americans came to our aid and provided us with equipment to pursue the war more effectively.

This is about our democracy, our decision making and—dare I say?—our royal family, whom no one has mentioned yet. Is a 28-nation bureaucracy run from the centre going to want to see little England waving its Union Jack? Is it going to want to see our royal family reminding our great country of the country we used to be? The Head of State is the Queen. They ain’t going to like that for much longer, I warn you now.

We have heard about the special status. We have also heard that the deal, if it can be called that, struck by the Prime Minister has been lodged with the United Nations. We were promised a treaty change but we do not have one. As I understand it, MEPs and the European courts can overrule the reforms that we have achieved, pathetic though they are. I fear that if we vote in and fall for this con trick, they will.

Over the page, the leaflet talks about a stronger economy and how the EU is creating all these marvellous jobs, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) has said, it is not the EU that does that, but the brave entrepreneurs who go out there and put their houses at risk to build and generate jobs. They then trade with other nations, as has been done since the world began. That will not change, because the Germans, the French and everybody else will want to trade with us, as we will with them, whether we are in or out.

We need strong economic partners to trade with. What if they are all basket cases? What if we simply cannot trade with Italy, Greece or Portugal because they are bust because they are trapped in the euro? The nature of those countries—they enjoy the sun and the wine—means that they do not make cars quite as effectively as the Germans. They make beautiful wine and enjoy life. They are different. The euro does not respect that. In the past, we would go and have amazingly cheap holidays and restore their economies. That can no longer happen, and it is to their detriment.

The leaflet talks about healthcare. We know that the pressures on the NHS are enormous. The many millions who come here are free to use it. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed mentioned the trade deals. What happens if we leave? It says that:

“The Government judges it could result in 10 years or more of uncertainty as the UK unpicks our relationship with the EU and renegotiates new arrangements with the EU and over 50 other countries around the world.”

So what? We can do it, and we will be in the driving seat. We are told that Canada has taken nine years to negotiate with the EU. I challenge anyone in this room to negotiate anything with 28 people from different backgrounds and come to a solution. It takes a long time.

[Richard Drax]

Regrettably, I think this document is a sham, a disgrace and a complete waste of taxpayers' money. I am ashamed—the hon. Member for Vauxhall used that word, and I will too. I thought better of the in campaign. We are going to see more fear sprayed around the country in the ensuing days.

I will end on this note. I was enjoying a ride with a taxi driver the other day. When he learned what I did—to my relief, he did not press the ejector button at that point—he said, “Look, guv; in or out?” I said, “What do you think?” He said, “Just the very whiff of having our country back makes me feel proud.”

6.24 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): As has already been pointed out, the people of Northern Ireland have not yet been subjected to having to read the dodgy dossier that has been published by the Government. No one should be surprised that it is not an objective assessment of the case for staying in or leaving because, as a number of hon. Members said, the Government made up their mind at the outset that, regardless of what happened in the negotiations, they would put forward the case for remain. No doubt, when the leaflet eventually makes its way through the Royal Mail's postbags to my constituents' houses, they will treat it with contempt because they will know it is not an attempt to set out the facts and figures.

We have just finished the Assembly election campaign in Northern Ireland, and the question I was most commonly asked on the doorstep over the past three and a half weeks, even though it is nothing to do with the Assembly election, was, “Are you in or are you out?” From the conversations I have had with thousands of my constituents, I have absolutely no doubt which way they will be voting on 23 June.

The Government are desperate. We saw the degree of their desperation when the Prime Minister visited Northern Ireland at the beginning of this campaign. He brought together farmers and told them that their crops will die in the fields, that their bank balances will be slashed, that European money will end and that we will no longer be able to feed ourselves because of the disaster that will befall Northern Ireland if we drop out of the EU and no longer have the support of the CAP. He ignored the fact that, as most farmers know—a large part of my constituency is rural—EU support for agriculture in the United Kingdom has been falling because support is increasingly being directed towards eastern Europe, and that many small farmers are crippled by bureaucracy and the CAP's requirements.

Of course, the Prime Minister pulled out the ultimate card: he said that somehow or other the peace process might be in jeopardy. I lived in Northern Ireland right through the troubles, and I never, ever heard any IRA spokesman say that he was determined to bomb the life out of people in Northern Ireland to stay in the EU. It was never an issue with republicans. Indeed, it is significant that, until it got embroiled in the politics of the Irish Republic, Sinn Féin used to be a very anti-EU party. Suddenly, because it wanted to curry favour with voters in the Republic, it decided that it was pro-EU. Saying that the peace process will somehow be in jeopardy is another scare tactic.

In Northern Ireland, whenever we get into trouble with the peace process, we can be sure that political leaders whose names the President of the United States has never heard before will get a telephone call from the White House. “Jimmy, how are you?”—I cannot do an American accent, so I will not even try—or, “Peter, how are you?” and the soft-soaping starts. It has been no different in this referendum campaign. The US cavalry has ridden to the rescue of General Cameron, who is making his last stand. I believe that he knows it is his last stand. He cannot convince the people of the United Kingdom to go into the reservation of the EU, so he has to bring in the American President to frighten them, but I think the American President's ham-fisted attempt has not weakened but strengthened the leave campaign.

Many Members have already talked about the false arguments in this document, and I want to pick up on one or two of them: first, that the cost of living is going to go up. How do they justify that—on the basis, primarily, that the value of the pound will fall. However, our exchange rate goes up and down. We have a freely floating exchange rate mechanism, because we are not part of the euro. Our exchange rate goes up and down all the time. We live with the consequences of that: sometimes it helps our exporters and sometimes it is to the detriment of our exporters; sometimes it brings down the cost of living because imports become cheaper, and sometimes it puts the cost up—but that is what happens without a fixed exchange rate. Our membership of the EU will make no difference to that—but that is the main way in which the cost of living could increase, according to the Government leaflet.

We have had that reinforced by the Chancellor's predictions and the Treasury's model up to 2030. I taught economics at one stage and the one thing I know about economic models is that we do not rely on economic models to tell us what is going to happen in 2030 when we are living in 2016. A Treasury model also told us that the deficit would be wiped out by now. The Treasury revises its estimates almost on a yearly basis, because economic models are subject to a whole range of assumptions. If we are looking 14 years in advance, how can we possibly know what parameters to put into an economic model? We are certainly not going to be able to tell people, “You are going to be £4,302.22 worse off,” which is what the Government want people to believe.

That is the first scare tactic. The second is the idea that people will not be able to go on their holidays any longer, they will have to get a visa to go to the sun and flights will cost more. For those who are concerned about carbon footprints, that would be a compelling argument, but it does not really play much with me. Again, that is based on what? The price of flights has come down not because of the EU, but because of people such as O'Leary, companies such as Ryanair and easyJet, and competition between airlines. That has nothing to do with the EU, yet it is rested at the EU's door.

Next is the argument that millions of jobs will be lost because it is more difficult to get access to European markets. However, in my constituency, there are companies that do research for the pharmaceutical industry; one firm has 140 workers who research new drugs and, as a result, drugs worth £750 million are produced across Europe from the patents for which they are responsible.

Do people buy that information because we are part of the EU? No, they buy it because the research is good quality, and the drug has been tested and is capable of being marketed.

In my constituency, too, Schrader Electronics provides valves that tell drivers whether their tyres have gone down, without them having to look at them. The valves are sold to car manufacturers all over the European Union, as part of the supply chain. On 24 June, are those manufacturers likely to say that they will no longer buy the valves? Of course not, because the technology is good and the price is good. The company is part of the supply chain and will remain part of the supply chain.

For anyone who flies on an airplane, every third seat is made in Northern Ireland—anyone sitting on seats A or D is probably sitting on one. Why? Is it because we are part of the EU? No, it is because we have a manufacturer that produces a competitive product.

I could go on. People buy our goods for those reasons. All around the world, we sell goods to countries that we do not have trade deals with. So what about the idea that, if we left the EU, suddenly we would not get a trade deal with it? First, the supply chain would demand that the goods are bought anyway and, secondly, if the product is not competitive, people will stop buying, but if it is competitive, they will keep on buying. The argument is that it will take us years to negotiate a new trade deal. It will not, for the simple reason that, if firms want our products, they will continue to buy them.

On the last argument to be made, I have to say that the Prime Minister has been despicable today, invoking the war dead. It shows desperation to say that people died for the European Union, or for a united Europe. They died for a Europe free of dictatorship; they died for a democratic Europe. The whole essence of the EU is that it is not a democratic institution—some people do not even try to defend it as that any longer—and it is not an institution in which the will of the people is reflected in the decisions made; the will reflected is that of people who believe they know better than the elected politicians. The bureaucrats believe that they can develop an efficient system of government, free from those pesky politicians with their mad ideas and everything else. For the Prime Minister to invoke the war dead was an absolute disgrace.

We have seen the security argument, unfortunately, blown apart in Paris and Brussels. Terrorists, because of the Schengen arrangements and open borders, can wander around Europe like jihadic nomads, crossing borders, planning and plotting, and then killing. That is why we need to have control over our own borders. That is why we need to be out of an institution that leaves us open to that kind of terrorist activity.

I made an intervention about this earlier, but it is significant that the Government's own document eulogises the fact that our special relationship with Europe enables us to opt out of and to distance ourselves from most of the major policies of the European Union. If there is a compelling argument, it is in the Government's own document. We do not want to be part of the euro, because we have seen what it has done, the devastation that it has wrought across economies in European countries, the youth unemployment, and the way in which democratic institutions have been undermined in Italy and Greece

as a result of the requirements to stay in the euro. Looking at the arguments in the document, we can also opt out of Schengen, another essential part of the EU.

By the way, the Government say that no country has been able to negotiate a trade agreement with the EU without allowing free access to labour. That is not true. Many countries outside the European Union trade freely with it, and they do not have to accept anyone and everyone who wants to move from EU countries to their country, but the document makes that claim—although the Government say that part of our special relationship is that we can opt out of that as well, and we can opt out of any other interference. If it is so good to be able to opt out of those policies, is it not even better to opt out of the EU altogether?

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Three people are standing, and I intend to call the Scottish National party spokesperson at 7 o'clock. People can do the arithmetic themselves.

6.39 pm

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship in this important debate, Mr Stringer. I pay a special tribute to all Members who have taken part so far. I was particularly moved by the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), which was powerful and sobering.

I am yet to find a constituent in Telford who thinks that the leaflet provides value for taxpayers' money, yet the Prime Minister tells us that it is money well spent. The decision to spend £9 million-plus on a glossy leaflet, sent out 11 weeks before the referendum, sends unintended messages to voters about the EU. It tells us that the Government are willing to spend taxpayers' money with no regard for the opinions of the people. It tells us that they are willing to waste taxpayers' money, and it is fundamentally anti-democratic. No Government should spend public money to tell the people they govern how to vote and what to think.

We know that public opinion is divided on whether to leave or remain. It is about 50:50 at the moment, and that is why we are having a referendum. As I remind my local council from time to time, taxpayers' money should not be used on publicity blitzes or vanity projects, and never to promote political ambitions.

Even those who think that a remain vote would be good for us and in our best interests have doubts about spending £9 million-plus on a leaflet. The BBC's headline on 7 April was "Will anyone read £9m government leaflet?" Some may do, under duress, but I have to admit that I did not, despite receiving it three times. I read it only when I came to prepare for the debate. Anyone who has ever taken part in a political campaign knows that one glossy leaflet, sent 11 weeks before election day, will be passed over, sent off for recycling and completely forgotten about when the time comes to put an X in the box.

The public deserve and clearly want unbiased, neutral, factual information about the referendum. This is a big issue for our country. Why would we not want to hear both sides of the argument so that we can make up our minds for ourselves? The Minister—I greatly respect him for sitting here this afternoon and listening to what we have to say—may say that the leaflet was produced

[Lucy Allan]

because there was a thirst for information. The Government should recognise that the reason why there is a thirst for information is that they have not provided it. They have a duty and responsibility to give the public the facts, not just the account they want us to hear.

The leaflet was clearly designed to masquerade as a Government information leaflet, yet from a cursory glance at its contents we can see that it is nothing of the sort. We have been told that the Government are not neutral about our decision on whether to remain or leave. That is true, but the leaflet needed to make that point and not pretend to be factual public information from a neutral and unbiased perspective. For example, there is no recognition in the leaflet that the mutual self-interest of other members of the EU would ensure that a leave decision would be achieved with minimal disruption to existing trading arrangements. There is no comment on the challenges facing the EU, which are set out in the Five Presidents report. I am sure the Minister knows who those five important people are, but I did not until one constituent of mine described them to me as the five best reasons to leave the EU. I would like to name those five reasons: the President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker; the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz; the President of the Eurogroup, Jeroen Dijsselbloem; the President of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi; and the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk. Yes, those are five reasons—very expensive reasons—to leave the EU.

We, the British people, do not like being told what to do by self-important bureaucrats. We do not like being told what is in our best interests or what is good for us. This debate is about liberty, economic freedom and democracy, and if the £9 million leaflet did anything, it served to remind the British people why we cherish those ideals and what the EU is really about. Perhaps the leaflet did have some value after all, and perhaps not all of that £9 million was wasted.

6.44 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I do not want to give the Minister all the arguments about why we should remain in the EU or leave. Many of them are well known, and I am not sure that the debate is entirely about those arguments. I want to talk about fairness—that is what the debate is about. We all have strong views, and we could all give long speeches explaining why, in our view, the leaflet is wrong on a particular fact and is based on supposition. We could ask how, when the Treasury has difficulty in getting its own borrowing figures correct even for the next year, it can possibly foretell what will happen in five or 10 years or how exchange rates will move. We could go through the entire leaflet and tear it apart—no Back Bencher from the remain camp has bothered to come to the debate, which is faintly sinister from the point of view of fairness—but I am not sure that anything would be achieved by doing that. I want to concentrate on the argument about fairness.

The Minister will quite rightly say that the Government have a particular point of view and are constitutionally entitled to put that point of view. No one denies that, and no one denies that the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Europe can give whatever

speeches they like, whether or not they agree with them. We all accept that. The Minister will no doubt also say that Governments have argued particular cases during past referendums, and all the rest of it.

We cannot deny that the Government have a settled view, although of course we should point out that we are in an unusual situation where several members of the Government have a completely different view, which should temper some of the rhetoric. The Government have a point of view, but our question is, what is the whole point of this referendum? Is the point not to draw a line under the debate so that both sides feel that they have had a fair crack of the whip, that both campaigns have broadly spent the same amount of money and had the same amount of airtime, that the arguments have been made and that the public have decided one way or the other? I say to the Government that even if they win, nothing will have been achieved if at the end of the campaign people feel a fundamental sense of unfairness and if one side—the remain side, with all its resources and backed by the Government, thousands of civil servants and so on—has had an undue advantage.

There is history in this debate, as I mentioned in my earlier intervention. I will quote John Mills, the Labour donor and deputy chair of Vote Leave, who was a national agent for the no campaign in the 1975 referendum. He wrote recently:

“We were deluged by propaganda heavily weighted in favour of the stay-in campaign. The total expenditure spending on advertising, leaflets, posters and all the other elements of the campaigns conducted on each side was roughly 10:1 in favour of staying in. This had a massive effect on public opinion and can't have failed to have had a significant impact on the result... In the autumn of 1974, only 36 per cent of the population thought membership of the Common Market was 'a good thing'. But by 1975, this figure had shot up to 50 per cent. It is very hard to believe that this huge increase in support for staying in was not largely down to the massive and disproportionate propaganda campaign waged by the pro-Common Market campaign.”

There is history in this debate.

Presumably, the remain campaign has come to the conclusion that it has to bombard the people and outspend the leave campaign. That is unfair. The remain campaign and the leave campaign are each allowed to raise £7 million. I actually talked to the Vote Leave campaign today about having a rally. I asked, “Can you organise a rally in Lincolnshire?” and the campaigners said, “Well, we'd rather you did it, because of course it comes out of our spending, which is very carefully controlled.” That is all fair enough. The leave campaign is limited to £7 million. The remain campaign will spend £7 million, and in addition the Government have produced a leaflet at the taxpayers' expense for £9 million. That comes to £7 million plus £9 million on the remain side, compared with just £7 million on the leave side, which is fundamentally unfair. Surely the whole point about the British mentality and way of doing politics is that both sides get a fair crack of the whip. Is that not why we have such hugely careful spending controls in all our general election campaigns in our constituencies—because we feel that there is a right to put an argument, but taxpayers' money should not be used to overwhelm the other side?

Perhaps I may make one comment about fairness. People are asking for a genuine debate. They want genuine information. Many people are still undecided.

If it were possible for the Government to help facilitate a genuine debate in which the arguments, facts and economics would be put, people would understand that, but they find it increasingly irritating that there seems to be a Government tendency to increase the war tempo of the rhetoric—there has been the latest claim today, of course. If the result of leaving would be so utterly disastrous for peace, the economy and all the rest of it, why are we having the referendum in the first place? Why did the Prime Minister risk it? Why did he say during his negotiations that he was prepared to consider recommending that we should leave if he did not get his demands, which we know were about only minor changes on migration? Now he says that leaving would have a devastating result on the economy, the prospects for war or peace in Europe, and many other things. Why did he risk all that? Why did the Foreign Secretary say during the negotiations that he was prepared to consider leaving, whereas apparently he now says that leaving would be a disaster?

I say to the Government, by all means put the arguments—no one is criticising them for doing that; they are the duly elected Government and have a right to do it—but just try to be fair, and do not try to overwhelm the opposition with taxpayers' money. That is what other Governments have done, in places such as eastern Europe. That is what the Council of Europe is all about, and it is why we had the debate on *purdah*. I know the Minister will say that he made it perfectly clear that *purdah* would apply only for the last 28 days. We understand all those arguments, but was not the reason for that debate our wish to make it clear that the Government should not misuse their massive power and resources to overwhelm the opposition? If the Government win on that basis it will be a dirty victory, and will not close down the debate. I also believe that it is counterproductive for the Government in their campaign, because people react to it. They are not fools, and they know when they are being taken for fools and fed propaganda. It will not work, and will create a nasty taste. I regret the fact that the leaflet was published in such a way and paid for by the taxpayer. I hope that the Government will learn from the reaction to their leaflet and not make a similar mistake in the future.

6.53 pm

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): It is a great pleasure to be called to speak, albeit late, in this well attended, though I must say one-sided debate. I ask right hon. and hon. Members to spare a thought for my right hon. Friend the Minister. He reminds me of one of those renaissance pictures of St Sebastian, who stands tethered to a tree, his body pierced by a multitude of arrows shot by myriad archers. He has been called on many times to defend the Government's handling of the referendum process. Today he seeks to defend the frankly shabby piece of disinformation posing as an informative leaflet, which has been comprehensively shredded, metaphorically, by the participants in the debate, just as it has no doubt been physically shredded by many of the people who had the unfortunate experience of finding it dropping through their letter box.

The arguments have been advanced and I do not want to repeat them, but there is one point that I want to touch on as a Welsh Member of Parliament, which is the timing of the leaflet. As the hon. Member for East

Antrim (Sammy Wilson) pointed out, the leaflets have not yet been delivered in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, because the Government wanted to avoid a clash with the elections that took place last Thursday. In England, of course, they were distributed between 11 April and 13 April, which was before the regulated period of the referendum campaign began. In Wales, they will be distributed this week, as they will in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

I have to tell my right hon. Friend the Minister that the timing had no effect whatever on the Welsh Assembly election campaign, because I had exactly the same experience as the hon. Member for East Antrim. Everywhere I went when I was canvassing in that campaign, I found that very few people wanted to talk about the Assembly election, but everyone wanted to talk about the referendum. In particular they were incensed at the fact that the Government had spent £9.3 million of their money—taxpayers' money—on a piece of propaganda.

The practical effect is that the leaflets will be delivered in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales squarely during the regulated period, which I suggest will give the remain campaign an unfair advantage. During that time, expenditure is carefully regulated and limited. The Government are not affected by those limitations of course, but in any event the remain campaign's expenditure will be augmented by the delivery of the leaflet through people's letterboxes. That is deeply regrettable, and the Electoral Commission has pointed out that after the Scottish referendum it recommended that Governments should not conduct any taxpayer-funded advertising during the regulated period. That is what has happened in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

I suggest that the Government should have had regard to the Venice Commission's code of good practice on referendums, which provides:

“The use of public funds...for campaigning purposes must be prohibited”

and states that any explanatory report produced by the authorities should

“give a balanced presentation not only of the viewpoint of the executive and legislative authorities or persons sharing their viewpoint but also of the opposing one.”

The Government's document is completely silent in that regard. The leaflet clearly contravenes those recommendations. It is utterly one-sided.

As a Conservative Member of Parliament I am bound to say that I find it highly regrettable that my party's Government has conducted itself in that way. I would go so far as to say that I am deeply ashamed. The fact that so many people have signed the e-petition, which no doubt is at somewhere around the 220,000 signature mark by now, is a clear sign that my concern, and the concern of so many other hon. Members who have spoken this afternoon, is shared widely by the British people. It has been an unfortunate episode in an unfortunate campaign, and I hope that on reflection my right hon. Friend the Minister will find it in his heart to apologise for what the Government have done.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Before I call the Scottish National party spokesperson, I remind the House that there is approximately 10 minutes for each Front-Bench speaker. Perhaps the Minister will leave two minutes at the end for the mover of the motion to respond to the debate; that is what we do by convention.

6.58 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I wish you and all other colleagues here a happy Europe Day, Mr Stringer—of course, that has yet to come up in the debate. I particularly wish the Minister a happy Europe Day. When I attend debates such as this I seem to be in the unusual situation of being one of the friendlier faces he encounters. That is a sad state of affairs indeed, but he will be glad to learn that I have brought reinforcements, who are also champions of the remain campaign. Indeed, my hon. Friends the Members for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) have just returned from a visit to Brussels, where my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) made a strong case for remaining part of the European Union. The Scottish National party is helping where others are not at the moment.

Today's debate, like the broader debate, appears to have a lot more to do with Conservative in-fighting than with the future of the European Union or the European debate. Indeed, some of the language used today has been rather intemperate and unfortunate. Of course, the leaflet is not yet for viewers in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales; I have no doubt we will get ours soon. We have just come through an important election period when we have been discussing issues such as education, transport, local government and our health service. I wonder whether we should take the opportunity to press the reset button on this particular debate now that we have come through those elections.

We would like to hear some positive remarks. The hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) threatened to grind government to a halt over the leaflet. He also made reference to the armada. Of course, some historians think the armada set forth as a direct result of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. We have talked about the royal family, and Mary Queen of Scots' forebears could not be any more European. *[Interruption.]* We have a monarch on the throne at the moment who is descended from Germans and married to a Greek-Danish prince. You cannot get a lot more European than that.

Mrs Trevelyan: The key point that I have probably had to reiterate more than any other is that there is Europe, and then there is the EU. The EU is a political construct. Europe is a geographical construct made up of many countries, some of which are in the EU and some of which are not. To continue to misuse the two terms is to treat the Great British public as stupid. They understand clearly the difference between the two.

Stephen Gethins: I thank the hon. Lady. She will be glad to hear that we will not be putting the fact that the Queen is married to a Danish-Greek prince at the heart of our campaign. We will be putting at the heart of our campaign the fact that the European Union makes us greener, wealthier, fairer and safer.

Fundamentally, we need to think about questions of fairness. That was reflected in the amendments that SNP Members tabled to the European Union Referendum Bill. I see in the Chamber Opposition and Government Members who backed some of those amendments—they were unsuccessful, but we are getting used to that in this place. We tabled those amendments because fairness has to be at the heart of this debate.

The Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), said that whoever is defeated must be able to do so with good grace. That is critical. I hope the Minister will agree that the referendum needs to be seen to be scrupulous. In our amendments to the Bill we were quite particular about the purdah period, because we hope not to see any last-minute promises or vows from either side, made out of panic.

I note that some Government Members have hit out at "Project Fear". I am glad that since the Scottish independence referendum, a large number of Conservative Members have had their hallelujah moment about that. I feared seeing far too much of "Project Fear". I sincerely hope we will move on from that.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I apologise, Mr Stringer, for not having been here for the whole debate. As my hon. Friend said, several of us were in Brussels and have returned by Eurostar, having heard my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) make an eloquent and clear positive case for remaining in the European Union—the antithesis of the scare stories we are hearing from both sides south of the border. I have no doubt that he will be a figurehead and champion for the remain cause in Scotland and across the UK. Would my hon. Friend care to reflect on whether such a figurehead or champion exists for the leave side in Scotland?

Stephen Gethins: My hon. Friend raises a good point. We keep on hearing that there is nobody here from the remain side. My answer to my hon. Friend is: I do not know. I have no idea who will be in charge of the leave campaign up in Scotland, because we have no one. So far, we have 59 out of 59 SNP Members of this Parliament in favour of remaining, 128 out of 129 Members of the previous Scottish Parliament in favour and five out of the six Scottish Members of the European Parliament in favour. Nobody is emerging for the leave campaign, but we will see what comes from the new lot.

I know that Members will be wondering what happened in the Scottish Parliament elections. They will all be glad to hear that the SNP won again, with 47% of the vote, which was up on 2011. Furthermore—*[Interruption.]* I hear sedentary points being made by Conservative Members; I would love to take an intervention. No? Nothing at all. The SNP Government won the highest proportion of the vote of any sitting Government in Europe. They are the most trusted Government in Europe.

Let us compare the track records. The Scottish Government have already published their agenda for EU reform, and they have a better track record on publishing documents. The White Paper published for the Scottish independence referendum was downloaded free, at no cost to the taxpayer, 100,000 times. Will the Minister tell us how many times he expects the referendum leaflet to be downloaded?

Sir Edward Leigh: What would the hon. Gentleman have said during the Scottish referendum campaign if the Government had paid for a leaflet to be issued to every household in Scotland, urging people to vote for one side? Would he not have complained? Therefore, to

be entirely consistent, should he not also complain during this referendum campaign? I am looking for consistency.

Stephen Gethins: The Scottish Government did produce a leaflet, and the Scotland Office, under the Conservative party, also produced a leaflet that was sent to every house. The hon. Gentleman should raise that issue with his Government's Minister. Our leaflet was downloaded 100,000 times.

Since the hon. Gentleman raises the issue of the Scottish independence referendum, let us look at it. There was an 85% turnout—I wonder whether the Minister thinks this referendum will reach that—with 16 and 17-year-olds engaged in politics and taking part, and in a study conducted afterwards there was a 95% satisfaction rating with how the referendum was carried out.

Tom Pursglove: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman will be interested in this point, so I will round off with it: it was not bad for our poll numbers either, as last week's election demonstrated.

7.6 pm

Pat Glass (North West Durham) (Lab): We are here to state the merits of a petition that I understand was started by Jayne Adye, who is the director of the Get Britain Out campaign. She is therefore not a disinterested person who is independent of the issue or whose only concern, as the petition claims, is about the spending of public money.

We need to be honest about what this debate is about. It is yet another example of the wider leave campaign wanting to talk about process and not the real issues. I do not have a problem with that, but let us not pretend that this is about a leaflet issued by the Government. The faux outrage is intended to drown out the arguments made in the leaflet. I very much doubt that the director of the Get Britain Out campaign would have raised a petition if the Government were spending taxpayers' money on a leaflet arguing that we should leave.

John Redwood: Has the hon. Lady been listening to the debate? Colleague after colleague has stood up and pointed out that the leaflet is simply wrong and misleading, because we care passionately about getting back democratic accountability and control for the British people.

Pat Glass: As the right hon. Gentleman said, I have sat through almost three hours of the debate very politely and courteously and listened to all of the arguments.

If we are going to do this, we should get it right. This is a small issue, but the petition talks about the Government spending

“money on biased campaigning to keep Britain inside the European Union”

and about the “Great British Public”. If we want to get this right, we must talk about the UK, not Britain. Britain is the island; the UK is much wider than that. I am sure that it was not the intention of the campaigners to cut out an entire country and all of the people of Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, let us get it right.

Kate Hoey: I thank my hon. Friend for that very important point. Does she not squirm at the fact that her campaign to remain is called “Britain Stronger in Europe”?

Pat Glass: It is not. It is called “Labour In for Britain”. I am part of a Labour campaign. As far as I can see, the leaflet is entirely legal. It has been issued by the Government well in advance of the last 28 days of the referendum period, when section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 will apply and restrict publications about the referendum by bodies or persons that are wholly or mainly publicly funded. The leaflet represents the official view of the Government on the biggest decision that this country will make in a generation and which will impact on this country and our neighbours for decades. In my view, it would be unacceptable for the Government not to have a view on that and not to share that view with the people of this country.

Ms Gisela Stuart: Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Pat Glass: No. As has been pointed out, we have had a huge debate, but we have heard one side of the argument. Hon. Members should do me the courtesy of allowing me to give the other side of the argument.

It seems perfectly reasonable to me for the Government of the day to set out their position in the referendum. This is not a precedent; it is exactly what Governments have done before. This leaflet is clear, and the title is not misleading. It seems to me, and no doubt to those watching the debate today, that those challenging the leaflet are hoping to silence the arguments contained in it, rather than discussing the merits of issuing a leaflet or the cost.

We know that, on this issue, the Labour party—I expect to get one or two requests for an intervention here—is largely of one voice. A handful of my colleagues—I think it is five altogether—have long-held and deep-set views on the issue, and I absolutely respect that, but I think they are mistaken, and they would certainly have to agree that they are out of step with the vast majority of the parliamentary Labour party, constituency Labour parties and Labour voters. The Conservative party, however, is split on the issue. Let us look at the facts. We have a parliamentary Labour party pro-EU group. That group has 214 members.

Tom Pursglove: Where are they?

Pat Glass: I will come on to that in a moment. They include all of the leadership and all of the shadow Cabinet. On this one issue at least, in comparison with Government Members, we look like an old married couple.

I have sat here throughout the debate and listened to the arguments, and some good arguments have been made. I absolutely accept some of the arguments made by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) about fairness. However, I was hoping that, in almost three hours, I would have heard what “out” looks like in terms of jobs, consumers and the environment. What would it look like for women and young people and for our future security? I have not heard any of that.

[Pat Glass]

What I have heard is that it will be all right on the night. Even the leading Brexit economist now says that an EU exit would kill off our manufacturing sector.

As someone from the north-east, I was surprised at what was said by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), who is not listening at the moment. We are the only region in the country that has a trade surplus. We are a manufacturing region, and hundreds of thousands of jobs depend on our being part of the European Union. Leaving the EU would be a disaster for regions such as mine. I understand what the hon. Lady says about one Emirates flight out of Newcastle airport every day, but that cannot compare to the hundreds of thousands of cars that we export from the north-east to the European Union.

In the leaflet, the Government make a clear recommendation to the people of the UK that they judge it to be in our national interest to remain a member of the European Union. For once, I agree with them. The Cabinet Office has told us that independent polling shows that 85% of voters are seeking more information on which to make an informed decision. That supports what I am finding on the doorstep. When I talk to people, they are clear that this is not their No. 1 priority at the moment. However, they know it is important and they want the facts on which to make a decision.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), I apologise for arriving late. I was stuck on a Eurostar train or I might have wanted to make a speech in the debate. Does the hon. Lady agree that it is a great pity that the referendum is taking place among the citizenry who are the least well informed in the whole of the European Union about what the European Union actually does? Is she concerned, as I am, that whatever the result is, it might not be the result of an informed electorate, and that cannot be good for democracy?

Pat Glass: Governments of both colours, over the last 41 years, have failed to make the case for the European Union; they have failed to make it real for real people's lives. That is part of the problem: we have had 41 years of one side of the argument. It is not unreasonable that we should now start to see some of the other side of the argument.

The leaflet has cost £9.3 million, which is equivalent, we are told, to 34p per household. The official in and out campaigns will each receive £15 million and a higher spending limit of £7 million each, the use of public rooms and a public grant of up to £600,000, in order to make their case to the people of the UK, so the cost of the leaflet will presumably not now be the issue. Presumably there will now be another petition, asking us not to spend the £15 million on each side and provide the access to public rooms and so on if the issue is really the spending of public money.

My understanding from talking to people who have received the leaflet is that it has certainly caused debate and a thirst for further information. The hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) said that he had received 476 complaints about the leaflet, and I do not doubt that for a moment, but I have received two complaints from constituents about it. In the past four weeks, I have received almost 500 contacts and complaints from

constituents about tax havens in UK dependencies and overseas territories. I have actually received more complaints from constituents about the degrading quality of modern bricks than about the leaflet. That shows that it is a much greater issue among different people and in different parts of the country. My reading of the situation on the doorstep is that there is a public thirst for information. The public want a debate on the facts, and they do not want a debate on a leaflet that has been sent out already in England. One thing that I hope we can all agree on is that at least the leaflet encourages everyone to be registered to vote—everyone should take part in this far-reaching referendum. No one can say that this issue does not affect them.

I want to reference this fact sheet. Full Fact contacted every Member of Parliament in advance of the debate—I have no reason to think it contacted only me. Having checked the leaflet, Full Fact says, in summary:

“The government explicitly states that the leaflet is arguing for the UK remaining in the EU. So it is not attempting to be even-handed...Given that, much of the leaflet is accurate and the government deserves some credit for ensuring that it was published with details of the sources, making it easier for” people to “judge independently.”

Finally, I simply want to set out Labour's case for remaining in the EU. It is a simple case. We believe that for jobs, growth, investment and security reasons, we are better off in the European Union. We believe that, for the protection of the workers of the UK and for environmental reasons, the UK is better off in Europe. We believe that we are safer in an increasingly unsafe world if we are part of a strong economic group of 520 million people. We believe that the people of Europe can tackle those big issues that do not recognise borders and that threaten our future—climate change, international terrorism and global tax avoidance—only if we do so together.

7.18 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): This afternoon, many of the arguments and—dare I say it?—many members of the cast have been an extended reprise of the exchanges that took place following my statement on the publication of the Government's leaflet on 11 April. The Government's position remains as I set out then: we believe that the referendum is potentially the most important decision that the British people will make on any political issue in their lifetime.

Independent polling carried out on our behalf made it clear that 85% of people wanted more information from the Government to help them to make an informed decision. We believe that the leaflet that we have distributed, the footnotes that we have published on the Government website so that the evidence on which we have made the statements presented in it can be examined and challenged, and the other Government publications, deliver on that commitment and help to fulfil that need.

Yes, as others have said, the Government are not neutral in the debate. The Government have a very clear collective position to support the United Kingdom remaining in the European Union.

Richard Drax: The Minister uses the word “collective”. The position is not collective, in that the Cabinet is split and the party is split—it represents, in effect, the Government; we are the party in power. It is not a collective decision at all.

Mr Lidington: I am sorry, but there was a collective Cabinet decision. There are and always have been—for as long as I have been in politics—honourable, sincerely held differences of opinion within our party and within the Labour party about the European question. The Prime Minister therefore said that, on this issue and this issue alone, he would relax the normal rules by which Ministers are obliged to support the collective Government position without question and that those Ministers would, in a personal capacity, be able to express their dissenting views.

Ms Gisela Stuart: I am happy for the Minister to write to me on this point. As he places significant importance on the Government's website, can he tell me where, as of today, I can find certain quotations by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer? As recently as four months ago, they said that we would be perfectly alright outside the EU, but those quotations have disappeared from the website.

Mr Lidington: The hon. Lady does not have to search through the Government website. She can look at *Hansard* and will see that my right hon. Friends have, on many occasions, said that the United Kingdom could survive outside the EU. However, the question that faces the electorate in the referendum is whether remaining in the EU or leaving the EU is the best outcome for our prosperity and security. It is my contention, and the Government's contention, that the economic and political interests of the UK and all its people are best served by continuing to remain as active and leading players in the primary international organisation on the continent of Europe.

The leaflet follows precedent from previous referendums, including that on EU membership in 1975, when a Government leaflet was also distributed. It also follows the precedent of the referendums on the creation of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly in 1997 and on the creation of the mayoral system in London in 1998, and of two Government leaflets during the Scottish referendum in 2014. Government publications of this sort, including the distribution of the leaflet, are entirely lawful. However, I can confirm that, as set out in section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, special rules limiting Government publications of all kinds will apply during the last 28 days of the referendum campaign.

Tom Pursglove: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Lidington: I will give way but I am very conscious of the need to leave time for my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) to reply.

Tom Pursglove: Will the Minister accept that the leaflet has undermined the trust not only of the country, but also of this place, which operates on the basis of trust? I was assured by Ministers in private not only that there would be no leaflets in the 28-day period, but that there would be no leaflets full stop. Does he accept that our trust has been undermined?

Mr Lidington: I have taken part in debates and responded to questions about the application of section 125, including in the Chamber and while giving evidence to the Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. I was very clear, as was my right hon.

Friend the Foreign Secretary, that we were talking about restrictions and whether they should be applied in the final 28 days of the campaign. Indeed, the hon. Members who often were most fervent in challenging the Government's original suggestion that there might be particular circumstances in which the section 125 arrangements should be relaxed were saying to us, "Don't worry because the Government will have every opportunity to present their case during the earlier stages of the referendum campaign."

Although hon. Members are right that the overall spending limit for each of the designated campaign organisations is £7 million, those two campaigning organisations will, in addition, have the right to take advantage of a free leaflet distribution to every letterbox or every registered elector. They will also both have the right to a broadcast to the British public.

If the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) is willing, I will write to her about the two specific questions that she asked. I assure the House that no copies of the leaflet will be distributed during *purdah* and that postal votes will not arrive before 27 May. That includes postal votes sent to registered electors living overseas. I hope that satisfies her to some extent.

A number of hon. Members suggested that, if we remained the EU, we would be inexorably dragged into further forms of political or military integration against our will. I remind hon. Members that we already have, in the European Union Act 2011—an Act that has now been accepted on a cross-party basis in the House of Commons—very considerable safeguards. They provide for a referendum of the people to take place before the UK, under any Government, could join the euro, sign up to an EU army or a European public prosecutor's office, join the Schengen agreement, or give up national vetoes on areas of policy that are currently subject to a requirement for unanimity.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Lidington: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I want to allow time for our hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam to reply.

The truth is that the UK is a European power with global interests, and Europe matters to our prosperity and security. Decisions taken in Europe will affect us, whether we are out or in. I want the Ministers of this country to be at the table, leading the debates, shaping the rules, and deciding the arrangements through which we trade and how we operate in the world. We should not be outside the door waiting for others to sew something up and tell us what they have decided that affects us.

We know at least that the leave campaign believes that we should withdraw from the single market as part of departure from the EU. That would put at risk not only the current tariff-free trading environment, but the enormous reduction in—and, in many cases, elimination of—non-tariff barriers that have proved to be one of the key advantages to British industry of EU membership.

As the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass) mentioned, one of the leading gurus of the leave campaign, Professor Minford, has said publicly that we

[Mr Lidington]

could expect to lose our manufacturing sector if we leave the EU, and that we should not be scared of that prospect. For people who have spent their lives working in the manufacturing industry or hope for jobs in manufacturing businesses, that would be a very alarming prediction indeed. It is little wonder that all the major business organisations report that a decisive majority, and in some cases, an overwhelming majority, of their members want to remain in the EU. That applies whether we are talking about the Confederation of British Industry, the EEF, the Federation of Small Businesses, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors, the National Farmers Union or TheCityUK.

Those who argue that we should be unconcerned about security risks ignore the opportunities that membership gives us. We have played a key part in successful European initiatives to defeat piracy in the Indian ocean, to reconcile Serbia and Kosovo, to train the military in Mali and to impose sanctions that brought

Iran to the nuclear negotiating table. We would be foolish to throw that away. I am confident in the ability of our country to continue to set the agenda. We should not look inward. We should not retreat to isolation. We should go ahead and help to shape the direction of the continent of which we are, and will remain, a part.

7.29 pm

Paul Scully: I pay tribute to Jayne Adye and the many people who signed the petition, including the 340 constituents of the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass). They may not have complained to her, but they signed the petition none the less. The establishment are circling the wagons so, no matter where we shoot, we can hit something. We need a fair and free debate from this moment on.

Question negatived.

7.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Monday 9 May 2016

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Energy Bill: English Votes for English Laws

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): I am pleased to announce the publication of updated analysis of the Energy Bill for the purposes of English votes for English laws.

The English votes for English laws process applies to public Bills in the House of Commons. To support the process, the Government have agreed that they will

provide information to assist the Speaker in considering whether to certify that Bill or any of its provisions for the purposes of English votes for English laws.

The memorandum provides an assessment of the amendment made at Lords consideration of Commons reason (LCCR) and the motion tabled for Commons consideration of Lords message (CCLM), ahead of CCLM. The Department's assessment is that amendment 7TB does not change the territorial application of the Bill.

The memorandum can be found on the Bill documents page of the Parliament website at: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/energy/documents.html> and I have deposited a copy in the House of Commons Library.

[HCWS714]

Petitions

Monday 9 May 2016

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Community pharmacies

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that local pharmacies are a vital frontline health service, forming part of the fabric of health communities across England; further that they may be forced to close as a result of Government proposals; further that this could deprive people of accessible medicines advice and other valuable support from trusted professionals; and further that it may also put more pressure on GPs and hospital services.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to reassess their proposed plans and protect local pharmacies.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Tom Brake.]

[P001694]

OBSERVATIONS

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Improved mobile telephone signal in South Suffolk

The petition of residents of South Suffolk,

Declares that too many communities in the constituency suffer from poor mobile phone signal and not-spots; further that the Department of Culture, Media and Sport together with Her Majesty's Treasury should bring forward a new round of Mobile Infrastructure Project funding to support new masts in the worst affected villages; and further that a local paper petition and online petition on this matter has received 3,707 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and Her Majesty's Treasury to support the earliest possible introduction of a new phase of the Mobile Infrastructure Project for rural areas.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by James Cartledge, *Official Report*, 9 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 387.]

[P001677]

Observations from The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): The Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) was a complex and challenging programme which aimed to address the small number

of the population without 2G coverage by supporting the build of mobile masts. Most mast sites will be able to provide 3G and 4G coverage once operational.

As you are aware, MIP and its associated funding was contracted to end on 31 March 2016, with there being no plans to extend the project beyond this date. I understand the disappointment of those communities that will not benefit from MIP intervention; I am acutely aware that in many of these communities there was strong support for the MIP programme.

There were four potential MIP mast sites identified in South Suffolk to tackle not-spot areas. One of these masts, in Bildeston, was built and is providing mobile coverage. Two identified mast sites—one near Assington Green and another near Hartest—could not be progressed due to withdrawal of interest by landowners. In both instances, withdrawal was due to concerns about the visual impact the mast structure would have on the landscape. Due to the timing of these withdrawals, alternative locations could not be considered.

I understand that for the final mast, a planning application was made following a successful pre application process. Unfortunately, the site provider became unwilling to proceed with the hosting of a mast site following strong opposition from neighbouring residents.

Despite the closure of the MIP programme, I would like to assure you that improving mobile coverage across the UK remains a top priority for Government. In December 2014, the Government reached a landmark agreement with the four UK MNOs to ensure that 90% of the UK's land mass will have voice and text coverage from each of them by 2017. It also means that 97.7% of the UK will have a signal from at least one mobile operator.

This is a significant change in the way MNOs relate to coverage in this country and will guarantee £5 billion of investment in mobile infrastructure. Mobile services will be provided to some areas for the first time, and will be improved across the UK. It is estimated that as a result of this deal, partial not-spots (areas where there is coverage from one or two operators but not all four) will be halved and complete not-spots will be reduced by two-thirds.

To support industry mobile coverage rollout further, the Government announced on 17 March 2016 proposals to reform planning laws (for England only) that will, amongst other things, make it easier to build taller masts so that coverage can be improved further. We will continue to work with industry to support investment and help deliver improved digital connectivity in the UK.

Additionally, Telefonica (O2) has a further licence obligation to deliver indoor 4G coverage to 98% of premises in the UK (and 95% of premises in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) by 2017. Other MNOs have indicated that they will also match this commitment. These licence obligations should bring improved coverage across the UK.

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**not later than
Monday 16 May 2016**

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