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19 October 2016**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 19 October 2016

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Infrastructure Investment

1. **Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on future infrastructure investment in Wales. [906612]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): I am sure the whole House will join me in marking the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan tragedy this Friday. That event shocked not just Wales but the whole of the country and the wider world. I am sure colleagues across the House will pay tribute to the bravery and strong community ties that pulled the people of Aberfan through the immediate aftermath and provided so much support in the months and years that followed.

Wales is benefiting from millions of pounds of UK investment across the country. We are modernising our rail infrastructure, investing in the North Wales prison, and providing significant funding and support to improve internet speeds. This is a clear demonstration of the Government's commitment to delivering improvements in infrastructure in all corners of Wales.

Alberto Costa: Wales receives its funding from the Barnett bloc, but does my right hon. Friend recognise that the UK Government have a part to play in UK infrastructure so that it meets the strategic need in the UK as well as in Wales?

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend raises an important point. He rightly underlines the Barnett arrangements, and we were pleased to introduce a funding floor that provides Wales with £115 for every £100 that is spent in England. In addition, we have the electrification of the Great Western main line, North Wales prison is a significant project, and we have broadband roll-out. After all, we are interconnected economies, and the Government are determined to do the best for the whole of the UK.

15. [906626] **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): May I first associate myself with the right hon. Gentleman's appropriate remarks concerning Aberfan?

I am pleased to hear the emphasis on infrastructure interconnectivity. The Minister will know that the excellent north Wales growth bid—supported by business, cross-party politicians and local authorities in north Wales—needs

financial support from the UK Government. Will the UK Government give financial support to the growth bid?

Alun Cairns: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the work he is doing cross-border with the Mersey Dee Alliance and the all-party group on Mersey Dee North Wales. That resonates with our policy to develop a growth deal that works on a cross-border basis. We are working with those who are developing the north Wales growth deal. We are in negotiations on that. We have recently received the Growth Track 360 bid, and we will analyse that in due course. We are keen to work together, and with the Welsh Government.

10. [906621] **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, train passengers from and to my constituency use part of the Great Western railway line. When will the new intercity express trains for the Great Western rail line be operational?

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend highlights the investment in the Great Western main line, and much attention is rightly drawn to the infrastructure of the electrification itself. However, it is fair to say that, as soon as we have electrified as far as Didcot or Swindon, the new trains will be operational, so his constituents, my constituents and those in Wales and the south-west in general will benefit from modern trains well before the infrastructure has been completed.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): Roads are critical in infrastructural investment—roads on both sides of the border. What conversations has the right hon. Gentleman had with the Welsh Government about the A5/A483, which goes from Oswestry towards the Wrexham area, given the particular road safety problems in the community of Chirk?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Lady raises an important point. It is something that has crossed the discussions over the north Wales growth deal, and it underlines the interconnectivity of the region she mentions with Manchester, Merseyside and north Wales. We are working closely with the Welsh Government on their infrastructure plan and the national infrastructure plans for the whole of the United Kingdom. It is important that they dovetail appropriately.

12. [906623] **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): The Minister will be aware of a range of infrastructure improvement proposals in the north Wales and Mersey Dee taskforce's Growth Track 360 plan. Could he advise on the merits of seeking funding via a north Wales growth bid supported by cross-border partners to accelerate the delivery of those elements of the plan that are priorities in the short term, and would he help facilitate that?

Alun Cairns: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he has done on this important issue. I think he drew attention to it at one of the first meetings immediately after the general election, and that started the discussions that have led to the Growth Track 360 proposal. There are growth elements and transport infrastructure elements, and it is important that we ensure that those come

together for the benefit of the whole region. I am happy to work with him and with the Department for Transport as we approach the control period 6 considerations that will take place in due course.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I, too, associate my party and myself with the Secretary of State's comments on the Aberfan disaster.

The Treasury aims to pool local government pension schemes in Wales and England to create wealth funds to invest in infrastructure, with each fund containing accumulated assets of £25 billion. Combined Welsh assets amount to £13 billion, meaning that if the Treasury has its way, Welsh funds will be swallowed up by a cross-border pool. Will the Secretary of State demand a specific Welsh wealth fund so that the contributions of Welsh local government workers are used to invest in infrastructure projects in Wales?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman raises a fairly technical area of policy. Appropriate economies of scale are involved in this. I am happy to discuss the details with him. The Welsh Government have made their views clear. However, it is not only about "Welsh money for Wales"—which, on the face of it, would sound good—but about having the economies of scale such that we can access funding elsewhere as well. Therefore, it is not necessarily the right thing, but I am certainly not closed to the idea.

Swansea Bay City Deal

2. **Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on whether funding for the Swansea bay city deal will be included in the autumn statement. [906613]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): I am very supportive of achieving a deal for the Swansea bay city region. However, this is not about Government telling local authorities what to do; it is about empowering them to bring forward bespoke proposals for their region. I welcomed the announcement in the Budget that we were opening negotiations, but it must be the right deal—a well-thought-out deal that delivers for the whole region.

Geraint Davies: The Minister will know that Brexit will deal a major body blow to Swansea's universities and the Swansea region overall. What assurances can he give that in the autumn statement the Chancellor will make a firm commitment to put his money where his mouth is, because we want hard cash, not hot air, to provide the required support for jobs and prosperity in the area?

Guto Bebb: First, I should correct the hon. Gentleman: the city of Swansea voted to leave, so if there was a body blow to Swansea, it was delivered by people in Swansea. On the city deal, he has to be slightly fairer about what this Government are doing. We have delivered a city deal for Cardiff, with over £1 billion of investment, including £500 million from this Government, and a guarantee that the European elements would be supported.

If the Swansea city deal is as good as early indications appear to suggest, it can be supported by this Government in due course.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): The Swansea bay city deal aims to turn the region, which includes Neath, into a digital super-hub to boost the local economy, transform energy delivery, and improve health and social care. Will the Minister assure the House that this deal will not face the delays experienced by the Swansea bay tidal lagoon and rail electrification projects?

Guto Bebb: It is important to point out that this was announced in the last Budget and is being taken forward. However, there is a bottom-up approach. This Government do not take the view that Westminster knows best. We believe very strongly that the proposal should come from the region, and it is fantastic to see the way in which the four local authorities are working together. I am confident that the deal brings something quite special to south-west Wales, but let us see the detail. If the detail is persuasive, the support will be forthcoming.

Rail Electrification

3. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on rail electrification in Wales. [906614]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): This week will see the completion of the engineering work in the Severn tunnel required for the electrification of the Great Western main line. This is a truly historic occasion and a clear demonstration of this Government's commitment to deliver a rail investment strategy that will benefit the people of Wales in its entirety.

Justin Madders: The Secretary of State has spoken of the Growth Track 360 campaign, which, as the Minister will know, has the potential to transform the north Wales and Cheshire area by delivering 70,000 new jobs over 20 years. Improving the Wrexham to Bidston line, which serves Neston in my constituency, has been identified as the first priority for the team. Will the Minister join in the words of encouragement that we have already heard in agreeing to make representations to the Chancellor ahead of the autumn statement so as to deliver some of this much-needed investment?

Guto Bebb: I am pleased to echo the words of the Secretary of State, who highlighted the Growth Track 360 proposals. These are made in north Wales or made in north-west England proposals which will try to improve connectivity between parts of north-west England and north-east Wales. We are supportive of the proposals. I am pleased to say that this morning the Treasury wrote to the proposers in north Wales stating that support.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Some £738 million has been ring-fenced for the electrification of the valley lines, although that is not expected to be completed until at least 2022 or 2023. What assurances has the Minister had that the £120 million

from the European regional development fund will still be forthcoming for this project before the UK leaves the EU?

Guto Bebb: The situation is very clear. The proposals for the south Wales metro are part of the Cardiff city deal. They are a significant investment, and they include a contribution of around £110 million from the European fund. My understanding from the Treasury is that it will, if necessary, underwrite that element of the contribution, but if the proposals move forward in a timely manner, the European elements will be funded by the European Union.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I associate myself with the words of the Secretary of State on Aberfan. In 1966, I was the same age as the schoolchildren who were killed in that tragedy. My predecessor Cledwyn Hughes, who was Secretary of State for Wales, said that that was the darkest day of his life when Aberfan lost a generation.

On rail integration, can the Minister tell the House whether he has had discussions with the Welsh Government, and indeed the Irish Government, about connectivity between rail and the port of Holyhead?

Guto Bebb: I assure the hon. Gentleman, who is a keen advocate of rail links in north Wales, that the Wales Office has had discussions with the Welsh Government, with the Irish Government and, just as importantly, with the Rail Minister at Westminster.

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Is it not a scandal that during its 13 years in government, Labour failed to electrify a single mile of railway track in Wales?

Mr Speaker: That is a most interesting point, but it is not germane to the hon. Gentleman's responsibilities. A brief sentence in response to the right hon. Lady will suffice.

Guto Bebb: I agree entirely with the comments made by my right hon. Friend.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Does the Secretary of State agree that the Department for Transport and its predecessors have prevaricated over funding rail electrification in north Wales for more than 40 years, and can he give us a definite date for the project to move ahead?

Guto Bebb: I agree with the hon. Lady that the situation in north Wales has been one of under-investment for a very long time, so it is important to highlight the current investments: £43 million for signalling in north Wales, and a significant investment in the Chester links into Wrexham. It is important to look at the Growth Track 360 proposals carefully and coherently to see how we can improve connectivity through rail in north Wales.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I join the Secretary of State in marking the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan tragedy, and I pay tribute to the spirit and resilience of the people of Aberfan.

Rail passenger numbers into our capital city station, Cardiff Central, are forecast to increase to 22 million a year by 2025, so the expansion of the station, in conjunction

with the south Wales metro project that includes EU funding, is critical. Will the Secretary of State explain why the Government have been willing to invest in Birmingham and Edinburgh stations but will not confirm funding to accelerate feasibility work on expanding Cardiff Central? Does he want our capital city to have a station that is fit for purpose, or not?

Guto Bebb: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place on the Front Bench. The situation in Cardiff is another example of the old-fashioned view that Westminster knows best. We are still waiting for the proposals from south Wales for what needs to be done in relation to Cardiff station. This Government are investing in rail in a manner that simply did not happen under 13 years of Labour government. If the proposal from south Wales meets the Government's expectations, it will be looked at in a constructive manner.

Jo Stevens: In April's Welsh questions, the Minister told the House:

"The European Union makes a massive contribution to the Welsh economy: it is our largest trading partner; it supports thousands of jobs; and it provides significant investments for projects all around Wales."—[*Official Report*, 13 April 2016; Vol. 608, c.340-341.]

Four months on from the referendum result, what is the Secretary of State's Brexit plan for Wales to replace that trade, those jobs and that infrastructure? Where is that plan, and when are we going to see it?

Guto Bebb: I remind the hon. Lady that the people of Wales voted to leave the European Union. I stand by the comments that I made four months ago, but it is important to point out that the Wales Office has been going around Wales and talking to stakeholders, identifying the opportunities as a result of Brexit and trying to provide reassurance. I hope that the hon. Lady will at least welcome the commitment made by the Chancellor to support European funding projects in Wales and agricultural funding in Wales. Those are underwritten proposals from the Treasury that Opposition Front Benchers should welcome.

Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon

4. **Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab):** What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the Swansea bay tidal lagoon. [906615]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): I remain in close contact with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the proposed lagoon at Swansea bay. This is an exciting project for Wales. I am due to meet Charles Hendry tomorrow to gain an update on the progress of the independent review, and I look forward to reading the findings when he reports later this autumn.

Margaret Greenwood: Last week, Sheffield Forgemasters and a host of other industrial companies in the northern powerhouse urged Charles Hendry to back a new tidal lagoon project, so I welcome the Secretary of State's comments. If the Government will not listen to Wales, will they listen to the industrial north and finally get on with the Swansea bay tidal lagoon project?

Alun Cairns: I recognise the hon. Lady's interest in all things environmental, but Charles Hendry's review has been seen as a positive intervention. The approach he has taken has been welcomed, as has been pointed out, not only by the lagoon company, local authorities and politicians, but by the business community in south Wales and across the northern powerhouse. We recognise the contribution that it could make, and we are looking forward to his judgment.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): While it is important to take the findings of the Hendry review into account, will the Secretary of State press for progress on this exciting project as soon as it reports? The project not only has the potential to deliver clean energy, but will continue to build on the success, vibrancy and ambition that characterises Swansea and Wales.

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend, like me, looks forward to the Charles Hendry report. There is no doubt that, as a test project, it has great potential for Swansea bay, but he, like me, has an obligation to the taxpayer to ensure that it works for consumers and taxpayers, and that it represents good value for money for all concerned.

13. [906624] **Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): Having taken a bloody nose for Hinkley and a black eye for fracking, is it not about time that this Government took an energy decision that enjoys the full support of this House and of the population at large? Why hold up any further the British-made, British-owned tidal lagoon projects that could change the fortunes not only of Wales, but of manufacturing businesses across the country?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Lady and I agree that we would like something like that to be developed and to go ahead for the prospects and opportunities it will provide, but we have an obligation to the taxpayer: we have to ensure that it provides value for money. Only in recent weeks, the hon. Lady and her colleagues have complained about the cost of energy for Tata and other energy-intensive industries. It is important that we generate energy in a cost-effective way that suits consumers as well as taxpayers.

Tourism

5. **Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to encourage increased tourism to Wales. [906616]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his time as shadow Secretary of State and thank him for his contribution at the Dispatch Box in that role.

As the House will know, tourism is vital to delivering economic growth in Wales. It has been a great year for inbound tourism in the UK and in Wales, with day visits increasing by 24% in the last 12 months.

Paul Flynn: Will the Minister pay tribute to the magnificent tourist attractions in Newport—Tredegar House, the wetlands, Celtic Manor, and the splendid Roman baths and amphitheatre—all of which increased tourist numbers last year by up to 70%? Will he confirm that visitors to all parts of Wales always praise the warmth of our hospitality?

Guto Bebb: I clearly agree fully with the comment about the welcome in Wales. In particular, I pay tribute to the *South Wales Argus* and its "We're Backing Newport" campaign, which highlights the fact that Newport is not just a great place to live, but a great place to visit.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): With B&Bs such as the Old Rectory on the Lake and the Ty'n y Cornel in Tal-y-llyn under new management and prepared, I hope, to do bar mitzvahs and gay weddings, does the Minister not agree with me that Welsh B&Bs offer a warm welcome to the English?

Guto Bebb: I agree with my hon. Friend that Welsh bed and breakfasts offer a great welcome, whether people are English, Welsh or any other nationality. They are a key part of the Welsh tourism offer, and they are to be applauded for the work they do.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I associate myself and my colleagues with the tribute to the people of Aberfan on the 50th anniversary.

In a previous life, the Minister was a very passionate supporter of the campaign to reduce VAT on tourism. He has made some very pronounced comments about that campaign in the past. Does he stand by them? More importantly, what representations will he make to the Treasury to make such a case to benefit tourism in our communities?

Guto Bebb: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly right in saying that I am a politician who advocates lower taxes, so I welcome the fact that this Government have cut national insurance contributions for small businesses and are cutting corporation tax for small businesses. There is a case to be made on VAT for many sectors of the economy, and that case will be made by the Wales Office, but there are no promises, I am afraid.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Minister agree that one dividend of Brexit has been the fall in the pound against the euro, meaning that holidays in Wales are now 15% cheaper for our European friends?

Guto Bebb: Certainly I am more than happy to agree with my hon. Friend that tourism in north Wales has done extremely well over the past few months. Last week I spoke to hoteliers in Llandudno, who were saying that they have enjoyed 90%-plus occupancy during the summer, so there has been a Brexit dividend in that respect.

Steel Industry

6. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to support the steel industry in Wales. [906617]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): I am in regular contact with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the First Minister and the Welsh Minister for the Economy. We have not lost focus while these issues have been out of the headlines. The Government leave no stone unturned in supporting the steel sector.

Alex Cunningham: What assurances can the Secretary of State give that, in the event of the completion of a joint venture by Tata Strip Products and ThyssenKrupp, commitments will be made on jobs, investment and the continuation of primary steel making at Port Talbot and across Wales?

Alun Cairns: It is in the UK's strategic interests to maintain a steel-making capacity, and so quite obviously to maintain that at Port Talbot. The Government stand ready and waiting to support any bidder. It is a matter for Tata as to whether it pursues the joint venture. We are maintaining a relationship with Tata and other potential bidders that were in discussions earlier this year. We are keen to maintain a sustainable future.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Welsh steel is obviously of the highest quality, and I hope that when Heathrow airport is expanded Welsh steel will be used. In that sense, will the Secretary of State have a word with the Prime Minister to ensure that she stops faffing around on Heathrow expansion and that we have a positive decision as early as possible?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman tempts me, but he knows that that decision will be coming soon. He makes an important point about the use of steel in infrastructure projects. The UK Government have already changed procurement rules, making it easier for British steel to be used in contracts. For example, Crossrail, Europe's largest civil engineering scheme, uses almost entirely British steel.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): As the representative for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney—
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has a very personal constituency reason for wishing to acknowledge the anniversary of the Aberfan tragedy. Let us hear him with the courtesy he warrants.

Gerald Jones: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As the representative for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, I too would like to associate myself with the comments of the Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), in relation to the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan disaster, an unimaginable loss for the families and, indeed, the whole community.

One major challenge—if not the major challenge—facing the Welsh steel industry is that its energy costs are far higher than those of our competitors. Despite warm words, little action has been taken. What action is the Secretary of State or the Government taking to bring down energy costs faced by energy-intensive industries?

Alun Cairns: I welcome the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State to their positions. He makes an important point on steel-making capacity and energy costs. He will be well aware that the energy-intensive industry package the Government have brought forward responded to the demands from the industry and from Tata specifically. We have reduced energy costs to the steel sector by £109 million, which

has been welcomed and has put the sector in a much stronger position, with a turnaround in finance from a loss of £64 million to an operating profit of £95 million.

Arriva Trains Franchise

7. **Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on the Arriva Trains franchise renewal. [906618]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): The in-principle agreement between the Welsh Government and the Department for Transport to devolve the Wales and Borders franchise was announced on 21 November 2014. We are engaging constructively with the Welsh Government to enable them to achieve the successful procurement of the next Wales and Borders franchise in October 2018.

Louise Haigh: Labour has tabled an amendment to the Digital Economy Bill to write free wi-fi into the renewal of any rail franchise. Does the Minister agree that this requirement would be welcomed by passengers in Wales and should be included in Arriva's next franchise agreement?

Guto Bebb: This is a fair point. That would be appreciated by passengers in Wales. As part of the devolution package, that is something to be agreed between the Department for Transport and the Welsh Government, but I am sure they will have heard the hon. Lady's comments.

Rural Broadband

8. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What plans his Department has to work with the Welsh Government on extending the roll-out of broadband in remote rural areas of Wales. [906619]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): Ensuring rural areas of Wales benefit from our broadband roll-out is one of my key priorities. The UK Government have supported investment in broadband across rural Wales, including £14.2 million in Powys and £13.9 million in Gwynedd. The Secretary of State recently had positive discussions with the Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and the Minister for Science and Skills on future work to roll out broadband in Wales.

Sir Henry Bellingham: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he agree with me that superfast broadband is a key driver for successful diversification in remote rural economies, and does he agree that it is time BT Openreach raised its game?

Guto Bebb: I am sure the mailbox of every MP would highlight the fact that it is time for BT Openreach to raise its game. On the importance of broadband to rural economic development, I can only agree fully with my hon. Friend. In my constituency of Aberconwy we have a call centre in Llanrwst, which is only in place as a result of the broadband roll-out encouraged by this Government's funding.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): In a Twitter message to me, the director of BT in Wales said that the

“vast majority of rural Wales, including Arfon, can already access superfast broadband”.

Does the Minister agree with her?

Guto Bebb: The “vast majority” is perhaps overstating the case, but the improvement over recent months has been spectacular, with rates of 90%-plus in many rural counties. There is still more work to be done, but in terms of rural broadband we are going in the right direction in Wales and the UK.

Hywel Williams: The main superfast broadband line passes the community of Crymlyn in my constituency, literally at the bottom of the people's gardens. Many of these people run businesses from home and need to access substantial documents, but the download speed in Crymlyn would be an embarrassment even in the previous century. When will the Minister, or his Labour confederates in Cardiff, actually do something to remove this huge barrier to prosperity and economic growth?

Guto Bebb: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the investment in his own constituency, which is approaching £12 million. There are still issues in relation to broadband roll-out in Wales, but sometimes we have to recognise that what has been achieved is tremendous. We are slightly ahead of the situation in England, which is something we should all applaud. However, I make no bones about the fact that more and faster broadband connectivity in Wales is crucial. The Wales Office will carry on pressurising BT Openreach to ensure that that is achieved sooner rather than later.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [906662] **Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 19 October.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I know the whole House will wish to join me in remembering all those who lost their lives and were affected by the Aberfan disaster 50 years ago this week. It claimed the lives of 144 people, the vast majority of them children. It caused devastation to the local community. It is right that we pause and reflect on this important anniversary, and recognise the solidarity and resilience of the people of Aberfan to overcome this powerful tragedy.

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

Mr Bone: May I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister? I am of an age that I can remember the terrible black and white film of this tragedy. It affected everyone. We in this House pass on our thoughts to the people of Aberfan today.

Mr Speaker, as you might know it is my birthday today. The Prime Minister has already given me a huge

birthday present by letting everyone know that we will be out of the European Union no later than 31 March 2019. May I press her for another present? Her excellent policy of closing Victorian prisons and opening modern ones is spot-on. Will she support the reopening of Wellingborough prison as part of this excellent programme, or would she rather just sing happy birthday?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to wish my hon. Friend a very happy birthday today: many happy returns! I hope that Mrs Bone is going to treat the occasion in an appropriate manner. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear what is coming next.

The Prime Minister: Calm down, Mr Speaker.

On the serious issue about prisons, I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend applauds the policy we are following of closing out-of-date prisons and building new ones. I hear the lobbying he has made for Wellingborough, and I can assure him that Wellingborough is one of the sites that is being considered. The Secretary of State will look at the issue very carefully and make an announcement in due course.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in commemorating the disaster at Aberfan all those years ago when 118 children along with many adults died. Many in that community are still living with that tragedy, and they will live with it for the rest of their days. As a young person growing up at that time, I remember it well, particularly the collections for the disaster fund. The BBC documentary presented by Huw Edwards was brilliant and poignant, and serves to remind us all of what the disaster was about.

One in four of us will suffer a mental health problem. Analysis by the King's Fund suggests that 40% of our mental health trusts had their budgets cut last year, and six trusts have seen their budgets cut for three years in a row. Is the Prime Minister really confident that we are delivering parity of esteem for mental health?

The Prime Minister: First, like the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), I am of an age when I can remember seeing on television those terrible scenes of what happened in Aberfan. I did not see the whole of Huw Edwards' documentary, but I thought the bits that I happened to see last night were very poignant, as the right hon. Gentleman said. Interestingly, what it showed again was the issue of those in power not being willing to step up to the plate initially and to accept what had actually happened, but the inquiry was very clear about where the responsibility lay.

It is right that we are introducing parity of esteem for mental health in our national health service. We have waited too long for this, and it is important that it is being done. We are actually investing more in mental health services—an estimated record £11.7 billion. In particular, we are increasing the overall number of children's beds to the highest number for mental health problems, which I think is important. There is, of course, more for us to do in looking at mental health, but we have made an important start and, as I say, that funding will be there.

Jeremy Corbyn: I received a letter from Colin, who has a family member with a chronic mental health condition. Many others, like him, have relatives going through a mental health crisis. He says that the

“NHS is so dramatically underfunded”

that too often it is left to the underfunded police forces to deal with the consequences of this crisis. Indeed, the chief constable of Devon and Cornwall has this month threatened legal action against the NHS because he is forced to hold people with mental conditions in police cells because there are not enough NHS beds. I simply ask the Prime Minister this: if the Government are truly committed to parity of esteem, why is this trust and so many others facing an acute financial crisis at the present time?

The Prime Minister: May I first of all say to Colin that I think all of us in this House recognise the difficulties people have when coping with mental health problems? I commend those in this House who have been prepared to stand up and refer to their own mental health problems. I think that has sent a very important signal to people with mental health issues across the country.

The right hon. Gentleman raises the whole question of the interaction between the NHS and police forces. I am very proud of the fact that when I was Home Secretary I actually worked with the Department of Health to bring a change to the way in which police forces dealt with people in mental health crisis. That is why we see those triage pilots out on the streets and better NHS support being given to police forces, so that the number of people who have to be taken to a police cell as a place of safety has come down. Overall, I think it has more than halved, and in some areas it has come down by even more than that. This is a result of the action that this Government have taken.

Jeremy Corbyn: The reality is that no one with a mental health condition should ever be taken to a police cell. Such people should be supported in the proper way, and I commend the police and crime commissioners who have managed to end the practice in their areas. The reality is, however, that it is not just Devon and Cornwall suffering cuts; the Norfolk and Suffolk mental health trust has been cut in every one of the last three years.

I agree with the Prime Minister that it is a very good thing for Members to stand up and openly discuss mental health issues that they have experienced, because we need to end the stigma surrounding mental health conditions throughout the country. However, NHS trusts are in a financial crisis. According to NHS Providers, it seems to be the worst financial crisis in NHS history: 80% of acute hospitals are now in deficit. There was a time, in 2010, when the NHS was in surplus. What has happened?

The Prime Minister: Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman what has happened in relation to NHS funding. We asked the NHS itself to come up with a five-year plan, and we asked the NHS itself to say what extra funding was needed to deliver on that. The NHS came up with its five-year plan, led by Simon Stevens as its chief executive. He said that £8 billion was needed. We are giving £10 billion of extra funding to the NHS. I might also remind the right hon. Gentleman that at the

last election, it was not the Conservative party that was refusing to guarantee funding for the NHS; it was the Labour party.

Jeremy Corbyn: In six years, the NHS has gone from surplus to the worst crisis in its history. A total of £3 billion was wasted on a top-down reorganisation that no one wanted, and Simon Stevens made it very clear to the Select Committee yesterday that he did not believe that NHS England had enough money to get through the crisis that it is facing.

May I offer an analysis from the Care Quality Commission, which seems to have quite a good grasp of what is going on? It says that cuts in adult social care are

“translating to increased A&E attendances, emergency admissions and delays to people leaving hospital, which in turn is affecting the ability of a growing number of trusts to meet their performance and financial targets.”

Will the Prime Minister also address the reckless and counterproductive adult social care cuts that were made by her predecessor?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman quoted what had been said by Simon Stevens, the chief executive of NHS England. At the time of the autumn statement last November, he said that

“our case for the NHS has been heard and actively supported.”

The right hon. Gentleman also raised the question of social care, and the interaction between healthcare and social care. More than £5 billion extra was put into the better care fund in order to deal with precisely those issues, and local authorities are able to raise 2% of council tax to deal with the social care costs that they face. What is important, however, is for the health service and local authorities to work together to ensure that they deliver the best possible service to people who require that social care. I saw a very good example of that at Salford Royal on Monday, and I want to see more examples throughout the national health service, delivering for patients. We have put in the funding, which the right hon. Gentleman's party would not have done, so that the NHS will receive better care for patients.

Jeremy Corbyn: We all want local government and the NHS to work closely together, but the problem is that local government funding has been cut, and 400,000 fewer people are receiving publicly funded social care as a result. The NHS is having difficulty coping with the crisis that it is in, and unfortunately there is bed-blocking. Acute patients cannot leave, because no social care is available for them somewhere down the line. The issue is a funding crisis in both the NHS and local government. Figures published by NHS trusts show that the total deficit is £2.45 billion, but the chief executive of NHS Providers says that the figure may be even bigger. The Government are disguising the extent of the crisis through temporary bailouts. *[Interruption.]* They are bailing out trusts in a crisis. That is, of course, a good thing, but why are the trusts in a crisis in the first place?

Next month, sustainability and transformation plans are going to be published. Many people across the country are quite alarmed by this because of the threat to accident and emergency departments. Will the Prime Minister deal with this issue now by quite simply saying

there will be no downgrades and no closures of A&E departments in the statement coming out next month?

The Prime Minister: I say to the right hon. Gentleman that over the course of this Parliament, the Government will be spending over half a trillion pounds on the national health service. That is a record level of investment in our national health service. There is a key difference between the way the right hon. Gentleman approaches this and how I approach it: Conservative Members believe that people at a local level should be able to make decisions about the national health service, and that decisions about the national health service should be led by clinicians—it should not be a top-down approach, which is typical of the Labour party.

Jeremy Corbyn: Wow! Well, top-down was what we got. It cost £3 billion for a reorganisation that nobody wanted at all.

I started by asking the Prime Minister about parity of esteem. All this Government have produced is parity of failure—failing mental health patients; failing elderly people who need social care; failing the 4 million on NHS waiting lists; failing the five times as many people who are waiting more than four hours at A&E departments—and another winter crisis is looming. The Society for Acute Medicine has it right when it says that this funding crisis and the local government funding crisis are leaving the NHS “on its knees”.

The Prime Minister: What has happened in the NHS over the past six years? More patients being treated, more calls to the ambulance service, more operations, more doctors, more nurses—that is what has been happening in the NHS. But let us just look at the right hon. Gentleman’s party’s approach to the national health service: a former shadow Health Secretary said that it would be “irresponsible” to put more money into the national health service; and a former leader of the Labour party wanted to “weaponise” the national health service. At every election the Labour party claims that the Conservatives will cut NHS spending; after every election we increase NHS spending. At every election Labour claims the Tories will privatise the NHS; after every election when we have been in government we have protected the NHS. There is only one party that has cut funding for the NHS: the Labour party in Wales.

Q3. [906664] Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): Is the Prime Minister aware that research shows that infrastructure investment most benefits areas that are prepared to capitalise on it with new associated possibilities for housing, skills and jobs? Will she ensure that current opportunities are taken for inward investment to preserve and re-energise essential national industries such as rotorcraft in the Yeovil area as we seek to capitalise on the dualling of the A303?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are right to invest in infrastructure such as the A303. That can make a real difference to local communities, but it is important that local communities embrace those opportunities. I know that my hon. Friend has been putting together ideas for a vision for Yeovil and I am sure he will share them with my right hon. Friend the Communities Secretary.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I join the Prime Minister and the leader of the Labour party in remembering the Aberfan disaster. Our thoughts are with everyone affected by that.

Thousands of innocent civilians have now been killed by Saudi air strikes in Yemen. Can the Prime Minister assure the House that those civilians have not been killed by Paveway IV missiles partially manufactured in Scotland that are under licence from her Government to Saudi Arabia?

The Prime Minister: First, may I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his election as deputy leader of the Scottish National party?

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we have one of the toughest regimes in the world in relation to arms exports. When allegations arise, we press—I have pressed in the past and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has pressed—the Saudi Arabia Government to properly investigate the issues and to learn lessons from them.

Angus Robertson: I thank the Prime Minister for her kind wishes but, to return to the subject of my question, it is beyond doubt that Saudi air forces are bombing Yemen. Planes made in Britain are being flown by pilots who were trained by Britain and dropping missiles that are made in Britain. I asked her a direct question and she could not answer it, so I will try a second time. Can she give the House an assurance that civilians have not been killed by Paveway IV bombs being dropped on Yemen that are partially manufactured in Scotland under license by her Government? If she does not know the answer to that question, how can she possibly, in good conscience, continue selling them to Saudi Arabia?

The Prime Minister: In response to the right hon. Gentleman, the point that I made was very simple: we press for proper investigations into what has happened in those incidents before we reach a decision or a conclusion. We have a very strong relationship with Saudi Arabia, which is important for this country in terms of dealing with counter-terrorism and a number of other issues, but what matters, when incidents happen about which there is concern, is that they are properly investigated.

Q5. [906666] Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): A few weeks ago I thought that I had successfully bought four tickets online for one of my favourite bands, Green Day, only to be told that the tickets were unavailable and the gig was sold out, but within minutes I could buy the tickets on another site, for twice the price. It turns out that the ticket site had been the victim of a computerised attack by organised touts who then resell tickets at inflated prices. Will the Prime Minister ask her Ministers to give close consideration to my amendment to the Digital Economy Bill that would make the computerised harvesting of tickets for resale an offence? Similar legislation exists elsewhere, and it would go a long way towards protecting consumers and genuine music fans.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue. I am sure that he is not the only Member of the House who has had that experience, and he is certainly not the only person who has been affected, as Members will know from their constituency mailbags.

The Consumer Rights Act 2015 introduced a review of online ticket sales. Professor Mike Waterson's independent report on online secondary ticketing makes a number of recommendations, including some whereby the industry itself could better protect itself from the problem. The Government will look very carefully at those recommendations to see what can be done to address the issue.

Q2. [906663] **Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): The child abuse inquiry needs to regain the trust of survivors. In September, the Home Secretary said that she had no information about serious leadership failings, but on Monday she told the House that she had known about serious problems since July. Yesterday it emerged that senior Home Office officials were briefed as early as April.

The Prime Minister set up the inquiry and appointed the chair. She was the individual responsible for the inquiry's success. She was the Home Secretary in April and the only person who had the power to act. Will she now finally tell us when she personally learned of the serious problems developing in the inquiry, and why she took no action at all?

The Prime Minister: I recognise that the hon. Lady has taken a particular interest in this issue. I am sure that she will recognise, as I hope other Members do, why it was that I set up the inquiry. For too long, people who had been subjected to child—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: For too long, the voices of people who had been subjected to child sexual abuse went unheard and they felt that they were not getting justice. That is why it is very important that the inquiry is able to continue and to find that justice for them.

I have to say to the hon. Lady that one of the important aspects of this is that, over the years, too many people have had concerns that those in positions of power have intervened to stop them getting justice. There were stories around about the inquiry and about individuals related to the inquiry, but the Home Secretary cannot intervene on the basis of suspicion, rumour or hearsay.

The hon. Lady refers to the statement that was made in this House yesterday about information being discussed with a Director general at the Home Office. She will also have noted that it was asked that that conversation would be confidential, and it was, as far as I am aware, treated as such. It is important for us to recognise that when the Home Office was officially informed of issues, it acted. It is now for the inquiry to get on and deliver for victims and survivors.

Q8. [906669] **Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Having been born in and grown up in south Wales, and as a former Secretary of State for Wales, may I associate myself with the heartfelt tributes paid by Members on the Front Bench and throughout this House to the valley community of Aberfan? That absolutely unparalleled tragedy stunned the world. Will the Prime Minister now step up to the plate, to use her own words, reconfirm her commitment to Wales and ensure that her Government work with the Welsh Government, particularly after leaving the EU, to maintain

the investment that is so vital to the long-term social and economic development of the valleys communities and the rest of Wales?

The Prime Minister: As a former Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend is well aware of the impact of the Aberfan disaster on south Wales and those local communities. As I said in my opening remarks, the events were absolutely tragic and the thoughts of the whole House are with those affected by them. I can give the commitment that she is asking for to Wales and to working with the Welsh Government. I am clear that this Government will deliver a country that works for everyone, and that means every part of the United Kingdom. Of course, the Wales Bill will put in place a historic transfer of powers to the Welsh Assembly. It will allow the Welsh Government to focus on the job of transforming the Welsh economy and, of course, we are talking to the Welsh Government about how we go forward with negotiations for leaving the EU.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Progress today has been very slow, so I appeal to colleagues to speed up. I call Stephen Pound.

Q4. [906665] **Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): I am much obliged, Mr Speaker. Can there be a single Member of this House who does not have reason to be grateful to those heroes of our high street, community pharmacists? Can there be any member of the public who is not as bemused as I am that the Government are proposing a 12% cut in the community pharmacy budget, potentially leading to 3,000 closures? Will the Prime Minister express her support for community pharmacies and have another look at this divisive, corrosive and destructive proposal?

The Prime Minister: Everybody in this House recognises the role and contribution of community pharmacies up and down the country, but it is also right that we look at how we are spending NHS money. That is why the Government are looking carefully at this whole issue. If the hon. Gentleman supports community pharmacies, perhaps he ought to have a word with the Leader of the Opposition, because his right hon. Friend's policy is to nationalise the health service completely, lock, stock and barrel—GP surgeries, Macmillan nurses and community pharmacies.

Q11. [906672] **Richard Fuller** (Bedford) (Con): May I welcome the fact that next week this Government will finally make a decision on airport capacity in the south-east, which eluded three of my right hon. Friend's predecessors and will help to boost trade? Does the Prime Minister agree that, on this issue, substance matters more than symbolism, and will she outline to the House her timetable for implementation?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue, and he is absolutely right. This month, the Government will take a decision on the appropriate site for extended airport capacity in the south-east. The subject has been debated, discussed and speculated about for 40 years; this Government will take a decision, but then a formal process has to be undertaken. The Government will identify their preferred site option.

That will go to a statutory consultation, and then the Government will consider the results of that consultation and introduce an airports national planning statement on which the House will vote.

Q6. [906667] **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Does the Prime Minister agree that any move to close the historical barracks at Fort George would be not only a poor military decision after 250 years of service, but a betrayal of the Black Watch and a slap in the face to the highlands?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the strength of the hon. Gentleman's view. No decisions on Fort George or other locations have been taken and the Ministry of Defence will engage with all parties impacted by any such decisions, including in Scotland.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): My right hon. Friend has expressed reluctance to submit to the House even broad plans for our negotiations with the EU because of worries that to do so might weaken her Government's negotiating position. She might have noticed that, this week, one or more Brexiteer members of her Cabinet have been briefing the newspapers copiously on every proposal being put forward in papers to the relevant Cabinet Committee by their colleagues and launching political attacks on Cabinet colleagues who seem to disagree with them. Will she take firm action to stop this process? Does she also agree that the proper approach should involve parliamentary scrutiny of the broad strategy, once her Government have reached agreement on what it should be?

The Prime Minister: The Government are very clear that the vote on 23 June was a vote to ensure that we had control of movement of people from the EU into the UK. Also, we want the best possible access for businesses for trading in goods and services, and for operating within the European market. That is what the Government will be aiming for, and we will be ambitious in that. Parliament will have its say. There are going to be lengthy negotiations over the course of the two years and more, and Parliament will have its say in a whole variety of ways, not least in relation to the great repeal Bill.

Q7. [906668] **Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Some of my constituents who have had their tax credits suddenly stopped by Concentrix have been accused of being in a relationship with the previous tenants of their homes, even though they have never met them, and in some cases of being in a relationship with members of their own families and told to prove that they are not. This Kafkaesque situation is causing deep distress and hardship among working mothers in my constituency. Is this what the Prime Minister means by being on the side of working people? What is she going to do to put this right?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises an issue that is a matter of concern to Members across the House. I am making sure that those who are being assessed are being assessed properly and that the right decisions are being taken. The Department for Work and Pensions is looking at the whole process of what should be done and how those assessments should be undertaken. I hope that she welcomes the fact that this Government have said that those with long-term conditions

that are not going to improve will not be put through the regular assessments that they had under her Labour Government.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): The first nuclear science degree apprenticeship, with apprenticeships with EDF at Hinkley Point and with the Ministry of Defence, has just been launched at Bridgwater and Taunton College. This is at the forefront of the Government's apprenticeship reform policy. The course combines academic study with practical work experience and it is paid. Does the Prime Minister agree that this is exactly the kind of business-led course that the nation needs if it is to forge ahead?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I commend Bridgwater and Taunton College for the steps it is taking to work with businesses to ensure that its courses are what business needs. That is exactly what we want to see. We also want a regeneration of our expertise in the nuclear industry.

Q9. [906670] **Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): The Prime Minister recently celebrated her 60th birthday, but she is not going to retire. That is her choice, but she is denying that same choice to many of my constituents, including women such as Christine from Springburn, who has worked every bit as hard as the Prime Minister, but will now have to work for an extra six years. When will the Prime Minister do the right thing and give the WASPI women their transitional arrangements so that they, too, can make the choices that she enjoys?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the hon. Lady knows that we have transitional arrangements in place and that action was taken by the Government to ensure that the period of time for the pension age change would be no more than 18 months compared with the previous timetable. For 81% of women affected by the 2011 change, it will be no more than 12 months.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): The employment figures that have come out today are of course fantastic news, but I am wary about the economic volatility that could result from Brexit, with the potential for inflation to rise and the cost of living to go up for people on very modest wages. Does the Prime Minister agree that we need to keep as many people in employment as possible? We have made the right decision on tax credits. May I urge her personally, ahead of the autumn statement, to look at the cuts that are still embedded in universal credit to ensure that she understands what they will do to people who are trying to get into work?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to talk about the importance of getting people into work, which has a benefit not just in terms of families having an income. I am proud of the Conservative Government's record over the past six years of getting more and more people into work so that hundreds of thousands fewer households now have no work income coming in. That is extremely important. The point of universal credit is to ensure that the transition from benefits into work means that people do see a benefit if they get into the workplace. The previous system meant that some people

said that they were better off on benefits. We want to see people in work and that is what the system is there to encourage.

Q10. [906671] Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I have been asking questions for 15 months about this Tory Government's appalling two-child policy and rape clause, but the Government still do not know how it will work. From one feminist to another, can the Prime Minister tell me how she justifies putting vulnerable women through the trauma of proving that their third child was born as the result of rape?

The Prime Minister: We have been clear that women who have a third child as a result of rape would not be subject to the limit that is being considered in relation to benefits. I absolutely recognise that the hon. Lady's point addresses concern about dealing with individuals who have been through the trauma of rape, and that is why the Government are taking their time to consider that. We are consulting at the moment and looking at how to ensure that we do this in absolutely the right way.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Given the increasing relevance of the Commonwealth for trade, will the Prime Minister give her personal support to the first ever meeting of Commonwealth Trade Ministers here in the UK next year? When she goes to India next month, will she commit to persuade Prime Minister Modi to attend the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in the UK?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to encourage all leaders to attend CHOGM when it takes place here in the United Kingdom. I assure my right hon. Friend that we are indeed looking at the possibility of trade deals in relation to the Commonwealth. I applaud that first ever meeting of Commonwealth Trade Ministers, which is an important step as we look to forge a new global role in the world, ensuring that we make a success of leaving the EU and trading our way around the world.

Q12. [906673] Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): Local clinicians are absolutely clear that the removal of 24-hour consultant-led maternity services from the West Cumberland hospital in Whitehaven will cost lives. Ultimately, this is a decision that the Government will have to make. Will the Prime Minister please commit today to visit my constituency to see what the effect of the decision will be on west Cumbrian families, women and children?

The Prime Minister: I recognise that this is not the first time that the hon. Gentleman has raised concerns about West Cumberland hospital. The point of how we are approaching this is that decisions are taken at and generated from the local level. It is the local area that will be looking at the services that people need, and at ensuring that they can be provided and are safe for his constituents and those in other parts of Cumbria.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The tragic murder of one prisoner and the critical wounding of two others at Pentonville prison last night brings home the stark decline in safety in our prisons. Will the Prime Minister give the Secretary of State for Justice

her full support in commissioning an immediate, thorough and complete review of the operation, management, capacity, leadership and resourcing of the National Offender Management Service, which has singularly failed to arrest this declining situation?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a matter that was one of the first issues that my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice raised with me: violence and safety in prisons. That is why my right hon. Friend is looking across the board at the action that needs to be taken. She has already announced extra money for more staff in prisons and recognises the importance of this particular issue.

Q13. [906675] Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Just one in every 1,000 pupils is a child on free school meals in a grammar school. Does the Prime Minister agree that that tiny number is a flimsy evidence base on which to create a new national schools policy? Would it not be better for her to look at the real evidence base and at how to reduce inequality in education?

The Prime Minister: I want to see every child getting the education that is right for them. I want every child to be able to get on as far as their talents and hard work will take them. That is why we need to increase the number of good schools in this country. If we look at the gap in attainment in grammar schools between those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are not, we see that it is virtually zero—that is the not the same in other schools. I just say to the hon. Lady that it is wrong that we have a system in this country where a law prevents the opening or expansion of good schools. That is what we are going to get rid of.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Will the Prime Minister work with her Ministers and Secretaries of State to champion a reduction in the ivory trade and in the trade in the organs of endangered species throughout the world so that this country tries to lead by example?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. This is something the Government have been taking up, and I can assure her that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not only heard her representations, but promoted this as an issue that the Government will take up.

Q14. [906676] Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): The pottery industry is witnessing a modest renaissance, in part through EU exports and EU action on Chinese ceramic dumping. The previous Prime Minister said that he would make sure that the ceramic industry's voice is heard and that we would get a good negotiation. What is this Prime Minister doing to ensure that Stoke-on-Trent's ceramic manufacturers maintain both tariff-free access to the EU and a level playing field in the face of protectionist dumping?

The Prime Minister: I am very pleased to welcome the renaissance in the ceramics industry that the hon. Gentleman refers to. His constituency, of course, has a long-standing history of and tradition in ceramics. What are we doing? As we go through the negotiations for leaving the European Union, we will be ensuring that

this country has the best possible access to trade with and operate within that European market. That is what people want and that is what we will deliver.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): Many constituents have contacted me to express concern about anti-Semitism. I am sure that every Member of this House can agree that we should show zero tolerance of anti-Semitism, but does the Prime Minister also agree that we must ensure that all parties do not allow a situation to arise in which it appears that an environment is created where anti-Semitism is tolerated?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that this House should send a very clear message that we will not tolerate anti-Semitism. I have been concerned about the rise in the number of incidents of anti-Semitism in this country. We should very clearly ensure that those incidents of anti-Semitism are properly investigated and dealt with, and that we give the clear message that we will not tolerate it. But that does have to be done by every single political party in this Chamber, and I say to the Leader of the Opposition that given the report of the Home Affairs Committee about anti-Semitism and the approach to anti-Semitism in the Labour party, he needs to think very carefully about the environment that has been created in the Labour party in relation to anti-Semitism.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): We are now just one month from the start of the new inquest into the Birmingham pub bombings. West Midlands police has set aside for itself a legal fund of £1 million, but as of today, the bereaved families have no legal funding. Prime Minister, this is a shameful state of affairs. Please intervene and show the Birmingham families the same compassion as was shown to the Hillsborough families.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman might be aware that the Birmingham families have been encouraged to apply—I believe they have applied—to the legal aid fund for exceptional funding. That was, as I understand it, what happened after the 7/7 bombings.

The Home Secretary has made clear her expectation that funding will be provided. We are waiting for the decision from the legal aid fund, and we are hopeful that it will be a positive one.

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Why attempt to build a new runway at Heathrow when we could deliver one at Gatwick in half the time, for half the cost and with a fraction of the environmental impact?

The Prime Minister: I assure my right hon. Friend that no decision has been taken on the site of airport expansion in the south-east. As she will know from her previous background, the Davies commission said that airport capacity in the south-east should be expanded and the Government accepted that argument. The Davies commission identified three sites, all of which it said would be credible and deliverable, and the Government will take a decision this month.

Mr Speaker: It is fitting that we finish with a question from Mr Gerald Jones.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): May I thank the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and other Members for their comments about the Aberfan disaster, and about the resilience and quiet dignity shown by the people of Aberfan? At 9.15 on Friday morning—the anniversary of the disaster—the people in that community and communities across Wales will mark the disaster with a minute's silence. As the disaster affected communities right across the country, if not the world, will the Prime Minister support that minute's silence being marked across the UK as well?

The Prime Minister: I know that the Secretary of State for Wales will be attending the memorial that will take place in the hon. Gentleman's constituency on Friday. It is appropriate that we all show our respect for those who lost their lives and for the families who suffered as a result of the Aberfan tragedy 50 years ago. As we said earlier, it was a terrible tragedy not just for individual families, but for a whole community, and it is right that we recognise that and mark it.

Sale of Annuities

12.46 pm

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on why the Government have abandoned plans to allow savers to sell their annuities in return for a cash lump sum.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Simon Kirby): This Government have taken a great step forward in giving more and more people freedom to choose how they use their pension savings when they retire. We have already seen more than 300,000 people choosing to access their pension flexibly since the reforms were introduced. Alongside our efforts to do that, we also said that we would look at how we could spread that flexibility to people locked into existing annuities. We consulted extensively with the industry and with consumer groups to explore whether we could put in place the right conditions for a market to develop to facilitate that idea.

Throughout our investigations, one of our very highest priorities was to establish whether people could get a good deal through such a market. In the course of our efforts to investigate the viability of a secondary market in annuities, two things became clear. First, without compromising on consumer protections there would be insufficient purchasers of these annuities to create a competitive market in which British pensioners could get a good deal. Secondly, pensioners trying to sell their annuities would also be likely to incur high costs in doing so.

This Government have made it very clear that we want this to be a country that works for everyone, and that includes making sure that everyone gets a high level of consumer protection. It has become clear, through our extensive research, that a secondary market would not be able to offer this. Rather than being to the benefit of British pensioners, it would instead be to their detriment. It is for that reason that we are not prepared to allow such a market to develop, and we will not be taking this policy further.

Greg Mulholland: No disrespect to the Minister, whom I like, but the Chancellor should have been here to answer this question, particularly given the disgraceful way in which the announcement was made.

The move towards pension freedoms was the flagship announcement in the Budget just two years ago, in 2014. Originally the brainchild of the former Liberal Democrat Pensions Minister Steve Webb, it was embraced by the former Chancellor and specifically included in the manifesto on which this Government were elected. Yet yesterday afternoon, the Government announced via the press, not via this House, that they were scrapping the whole deal. This is a huge U-turn, which was announced after clear lobbying by an industry that never really subscribed to it, and a failure by the Government to build a reasonable secondary annuity market. Of course it is right that protections are put in place to ensure that people are not exploited on the secondary annuities market, but there are tens of thousands of people trapped in poor-value annuities who are eager to be able to take advantage of the new freedoms. Based

on the promises in this Government's manifesto, many of them will already have been considering how to take advantage of the plans in order to release themselves from their annuity and invest their savings differently. This announcement will leave many people having to make different decisions about their retirement from those to which they were being directed—if, that is, they have even heard of the change, given the way that it was rushed through and the way it was announced by the Government.

Can the Minister say, first, when the decision was made to drop the new pension freedom plans? Secondly, why was this decision not announced to Parliament before it was announced to the media? Thirdly, what are the Government doing to inform those who may wish to cash in their annuity that they will no longer be able to do so? Fourthly, what assessment have the Government made of people's change of behaviour in response to the freedom, and how will this affect their financial decisions?

The pensions freedom plan was about trusting people with their money. Clearly, this Government have decided that they no longer trust people. They owe an apology to those who have spent time and money examining their options for retirement, and I hope we get one today.

Simon Kirby: It is easy to wish to have the cake and eat it, as the Lib Dems regularly do. It is difficult being a Minister. Sometimes we have to make hard decisions, but on balance, the interests of the consumers, often older people and the most vulnerable in our society, have trumped the desire to further increase pensions flexibility. The hon. Gentleman is disingenuous. It was one element of our pension freedoms and, after extensive consultation, it transpired that it would not provide value for money. Which?, which is totally independent of Government, has said that

"it would have been wrong to move forward without assurances that consumers could get value for money and have the necessary protections"—

assurances and necessary protections protecting those most vulnerable people in our society.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I did not interrupt the Minister in his flow, but may I ask that from now on we avoid the use of the word "disingenuous" or "disingenuously"? There is an imputation of dishonour and we should avoid that. The Minister is a dextrous fellow with, I am sure, an extensive vocabulary and he can deploy some other term to get his point across. On the subject of those with dexterity and great vocabulary, I call Sir Desmond Swayne.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): It is the right decision for the circumstances, but does my hon. Friend think that there is any connection between poor value in the annuities market and the Bank of England's monetary policy?

Simon Kirby: Mr Speaker, I acknowledge your sound advice, as ever, and apologise if I have been anything other than my usually well-behaved self.

[Simon Kirby]

My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) raises an interesting point, but this is about people, many of whom are older and more vulnerable, making the right choices, and the Government making sure that the market is there to support them. That is not the case, which is why we have changed tack.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): This is the latest of the many U-turns that the Government have made. I thank the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) for securing this urgent question. Labour Members want to know why the Government did not do proper market analysis prior to the announcement. They were warned at the time. If they had done that analysis at the outset, they may have realised the chaos and confusion that such an announcement would cause for up to 500,000 pensioners across the country, who are already worried about their long-term future.

This U-turn on pensions comes in the same week as the Government have pushed forward with their proposals for a lifetime ISA, despite widespread cross-party concern about the impact of future public finances on personal retirement plans. In the UK pension market the consumer is unable to make an informed choice because of a lack of cost and performance data. We believe that it should be the role of the Government to provide those data. What will the Government do to assist with that process?

Like the hon. Member for Leeds North West, we would like to know when the Government decided to abandon the policy. Who made the final decision? Was there another interference by the Prime Minister in the previous Chancellor's decisions? Who was consulted? How extensive was that consultation? The Government were warned. What assessment has been made of the pension market in general and the knock-on effects of this decision? What influence, if any, has the recent vote for Britain to leave the European Union had on this decision?

There is an indication that because of this decision, £900 million may be lost in the first two years in tax that would have come in as a result of people paying tax on the sale of their annuity. Where is that money going to come from? Is that not another black hole in the Government's finances?

Simon Kirby: Let me deal with the points in reverse order. The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the autumn statement to see what the finances look like, but it became increasingly apparent that not only was it not a good deal for consumers—those vulnerable people who we care about—but it was unlikely to provide the kind of income that had first been expected. We consulted extensively with the industry and consumer groups. I had many conversations with the Department for Work and Pensions, and particularly with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions. The hon. Gentleman asks where information will be provided. The Government are introducing a new money advice service that will provide such information.

I shall finish with a quote from the Association of British Insurers, in whose interest the hon. Gentleman might suppose it was for us to continue with the policy. The ABI says:

“This is the right decision for the right reasons”

and that there were

“considerable risks for customers, including from unregulated buyers”.

We do not want to see unregulated buyers out there or vulnerable people affected.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that for a market to work, buyers as well as sellers are needed? To try to create a market where there are not both is an impossibility, and to have done so would have led to a potential disaster for consumers.

Simon Kirby: As ever, my hon. Friend makes an excellent point. There were very few people interested in buying those products, which would have resulted in a very poor deal for customers. The market was not big enough to provide value for money and on that basis we decided not to proceed.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On that point, given that we now know that there was an absence of buyers in the market, where was the Government's consultation before they offered their proposal? We cannot get away from the fact that this was a manifesto commitment from the Government. I welcome the U-turn; they have done the right thing, but why was the matter not brought to the House? Why did we read about it in the media?

Last April the Financial Conduct Authority said that there were concerns about the secondary market in annuities, which would mean

“a significant risk of poor outcomes for consumers”.

The regulator said:

“Annuities are inherently difficult for consumers to value, and consumers who will be able to participate in this market will include a higher proportion of older, more vulnerable consumers.”

We could see that. The FCA came out with that last April. Why has it taken so long for the Government to do the right thing? We recognise some of the concerns for consumers as a result of the pensions freedoms introduced. May we have a full review of the pensions freedom policy?

Simon Kirby: I thank the hon. Gentleman for recognising that this is the right thing to do. It is a difficult decision and it is, as ever, a balance between two conflicting viewpoints. My job as a Minister at the Treasury is about making sure that consumers are protected, that industries are regulated sufficiently, and that there is the very best possible deal for customers. Withdrawing this product, which is aimed at many old and vulnerable consumers, is absolutely the right thing to do.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): I know that the Minister has very bravely taken this decision to protect the more vulnerable pensioners who are suffering, but what will he and the Treasury be able to do to ensure that pensioners on very low incomes who are trapped in difficult annuities can escape those punishing regimes?

Simon Kirby: We are looking at an economy that works for everyone, including those pensioners on low incomes. The Treasury will be considering this very carefully, but my hon. Friend will have to wait until the autumn statement to hear how we are best placed to

deal with this. However, those people are absolutely at the centre of our attention, and we will do all we can to help.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Of course, guarding against mis-selling is important, but does this announcement not represent two new problems? It is a problem, first, for those hundreds of thousands of pensioners who have been marched up the hill only to be marched back down again, and left uncertain about their financial options, but, secondly, for those other generations of potential savers who are baffled by pensions generally and who will find this mixed message—this chopping and changing—on flexibilities even more of a reason to feel sour towards the attractiveness of pensions? We have a savings crisis in this country, and the Government need far more consistency and a clearer policy.

Simon Kirby: None of us wants to see people being baffled, and none of us wants to see uncertainty, but at the end of the day we are surely better off making the right decision, which protects vulnerable consumers, rather than carrying on regardless. The hon. Gentleman is right that we all have a responsibility to educate and inform people throughout their lives about the importance of savings and pensions, and that is something the Government fully intend to continue doing.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I know that this is a difficult decision for my hon. Friend, because he feels passionately about pension freedoms. Can he assure the House, though, that every effort is now being made to ensure that pension providers fully co-operate with all other aspects of the Government's wider pension freedoms, which have been so warmly welcomed around the country?

Simon Kirby: I can give my hon. Friend the reassurance that I will do all I can to make sure that providers work closely with the Government to get the best possible deal for older people and indeed savers, including younger people—people who are perhaps not in the habit of saving or contributing to pensions. That is an important thing, and I am happy to pursue it with my full vigour.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I will ask the Minister a third time why this announcement was not made to Parliament before it was made to the media. Also, what is he going to do to inform people who may have intended to cash in their annuity, but who are now not going to be able to do so?

Simon Kirby: It is fair to say that there are often circumstances where information or announcements are market sensitive, and sometimes that drives how things are announced.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Given that these retirement annuities can form the bedrock of many people's financial security, it is right that a decision is taken to secure the interests of those people rather than to press ahead purely because of a manifesto commitment. Will the Minister reassure me, though, about what work the Treasury is doing to ensure that people get a better deal on their annuities in the first place? For many people, looking to cash in their annuity in was about trying to deal with the bad deal they got on that annuity, not necessarily about wanting a lump sum.

Simon Kirby: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: two wrongs, sadly, do not make a right. The Government are committed to giving people pension freedoms so that they can choose what to do with their money, because that is the right choice to make, but, in this particular and individual circumstance, it was not the appropriate way forward.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): My constituent, Mr Anderson, contacted me and advised me that, despite the risks, he planned to take up the option of selling his annuity. I wrote to the Treasury and was assured only 19 days ago:

"The Government remains committed to delivering these proposals".

Yesterday's announcement is a betrayal of people such as Mr Anderson. I notice that the Minister did not answer the question a few minutes ago, so what exactly do the Government suggest that Mr Anderson and others do now?

Simon Kirby: Obviously, Mr Anderson is as important as all the other people who, no doubt, will be very interested in this announcement. It transpired through consultation that a very small percentage of people would be better off. We were looking at legislation that would oblige the Government to provide guidance and advice; in the vast—very vast—majority of cases, that advice would be that it would not be appropriate and in the consumer's best interests to proceed. There is no easy answer, but at the end of the day, I am not going to allow vulnerable older people to take advantage of what may, superficially, seem a good deal, but what, in the long term, is a poor one.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): John Lawson, the head of retirement policy at Aviva, has said that one of the obstacles in the way of the secondary annuities market is the existence of statutory override clauses in annuity contracts. Has that played any part in the Government's decision, and do they have any plans to at least look at passing legislation to deal with that?

Simon Kirby: That is certainly something we will be looking at. At the end of the day, many people got a poor deal on the way in; the last thing I want to do is to give them a doubly poor deal on the way out because the market is not big enough to provide value for money. If that means the option of reducing regulation, I am not a fan of that; regulation exists to support people and to help them make the right decisions.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The industry opposed this; millions of pensioners who were locked into low-paying annuities supported it. The Chancellor at the time knew all the problems, yet he claimed to be the champion of choice for the people. What has changed? Do the Government now believe that the nature of people they said would make good choices because they were sensible and had good advice has changed? Given that the Minister has removed choice, but not the problem, what does he intend to do for those who still find themselves locked in annuity arrangements that do not give them a sensible and fair income?

Simon Kirby: It is fair to say that the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time was not in possession of all the information following the consultation. It was our

[Simon Kirby]

intent, clearly, at the time to listen carefully to not only the industry but consumer groups, which we have done extensively. It is worth saying that we remain absolutely committed to all the other pension freedoms that we are introducing. This is a sensible way forward, and I hope the hon. Gentleman welcomes it.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): This pop-up policy, which has now been popped down again, came from a Government who had a long-term economic plan, yet this policy has not survived very long. As has been indicated, the policy was a response to the bubbling sense of scandal that was there because people were stuck with meagre and marginal annuities, and it was a chance to give them something different. If the Minister is convinced that he is avoiding the new scandal that would have happened, of people ending up mis-selling their annuities, what is he doing about the original scandal of the meagre annuities that people are trapped in, which this policy was designed to respond to?

Simon Kirby: The hon. Gentleman is right in as far as that certainly was the intention of the policy. There is a long-term plan, because I am concerned about the long-term financial wellbeing of these older and vulnerable

people, and it is important that they get the right deal and make the right decisions. That is why this suggestion, which is only one of many, is not appropriate to carry forward. It is not a pop-up policy; we have listened carefully, and we have made the right decision.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): This U-turn has come about because of concerns about mis-selling and protecting consumers. The same risks and concerns must surely apply to the people who are currently exercising pension freedoms by cashing in their pension policies for lump sums. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) said, when are this Government going to have a coherent review of the existing pension freedoms legislation?

Simon Kirby: What happens in the secondary annuities market is very different from cashing in existing pensions for lump sums. To be clear to the House, selling an annuity would never have been the same as getting a refund on all the money that was put into the product or the original pension pot minus any payments made. Purchasers would have paid what they thought the income stream was worth. Without a competitive market, that income stream would have represented poor value for money, and people would have got a very poor settlement as a result.

Point of Order

1.10 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday at Foreign Office questions, the shadow Foreign Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood):

“When can we expect full, independent, UN-led investigations of the thousands of airstrikes on civilian targets in Yemen?”

In his reply, the Minister stated:

“There are not thousands, as the hon. Lady suggested—that is to mislead the House—but there are a number with which we are concerned that need to be clarified.”—[*Official Report*, 18 October 2016; Vol. 615, c. 667-668.]

However, I have discovered that on 16 September *The Guardian* newspaper stated that the independent Yemen data project

“records more than 8,600 air attacks between March 2015, when the Saudi-led campaign began, and the end of August this year.”

Moreover, Human Rights Watch lists dozens of airstrikes that have appeared to be “unlawfully indiscriminate” and have caused civilian casualties. Can you advise the House on whether the Minister needs to come to the Chamber and correct the inaccurate and rather dismissive reply that he gave to my hon. Friend yesterday?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice that he intended to raise this point of order. What Members say in this House—I often have to make this point, but it bears repetition—is their individual responsibility. This applies to Ministers, and indeed to Opposition Front Benchers, as it does to other right hon. and hon. Members. The hon. Gentleman believes that Ministers have been inaccurate in what they said yesterday—or, specifically, that the response to the shadow Foreign Secretary was inaccurate. He has made that view clear, and he has done so on the record. I am sure that it will have been heard by those on the Treasury Bench, and that it will be relayed to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I am also sure that if the Foreign Secretary and the Minister feel that the House has been inadvertently misled, the relevant Minister will take swift steps to correct the record. It is only fair to say, as it is not for me to umpire on whether a clarification is required, that a Minister may take a view of the facts of the matter that differs from that of the hon. Gentleman. As to whether that is the case, we will have to await events.

Cosmetic Surgery (Standards of Practice)

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

1.13 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a bill to make provision about the training, qualifications and certification of medical practitioners conducting cosmetic surgical procedures; to establish a code of practice for the provision of information to patients on the options and risks in relation to such procedures; to make provision about permissible treatments and the advertising of such treatments; and for connected purposes.

I became aware of the scandal around the £3.5 billion-a-year cosmetic surgery industry through a constituent, Dawn Knight, who in 2012 had cosmetic surgery on her eyes at Dolan Park hospital, run by Hospital Medical Group. The surgery was sold to her with a lifetime aftercare package to take care of any complications arising from the procedure. Following the surgery, Dawn was unable to close her eyes, and still, to this day, has to apply artificial tears to her eyes every two hours to stop them drying out. Dawn saw the surgeon who undertook the procedure, Arnaldo Paganelli, who refused to admit there was a problem. When she contacted Hospital Medical Group about the aftercare package, it simply pointed out a clause in her contract that said that treatments could be undertaken only if the surgeon agreed to it. No further help was offered, making a complete sham of the aftercare plan she was sold. As in similar cases, the NHS is now having to pick up the bill for Dawn’s ongoing care. Dawn’s case is not an isolated one. Many others have come forward since the publicity around it.

Although Hospital Medical Group promotes itself as a cosmetic surgery company, along with its associated companies, it is nothing of the sort. Rather, it is a facilities management company, simply providing the facilities where surgery takes place and marketing the procedures. When Dawn complained, she found out that her contract was not with Hospital Medical Group but with the surgeon who performed the procedure, and was told that it was her responsibility to check his General Medical Council registration and insurance. In Dawn’s case, her surgeon was a bankrupt, under-insured individual who was based in Italy and flew into the UK to work for Hospital Medical Group.

Herein lies the problem: at present, cosmetic surgery is not a defined surgical speciality in its own right. As the Department of Health has noted, the training within certain defined specialities such as plastic surgery, ear, nose and throat surgery, and eye surgery includes an aspect of cosmetic training, but no qualification is available for those who perform cosmetic surgery. In fact, the law allows any qualified doctor—they need not even be a surgeon—to perform cosmetic surgery without undertaking additional training or qualifications. My Bill aims to close this loophole. It has the support of the Royal College of Surgeons.

The Government and the Department of Health are aware of this situation. Following the PIP breast implant scandal, the Government asked Professor Sir Bruce Keogh, the then NHS medical director, to undertake a

[Mr Kevan Jones]

review of the regulation of cosmetic interventions. That review was published in April 2013. It asked the Royal College of Surgeons to establish a cosmetic surgery inter-speciality committee to set standards for cosmetic surgery practice and training, and to make arrangements for formal certification of all surgeons regarded as competent to undertake cosmetic procedures, taking into account their training and experience.

The Department of Health requested the Law Commission to draft legislation, and this was done in 2014. The legislation was widely supported, but the coalition Government failed to enact it, as have the current Government. The Royal College of Surgeons would like only surgeons with appropriate skills and experience to undertake cosmetic surgery. I strongly support that, and I think that most members of the public would do so. To facilitate this, the GMC needs to be given legal powers to formally recognise additional qualifications or accreditations such as those that the Royal College of Surgeons is developing in cosmetic surgery. It should then be mandatory for those offering cosmetic surgery not only to have these but to make it clear to the public that they have them when advertising their services.

This is not the first time I have spoken about this case; I raised it in the House on 20 October 2015. I would like to put on record my thanks to the right hon. Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), the then Health Minister, who met me and my constituent, Dawn Knight.

Another area that the Bill aims to address is the marketing of cosmetic procedures. Some of the techniques that are used would be more appropriate for selling double glazing than cosmetic surgery, with its related risks. They include two-for-one offers, along with glossy brochures with no explanation of the potential risks of undertaking the surgery. The whole thrust of the advertising is to sell such procedures without any counselling or advice on whether it is appropriate for an individual to undergo them. Individuals who have already undergone surgery are often bombarded with more adverts, by email or on Facebook, despite the fact that that practice has been reported to the Advertising Standards Agency. Such aggressive marketing needs to be banned and a mandatory cooling-off period introduced once people

have signed up to allow them to change their minds. I would go further and include mandatory counselling for individuals before they undertake any such procedure.

I want to address the way in which the companies that sell cosmetic surgery are structured. Dawn Knight responded to an advert from the Hospital Group, but her contract was with a company called the Hospital Medical Group Ltd. If we look at the Companies House register, we see that under the main Hospital Group holding there are eight different companies. In 2012-13, the group's turnover was £44 million and dividends of some £7.5 million were paid to its directors. In 2016, the Hospital Medical Group was liquidated and its assets were sold to one of its parent companies. Some 80% of creditors on the liquidator's list are solicitors representing former clients. One suspects that that structure was put in place to avoid any potential for former clients to sue the company for negligence.

With the liquidation, the lifetime guarantee that Dawn was sold is, like those sold to many other people, now completely worthless. Regulation is needed to ensure that guarantees offered on cosmetic surgery can actually be used to get redress. Despite the fact that a large number of women now have no recourse to law, the Hospital Group continues to operate and sell its products. The continuing care of individuals such as Dawn is falling on the NHS, while the group and its associated companies continue to make a profit. Guarantees must be backed up by insurance, so that if a company is liquidated, people can get legal redress.

The Prime Minister, in her speech to Conservative Party conference, said that the state should intervene where the market fails. We have here a classic example of the market not only failing but being used to exploit people, which is ruining their lives and costing the NHS millions of pounds a year. The Government are aware that action is needed in this area, and there is no reason why they should not act.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Holly Lynch, Judith Cummins, Claire Perry, Helen Jones, Fiona Mactaggart, Paula Sherriff, Mr Iain Wright, Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan and Mr Kevan Jones present the Bill.

Mr Kevan Jones accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March 2017, and to be printed (Bill 77).

Opposition Day

[9TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Rights of EU Nationals

1.23 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the contribution that nationals from other countries in the EU have made to the UK; and calls on the Government to ensure that all nationals from other countries in the EU who have made the UK their home retain their current rights, including the rights to live and work in the UK, should the UK exit the EU.

It is nearly four months since the EU referendum, and the long-term status of non-UK EU nationals living in the United Kingdom is still unclear, just as the Government are still without a plan or a negotiating strategy for the Brexit that they accidentally delivered. The status of millions of our fellow workers, friends and neighbours is uncertain. That is simply not good enough. Despite repeated requests, the Government have refused to guarantee, in the long term, the rights of EU nationals who have made their home in the United Kingdom. In the meantime, in England and Wales hate crime has soared and xenophobic rhetoric is common in the mainstream media and, sadly, sometimes in the mouths of Ministers.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I thought that the Government had clearly said that they had no wish to make anybody leave unless there were evictions from the continent. Is the hon. and learned Lady saying that continental countries are going to evict British citizens?

Joanna Cherry: The whole point of this motion is that human beings should not be used as bargaining chips in negotiation. If the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues think that the United Kingdom has so much to offer the European Union in its negotiations, why do they insist on using human beings as bargaining chips?

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Does the hon. and learned Lady agree that many of the people we are talking about provide vital services and work in our public services? For instance, 6% of doctors working in the Welsh health service come from the EU. We face a crisis in that a third of our doctors may retire in the next few years, so we will need those people and additional qualified individuals to work in our health service. If the Government's rhetoric is translated into policy, it will have a detrimental impact on the delivery of health services in my country.

Joanna Cherry: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The statistics are very similar in Scotland, where about 6.7% of staff in the NHS are EU nationals. The net result of the refusal to guarantee the long-term status of EU nationals, and of the xenophobic rhetoric and hate crime across the United Kingdom, is that many EU nationals are living with considerable stress and worry. We all receive letters from them as their constituency MPs. Damage has been done to the British economy and, importantly, to our international reputation.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): My hon. and learned Friend will undoubtedly have read the disgraceful comments in some quarters of the press this morning by a Tory MP who suggested that some child refugees should have to undergo dental checks to confirm their age before gaining passage to the UK from Calais—as if those children had not been through enough. Leaving aside the fact that those children have a legal right to family reunification here—

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) will resume his seat. We will be with him in a moment. There is a point of order from Mr David T.C. Davies.

David T. C. Davies: I am the Conservative MP who has just been referred to. This is not a matter that is before us today. I wanted to speak about EU migrants, being married to one myself. If the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) wants to raise a completely unrelated matter, will I be able to answer that in the speech that I hope you will call me to make later on, Mr Speaker, even though it has nothing to do with this debate?

Mr Speaker: I did not judge the remark to be disorderly, although it needs to be made briefly. I did not and do not think it was disorderly, but I give the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) the assurance, which he is entitled to seek, that he will have an opportunity in his remarks to respond as he thinks fit. No one should deny him that opportunity. Briefly, Mr Gray; let us hear it.

Neil Gray: Does my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) agree that such disgraceful, xenophobic rhetoric is unhelpfully fuelling the xenophobic attacks that we have seen across the country since the Brexit vote?

Joanna Cherry: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. It is incumbent on all of us in public life to be mindful of the language we use, particularly when we are talking about refugees who are children—the definition of a child being someone under the age of 18.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con) *rose*—

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con) *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: I will make some progress. Those of us who have actually been to Calais, met some of these child refugees—some of them are young men, but they are still children—and seen them separated from their families and in tears found the comments to which my hon. Friend referred deeply distasteful.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

Joanna Cherry: I am going to make some progress.

[Joanna Cherry]

Tomorrow, the Prime Minister will attend her first European Union summit in Brussels. I very much hope that it will not be her last. Britain's position on EU migrants will be a central issue. Now is the opportunity for the UK Government to do the right thing, so the Scottish National party calls on this House today to recognise the contribution that EU nationals have made to the UK. We also call on the Government to ensure that all EU nationals who have made this country their home retain their current rights, including the rights to live and work in this country, should the UK exit the European Union.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I asked the Home Secretary how an EU citizen demonstrates that they have lived in the UK for five or more years, how citizenship is claimed after six years, which Department will be responsible for confirming the right to remain, what citizenship they will be able to claim, what certification of these rights will be provided and what the estimate is of the costs of going through this process. In reply to that parliamentary question, I was told:

"The Home Office has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period."

Is it not time we got our act together as a country and gave people who have given their lives and their taxes to this country the security of knowing that they can remain?

Mr Speaker: Order. These are all very serious and worthy interventions, but they suffer from the disadvantage of being too long. This must not continue. We must try to restore some sort of order to this debate. I do not want to embarrass him unduly, but if Members would model themselves in terms of brevity on the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood)—or on the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart)—they would serve the House well.

Joanna Cherry: I could not agree more with the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon). Is this not symptomatic of the complete failure of various Departments to answer any questions arising from the strategy they will presumably need to adopt as a result of the result on 24 June?

Mr Harper: Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

Joanna Cherry: I will give way in a moment.

To pick up on the hon. Lady's point, I am delighted that Scottish National party Members have the full support of Labour party colleagues for the motion. We are very happy to work with them as part of a cross-party, progressive alliance, which I am sure will include some Government Members, to protect the rights of EU nationals across the UK.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: I am spoilt for choice, but I will take an intervention from the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper).

Mr Harper: Briefly, I completely agree with the first part of the hon. and learned Lady's motion, which I have read very carefully, in which she recognises the contribution made by EU nationals, but does she not

accept that the first responsibility of the Minister for Immigration and the Prime Minister is to British citizens, more than 1 million of whom are in European Union countries? Their rights must be protected, but her motion is silent on their interests.

Joanna Cherry: It is of course open to the right hon. Gentleman to bring forward such a motion. This motion is about protecting the rights of EU nationals in the United Kingdom, which the United Kingdom Government are in a position to do.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): My husband is a UK citizen based in Germany, where he runs a very small business. He was horrified by the tone of his Government in looking after his rights as a person who is working and has established himself abroad. He said to me, "Do they not understand that threatening Europe is not the best way to open negotiations?" I merely said, "No, they don't."

Joanna Cherry: I could not agree more with the hon. Lady. As I have said, if, as we are constantly told by the Brexiteers, having trade agreements with Britain is such a fantastic option for the other 27 member states of the European Union, why must the Government keep individuals up their sleeve as bargaining chips?

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): I note in passing that if the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) wanted to make his point, he could have tabled an amendment, but he chose not to do so. Is not the right thing to look after our own communities, and EU nationals are essential to the functioning of many businesses and services in our communities?

Joanna Cherry: Absolutely. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The purpose of the motion is to make sure that we do not get into the very unfortunate position of having people living, working and paying taxes in the United Kingdom who have lesser rights and status than others. That would be deeply invidious and, if I may say so as a Scottish nationalist, I would have thought it was contrary to the British tradition.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Equally, there will be British citizens working abroad whom we do not want to suffer from having any lesser rights. Would the hon. and learned Lady go into the negotiating chamber armed only with the glow of the good will and the moral high ground as against the hard-headedness of her interlocutors in the negotiations?

Joanna Cherry: I am very happy and proud to say that I and my Scottish National party colleagues would never go into the negotiating chamber using individual human beings as bargaining chips.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: I am going to make a little progress, and I will then give way.

I use the phrase "bargaining chips" advisedly, because it is a source of shame to this House and to the United Kingdom that the Prime Minister and several of her Ministers—including the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and, I am particularly ashamed to

say, the Secretary of State for Scotland—have hinted at using EU nationals living in this country as bargaining chips. Indeed, at the Conservative party conference, which we all so much enjoyed watching on television, the Secretary of State for International Trade went so far as even to compare European Union nationals with “cards” in a game.

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): The hon. and learned Lady is talking about European Union citizens being used as bargaining chips. Does she recall that in 2014 Nicola Sturgeon threatened to strip EU nationals of their right to remain in an independent Scotland? As reported in *The Scotsman* newspaper, she said:

“There are 160,000 EU nationals from other states living in Scotland, including some in the Commonwealth Games city of Glasgow. If Scotland was outside Europe, they would lose the right to stay here.”

Who is being used as bargaining chips there?

Joanna Cherry: May I in the gentlest and friendliest way counsel the hon. Gentleman against taking advice, first, from the Conservative party in Scotland, and secondly, from *The Scotsman* newspaper, which is frankly not what it was when I was a girl?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: I will just finish responding on that point.

There is absolutely no question that the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, or her distinguished predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), ever threatened EU nationals with not being part of Scottish society. Our policy has been clear for many, many years: we want an independent Scotland in the European Union, with equal rights for all living in Scotland. We are quite clear on that. This debate is about making the UK Government be clear about having equal rights for all across the United Kingdom.

Charlie Elphicke: I have listened to the hon. and learned Lady’s speech with care. She has been pressed time and again to say whether she would defend the rights of citizens of this nation who are living abroad, and time and again she has refused to do so. I will give her one more opportunity. Would she stand up for Britain and British citizens and their rights around the globe?

Joanna Cherry: Yes, of course I would, but I am not going to be sidetracked on an issue that is not the subject of this debate. If the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues were so agitated about this aspect of the argument, they were free to table an amendment, as my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Mike Weir) said. I am delighted to hear that they are so concerned about the welfare of British citizens in Europe, which has been put at risk by the Brexit vote, but I would like them to extend the same concern to EU nationals living in the United Kingdom. That is what the motion is about, and no amount of obfuscation from Government Members is going to sidetrack me.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Does my hon. and learned Friend not agree that we can negotiate in two ways—positively or negatively? If, on 24 June, we had graciously said that everyone who has

settled here can live here, that approach would have been returned. When I met the German ambassador, it had not occurred to the Germans to throw out British citizens. That idea has arisen only because we are threatening their citizens.

Joanna Cherry: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con) *rose*—

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Goodwill *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: I am now going to try to make some progress, as I have taken a lot of interventions. I will be very happy to put Government Members right on a few points later, but at this stage I want to make some progress.

We would not expect the 1.2 million UK citizens who live in other EU countries to be treated as bargaining chips, and we would not expect the Governments of other EU countries to preside over a shocking rise in xenophobic hate crime, so the UK Government must accept their share of responsibility for what is going on in this country at the moment and stop fuelling division.

Mr Clarke: I entirely share the hon. and learned Lady’s sentiment that we all want to reassure people who are here, so we must be careful not to arouse a sense of insecurity among them. I do not know of any Member of this House in any party who wishes to remove EU nationals who are now lawfully here and making their lives here. I have never met a European politician from any country—I have met quite a lot of them—who wishes to remove British nationals who have settled down there, as the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) pointed out. We are having a rather artificial debate here. Would it not be best if this were all sorted out at the summit tomorrow, with the leaders quickly agreeing among themselves that neither side would seek, in any negotiations, to remove nationals lawfully living in their respective territories?

Joanna Cherry: I always listen to the right hon. and learned Gentleman with great care, because he has made an amazing contribution to the debate about the European Union over the years. However, this is not an artificial debate. I hate to disillusion him, but a Conservative and Unionist party colleague of his in Scotland, a Member of the Scottish Parliament, suggested recently in a press release sanctioned by the Conservative and Unionist party that EU citizens living in Scotland should not have the same right to participate in civil society as others—for the record, that person was referring to a French national who lives in Scotland and was previously a Member of the Scottish Parliament—so it is a very real concern.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: I will take more interventions later, but I would like to make some progress as I am conscious that many other Members want to speak.

[Joanna Cherry]

Scotland is an inclusive and outward-looking society. We recognise the immense contribution that migrants make to our economy, society and culture. We firmly believe that similar views are held by many throughout the rest of the United Kingdom. We appeal to the UK Government to listen to the voices from across the UK of those who do not want EU nationals living in the United Kingdom used as bargaining chips in the Brexit negotiations. This Union of nations should be better than that.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I think we can agree that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) is right to say that no one in this House would want to see EU nationals who are living and working here expelled. The point is that there are people out there who have been emboldened by the current political climate who want to see EU nationals living here expelled, and worse. The sort of signal that the hon. and learned Lady is calling for, which I support, would be very powerful in saying that the views of those people are wholeheartedly rejected by all right-thinking people.

Joanna Cherry: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that point; I am also grateful for the support of the Liberal Democrats and, indeed, of Plaid Cymru for the motion.

Mr Nuttall *rose*—

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con) *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: I intend to make some progress.

I will say a little about the valuable contribution that EU migrants make to our society across the UK. As we all know, about 3 million EU migrants live in the United Kingdom, about 173,000 of them in Scotland. Data produced during the EU referendum show that, contrary to popular myth, EU migrants to the UK make a net contribution to the economy. Indeed, the EU citizens who come to live and work in Scotland are critical to key sectors of our economy. More than 12% of the people who work in the agricultural sector in Scotland are EU migrants, and 11% of people who work in our important food, fish and meat processing sector are EU citizens. There are two major universities in my constituency, Edinburgh Napier University and Heriot-Watt; they would be gravely affected by a decrease in the number of EU nationals choosing to study, research and teach in Scotland.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The hon. and learned Lady is making a wonderful case for the contribution that EU nationals make to Scottish and British public life; we must be much more confident in making that case. Does she agree that we should consider not just the contribution that they make, but in which particular sectors, such as the one she is about to come to in her speech? For example, 25% of the staff of the Edinburgh University King's Buildings, our world-renowned science institute, are EU nationals. They need the certainty that they can stay so that Edinburgh can stay in the top 100 universities around the world.

Joanna Cherry: The hon. Gentleman and I are privileged to have students and academics from three very fine universities spread across our adjoining constituencies. I am sure that, like me, he spent the summer meeting those academics and students. Shortly after the EU referendum I was informed by the principal of Edinburgh Napier University that within days of the referendum she had been advised of potential staff members from other EU countries withdrawing from job offers at universities across Scotland. When I met her academic staff and those from Heriot-Watt University over the summer, they expressed similar concerns about how the quality of their teaching and research could be undermined if the position of EU migrants in Scotland were not guaranteed. I have no doubt that that is the same across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Charlie Elphicke: How EU citizens feel about remaining in the UK is a really important point. I have not heard a single Member on the Government Benches say that they want anyone to leave at all. The issue is being raised only by the SNP and the Labour party. I very gently say to the hon. and learned Lady that she should be aware, when she makes such cases for political reasons, of the concern that she sows—concern that should not be felt by any EU citizen in this nation.

Joanna Cherry: I cannot speak for the hon. Gentleman's constituents or the mail that he receives, but SNP Members are all receiving a considerable weight of mail and emails from concerned EU citizens. I am sure that Members on the Opposition Benches will speak to the same later in the debate. This is not fearmongering—and believe you me, Madam Deputy Speaker, we in the SNP are experts on fearmongering having been on the receiving end of it during the 2014 referendum.

Dr Murrison *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: I am not going to give way; I will make some progress. This is a valid issue about which many constituents are very concerned. We would be failing in our responsibilities if we did not raise it, no matter how embarrassing it is for those on the Government Benches.

I want to get back to the contribution that migrants make to our economy. The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) has already mentioned the NHS. As he said, 6% of doctors in Wales are EU migrants; it is just under 7% of doctors in Scotland. The British Medical Association and the Scottish Government say that 5% of the total NHS workforce were born in other EU countries. Put bluntly, our NHS would struggle to cope without them.

There are very valid concerns that pushing EU nationals to leave because of uncertainty about their future would have a devastating impact on the NHS, the hospitality and agriculture sectors, higher education and science, all of which rely heavily on labour from the EU. I also share the concerns raised by the Trades Union Congress, which has said that the longer we leave EU workers uncertain about their future, the greater the likelihood that they will leave, creating staffing shortages that will particularly negatively affect our public services. That will serve only to increase the concerns felt by those

who voted to leave the EU in order to increase resources for public services—and there is not much sign of that happening, is there?

Mr Nuttall: Talking of uncertainty, as the hon. and learned Lady was just then, may I ask her about the last few words of the motion? Why does it say

“should the UK exit the EU”?

Why is it “should”?

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): To annoy you, David!

Mr Nuttall: The reality is that 17.4 million people voted for this country to leave the European Union and we are going to leave. There is no “should” about it; that word should surely be “when”.

Joanna Cherry: I do not think I can answer the intervention better than my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that in Scotland, by a huge majority, we voted to remain a member of the EU. The SNP will do everything in its might to ensure that the wishes of the Scottish people are respected.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The hon. and learned Lady makes a very powerful case. Am I right in saying that all she is seeking to do in this debate is to ensure there is clarity? The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said that nobody in this House would like to see any EU national leave the country. Would it not be the best possible course of action at the end of the debate if the Minister were just to say that these rights are granted?

Joanna Cherry: I could not have put it better or more succinctly. I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.

I mentioned earlier the phenomenon of the rise in hate crime across England and Wales since the referendum. Home Office statistics published just over a week ago show that hate crimes have soared by 41% in England and Wales. I suggest that this is a symptom of the negative and xenophobic rhetoric used by some—not all—in the lead-up to the referendum. This has had a major effect in legitimising hate crime on the part of a small but violent and vocal minority.

Many of us were very concerned about some of the rhetoric that came out of the Conservative and Unionist party conference in Birmingham the other week. This is not just a concern of the SNP. Concern has also been raised by other Members and by international human rights bodies. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance have all expressed concern about the spike in hate crime in England and Wales.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that this situation requires leadership and a Prime Minister who will advocate in the best interests of every single individual in this country, EU national or otherwise? Will she share with me support for the First Minister’s statement on inclusivity and the need for leadership in this debate?

Joanna Cherry: I do share that. Indeed, the purpose of this motion is to invite the United Kingdom Government to follow the lead that the First Minister and the Scottish Government have shown in that respect.

Ian Murray: I am very grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for giving way again. Again, I emphasise that she is making a compelling speech. Do the Government not have to look at the will of this House, which in July voted by 245 votes to two to do the very thing for which her motion asks? Rather than making xenophobic speeches at the Conservative party conference, they should abide by the will of this House and do what this House has voted for already.

Joanna Cherry: The hon. Gentleman rightly refers to the debate on this issue on 6 July. The Government have failed to respect the outcome of the vote in that debate.

Returning to the international concern about what is going on in the United Kingdom, the Polish ambassador gave evidence yesterday to the Lords EU Justice Sub-Committee. He said that he had

“noticed an increase in xenophobic behaviour”

in Britain since the Brexit vote. He expressed concern about the uncertainty being caused to Polish nationals living in the UK. So there we have another non-SNP voice talking about the very concern that has made us bring forward the motion today.

I am pleased that we have not seen any increase in hate crime north of the border, but we must always be vigilant to ensure that hate crime is made unacceptable across the whole of the United Kingdom.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I have been a remainer for a very long period of time. I have come to the Chamber and listened very intently to what the hon. and learned Lady is saying. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said that nobody disagrees with what she is saying, and no one in this House disagrees with protecting EU nationals as well as we protect our British citizens. From one remainer to another, may I just ask why—I would have voted for it—you did not put this in your motion?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order.

Ben Howlett: Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, I did not mean you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman definitely, in everything he has just said, did not mean me. He has got the point without my saying anything further.

Joanna Cherry: The motion is as framed advisedly. If Conservative Members felt it could have been improved, it was open to them to bring forward an amendment. We would have looked at it carefully, as we always do. I am now going to make a little bit more progress. I am conscious that I have taken a lot of interventions and I want to wind up fairly soon.

I want to say a little bit about what the Scottish Government have been doing since the referendum. Members will recall that immediately after the referendum result the First Minister moved very quickly to give EU citizens in Scotland reassurance that

[Joanna Cherry]

“the Scottish Government is pursuing every possible option to protect Scotland’s position in Europe and, by extension, the interests of the people from across the European Union who live here.”

Indeed, at an event unprecedented in my constituency in August, the First Minister held an open question and answer session with EU nationals. I can tell Conservative Members that it was extremely well attended by EU nationals living and working in my constituency and in other parts of Scotland. They had many concerns and questions for the First Minister about their status in the United Kingdom following the vote. At our conference last weekend, the SNP passed a motion condemning xenophobia and prejudice in all its forms, making it very clear, in no uncertain terms, that international citizens are welcome in Scotland. In her closing address to the SNP conference in Glasgow on Saturday, the First Minister talked of the “uniting vision” of

“an inclusive, prosperous, socially just, open, welcoming and outward-looking country”

and contrasted that with the xenophobic rhetoric of the UK Government. The difference between the SNP conference and the Tory conference could not be starker.

I am very well aware that the desire for inclusivity, openness and being welcome and outward-looking is not the preserve of the SNP and the Scots. It is shared by many people across these islands. It is about time that Conservative Members lived up to the good aspects of British tradition and the good aspects of our reputation abroad, and stopped undermining them by encouraging the sort of xenophobia we have seen in recent months as a result of some of their rhetoric. [Interruption.] I am absolutely delighted to get such a reaction.

Dr Morrison: I am very grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for giving way. Nobody is suggesting that anybody is going to be ejected from the United Kingdom. She is simply setting hares running. Does she understand and admit that there is a layer of complexity that she has completely ignored? If she is giving rights to people, which I think we would all accept, what effective date is she going to choose? What then happens when people go outside the UK and seek to return? All these things are also relevant to British nationals, on behalf of whom the Government have to negotiate.

Joanna Cherry: I must admit to deriving some satisfaction from the fact that my speech is touching such a raw nerve with those on the Government Benches. What I would say to Conservative Members is that actions and rhetoric have consequences, and these are the consequences of some of their actions and rhetoric.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) has often said that Scotland’s problem is not immigration but emigration. We in Scotland would like immigration powers to be granted to Scotland in recognition of the differing needs across the United Kingdom, and the fact that in Scotland we require immigrants to help to boost our economy and skills, particularly in remote areas. Both Australia and Canada pursue sub-national immigration policies that respond to the needs of skills and expertise across the regions within their states. Now is the chance for the United Kingdom to do likewise, but I shan’t hold my breath.

To be fair, even many leavers during the campaign, said:

“there will be no change for EU citizens already lawfully resident in the UK.”

Speaking on Radio 4, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who co-chaired the campaign to leave the EU, said:

“I think it would be good for the British Government to take the initiative, say that we will protect EU citizens’ rights, and then expect the same for UK citizens in the rest of the EU to be similarly protected.”

So there we have the answer to the question raised by Government Members. She went on to say:

“One of the duties of politicians is to be humane and when we deal with people’s lives, I think to show that we are open, we are a welcoming country, that we simply decided to leave a political institution called the European Union, that doesn’t mean we are ignoring people’s rights.”

It is not often in recent months that I have found myself in agreement with the right hon. Lady, but on this occasion she is right: if the British Government do the right thing, take the initiative and say that they will protect EU citizens’ right, they could hope for a reciprocal gesture towards British citizens abroad, about whom we are all so concerned. It is a question of basic humanity—human beings should not be used as bargaining counters.

To conclude, I do not believe that this failure to reassure the EU nationals living in the United Kingdom represents the best traditions of these islands. Much of what underlies that failure and, I believe, the rise in hate crime, is misinformation put about during the leave campaign. That is due also to a failure of leadership by the previous Prime Minister and many in the remain campaign to articulate the truth about the benefits that migration and EU migration bring to the UK. Sadly, that failure of leadership is being perpetuated by this new Government, as they spin rudderless in the tailwind of Brexit.

Now is the time to put things right, so today the SNP—with the support of others, for which we are very grateful—calls on the Government to provide a cast-iron guarantee for EU citizens who have made the UK their home; to reject and to continue to work on tackling the rise of xenophobia, which has been confirmed by the Home Office for England and Wales; to recognise that the UK-wide blanket approach to immigration policy is not working and disregards the national, regional and demographic differences across the UK; and, most of all, to reassure all those who choose to make Scotland and the UK their home, that their rights will be honoured, that they are welcome to remain here and that their vital contributions are valued by all of us. Until that commitment is given, people will have the sort of worry and uncertainty that leads them to flock to events such as that organised by the First Minister in Edinburgh, and to write emails to all of us on a regular basis.

2.2 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): There are many limits to my capabilities, and one of those is the inability to be in two places at the same time. I apologise if I have to dash off at the conclusion of my remarks to give evidence to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, but the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union will wind up the debate and pass on any comments particularly directed at me.

My job this afternoon is to reassure the House of our aspirations to protect the interests of EU citizens living in the UK and to counter some of the scaremongering that we have just heard. When I read the motion on the Order Paper, I was concerned and thought that there was a typographical error whereby the word “should” had been substituted for the word “when”. The fact of the matter is, as the Prime Minister has made clear, that Brexit means Brexit, and we are determined to carry out the wishes of the British people to leave the European Union. The negotiations that take place will be to secure the best possible deal.

As the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU said in the Opposition day debate last week, the Government are determined that

“Parliament will be fully and properly engaged in the discussion on how we make a success of Brexit.”—[*Official Report*, 12 October 2016; Vol. 615, c. 326.]

I am therefore pleased that the House has the opportunity to debate this aspect of our future relationship with the European Union.

There are over 3 million European Union nationals currently living in the UK. They make a vital contribution to important aspects of our economy and public services, not least in the NHS and care sector.

Keith Vaz: I thank the Minister for providing us with the figure of 3 million. However, some EU nationals will have arrived without passports, and those coming from Romania or Italy would have travel documents in order to enter the United Kingdom. How is the Minister's figure a genuine one, given that he could not know precisely how many people are here?

Mr Goodwill: That is certainly one aspect of the negotiations that we would need to explore. Indeed, the security aspects of some of these travel documents are not as robust as passports that have the biometric data that is so important to ensure that people's identity is clear when they are crossing borders.

Keith Vaz: I am not raising the issue of identity, which is, of course, important but a separate issue. My point is that when an EU national comes here—for example, a Romanian or an Italian—with a travel document instead of a passport, it is not stamped. EU citizens do not get their passports stamped. Is the Minister basing the 3 million figure on those who have acquired national insurance numbers, namely those in work, or is it based on some other data? That is what I want to know; it is not a security issue.

Mr Goodwill: The right hon. Gentleman is right. The 3 million figure can only be an estimate, particularly as exit checks have been introduced only recently. Although we might know who has come into the country, historically we were not aware of who had left. There are a number of ways of compiling the figures, including national insurance numbers, but there are other ways, too.

Charlie Elphicke: A few moments ago, the Minister was speaking warmly of the immense contribution made by EU nationals in the UK. Is he aware of any Conservative Member who is saying that EU citizens should leave this country, or is it purely coming from the other side?

Mr Goodwill: I think I have made the point previously that the only quote I have seen that has in some way threatened EU nationals was one from *The Scotsman* dated 14 July 2014, which referred to a specific threat that if Scotland was not allowed to join the European Union as an independent country, there would be a threat to the status of those people. If SNP Members are concerned about the accuracy of reports in *The Scotsman*, perhaps I could draw their attention to the official record of the Scottish Parliament's Health and Sport Committee dated 27 September 2016—quite recently.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Goodwill: Let me make the point, after which the hon. Gentleman can have his try.

At a session of the Health and Sport Committee in Holyrood, Shona Robison, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, said that in response to the Brexit, the Scottish Government were looking at including additional questions on the workforce survey to try to gather more information about whether people are EU nationals or indeed where they come from more generally, and that that would be helpful. Following that, Sarah Gledhill, a Scottish Government official, confirmed that they were looking at adding additional questions to workforce surveys as a matter of urgency. Who is using whom as a political bargaining chip?

Stewart Hosie: I think workforce planning is a fantastic idea. On the quote from *The Scotsman*, I have the article with me. It is a very small article. The point that the then Deputy First Minister was making was that if Scotland were to be pulled out of the EU against its will, the rights of EU citizens might, of course, be put at risk. Lo and behold, having been pulled out of the EU against their will, the rights of EU citizens are being put at risk! The Minister could end this today. Can he guarantee that the rights of EU citizens will be protected, and will he stop pandering to the attitudes of the United Kingdom Independence party, which wants to use people as bargaining chips?

Mr Goodwill: Let me see what I can do. As Madam Deputy Speaker knows, my middle name is “Reasonable”, and I think we need to be a bit more reasonable and not indulge in scaremongering. Many EU citizens watching this debate will be unnecessarily concerned about some of the rhetoric that we have just heard.

The Government have been clear that they want to protect the status of EU nationals resident in the UK. As the Prime Minister has made clear, the only circumstances in which that would not be possible are if British citizens' rights in other EU member states are not protected in return. The Government have provided repeat assurances on this point, and their position has not changed. I am sorry that the SNP has not included that reassurance in their motion.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Goodwill: Let me make a little progress, if I may.

I want to make it absolutely clear that the Government have also been clear that the timeframe for resolving this issue is to address it as part of a wider negotiation on the UK's exit from the EU, to ensure the fair treatment of British citizens—including those from

[Mr Goodwill]

Scotland, by the way—living in other EU countries. Over 1 million British citizens have built their lives elsewhere in Europe, and they are counting on us to secure their future. We simply want a fair deal for EU nationals in the UK and British citizens in the EU. That is a sensible approach, and it is the one we will take. As the House is aware, the Government have committed to invoking article 50 by the end of March 2017, once they have clear objectives for the Brexit negotiations.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: This is becoming increasingly baffling to me, I am afraid. I understand that the Minister is proposing to ask us to vote against the motion, but what he has just said confirms that the motion coincides exactly with the committed aim of the Government, which is to seek to ensure that all EU nationals who are living and working here now can be reassured about their status. If we let the motion go through, the chances of some proposal from the continent that British nationals should be expelled is almost nil. Of course we might have to revisit the thing, but even then we would not want to take reprisals against wholly innocent people who are contributing to our economy here. Should we not get on to the next motion and stop splitting hairs in this way, given that we are all agreed on the objectives?

Mr Goodwill: My right hon. and learned Friend has made a perfectly reasonable point. The only problem that the Government have with the motion is that it does not go far enough, in that it does not include the rights of British citizens living in other EU member states, which we would demand to be protected in return. It is impossible for us to support the motion, because that reassurance is not contained in it.

I fully appreciate the importance of giving certainty to EU citizens who have built a life here in the United Kingdom. As I have already said, they should be reassured that we are working on the basis that we want to protect those people's status in UK law beyond the point at which we leave the EU.

Lyn Brown: As the Minister knows, I am very fond of him—[*Interruption.*]. It is true; it is a guilty secret. However, I am genuinely wondering why he has not responded to the question asked a moment ago by his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). Why are we still debating this issue, given that the Government clearly agree with the motion?

Mr Goodwill: I have made it crystal clear, I hope, that the motion does not go far enough because it does not extend the protections that SNP Members want for EU citizens here in the UK to British citizens, including Scottish citizens—people from Stranraer, Montrose and Edinburgh—who are living and working elsewhere in the EU and who require reciprocal protection. That is all we are saying. If the SNP Members had included that in their motion, we would have been more than happy to support it, but this is a fatal omission.

Mr Harper: There is another reason why I think that my hon. Friend is right to be both reasonable and cautious. As a former Immigration Minister, knowing the difficult challenges that he faces, I suggest that one

of the important things that the House must do in order to deliver certainty is use very clear language. Many immigration matters go to court. Referring to people who have made their home here does not make clear whether they are people who have been here for five years, 10 years or five minutes. That description also excludes the thousands of EU nationals who fall within a group that I do want to leave the United Kingdom—the thousands of EU nationals who currently reside in Her Majesty's prisons having committed criminal offences, and whom I want the Government to be able to remove from this country at the end of their sentences.

This matter is complicated. It is not straightforward. I urge my hon. Friend to continue to be reasonable and careful, in order to get this right and provide the certainty that is necessary. The position is not as simple as the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) makes out.

Mr Goodwill: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The issue is much more complex than it is sometimes painted, and we need to engage in the negotiations with that in mind.

We intend to reach an agreement as soon as possible, but the fact remains that there needs to be an agreement, and I strongly believe that it would be inappropriate to lay down unilateral positions. Indeed, it would be irresponsible to do so. In the meantime, as the Government have made clear on numerous occasions—I will repeat it again today—until the UK leaves the EU, there will be no changes in the circumstances of European nationals in the UK. They will continue to have to have the same rights under EU law that they had before the referendum.

As I have said, however, this issue is also about British citizens living and working in other EU member states and exercising their treaty rights. The Prime Minister has made clear that, through the negotiations, we are seeking to secure the best deal for Britain, and that deal rightly includes protecting the status of British citizens who are living, working and studying elsewhere in the EU. It is disappointing that the motion makes no reference to those British citizens. The Government are therefore unable to set out a definitive position now: that must be done following an agreement with the EU. Those EU nationals who are worried about their current status can have the Government's complete reassurance that their right to enter, work, study and live in the UK remains unchanged. They continue to be welcome here.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: I share the Minister's aspiration to protect the rights of UK citizens living elsewhere in the European Union, but may I suggest that the best way to achieve that end would be to make a commitment to EU citizens living here, thus creating an atmosphere in which positive negotiations on other matters might take place?

Mr Goodwill: I am sure the right hon. Gentleman agrees that, while this will be a negotiation of the willing on both sides, other complex issues, such as those identified by my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), will need to be worked out. Immigration is a complicated matter. However, I hope that, following what I have said today, EU citizens who are living and working here, exercising their treaty rights and contributing to the industries of our country

we know that they make a fantastic contribution to, for instance, agriculture and the hospitality industry—will be reassured that we will seek to protect their status, while at the same time seeking to protect the status of UK citizens living and working elsewhere in the EU.

The Prime Minister has said in numerous statements that there will be no immediate changes in the circumstances of EU nationals. In addition, let me draw the House's attention to the recent confirmation by the Department for Education that EU students applying for places at English universities or further education institutions in the 2017-18 academic year will continue to be eligible for student loans and grants for the duration of their courses.

Given that it is in the interests of all interested parties to protect the rights of their citizens once the UK exits the EU, we are confident that both EU and British citizens will be protected through a reciprocal arrangement following discussions. As I have said, I want to be able to conclude this matter as quickly as possible once negotiations begin, but there is a balance to be struck between transparency and good negotiating practice. Any attempt to pre-empt our future negotiations would risk undermining our ability to secure protection for the rights of British citizens living in the EU, and that is why we are unable to support the motion.

2.17 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Minister is now well established in his new role, but let me take this opportunity to welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker). I look forward to working with him and the rest of the team in the years ahead.

I am grateful to the SNP for bringing this issue back to the House. For the avoidance of any doubt—if the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) were still in the Chamber, I would say that this applies particularly to him—I should make it clear that Opposition Members accept the result of the referendum. We simply want to ensure that our departure from the EU takes place on the best possible terms for the UK. As one of my colleagues said during last week's Opposition day debate, the British people voted to come out; they did not vote to lose out. Providing guarantees for EU nationals now is part of securing the best deal for the UK. That is why we made it the topic of an Opposition day debate just two weeks after the referendum, and why we support the motion moved so ably today by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry).

Back in July, as now, it was clear that the Government did not have a plan. They had no plan for what Leave would look like, and no plan for the 3 million EU nationals who are living, working and studying in our country. During that debate, however, one of the leading leave campaigners rightly pushed for certainty on the issue. He said:

"I would like to put on record what I think has been said already—that countless times the Vote Leave campaign gave exactly this reassurance to everybody from EU countries living and working here, and it is very, very disappointing that that should be called into question. I think it is absolutely right to

issue the strongest possible reassurance to EU nationals in this country, not just for moral or humanitarian reasons, but for very, very sound economic reasons as well. They are welcome, they are necessary, they are a vital part of our society, and I will passionately support this motion tonight."—[*Official Report*, 6 July 2016; Vol. 612, c. 939.]

Let us give credit where it is due. After making that contribution, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) not only talked the talk but walked the walk, as did the overwhelming number of Members who voted for the motion to guarantee EU nationals the right to remain here. I hope that now that he is Foreign Secretary he is making the case even more strongly, because I guess in his new role at the Foreign Office he is learning the art of diplomacy. [*Interruption.*] Yes, he may have some way to go; I appreciate the Prime Minister is not yet entirely convinced. What he will know by now is that the way in which the Government have turned EU nationals living here into bargaining chips for the Brexit negotiations, or, as the Secretary of State for International Trade put it,

"one of our main cards",

is not only deeply unfair to those concerned, but severely undermining our reputation with the very people with whom we want to be entering into negotiations next spring, not to mention the damage it does to our economy. Put simply, it is not in our national interest.

It is absolutely wrong for the Government to suggest that we cannot guarantee the status of EU nationals here—many of whom have been here for decades—without a reciprocal arrangement for UK nationals abroad. The Government are effectively asking people—doctors in our NHS, business owners and entrepreneurs, teachers in our schools—to put their lives on hold and wait until March 2019 to find out what their future holds. But many will want certainty for themselves and their families.

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): The following question then arises: if he were in the Government, what guarantees would the hon. Gentleman give to British citizens living in the EU regarding their rights? What possible guarantees or safeguards could he give them?

Paul Blomfield: By giving those guarantees to EU nationals living in this country, we set the marker, and we give the best guarantees to our citizens living in the rest of the EU by making that stand now.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Would it not therefore be better for Ministers to be out there negotiating and getting the reciprocal rights, rather than having to remain at the Dispatch Box for these futile debates that stop them getting on with the job?

Paul Blomfield: I think it would be much better if Ministers did not see EU nationals in this country as bargaining chips, but instead saw them as citizens contributing to our economy and society, as the Foreign Secretary said in the debate in July.

Mr Harper: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Foreign Secretary and diplomacy, so may I ask a question that might test his? Does he agree with his party leader, and presumably his party's policy, that Labour wants to continue having free movement even after we have left

[Mr Harper]

the EU? That is the position set out by his leader. Can he just confirm to the House, because we want clarity and certainty, if that remains his party's position?

Paul Blomfield: The shadow Secretary of State made that very clear last week. The right hon. Gentleman misrepresents Labour's position. I do not know whether he was present for the debate, but he might usefully read *Hansard*. Opposition Members accept that there will be adjustments to the arrangements and believe in reasonable management of migration.

Keith Vaz: I congratulate my hon. Friend most warmly on his appointment to his new post; I am sure that he will find it very challenging. The Opposition's position is very clear, and it is the common-sense position, which is a double guarantee: we want to see British citizens keep their rights in the EU, and we want to give EU citizens their rights to stay here. No EU country has said that it wants British citizens to leave the EU. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Paul Blomfield: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and it is unfortunate that some of the cavalier comments by Ministers have put this issue on the table.

As I was saying, EU nationals want some certainty for themselves and their families, and, if we do not offer it, many of them will only find it by leaving the UK. That is unfair to them, but it is also a loss to our country.

The Opposition do not believe in cutting off our nose to spite our face. We want unilateral and immediate action from the Government to guarantee the status of EU nationals who contribute so much to our society, and we do not believe that that will undermine the Government's ability to secure the status of UK nationals living in other EU countries, because we believe that they, too, are an asset to the communities in which they have set up home.

If the Government position is not playing too well with our partners abroad, it is not going down well here at home either. Polling for British Future conducted immediately after the referendum shows that an overwhelming majority of both leave and remain voters take the same view: EU nationals should be allowed to remain. Some 84% of people, including 77% of leave voters, want existing EU nationals to stay. A letter to *The Sunday Telegraph* back in July calling for guaranteed rights for existing EU nationals brought leave and remain supporters, Migration Watch UK and migrants' rights groups together.

Last week this House made it clear that simply repeating "Brexit means Brexit" will not wash. It will not wash for this House, and it will not wash for people up and down the country. The uncertainty it is creating is having its impact on our economy. So we welcome the Government's commitment to share their plan for Brexit with Parliament, albeit following pressure from both sides of the House, but there are some issues that cannot wait, and this is one of them.

People who have made their lives here deserve better. Withholding rights from EU nationals here until rights for UK nationals abroad are guaranteed sounds logical enough until we look into what it means in practice.

It means that decisions to invest or expand businesses are being scrapped because EU nationals do not want to wait until 2019 to find out if they are welcome and public services are strained further as EU doctors, nurses and teachers uproot and move somewhere they are welcome and can plan for their future. In the meantime the status of UK nationals in other European countries is no more secure since Brexit negotiations are ongoing.

In his statement to the House last week the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union said that "five out of six migrants who are here either already have indefinite leave to remain or will have it by the time we depart the Union."—[*Official Report*, 10 October 2016; Vol. 615, c. 48.]

Leaving aside the arrogant assumption that EU nationals will just wait around and hope that they will be okay rather than go somewhere they know they will be welcome, what will concern EU citizens who heard that statement is that indefinite leave to remain is not handed out automatically on the basis of length of residency. It has to be applied for, and applying for it is costly and onerous, and there are no guarantees. Perhaps the Minister can today clarify whether that is really what our offer is to those helping run our public services and contributing to our economy—"Stick around for two years and you might be able to apply for indefinite leave to remain." That is simply not good enough: it is not good enough for them, and it is not good enough for our country.

We are grateful to the SNP for bringing the issue back to the House, and we repeat the call we made in July, which this House endorsed, which is that the Government should provide immediate clarity to EU nationals who are taking decisions about their future now.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Time is limited and many Members wish to speak. I will impose an initial time limit of eight minutes, with the proviso that it might well have to be reduced.

2.28 pm

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I will endeavour to keep my comments pithy—I do not have a lisp. First, I thank the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) for being so unwilling to take interventions from my hon. Friends during her speech, because so many of the points I had scribbled down for my speech were being brought up by colleagues that otherwise I would have nothing left to say.

I had intended to begin by saying that I assumed that the motion was driven by genuine concern, rather than a desire to play simple party politics. Unfortunately, however, as the hon. and learned Lady's speech progressed, I found it less easy to maintain that position, because, time and again, I heard examples of this important issue being used as a Trojan horse simply to cast unpalatable accusations at my party. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman) says from a sedentary position, "Look in the mirror." I look in the mirror every morning when I shave, and what I see is a black face looking back at me. When hon. Members start accusing Conservative Members of being xenophobic, I ask that they reflect on those comments before they start accusing—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Comments are to be reflected upon and discussed; they are not to be made from a sedentary position. If the hon. Member for Darlington wishes her comments to be noted, she should stand up and make them. If not, she should not make them.

James Cleverly: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

James Cleverly: Time is limited, so I will make some progress. The most important point—this has been brought up numerous times by my hon. Friends, but it has been ignored and left unanswered by the motion's proposer and those Labour Members who support it—is that British citizens currently living in the EU have had no confirmation about their future status. I remind Members that it is not from the British side of the negotiating relationship that we hear words such as “punishment”. It is from voices at the Commission—EU members—that we hear that Britain needs to be punished. I have spent a lot of time scouring the internet, but I am yet to find an assurance from the EU that British citizens can expect protection as part of the negotiations.

Dr Philippa Whitford: The hon. Gentleman casts an aspersion that members of the Commission are threatening British citizens in Europe. Has he actually seen, read or heard that, because nobody else has? We started it: we voted to leave, so we are the ones who have to start the solution.

James Cleverly: No Government Members or likely members of the negotiation team have been using words such as “punishment”. We should respect the decision of the British people and enter the negotiations—this has been said by Members on both sides of the House, to be fair—with a desire to get the best outcome not only for the British people and our friends and colleagues in the EU, but for British people living in the EU and EU nationals living in Britain. Our collective desired outcome is to come out of the negotiating period with a relationship that works for the EU, us and all people living both in the EU and in the UK.

An estimated 1.2 million British nationals live in the EU, and at the moment their status has a question mark over it. Yet we heard nothing from SNP or Labour Members, despite the numerous opportunities they were given, about whether any effort has been made to secure the status of those British nationals. My right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), who has unfortunately left the Chamber, was right to say that the British Government's first responsibility is to the British people. While there is a question mark over the status of British nationals living in the EU, unfortunately it is not legitimate for us to say, unilaterally, that we are going to secure the rights of EU nationals. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Darlington speaks again from a sedentary position, saying, “Humans as bargaining chips.” She accuses the Government of doing that, but fails to use the same phraseology when talking about the people negotiating on behalf of the EU.

We want—this has been said from the Dispatch Box on numerous occasions—to maintain, as closely as possible, our excellent relationship with EU nationals in the UK. We value their commitment.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP) *rose*—

James Cleverly: I am short of time, so I am afraid that I am going to make progress. As the son of a migrant, I absolutely recognise the incredible value to the UK of immigrants from EU countries and wider afield. This Government have said on many occasions that the value of migrants will be recognised, both now and moving forward.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I am the daughter of an immigrant. Does it not cause the hon. Gentleman great concern that, since the EU referendum, there has been an exponential rise in hate crime in England and Wales? That is not the position in Scotland.

James Cleverly: I do not have access to the detailed figures or the time to answer that question fully, but I would be more than happy to have an extended discussion about the validity of those figures. With the best will in the world, I find it hard to believe that there have been no racially motivated crimes north of the border.

The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West, who moved the motion, kept saying that people were being used as bargaining chips. That fundamentally misses the point that everything we do in politics, including every policy position and every negotiating position we take with the EU, is about people. Politics is about people—always has been, always will be. Every decision that we make through this negotiation will have an impact on people. Yes, our collective attitude towards migration policies has an effect on people, but so do our policies on trade and agricultural subsidies. All those things have a real effect on people. To single out one element of a future negotiation and say that we should unilaterally close it down suggests a naive at best and cynical at worst attitude to our negotiating position. I want the negotiations to be successful for both Great Britain and the EU, but that will not be possible if Great Britain takes unilateral decisions. It has been confirmed from the Dispatch Box that if our EU partners provided a resolution on this issue, it would go away immediately, yet I have heard nothing from them.

Our Government need to have the flexibility to negotiate the best possible deal for the British people. I encourage hon. Members who support the motion to put as much energy and passion into speaking to people on the continent with whom they may have influence about clarifying the position of British nationals in the EU. The whole issue would then be taken off the table and we would end up in the position that I think Members on both sides of the House want—namely, that of having a positive attitude towards the negotiations, with the ultimate goal of giving as much clarity and reassurance as possible both to EU nationals living here and to British nationals living in the EU. I call on Members to reject the motion.

2.39 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The simple reason we should make the move is that it is the UK that has voted to leave. It is we who have caused the insecurity, whether for our citizens in Europe or for EU nationals here, so it is incumbent on us to make the

[*Dr Philippa Whitford*]

move to try to deal with that. As for the idea that people are not having problems, I have constituents struggling to get loans or mortgages for businesses and for houses. It is ridiculous to say that they are not concerned; they absolutely are. The idea that they should spend two years in limbo is frankly appalling.

Obviously, with my health background, I can say that we know that our health and social care system completely depends on EU nationals. We have more than 50,000 such doctors and nurses. The Minister was berating Shona Robison about trying to collect the data in Scotland, but we do not have data for Scotland. The 130,000 is for England, because we never considered it at all relevant where someone who was settled in Scotland came from and therefore never asked. Now, we need to know how many people might have an issue, whether it is that they will get thrown out or that they will get fed up with the insecurity and leave.

The other question is how we think we will attract more. One in 10 medical jobs in England is empty; we have massive rota gaps. How easy do we think it will be to attract EU doctors to come and fill those posts in the coming years when the message they get is that they are not terribly welcome and that, if they come, they might be asked to go home because they came after—

James Cleverly *rose*—

Dr Whitford: The hon. Gentleman was not keen on taking interventions, so I shall crack on.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: My hon. Friend talks about how EU nationals might feel about coming here in future. Does she share my concern and that of my constituents that this goes right back to the debates in this House on the European Union Referendum Bill, in which we even froze them out of having a vote on the issue? The message is not good, and they might decide to turn their backs on this new Brexit Britain.

Dr Whitford: Absolutely. So much of this is about not technicalities but the message we give outside this place. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said in winding up her speech, it is also about Britain's reputation. Britain previously had a reputation for fairness. Look at the second or third generation of immigrants, who have made their home for generations in this country. Now we say, "You might not be able to stay," or, "You might not be able to come." The best way to secure the place of British nationals in Europe is for us to be gracious.

The hon. Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) asked what we have done to try to make the position secure. I am on the all-party parliamentary group on Germany; we raised this issue both when we met the ambassador here and when we visited Berlin, and they were incredulous that we would even think that they would ask British nationals to go away. They said, "Should we make a move?" It is our move to make because the UK has created this situation.

We cannot survive without these people in the NHS and, in particular, the 80,000 who work in social care. If they apply because they are anxious for British citizenship, it will cost them almost £1,500 per head, per member of

their family, to do so. That is quite a lot when someone might not even be earning the minimum wage. If the final position is that they are eventually treated the same as non-EEA citizens, it will cost £4,000 per head, including the NHS surcharge, which, despite working in it, they might actually have to pay to access it. To say that these things are trivial and that these people should be reassured is, I think, naive.

There is already an impact on medical research and academia. When I was at the graduation of my local university just a week after Brexit, had lost a senior researcher from mainland Europe who was almost at the point of stepping on the boat. He said, "Why would I move my children to an English-speaking school? Why would I disrupt and move my family when I might get sent home in two years?" The idea that this is having no effect and that people should just cling on to soft reassurance is childish. We are the ones who need to make the first move and we should make that move. Future agreements can be negotiated, but everyone settled here on 23 June or earlier should have that right to remain and we are the ones who should make that move.

The APPG visited Berlin and it was very interesting. I picked up a couple of points. Peter Altmaier, second-in-command to Angela Merkel, was quite shocked that we use the term EU migrant. He said that they would never use that term; to them, migrant means someone from outside Europe. It would be like our being described as Scottish migrants, or Irish migrants, within the British Isles. It seems abhorrent.

Kwasi Kwarteng: This is the nub of the issue with the Brexit vote. The Germans are quite happy to describe people from outside the EU as migrants, but not people from within the EU. It was that exclusive club that I think led many ethnic communities in Britain to the out vote.

Dr Whitford: Frankly, this is an immigration arrangement from Europe. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that having stirred up the anti-immigrant view that led to leave we are going to say that we will not take EU nationals but that we will take many more people from all over the world, he is deluding himself.

Another point came up when members of our group said that Europe had to change free movement, so that we could stay in the single market. Where were we sitting at that moment? We were sitting in what had previously been East Berlin. We need to understand that for all Germans and east Europeans free movement of people comes from the heart; it is not a technical problem. They do not realise that we do not understand that. Twenty-seven years ago, there was a wall through Berlin. The last person trying to get over it was shot just a few months before it came down. Angela Merkel could not travel west until she was 36 years old.

David T. C. Davies *rose*—

Dr Whitford: I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

In our debate in July, I mentioned that my husband Hans is a GP who has worked in our NHS for 30 years. At first, he did not really think that this concerned him, because he thought that it would all disappear, but four

months on it has not. The problem is that these people are finding it terrible. The Minister said in that debate that anyone who had been here about five years could apply for right to remain, and when I mentioned my husband he said, "Oh, he can definitely stay." My husband has printed out *Hansard* and is keeping it in his passport to prove absolutely that he has his personal reassurance. The Minister also said in that debate that we would have to consider what rights and benefits they have and which of our public services they can access. My husband, nearing retirement after 30-odd years in the NHS, is really concerned that he might get to stay but might suddenly have to pay for the healthcare he has been delivering for 30 years. And we are told that we are the scaremongers.

The story of my husband's family is this. His father was German; his mother was Polish. They met during the war and were not allowed to marry. They had a child who was taken away from them. They were lifted and interrogated by the Gestapo. His father was imprisoned and his mother was turned into a forced labourer. Long before this debate arose, my husband used to say, "I can't believe that in one generation I have been allowed to marry who I like, settle where I like and carry out the profession I chose." I cannot believe that in one more generation we could lose those rights and take them away from our young people.

2.48 pm

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): It is with some sadness that I rise to contribute to the debate, because where I can I, as a fellow Celt and a Welsh MP, look to support much of what my friends the Members from Scotland do. I was a happy remainder until the referendum and my constituency, Cardiff, voted by 60% to remain, but now I am working with my constituents to remain with the best bits of the European Union. Most of them, and especially me, are convinced that we are leaving and that is that. We get on with it.

I represent the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff. Much has been said about how much the medical profession relies on people coming from all over the world, not just the European Union. I wonder whether Scottish National party Members have thought about the impression that their language and rhetoric in today's debate are creating. I have just heard the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) use the term "thrown out". That kind of language is not coming from those on my Benches. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) made the point that we are agreed on much of this. My right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) and the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire said that people who lived here before 23 June should have the right to stay, but that is not what the motion states. It talks about people who have "made the UK their home". That is open to interpretation. My right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean, a learned Member with much experience as an Immigration Minister, explained why the motion was so clumsily worded.

I am rising not to support the motion but to say that I am working to ensure that the EU nationals in my constituency, in Wales and in the United Kingdom know that they are welcome. They make a terrific contribution to our economy, our communities and our society, and we want to keep them there, but we are also

rightly trying to protect the interests of British people in the EU as well. As a Welsh MP, I am protecting Welsh people across the European Union. They have settled all over the place. I hope that hon. Members from Scotland will support me in that, but I have been saddened to hear their rhetoric in this debate.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman talks about the language being used in this debate. I should like to ask him whether he was at the Tory party conference. My wife is an EU national, and she already feels as though she is a second-class citizen because she does not get a vote from the UK Government. After she had listened to the speeches at the Tory party conference, she said to me, "I am no longer welcome in the UK under this Government." How does the hon. Gentleman answer that?

Craig Williams: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman was tuning into the Conservative party conference. I was indeed at the conference, with many EU nationals from my constituency and from my team in this Parliament. I have EU nationals working for and with me. This is absolute nonsense. It is scaremongering and it is terrible. The scaremongering is coming from those on the Opposition Benches and it is deplorable—

Dr Philippa Whitford: What about "bargaining chips"?

Craig Williams: Is this about bargaining chips? No it is not.

I fear that SNP Members are trying to rerun the arguments of the referendum. I was with them on many of those arguments during the referendum, but I am afraid that we lost. I know that it is the ambition of SNP Members to ignore referendum results until they get them right, but speaking as a Welsh Member, I do not take that view. We must now respect the will of the British people.

Joanna Cherry: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, during the independence referendum in Scotland, the leader of the Conservative and Unionist party in Scotland, Ruth Davidson, told the voters of Scotland that the only way they could guarantee their continued EU membership was to vote to remain part of the UK? Does he agree that that is now a broken promise?

Craig Williams: Absolutely not. Ruth Davidson is a politician without parallel in Scotland and I am incredibly proud that she leads our party up there. I was up there during the independence referendum, campaigning alongside her. I could happily chuck in many quotes from the Spanish Government echoing my point about Scottish membership of the European Union, but that would do nothing for my constituents. Much of this debate will do nothing for the EU nationals in my constituency who are seeking leadership and certainty from this place. We are hearing that from the Government, but not from Members across the House who want to use this issue as a political football. That is deplorable.

I want to quote some Government Ministers at this point. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has said:

"We always welcome those with skills, the drive and the expertise to make our nation better still. If we are to win in the global marketplace, we must win the global battle for talent".

[Craig Williams]

How much more welcoming could anyone be towards EU nationals, or indeed towards the world, than that? The Home Secretary has said:

“I believe immigration has brought many benefits to the nation. It has enhanced our economy, our society and our culture. That is why I want to reduce net migration while continuing to ensure we attract the brightest and the best”.

This is what my constituents put me here to do. This is the Government I am supporting and I am delighted to do so. The Prime Minister has said:

“Let me be absolutely clear: existing workers’ legal rights will continue to be guaranteed in law—and they will be guaranteed as long as I am Prime Minister”.

I can assure the House that she will be Prime Minister of this great country for many years to come and that those workers’ rights will be guaranteed. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury made a speech to representatives of the UK financial services industry recently, in which he said of the negotiations that, as long as we get a comparable relationship with other EU nations, there will be no question but that EU nationals who are already working here will be able to stay. The nub of the question is that we must achieve a reciprocal arrangement with our EU neighbours.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to my Welsh colleague for giving way. He has quoted various Ministers, and indeed the Prime Minister, on the subject of people working in this country. What does he have to say to the EU nationals living in my constituency who are pensioners? They have had no such reassurances from Ministers or from the Prime Minister. The hon. Gentleman keeps talking about the workers and the brightest and the best, and I am sure that everyone welcomes the fact that such people are working in this country, but I am not scaremongering when I say that my constituents who have retired and who are living here have had no assurances from those on the Government Front Bench that they have the right to remain here.

Craig Williams: I personally want them to remain here happily spending their money in our economy, but what about the British pensioners in Spain who are spending their money in the Spanish economy? This is the point: there must be a reciprocal arrangement. If British pensioners in EU states can be protected, we will protect the EU pensioners in this state. That is the nub of the issue.

This has been a sad debate for me, as a remainder and now a committed leaver. I want to work constructively across the House to protect the best bits of the European Union while getting the best possible agreement for British citizens who currently reside in the EU, be they pensioners, workers, students or those doing research. However, it is clear that this whole issue is being hijacked by Opposition Members to provoke needless outrage, and that does not help anybody. I hope that the speakers who follow me will try to change the tone of the debate and help my constituents in Cardiff.

2.58 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to support such a consistent politician as the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Craig Williams)—a remainder one

day and a leaver the next! However, he made a strong case for a guarantee for EU citizens to remain in this country. The difficulty is that all those amazing quotes he has gathered—which the hon. Member for Braintree (James Cleverly), with all his internet shopping, was unable to give us—are actually worth nothing unless they are spoken from the Dispatch Box. The hon. Member for Cardiff North is right to say that Ministers and others have talked about the contribution made by EU nationals, but at the end of the day it is for the Government to make those statements here in this House or in written statements.

I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) on her powerful, eloquent and clear speech. In fact, all that she has sought is clarity, and all that we have heard from Ministers so far—the Minister for Immigration has left the Chamber, leaving it to the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, whom I congratulate on his appointment, to answer for the Government—is that it is all going to be all right on the night, but they just cannot say that in the House of Commons. All Members of the House have made the point that clarity is extremely important. If we have that clarity, it will be clear where we stand and there will be no need for the Opposition to keep bringing this debate back to the House every two weeks or so.

As a former Minister for Europe, I know that nothing at summit meetings is kept private. There is no question that any EU Head of Government has said to our Prime Minister either publicly or privately—if it was private, it would be public by now—that they want to remove British citizens from the EU. We heard today about the double guarantee. There is no question but that the SNP and the official Opposition would guarantee British citizens the right to remain in the EU if we had the power. All that we seek is the guarantee that EU residents in this country will be allowed to stay here.

Dr Philippa Whitford: Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that we are the White Queen in these negotiations and that we have to make the first move? If that move is gracious, it will invite a gracious response.

Keith Vaz: The hon. Lady, who made a powerful speech, is right. It is possible for us to take that position, and the position of the other EU countries is also clear because nobody has said that they want to do any damage to British citizens abroad, so we can show leadership by saying what the deal is. That would clear the matter up immediately.

The problem with putting the matter into the negotiations is the disparity of numbers. There are 1.2 million British citizens in the EU and 3 million EU citizens here. We do not want people to say as part of the negotiations that we will have absolute parity of numbers. That is what worries me.

The Minister nods. He will have the chance when he winds up the debate to state that there will be no question of our saying to the other EU countries that we will allow only 1.2 million people to stay. That is why it is far better to be clear about the rights of EU citizens now than to wait until the end of the negotiations.

There are three possible cut-off dates: 23 June, the date of the referendum; 31 March 2017; and 31 March 2019. I favour the date of the referendum, because it is absolutely clear. Others may favour the date that we actually leave the EU, but the point is that we are making a mess of our immigration policy if we keep negotiating in this way. We need absolute clarity, particularly on immigration. The Government are worried that if they wait until 31 March 2019, there will be a spike in EU citizens coming to this country before we exit in order to secure the right to stay here. When the Minister comes to wind up, I hope that he will give us the figures for how many EU nationals have actually come to Britain. In fact, many are so worried that they are considering leaving our country because they simply do not know where they stand.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) asked the SNP whether it was necessary to keep bringing this debate to the House when the matter is actually all settled. I am sure that it is settled in his mind and my mind, but it is not settled in Government policy. However, we can have a settled Government policy. We just heard an excellent statement from the Immigration Minister that EU citizens who are studying in our country will be allowed to remain and get the support that they have had in the past. If a Minister can come to the Dispatch Box and make a clear statement of that kind to reassure EU nationals who are studying here, it is simple for the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union to get up and make exactly the same statement about EU nationals who are resident here. The fact that the SNP included the word “should” in its motion should not stop the Government supporting it. They had the opportunity to enter into negotiations with the SNP, as we saw last week when they avoided another vote, which everyone thought was going to happen but which did not happen, thanks to the position taken by the Government. If we are trying to ensure that the fears of EU nationals are put to one side and that EU nationals are reassured, we can easily make such a statement today.

My next point relates to the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), a former Immigration Minister, who said in his intervention on the current Immigration Minister that we would also consider the matter of EU nationals in our prisons as part of the negotiations. That is news to me. I did not realise that that was going to be part of the negotiations. Over the past 10 years, successive Governments have been trying to send EU citizens back. They constitute 10% of the entire prison population and we have not been able to move them out. Are we suggesting that we will put the question of EU citizens in our prisons into the negotiating pot as part of the deal for allowing EU citizens to remain here?

Mr Kenneth Clarke: We have an EU agreement whereby all EU Governments agree that they will exchange prisoners, so the current legal position allows that to happen. The problems that have stopped that happening are largely logistical and rather wrapped up in the bureaucracy of the Interior Ministries of different countries. At the moment we have reciprocal agreements, and EU countries have agreed to accept their own nationals to complete their sentence in their own country if they are returned as prisoners from other countries.

Keith Vaz: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right. He probably negotiated that agreement when he was either Home Secretary or Lord Chancellor. There is therefore no need to put that into the negotiations because it is already there, although Poland has a derogation and the Polish situation will become live again only at the end of this year.

The Minister is in his first, well-deserved job in government and can make a hero of himself to the Government Whips, because they will not need to keep bringing back debates on the European Union and the rights of nationals, to Worcester and to the EU. Rather like the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Craig Williams), he was a remainer but is now a committed exiter as a result of the decision on 23 June. All we seek is clarity, so let us be clear. Nothing is put at risk by accepting what the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West has said. Let us put the matter to bed. Otherwise, the Minister can be sure that the issue will return again and again.

Finally, the EU summit is tomorrow and the Prime Minister will presumably, since we are still members of the EU, be there. Some Members have suggested that Members of this House should begin the negotiations, which is well above our pay grade, but the Prime Minister is going to that EU summit tomorrow. The will of the House can be expressed today and the Prime Minister can begin the discussions on this particular issue tomorrow. I am sure that she will get a positive reply from the other EU leaders.

3.8 pm

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I echo the comments about how disappointing it is that the SNP chose to play a game of political football rather than to discuss the issues seriously. There is little in the motion that I would disagree with except for the word “should”, to which I will return in a moment. The motion asks us to recognise the huge contribution that people from other EU countries have made to this country. Of course we all recognise their contribution. That point has been made over and over again on these Government Benches, and inside and outside the House by people in both the remain and leave camps. Let me say it again: people from other European Union nations have made an enormous contribution to this country. They are very welcome in this country. They were welcome before the referendum took place, they are welcome now and they will be welcome after we exit the EU.

Keith Vaz: May I add the hon. Gentleman's wife, who is of Hungarian origin, to that list of people?

David T. C. Davies: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I was going to mention that. I declare an interest in that my wife is Hungarian. My children are completely bilingual and have dual nationality. It is a cliché, but when I say that some of my closest friends are from eastern Europe, I mean that I go on holiday and share houses with them, which makes us pretty close friends. It is ludicrous even to suggest that people who are involved in the leave campaign—dare I say that I was the leader of the campaign in Wales?—have some kind of xenophobic or anti-EU agenda.

At the same time, we should also be making it clear that we welcome the contribution of professionals from countries outside the EU. I have dealt with many EU

[David T. C. Davies]

nationals who work in the NHS and the public sector in Wales, but I have also dealt with doctors from Egypt, businessmen from India and nurses from the Philippines, and they are also making a huge contribution to our economy. These people from outside the EU nations are also very welcome and will continue to be so. It is ridiculous to suggest that people from EU states should somehow be scared or worried about what is going to happen when we leave the EU, given that we already welcome and appreciate the contribution of so many people from outside it.

This Government have put compassion at the heart of their policy. We are spending more money on foreign aid than any other Government in this country has ever done and more than any other country in Europe is doing; we have ring-fenced NHS spending in England—Labour certainly has not done that in Wales; and we are dedicated to ironing out the inequality within the education sector. It is ludicrous in the extreme to suggest that anyone on any part of the Government Benches would ever want to round up people from other EU nations and throw them out—that is a fantasy and it will never, ever happen. Nobody wants it to happen and nobody has ever called for it to happen. I am just grateful for the opportunity to say that clearly once again.

Apparently, there have been issues with hate crime. May I say once again, as someone who was heavily involved in the leave campaign, that I, along with everyone I campaigned with, unreservedly condemn any form of hate crime towards anyone, be they from EU nations or outside, and whether it is because of their sexual orientation, the colour of their skin, their religion or their nationality? I, along with every person I have ever worked with on the leave campaign and with every person I have been involved with in politics, totally condemn that sort of behaviour. We should not run away with the idea that people from eastern Europe or from other European nations are constantly being hassled as they walk around; in my experience, which is considerable, that is simply not happening. I have been married for 13 years to somebody who moved here from eastern Europe and who has never been a victim of that sort of behaviour. I am not suggesting it does not happen, but I sometimes think there is a tendency to over-exaggerate.

Joanna Cherry: Does the hon. Gentleman accept the statistics produced by the Home Office showing that hate crime has increased by 41% in England and Wales since the EU referendum? Does he accept those stats produced by his Government's Home Office?

David T. C. Davies: Of course, but the statistics have increased because the Government have rightly said that they are determined to stamp out hate crime and are looking to police forces—

Several hon. Members rose—

David T. C. Davies: Let me answer the question and then perhaps I will give way again. The Home Office has rightly said that it is determined to stamp out hate crime and it is expecting police forces to produce figures and to seek out examples. Of course we also face the additional problem that social media sites such as Twitter make it easier for keyboard warriors to commit hate crimes—one has only to look at my feed today to see that that is the case.

Joanna Cherry: I am very interested by what the hon. Gentleman has just said, as I think he is suggesting that the Home Office has changed the basis on which it calculates hate crime in the UK since the EU referendum. Would he like to tell us his source for that? Or perhaps the Minister will be able to help us with that later.

David T. C. Davies: I have not suggested that; I have said that the Home Office is rightly determined to stamp out hate crime and it has asked police forces to be much more rigorous in getting the figures. The Home Office will be looking to use those figures to investigate this, and quite right too; there is nothing wrong with that. But what I find concerning is that the hon. and learned Lady and others seem to have tried to make a correlation between hate crime and Brexit, and the clear and worrying implication of what they are doing is to suggest that the 17.2 million people who legitimately voted for Brexit are in some way responsible for hate crimes. That is an absolutely outrageous suggestion and I hope that—

Joanna Cherry rose—

David T. C. Davies: I hope that if I give way to her for the third time, the hon. and learned Lady will take this opportunity to make it very clear that those people who voted to leave the EU were exercising their democratic right to do so and do not, in any way, support hate crimes.

Joanna Cherry: I was going to ask the hon. Gentleman this: how does he explain the 40% increase in hate crime in England and Wales since the referendum if it is not down to the vote? To what does he attribute this? How does he explain why there has been no such increase in Scotland? We would love to hear his wisdom on that.

David T. C. Davies: I am not an expert on Scotland, but I can tell the hon. and learned Lady that the Government are absolutely determined to stamp out hate crime and are rightly demanding that police forces come forward with those figures, and I am very glad that they have done so. The problem she has is the same as a conundrum I faced about 17 or 18 years ago when I was on the losing side of the referendum on whether or not we should have a Welsh Assembly. That all went through on a very small vote and issues were raised about how the press had handled it. Those in the anti-Assembly campaign all sat down afterwards and thought, "What are we going to do? We should challenge this and get the Lords to chuck it out. It is outrageous. How dare they do this on the basis of a vote of about one in four of the population?" At that time, I was probably a little less older and wiser than I am now, and I was probably all for fighting the campaign and re-running the whole referendum. I am glad that wiser heads within the Conservative party prevailed and those in the anti-Assembly campaign said, "Hang on a minute, people have voted for this. It may only be one in four of the population in Wales and we lost out by only a few thousand votes, but the reality is that people have voted for it and we now need to let them get on with it." What we did was to appoint to the National Assembly advisory group somebody who is now a Conservative Minister, Nick Bourne, who became a very good friend. He decided that he was going to get the Conservative party involved in this, to iron out the details of what was actually going on.

The motion's use of the word "should" is what would lead me to vote against it; the rest of the motion is absolutely fine. We do recognise the contribution that is being made by EU migrants within the UK, and the Government are doing everything they can to ensure that their rights are respected post-Brexit. The whole point of what the Government are doing at the moment is to say to other EU nations and to the EU itself, "Look, we've got 3 million people here. We want to protect their rights. We want to ensure that their freedom to move around continues in every single way, but you are going to need to reciprocate in some way." As someone who is married to an EU immigrant, may I say that I utterly support what the Government are doing and trust them to do exactly the right thing?

Dr Philippa Whitford: I gently point out that this is a debate on the EU and not on Wales. It is absolutely the case that people who voted leave are not racist or xenophobic, but unfortunately what that vote has done is give authorisation to people who feel emboldened, now they are in the majority, and we have seen these incidents across the country.

David T. C. Davies: Everyone absolutely condemns any form of hate crime. The hon. Lady made a point earlier about Berlin and the Berlin wall, so let me say how strongly I feel about that. I have visited Sopron, where the Berlin wall really fell; the videos of people cutting through the barbed wire can be seen on YouTube. These were people from Berlin who had gone on holiday in that summer of 1989 to Sopron in Hungary. They snipped through the wire and walked into Austria because they had been told that they were not going to get shot at for doing so. It was there that the Berlin wall really began to fall and the socialist Government in East Germany finally realised that their blinkered view of how people should live their lives was not going to prevail because people do demand freedom.

We are not in the business of erecting a wall as a result of Brexit; we are in the business of taking down a wall—a much less violent wall but one that exists around the European Union—going out into the world and giving people the freedom to trade and to do business all over the world. That is what this is all about.

Let me finish by saying how delighted I am that the hon. Lady recognises the important significance of the Berlin wall coming down and the defeat for socialism, for that is what it was. I hope that she will join me in paying tribute to Lech Walesa, Ronald Reagan, Pope John Paul and Mrs Thatcher, who did so much to bring about the end of socialism in eastern Europe.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. This has been such a lively and excellent debate, with so many interventions that speeches have gone way over eight minutes. I am afraid that I therefore now have to reduce the official time limit to six minutes, but I am sure there will still be lively interventions.

3.18 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I commend the words of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) when setting out the case as to why it is important that we give reassurance to European

citizens across the UK. That case is even more focused in Scotland and, in particular, in the highlands, given the history there of struggling over many centuries to retain our population. Our issue is one of emigration and being able to retain young people and young families—being able to make the highlands a place where people will stay. We have done great work over the past decade or so to turn around the situation where people are leaving. I wish to read out two quotes from a report by Highland Council, the first of which is:

"An area at risk of depopulation needs to welcome those who want to make it their home."

As a former leader of Highland Council, I am particularly proud that it also put forward this statement in the report.

"Highlanders have always warmly welcomed people from other countries who choose to live and work in our area and it will be important at this time to provide reassurance to EU nationals that this welcome continues and that we value their contribution to Highland life."

Highland Council drew up this report and put out its statement on a cross-party basis—all parties and none. There was no scaremongering. The council just saw a need to reassure people, and I wholeheartedly agree with it on that.

I wish to talk about language. When we talk about the welcome that people have in Scotland and in the highlands, let me be absolutely clear that welcome means welcome. A French national came to my surgery recently. He had been living in our area for 30 years and spoke with a Scots-French accent. He was concerned that he might have to make changes. In our economy, we depend on EU nationals for our agriculture and fisheries, food industry, hospitality industry, the care industry and the NHS, and the tourism industry. One local hotel owner told me that, during the busy part of the year, 40% of his employees are EU nationals. We require these people. The new University of the Highlands and Islands depends on European involvement as well as the young people.

This issue does not just affect the highlands and Scotland. Antony Walker, chief executive officer of TechUK, said:

"The UK is one of the leading digital economies in the world. Part of the reason is because the UK is able to attract the world's most talented individuals to fill jobs where the UK simply does not have the domestic skills base. Making it harder for tech companies to bring in the best and brightest is not the solution and will be a lose-lose situation for everyone—growth will slow as companies find it harder to recruit, meaning lower revenue for the Treasury."

Clearly, there is a warning there.

I held a meeting in my constituency for concerned EU nationals. This was not about scaremongering, but about reassuring people. That meeting was completely sold out. It was packed to the rafters with people who were looking for some reassurance that they would be able to stay.

I wish to use my remaining time by quoting from a local woman of Polish extraction. Paulina Duncan is a UK citizen and a Pole. She said:

"Maybe I can summarise some of the comments I got from people when I initiated the discussion on the Poles in Inverness Facebook group over the weekend. I did it to find out what people think. I also went to the Polish delicatessen to chat to people there. Without any doubt, the common theme appearing in people's comments was uncertainty and confusion about their future. There was also a lack of trust in the assurances from the

[Drew Hendry]

Westminster Government. Generally, people would like something more than just words, being aware that words have no value and that they might be used as pawns during the negotiations.”

Those are the words of an EU citizen, not of Members in this debate. Paulina went on to say:

“Sadness and disappointment and maybe also disbelief is another common sentiment. One of my French friends, who came to Scotland as a student 15 years ago and has stayed here ever since, commented on how sad it was to see how inward looking Britain has become when other countries have so much healthier communities when they are more open. Some people consider returning to their countries, which is maybe what Theresa May has in mind. However, some have nowhere to return to as they have bought their houses here, their children were born in this country and never went to Polish school.”

This is about reassuring the people who live here—our friends, our neighbours and the people in our community. They are vital to our community and to our future. I urge the Minister to make a statement—an easy-to-make statement—to reassure EU nationals that they will be given the right to remain here, live here, work here and be valued as part of our society.

3.24 pm

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): It is with some trepidation that I rise to speak in this debate; my constituency has seen, proportionally, more EU migration than any other in the country. Drawn by the UK's relatively high minimum wages, literally tens of thousands of people have come from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and elsewhere to Boston and to Lincolnshire more generally in search of better lives, more money and greater prospects. They were drawn here by the rights mentioned in this debate. They may not be able to vote for us in this House, but, as I have said here before, we should all be keenly aware that those people are our constituents wherever they were born and whatever passport they hold.

Those new communities are in many cases home to model citizens; head pupils in schools in Boston are now from a diverse range of communities in a way that they were not in previous years. In schools, children show that children treat children equally, whatever their nationality. Done wrong, immigration, wherever it is from, leads to talk of “them” and “us”; done properly, “them” becomes “us”.

Boston's agricultural economy relies on migrant labour from eastern Europe just as in previous centuries it relied on labour from the midlands, Ireland or Portugal. We have a lower rate of empty shops than the comparable national average because new communities come not just to work in our fields, but to set up their own firms, and to improve their lot. They come to do all that, and they are able to do all that, because of the rights that we are talking about in this debate. Done right, the town benefits from all of this.

When it comes to today's motion, I hope that Europe will see the benefits that British people bring to the continent and grant them the right to stay after the UK leaves the EU, and then the UK can do likewise. In many ways, Boston and Skegness's continued economic growth depends on that reciprocity. That basic equality seems to be uncontroversial; it should be straightforward.

I wish to talk a little bit about why there are parts of this country, my own included, where we have got migration badly wrong, making debates such as this too shrill, too partisan and frankly sometimes too difficult to attract genuine contributions. With hindsight, the expansion of Europe to far poorer economies than our own was inevitably going to draw large numbers of people to areas where labour was abundant and very often casual. The Government of the day bungled the figures; we did not see changes coming and we failed to invest in local public services to keep pace with demands for schools, hospitals, GPs, and even housing and roads.

Today, while Boston still needs the bypass that has been on the drawing board for 100 years, schools have caught up but the NHS has not, and that raises tensions and causes debates such as this. No longer required to have a job before travelling to the UK, many people were tempted by inaccurate representations of life in the UK, and found themselves doing desperately hard work in freezing fields before returning home to a rented room unfit for human habitation in which they were allowed to occupy the bed only when it was their turn. Boston's work in tackling rogue landlords has been rightly lauded in this House, but migration has worsened a problem that the Government should have foreseen. The consequences of those poor housing conditions has led to tensions, such as street drinking, antisocial behaviour and violent crime. Some Bostonians ask what those add to an historic town that was once a port second only to London.

Fast forward to 2016 and Boston is called—wrongly in my view—the least integrated town in the country by Policy Exchange. That report is wrong because it does not measure recent work done on street drinking, rogue landlords, and community integration, but it is talking about a real problem. Some constituents have asked me why everyone should be allowed to stay.

The solution to these issues is not to blindly pretend that every aspect of Boston or Britain is either better or worse for migration. There are a host of opportunities that we must seize and a host of nettles that we must grasp if we are ever to make these debates more sensible. We should depoliticise debates such as this and treat people like people.

I want to close by reading a few comments that were posted on my own Facebook wall. I went to see a superb new agricultural development that will create around 100 new jobs. Underneath the photographs some of my constituents wrote: “We all know who will be filling the labour requirements here”; “We shall see how many locals get a job”; “They don't employ English. I got told that when I went for a job, so I didn't even get an application form so it won't be local people.”

When we get immigration wrong, we divide our country, we divide our towns and we foster radical parties that bring out the worst in good people. We end up having debates such as this. There is no easy way to encourage integration, especially when predominantly young men work in my constituency's fields, largely in groups from their own countries, and go out in their precious leisure time with little motivation to integrate. But if we are to sensibly conclude debates such as this, we should have a care to those concerns just as much as we do to the rights of migrant workers, whether we are speaking of a Briton in Spain or a Lithuanian in Boston.

3.29 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It has been 118 days since the EU referendum—118 days of blunders, slap-downs, in-fighting and conflicting statements from this UK Government. It is a case of life imitating art, as this shambolic response from the UK Government is more akin to a plot line from “The Thick of It” than a co-ordinated response to a deeply challenging and serious situation. It would be laughable if the consequences of Tory Brexit were not quite so serious.

It might be 118 days of in-fighting and a failure to govern, but it has also been 118 days when 3 million of our citizens do not know what the future holds for them or their families. Since 23 June, 3 million EU citizens, who pay an estimated £14.7 billion in income tax and national insurance contributions, have been referred to as “bargaining chips” in a Tory game that no one ever wanted to play in the first place.

But this is not a game and our EU-born nationals are not “bargaining chips”, “pawns” or “playing cards”. They are our wives, our husbands, our neighbours, co-workers, doctors, nurses, teachers and our friends. Instead of throwing fuel on the fire and making a very worrying situation for them even worse, this Government should be doing all they can to provide the assurance to the 3 million EU citizens in the UK that their future is secure here.

This debate says a lot about what kind of country we are. It might be an inconvenience for a few in the Brexiteer camp to think of the UK as a diverse country, but that is exactly what we are. We are better as a country because of the 57,000 NHS staff who were born elsewhere in the EU. Many sectors of our economy are world-leading not in spite of EU workers, but because of their expertise and skills. *Times Higher Education* highlighted how UK universities are world-leading, and this is in no small part because of the excellent level of teaching and research that EU nationals provide.

The Prime Minister’s short-sighted refusal to provide our EU nationals with the assurance that they are entitled to represents a slap in the face despite their hard work and the contribution they have made to our society.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gavin Newlands: Not right now.

The UK Government may want to pretend that nothing will change, but the fact is that everything has changed for our EU nationals following the Brexit vote. Many are starting to think again about the country in which they have invested so much time and effort. Agnieszka from the Renfrewshire Polish Association, whom I met a few weeks ago, shared her concerns and those of many members of her group not only about the result of the referendum, but about some of the divisive rhetoric since. However, she felt somewhat sheltered from this by living in Scotland, with the different approach taken by the Scottish Government.

It is not only the failure to give assurances that is problematic. The statements and speeches at the Conservative party conference caused many EU nationals to consider their future. The new Home Secretary seems to share her predecessor’s bleak vision of reducing migration to tens of thousands and sees Brexit as one means of achieving this, refusing to recognise that 78% of working-age EU citizens in the UK are in work, compared with around 74% of UK nationals. It is economic vandalism of the highest order for the Home Secretary not to give these hard-working individuals the right to live and work in the UK, all with the aim of achieving the right-wing holy grail of reducing immigration.

Adding fuel to the fire, the Home Secretary expressed her desire to implement a system which requires companies to compile lists of foreign workers which would be used to “name and shame” those who employ large numbers of foreign workers. It is not the companies that should be placed in any wall of shame. The only person who should be ashamed is the Home Secretary for managing to propose a policy which even UKIP says goes too far.

Following a poisonous Brexit campaign, which has helped to create the environment in England and Wales for an increase in racially or religiously aggravated offences, a responsible Government would be praising and thanking EU nationals for the contribution that they make to our communities and assuring them of their right to stay. This UK Government have singularly failed to do so. The contrast could not be any sharper north of the border. Whereas the Prime Minister has remained silent and allowed her “hard Brexit” colleagues to describe EU nationals as “bargaining chips”, Nicola Sturgeon has shown compassionate leadership and adopted a positive and inclusive approach, and has repeatedly reassured those EU nationals who have made Scotland their home that Scotland is and will continue to be their home.

Economically, socially, culturally and morally the UK Government should do the correct thing today and offer a cast-iron guarantee to all those who have made the UK their home. That is a call that the Scottish Parliament, wider civil society, the business sector and EU nationals have all made to the Prime Minister.

Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU and to reject the narrow-minded politics of the UKIP-Tory right-wing alliance. Those votes and those voters need to be respected, so the Government should stop playing games, end the xenophobia, lead for all our citizens, back this motion and categorically state to EU nationals that their future lies here and their residency status will be protected.

3.35 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): I have listened to the debate with considerable interest. I have found it particularly interesting—and slightly nauseating actually—to hear from Members of the Scottish National party, who drape themselves in a cloak of moral certainty, as if to cast aspersions on Conservative Members’ motivations and desire to foster good community relations. The Conservative Government and my constituents, who voted overwhelmingly to leave the European Union, are not racists. May I repeat that for the benefit of SNP Members? It is not a racist campaign. This notion that, somehow, the Brexit vote was fuelled by xenophobia,

[*Kwasi Kwarteng*]

that the people in the SNP are on the side of the angels, and that everyone who opposes them—everyone who has ever argued against them—is in a benighted cave of their own is completely ridiculous. Frankly, it is embarrassing; it insults the intelligence of people in this House for SNP Members to suggest that everyone else is xenophobic and that they alone are the guardians of moral virtue. [*Interruption.*] They may not have said it, but everything they have ever said on this issue implies exactly that: they seize the moral high ground and they proceed to lecture us, and those of us on the Government Benches have had enough of it.

Now, let me address the issue at hand. Nobody has suggested in the debate that migration is a bad thing in Britain. Many of the people who have spoken—myself included—are themselves the children or grandchildren of immigrants; they fully understand, and are fully conscious of, the benefits of migration to this country. The issue is simply a narrow one about the negotiation and the nature of the deal with the EU going forward. It is entirely legitimate for a Government, ahead of negotiations, to say, as the Government have done, that our aim is to guarantee and secure the rights of EU nationals in this country. That is what the Government have done, and it is entirely reasonable for them to have done that; in fact, nobody in the House, I think, would suggest that that was a bad thing.

The Government have said that that is the aim. Now, if it were to happen, for whatever reason—I am not prejudging this in any way—that an EU Government questioned the rights of British citizens working in their country, circumstances would of course have changed, and we could well be in a different situation.

Dr Philippa Whitford: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether, if there were difficulties with a country, he is suggesting that the Government would take reprisals?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am not suggesting anything of the kind. What I am saying is that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) suggested, it is naive simply to give cast-iron guarantees at this point. I suspect that these guarantees will be given further along the line and that it is very likely we will reach a situation where everyone is happy and everyone can stay. However, at this moment—in October 2016—it would be a little premature, perhaps, to give those undertakings.

James Berry: In Kingston, as in Spelthorne, foreign-born people are welcome. We very much value their contribution; we want them to stay. However, is my hon. Friend aware that not one EU Head of State has given the unilateral and unequivocal guarantee that SNP Members are asking for in the debate?

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend is exactly right. I regret to say this, but if one has been following the foreign news reports of the statements made by Jean-Claude Juncker and other people, it is clear that there is an air of menace around. I am not saying that it is universally expressed, but there is a view that somehow the British people acted defiantly or insolently towards the EU and that we should be punished as a consequence of the

vote on 23 June. I regret having to say this, but it is a fact that people on the continent in high positions in the EU have made such statements.

Mr Baron: Many of us, leavers and remainers, have great sympathy with the position expressed in the motion, but where we part company is with the final six words

“should the UK exit the EU.”

Brexit means Brexit, and that is pure mischief-making by the SNP. That is why a lot of us will not be supporting the motion.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I think there are a number of reasons—

Mike Weir *rose*—

Kwasi Kwarteng: I have given way enough, and I want to proceed with the rest of my remarks.

Clearly, we are all in a mood of beneficence, good will and co-operation towards migrants from the EU and from outside the EU. The modern economy that we foster in Britain is dependent on a large degree of migration—we accept that. What we do not accept is the free movement of people unilaterally across the EU. Many Conservative Members do not think that is the right way to proceed. At this stage, before we have even entered into a negotiation, it would be premature to give the cast-iron guarantees that we all want to reach at the end. We all want to get to the stage where we can give these guarantees, but for as long as the rights of British citizens in the EU have not been guaranteed, it would be premature for a British Government to do so. [*Interruption.*] I can hear the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) chuntering from a sedentary position. He has spent many years in this House. He can ask to intervene in the customary fashion, if he wishes to do so, and I am quite willing to give way.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): Can the hon. Gentleman explain the contrast between the 42% rise in hate crime in England in the immediate aftermath of Brexit and a 15% fall in similar statistics in Scotland?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I would not presume to talk about the earthly paradise otherwise known as Scotland. I am not going to make any statements about what is going on in Scotland, because I do not have the expertise to do so. However, I do regret the assumption that somehow the Brexit vote was driven by xenophobia and racism, and that the right hon. Gentleman's party is completely absolved from that.

Alex Salmond *rose*—

Kwasi Kwarteng: I will allow the right hon. Gentleman to intervene once more, and then I want to wrap up.

Alex Salmond: This is not the hon. Gentleman's responsibility, but he will remember the “Breaking Point” poster during the campaign—not the campaign that he was part of, but it was there for people to see. Does he believe that a poster like that, with Mr Farage in front of it, would tend to be the sort of thing that might incite hate crime?

Kwasi Kwarteng: For the record, I want to state that I denounced that particular intervention from Mr Farage.

Of course we accept the benefits of migration, and of course we want to preserve and guarantee the rights of EU migrants, but today, when the rights of British citizens in the EU have not been guaranteed, it would be premature to give the guarantees that SNP Members seek.

3.43 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Yesterday evening, I found myself experiencing a very strange sensation that I had not experienced before, because when I started to read the motion tabled by the SNP, I found myself largely agreeing with it—that is, up until the last six words:

“should the UK exit the EU.”

Those six words betray the real reason this motion has been brought to this House—not primarily out of a concern for EU nationals living in the UK, but to continue the referendum debate once again.

Mike Weir *rose*—

Steve Double: I am not going to take an intervention yet.

It has become quite clear, as this debate has gone on, that that is what this is actually about. It is tough for SNP Members having been on the wrong side of public opinion three times in a row in referendums. I would have thought that they had learned the lesson by now that they tend to be on the wrong side and that it is time to give up, yet they seem to be keen on even more referendums.

The fact is that we are leaving the EU. The British people have made a decision and given their very clear instruction to this place, and we will be leaving the EU. There is no “should” about it; it is a question of when we leave the EU.

As I have said, I largely agree with the spirit of the motion, apart from that bit and perhaps one other minor point. The 3 million EU nationals who have made their home in this country, and who are largely here contributing positively to our nation by working and paying their taxes, are very welcome and we want them to stay. No Conservative Member has suggested anything other than that we want those EU nationals to be able to remain in this country and to live, work and contribute to our economy for as long as they wish to. No one has suggested otherwise, and it is disingenuous to suggest that Conservatives have any other desire or motivation.

In my constituency, EU migrants make a huge contribution to our economy. They work in tourism, in bars, restaurants and hotels. They work in agriculture, often seasonally, helping to bring in Cornwall’s variety of excellent produce. They also work in the processing of our excellent seafood and dairy products. They play an absolutely crucial role in our society, and we want them to continue to be able to do so. The Government have made it very clear that that is their intention, but I absolutely support their position that we should not give a cast-iron guarantee on the matter until other EU countries reciprocate. We would be doing a disservice to the British citizens who live in other EU countries if we did so.

Let us remember that our first responsibility is to British citizens, and we should be looking out for their future and wellbeing just as much as anyone else’s. It is absolutely right that we continue that approach and seek those assurances because, as other right hon and hon. Members have pointed out, those assurances have not yet been given. I am absolutely confident that once we are given them, we will reciprocate and guarantee the future of EU nationals who live and work here.

Another point about the motion is that it refers to “all” EU citizens. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), who is no longer in the Chamber, pointed out earlier, there are some EU nationals whom we probably do not wish to keep. By breaking our laws, convicted criminals have abused the hospitality and the welcome that we have given them. It is absolutely right that once they have served their sentences, we should seek to return them to their country of origin. The word “all” is too open, because we do not necessarily want all EU citizens to remain.

Dr Philippa Whitford: May I clarify that the hon. Gentleman wants to guarantee that the various crooks settled on the Costa del Sol will stay there?

Steve Double: I suggest that if those people have broken laws, it is for the Spanish Government to decide what to do with them at the end of their stay at the hospitality of the Spanish Government. The position in this country is absolutely right.

Much has been said by the SNP about the rhetoric that is stirring up uncertainty, but I suggest that such motions create uncertainty by raising the issue when the Government have made absolutely clear their intention and desire for EU citizens to be able to remain in this country.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP) *rose*—

Steve Double: I will not give way again.

By continuing this debate and continuing to stir up such uncertainty, we are actually creating and perpetuating uncertainty. It is absolutely right for the Government to hold the line that we continue to wait for a similar assurance from other countries and that, once it is given, we will be more than happy to reciprocate and guarantee the future of EU nationals and their right to stay in this country. For those reasons, much as I agree with the spirit of the motion, I will not be able to support it later today.

3.49 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the powerful speech of my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). I, too, agree with the first part of the motion, because I certainly recognise and appreciate the contributions that workers from the EU have made in this country. Some key businesses and public sector services—many hon. Members on both sides of the House have identified them in their own constituencies—are vitally served by EU workers. In my own constituency of Bexhill and Battle, where the proportion of older people is particularly high, none is more key than our care home sector, and we would be in a very difficult position without those EU workers. Of 35 care homes inspected, only nine were

[Huw Merriman]

rated good, and the rest required improvement or were inadequate, so where would such homes be without key workers from the EU?

I maintain that during the past six years the Government have provided the economic base for many workers to come to Britain and make a great success of themselves. More jobs have been created in the UK during that period than in the rest of the EU put together. Those individuals have come here with great aspiration and a desire to work, as well as endeavour and enterprise. It is in their DNA, and it is certainly in the DNA of my party and my hon. Friends on the Government Benches. In that sense, we certainly do not need any lectures on our support for EU citizens.

I have concerns about the second part of the motion in reference to the future, and I therefore certainly cannot support it. As colleagues on the Government Benches have pointed out, there is a typo in the motion: it says “should” the UK exit the EU, rather than “when” it does so. I did not vote to leave the EU, but in my view, now that the decision has been made, we need to embrace the opportunity and get on with it.

I made this point earlier, but I find it frustrating that there are so many debates in this House about the pitfalls, that we are holding up Ministers and preventing them from getting on with the job and getting it done. There is a certain irony in my position. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) is chuckling. He, like me, was in Strasbourg last week, where we were working with our European partners, only for us to come back to the House for a debate about Europe. We could have been in Europe, making friends and building relationships, which would be a better use of our time.

During the last week of the referendum campaign, I visited 25 schools, and I visited another 10 during my own party conference. Teachers and, indeed, pupils consistently asked me questions about the right to remain, to which I made the point that in time, once this is settled, should we leave the EU, I would imagine that the right to remain will absolutely be honoured. I certainly hope that it will be.

I should point out that people who have been here for five years already have the right to remain. Indeed, by the time we exit the EU, those who have come here relatively recently will have reached that five-year point. I therefore find much of this debate slightly false.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. When constituents who are concerned and need reassuring come to my surgeries—3,000 eastern Europeans live in my constituency—I make the point he has just made. Five out of every six EU nationals living in this country either already have the right to remain or will have it by the time we leave the EU. The 2.9 million EU nationals living in the UK today have nothing to worry about.

Huw Merriman: My hon. Friend makes a fine point. Like me, he is a lawyer. I am not sure how many of the 1.2 million UK citizens resident in the EU have the same right. To support those 1.2 million people, it is even more imperative to ensure that they have the same right to remain as the five out of six EU citizens working here to whom he refers.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) pointed out that no Government Members—indeed, this does not seem to be debated at all, except on Opposition motions—are calling for any rights to remain in the UK to be rescinded. Nobody on our Benches is using the words “bargaining chips”. I point that out because the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), whose speech I listened to carefully, used those words about five times. Such rhetoric is coming from SNP Members, not those on this side of the House. I ask Opposition Members to be a little more responsible with their language, because that sort of language is not being used by those of us on the Government Benches. We absolutely must ensure that we serve the rights of those from EU member states working in the UK, but we must give equal priority to serving those people from the UK living in the EU. I hope that the official Opposition and the SNP will start to talk in the same language and even things up.

In the minute remaining to me, I want to caution against using the EU referendum result in the separate debate on immigration. I recognise that 52% of the country voted to leave the EU, but nowhere within that was there a definitive mandate for curbing or controlling immigration. I know that many people—including colleagues on the Government Benches—will say that the immigration debate was implicit in the referendum, but from my perspective, all we know is that 52% of the UK voted to leave, so 48% voted to remain, and nothing more. Similarly, we do not know that a large chunk of the 52% were duped into voting to leave the EU; we know only that we are leaving, and that is that.

In a recent YouGov poll, two thirds of people stated that they wanted to see immigration reduced, somewhat busting my argument. However, when asked how much they would pay personally for it to be reduced, about the same amount said zero, and therefore that they would be willing to have the same number of immigrants in this country. I add that purely as a note of caution. I recognise that we are leaving the EU, but I return to my real passion for making sure that we protect the EU workers who have come this country and that we do not use the referendum as anything other than a decision to leave the EU.

3.56 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The contribution of EU nationals to our country is difficult to overstate, which is why I do not disagree with a word of the first part of the motion. There are now 3 million EU nationals living in the UK. They are overwhelmingly in employment, living decent, law-abiding lives and enhancing British society. A fact that has sometimes been lost in the discussions about immigration over recent months is that the success of the British economy over recent years owes a great deal to the contribution of EU nationals. In 2014, more jobs were created in the county of Yorkshire than in the whole of France, and more jobs were generated in the UK than in the rest of the EU put together. EU nationals have helped to build that success, and in doing so helped to pull our country back from the financial abyss we were staring into in 2010.

In Cheltenham alone, Polish nationals in particular have, in a short period, become part of the backbone of our community and our way of life. They are there working in Monkscroft care home, in Cheltenham general

hospital, in the shops on the Promenade and in our bars and restaurants, and the overwhelming majority of them do so quietly, diligently and uncomplainingly. Their work ethic and “can do” attitude are an object lesson. They seek nothing more than the right to stand on their own two feet. The message that must ring out from this Chamber then is that those who have come and built their lives here are welcome, valued and respected.

In that context, it is—unusually, perhaps—hard to disagree with the SNP sentiment, but I fear that the motion appears to be political. I am sorry to say that it appears to be mischief-making at best and irresponsible at worst. I say that with some diffidence, because much of what comes from SNP Front-Bench spokesmen bears listening to. I have concerns about the motion, however.

First, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) indicated, the fact is that by the time Brexit happens—I was a remainer—the overwhelming majority of EU nationals will have the right to remain in the United Kingdom because they will have indefinite leave to remain.

Dr Philippa Whitford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Chalk: Let me just develop my point and then I will come to the hon. Lady.

Secondly, let us be clear: EU nationals are not going to be required to leave. It is not going to happen. I would not vote for it. The House would not vote for it. It would be morally bankrupt and economically ruinous. There is therefore a danger that the motion unnecessarily sets hares running. It stokes fear when none need exist.

The reality is that the duty of any British Government—this is plain as a pikestaff—is to protect the rights of their citizens. The SNP’s contributions have been disappointing because they have not acknowledged the fair point that 1 million British citizens living abroad want reassurance, too, because—guess what?—they have families, jobs and livelihoods that they do not want to lose. It is a fair point that no EU Head of State has provided our nationals with that reassurance, including Scottish nationals.

Joanna Cherry: If the rights of British citizens living abroad were so important to the Conservative party, why did it not give them a vote in the EU referendum?

Alex Chalk: I am always grateful for interventions, but with respect that is a bit of a distraction. That is not what we are focusing on here. We are focusing on the rights of British nationals overseas and EU nationals in the UK. It is wrong for us to be sidetracked in that way.

The SNP is right that this has to be resolved. I am concerned—I am sure some of my colleagues are, too—about this dragging on. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) made a fair point about the Council summit tomorrow. I hope the opportunity will be taken to discuss the matter with Heads of State. Make no mistake, we are dealing with people here. It is incumbent upon Heads of State in Europe and our own Government to grasp the nettle and put the issue to bed, but, for the reasons I set out, I am not in a position to support the motion.

4.1 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): As I rise, I look across at Government Members who are probably thinking that I am a principal scaremonger. I was the first on the SNP Benches to raise the issue of EU nationals in this House. I raised it before the referendum vote when, because of the leave campaign, two of my constituents, originally from Germany, Thomas and Elke Westen, said to me that such was their concern about the way immigration was being discussed they were leaving the UK. They did not want to be around for the vote. They had been denied a vote by the Government. They were allowed to have a vote in the referendum on Scotland, but not on the European referendum. They said that if there was going to be a vote to leave the EU they would choose to leave and go to an EU country. I have tried all I can to persuade them to stay, but in the past two weeks they have put their house up for sale, they are closing their business and they are seeking to move back. That is not scaremongering. That is recognising the real effect on human beings living in our country.

Alex Salmond: Throughout the debate there has been a refrain from those on the Tory Benches that there is nothing really to worry about. The Chancellor has just been questioned by the Treasury Committee about this exact point. He said he hoped there would be an agreement, but then went on to say that if UK and EU failed to reach such an agreement, then under a migration scheme that was unilateral we would have choices to make about how we would choose to deal with those EU nationals in the UK. It would be a matter for the UK to decide. It is hardly a wonder that people are frightened when that is what the Chancellor says.

Roger Mullin: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. That harks back to the opening remarks of the Immigration Minister, who is no longer in the Chamber. At one stage in his speech he was trying to provide reassurance and say there was no uncertainty, but he also said that he was not in a position to set out a definitive position. Why not? He went on to say that it was because it would not be good negotiating practice.

Alan Brown: My hon. Friend correctly says that EU nationals were allowed to vote in the Scottish referendum, but did not get a vote in the EU referendum. Another symbol that the UK Government are throwing down is that they are now changing legislation so that British nationals living abroad get a vote for life. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is another clear national divide?

Roger Mullin: I agree entirely.

I want to move on to tackle a question raised by Government Members, who asked us whether we were not also concerned about the rights of British citizens living abroad. Well, I can tell them that I am. I will tell them who first raised this concern with me: Tracy de Jongh Eglin, who lives in the Netherlands. She contacted me some months ago. What worried her was that when the UK Government were saying “This is negotiable”, they were saying that it was not just EU national citizens’ positions here that were negotiable, but British citizens’ rights abroad, too. The UK Government are the ones who have created this insecurity for EU nationals here and for British nationals overseas.

[Roger Mullin]

When negotiations are entered into, uncertainty is automatically created. It cannot be otherwise, because negotiations involve the trading of positions. I have a question and I hope that the Minister will be able to answer it in his reply: what is it that he is willing to trade away in these negotiations? He must have something tradable in mind; otherwise, there would be no negotiations. Negotiations do not have to be “symmetrical” where the citizenship status here has to be negotiated with respect to people in a similar position elsewhere. It is possible to have asymmetrical negotiations, which would mean trying to secure the rights of British citizens by utilising economic levers, for example, so there is absolutely no moral justification and no negotiating justification for the uncertainty that this Government have created both for EU nationals and for British citizens overseas.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a fantastic speech. The motion is quite simple: it is about EU nationals retaining their current rights. When Conservative Members applaud the sentiment behind the motion but say they are unable to vote for it, what they are really doing is to send snarling signals to Europe of this House's attitude to EU nationals retaining their current rights. They should not do that; they should vote for the SNP motion today. They should, for once, send the right signal from the UK.

Roger Mullin: I agree entirely.

It is not enough to say that we want people to stay here; it is more about allowing those people to have rights. The problem at the moment is that many of the rights that individuals hold in our society are rights that they have because they are EU citizens and fall under EU law. It is under EU law that they have a right to work here, the right to retire here, the right to a vote in some elections, the right to access welfare and the right to access health services. These are EU-guaranteed rights. We want to see those rights enshrined in law here.

Alex Salmond: The Chancellor continues to caw the feet from the Tory case as presented in this Chamber. He has now said to the Select Committee that there will be no migration curbs on bankers under Brexit, so the bankers will be fine, but my hon. Friend's constituents will be struggling.

Roger Mullin: I thank my right hon. Friend for that quite astonishing point. Does that not speak to the morality of Conservative Members?

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, but there is an additional right that is important while these negotiations are going on. It is the right to safety, particularly when we look at what has happened to members of the Polish community, which seems to be taking the brunt of all this anti-European sentiment. Surely they have a right to reassurance here.

Roger Mullin: The hon. Gentleman makes a wonderful point. I have been in discussions in my own constituency with a body called the migrant forum, the majority of whose members are of Polish extraction. They have been coming to me with concerns, wanting to find ways to gain reassurance. It is not good enough for some

Conservative Members to say, “They should not be frightened and they should not be uncertain, but by the way, we are putting you into the negotiation pot none the less.” That is not reassurance. It is perfectly understandable that people are feeling uncertain and insecure about their rights.

My hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) put that point wonderfully when she talked about her own husband, a doctor and a fine man—I have met him—who has been working here for 30 years. With his background, he is not going to be easily scared or put off, but there is uncertainty in his mind as well as in thousands upon thousands of people's minds.

I held a meeting in my constituency, and 40 EU citizens came along to talk about their anxieties. These are real anxieties, and the Government should do the right thing. The Minister should stand up now and guarantee all those people's rights in our country.

4.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): I congratulate the Scottish National party on securing the debate. We have been dealing with a very important issue: the status of EU nationals living in the UK following the EU referendum and the decision of the British people to leave the EU. I am very glad that Parliament has had a chance to debate the issue in detail, and I commend the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) for bringing it to the attention of the House. I am also delighted to face across the Dispatch Box, for the first time, the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield). We have served together on Select Committees in the past, and I think that we share a number of very similar values. I look forward to working with him on future debates.

Having listened carefully to what has been said today, I would say that tone is important. As we were told by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), we should be here to provide reassurance, and I hope that I shall be able to provide some now.

We have heard a number of excellent speeches. It was great to hear from my hon. Friends the Members for Braintree (James Cleverly), for Cardiff North (Craig Williams), for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) and for Basingstoke and Skegness (Matt Warman). My hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness made some thoughtful comments about immigration issues, which were picked up by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). That is, of course, a debate for another time. I think it important for us to focus today on the rights of EU nationals, and on the point that so many of my hon. Friends have made about the rights that we must secure for UK nationals as well.

Let me begin by making it absolutely clear that the Government want to protect the status of EU nationals who are resident in the UK. The only circumstances in which that would not be possible would be those in which British citizens' rights in other EU member states were not protected in return, and, like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, I find it hard—near impossible—to imagine that scenario arising.

As Members in all parts of the House have made clear today, EU citizens make an invaluable contribution to our country, and the Government welcome that contribution. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), I recognise it from my own constituency. We all agree that steps must be taken to guarantee the status of the EU nationals who have chosen to build a life here in the UK. The House clearly feels strongly about the matter, and the Government will seek a swift solution when discussions with the EU begin.

That brings me to my second point. While it is a Government priority to address this issue as soon as possible, the fact remains that we need an agreement in order to do so. It would be inappropriate and irresponsible to set out unilateral positions at this stage. Just last week, the House voted on a motion which provided for parliamentary scrutiny of the Brexit process but included the provision that we should not do anything to undermine the Government's negotiating position. The Government understand the importance of giving certainty to EU citizens who have moved to build a life in the UK, but we are not able to set out a unilateral position now, ahead of negotiations; that must be done following negotiation and agreement with the EU. Doing otherwise would risk adversely affecting our negotiating position, and hence the position of British citizens who have chosen to build a life, with their families, in other countries. My hon. Friends the Members for Braintree and for Bexhill and Battle made that point very clearly.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Walker: I will not give way for the time being.

The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) created an entirely new area of fear by talking about some kind of trade-off in terms of numbers. It was the first time that I had ever heard such a suggestion, and I assure the right hon. Gentleman that it is certainly not something that we have been contemplating.

The Government want the same fair treatment for British and EU citizens. That is a sensible position to take, and the Government are confident that they will be able to achieve their aim in agreement with the EU. We have already made it clear that this is a priority for negotiations. Only last week, the excellent Leader of the Opposition in Scotland was pressing the case on the open door of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union.

This brings me to my final key point in this section: the status of EU nationals living in the UK will not change while the UK remains a member of the EU. It is important to remember that we remain a full member of the EU with all the rights and responsibilities of EU membership until the end of the article 50 process.

We have heard contributions from Members on both sides of the House and of this debate who are married to EU citizens, and I commend them for their statements. They raised real concerns about EU nationals and their status, but it appears to me that there is near unanimity in this House on providing reassurance. We should all be seeking to do that in our comments.

Dr Philippa Whitford: Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that platitudinal reassurance is not real reassurance? Reassurance has been given to students; why not give it

to resident EU nationals? Otherwise it will be three years from the vote until we know what is going to happen.

Mr Walker: As I have already pointed out, during those three years it is the Government's absolute intention to secure the rights of EU nationals in the UK and UK nationals in the EU as early in the negotiations as we can.

I think that is reassurance. Let me be clear that EU nationals and citizens can continue to live, work and study here in the UK under existing EU law. They will also be able to be accompanied or joined by family members. I know the whole House will agree that it is important that we make this clear and continue to provide reassurance to all our constituents.

Alex Salmond: I understand what the Minister says and it all sounds very good, but why was the Chancellor this afternoon able to give specific assurance about bankers that apparently the Minister is unable to give to the rest of our EU citizens?

Mr Walker: We should not be trying to create an atmosphere of fear. We should set out the reassurances I have given and will continue to give.

In conclusion, EU nationals can have the Government's complete reassurance that there is no immediate change to their right to enter, work, study and live in the UK as a result of the EU referendum. I reassure EU citizens in Scotland and up and down the country generally that we recognise the enormous contribution they make to our economy, our health service, our schools, our care sector and our communities. We will act fairly towards them as we expect other EU countries to act fairly to our citizens living there.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)
rose—

Mr Walker: I will not give way again.

We have heard from all parts of the UK and all sides of the referendum debate today, and as we move forward we must seek to bring the whole country together. Given that the UK and the EU would like to maintain a close and friendly relationship, the Government are confident that we will work together and that EU and British citizens will be protected through a reciprocal agreement. Because this motion fails to acknowledge that, and because of its technical failings which were pointed out by my hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration, my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) and my hon. Friends the Members for Braintree and for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), I urge Members on both sides of the House to reject it.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 250, Noes 293.

Division No. 69]

[4.18 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie	Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Anderson, Mr David
Alexander, Heidi	Arkless, Richard
Ali, Rushanara	Ashworth, Jonathan

Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 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
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 David, Wayne
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debonnaire, Thangam
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dougherty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline

Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 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
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 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, rh Alan
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinahan, Danny
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve

McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve

Salmond, rh Alex
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherrieff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thomson, Michelle
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Owen Thompson and
Marion Fellows

NOES

Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, rh 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
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinéage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael

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

Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Mann, Scott
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew

Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 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
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
 Christopher Pincher and
 Chris Heaton-Harris

Question accordingly negated.

Speaker's Statement (Select Committee Chairs)

4.34 pm

Mr Speaker: I can now announce the results of the Select Committee Chair elections held today. Nominations for the five vacant Select Committee Chairs closed yesterday and elections were held by secret ballot today.

No ballot was necessary for the International Trade Committee, for which a single nomination had been received. The Chair of that Committee will be Angus Brendan MacNeil.

In the four contested elections, a total of 546 ballot papers were submitted, the ballots being counted under the alternative vote system. The following candidates were elected:

Culture, Media and Sport Committee: Damian Collins

Exiting the European Union Committee: Hilary Benn

Home Affairs Committee: Yvette Cooper

Science and Technology Committee: Stephen Metcalfe.

The full breakdown of voting in each contest indicating the votes attributable to each candidate after each redistribution of the votes of eliminated candidates is set out in a paper available from the Vote Office. The Members so elected take up their positions immediately, except in the case of the Chairs of the Exiting the European Union and International Trade Committees, who will formally take up their positions when their Committees have been nominated by the House. I warmly congratulate all the right hon. and hon. Members concerned. I should like to thank—on behalf of the House, I am sure—all the candidates who participated in the elections, and I know that the House will want to join me in thanking very warmly all the staff of the House who so efficiently facilitated the conduct of the elections.

House of Lords Reform and Size of the House of Commons

4.37 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern the size of the unelected House of Lords which, with more than 800 members, is considerably larger than the elected House of Commons; believes that there is no case in a modern democracy for the number of members of an unelected chamber to exceed the number of members of the democratically elected House; cannot condone any Government action that may increase the number of unelected members while reducing the number of elected Members of Parliament, particularly when there are no published plans to concurrently reduce the number of Ministers or amount of support to Government departments; believes that, in the event of an exit from the EU, the return of significant powers will mean additional work for a smaller number of Members of Parliament; calls on the Government to put in place plans to significantly reduce the number of unelected Lords; further calls for a full review of reform of the House of Lords; and calls on the Government to abandon any plans to reduce the number of Members of Parliament until the issue of the size of the unelected chamber is resolved.

May I be the first to congratulate the worthy winners of the Select Committee elections? I also congratulate everybody on making it such a little festival of democracy within these hallowed chambers. Everybody appreciates the opportunity to have a say in who sits on these Select Committees once again.

What on earth is going on in our so-called parliamentary democracy? How can we possibly reach a state in which we have more parliamentarians in these Houses of Parliament appointed by a Prime Minister than elected by the people? In what sort of parallel political universe can it be a good thing to continue to increase the membership of an unelected House while simultaneously seeking to reduce the number of directly elected Members of Parliament? Has anyone had a look at that place down the corridor? Has anyone taken a cursory glance at its membership? It is an utter undemocratic disgrace. It is an antiquated, absurd Chamber stuffed full of cronies, donors, placemen, former MPs and failed MPs.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: It is early in proceedings, but why not?

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He asks whether anyone has seen how the other place operates but—come on!—has he heard any of the debates? Has he heard the contributions from distinguished lawyers, surgeons, architects and others, some of whom have more expertise than those in this place?

Pete Wishart: I want to go on to forensically look at the membership of the House of Lords, and I hope the hon. Gentleman listens carefully to the type of people we have assembled in that place because they are undemocratic horrors. There are now 812 Members of the House of Lords, making it the second largest legislature in the world behind the People's Congress of China.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should reduce the size of the House of Lords and that we could do so simply? We could get rid of 21 of the 26 bishops, along with 92 hereditary peers, and we could have mandatory

retirement, whereby peers retire after 20 years—this would be based not on age, but on length of service. That would easily take care of 212-plus peers and the House of Lords would be smaller than House of Commons.

Pete Wishart: I say to the hon. Gentleman, whose interest in this issue I recognise, that that would be a start but that much more needs to be done to address the anomalies of the political circus down the corridor. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant). He is right to say that there are people serving in the Lords who are technocrats and the great and the good. These people have been appointed by the independent Lords Appointments Commission, but they are a tiny minority. The House of Lords tries to project this image of itself as inviting in the great and the good to help us with our legislation, but the overwhelming majority of the membership of that House is appointed by a Prime Minister from the list supplied by the leaders of the UK parties. That is why we find the cronies, the placemen, the donors and the failed or former MPs.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I find myself discombobulated in agreeing with some of the hon. Gentleman's sentiments. Do I infer from his comments that if the other place were to take a decision in the future with which he agreed but then set its face against the Salisbury convention and a commitment enunciated in our party's manifesto in government, he would not support the Lords and would reiterate his view that peers are unelected and that they lack democratic accountability and authority?

Pete Wishart: I would support Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan and their many hordes if it helped to defeat this Government. I have no issue or problem with supporting the House of Lords when it gets something right, but that does not make it any better on these issues. I have sensed the pain in the past few months of so many Conservative Back Benchers who have looked at this place and got increasingly upset that the Lords has defied its will. This Government do not particularly like to be challenged, but the fact that they are being challenged by an unelected, undemocratic House is beginning to disturb the Conservative party, and so I say join us in dealing with this undemocratic disgrace.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I agree that we should be doing something about the House of Lords quickly. I know that the hon. Gentleman is an intelligent character, so perhaps he can help me out with some maths. The current Prime Minister and the former Prime Minister have wanted to cut the number in this place from 650 to 600 to save £12 million, yet they have stuffed the other place, costing £34 million. To me, that sounds like a cost, not a saving.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman is spot on, although actually it is worse than that, as the last figures we have are for 2014-15, when the cost of the House of Lords was approaching £100 million—that is what we are actually spending on it. Instead of reducing that, this Government's sole intention and ambition on the House of Lords is to continue to increase the size of that place.

Let us take a cursory look at our latest batch of new parliamentarians—the 16 new appointees from the former Prime Minister's resignation list. This list was oozing and dripping with patronage and cronyism. We now

have 16 shiny new parliamentarians to welcome to these Houses of Parliament, but let us look at who they are. Thirteen of them are Conservative—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Let me tell people exactly what they are like before they say that. Five of them were senior members of staff in the former Prime Minister's office, with one a former special adviser to that Prime Minister. One was a special adviser to the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. One is a Conservative treasurer who just so happened to have given the Conservative party millions and millions of pounds over the years. Curiously—this is the one that gets me—one is the former leader of the Conservative remain campaign, who, I suggest, is not getting a peerage for any great success that he has delivered to the Conservative party.

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): I rise to correct the hon. Gentleman. The Conservative leader of the remain campaign is a she, not a he. If the hon. Gentleman professes to be an expert on appointments to that Chamber, it would at least be appropriate for him to recognise that it achieves gender balance as well as having many other virtues.

Pete Wishart: There are many things that can be defined as redeeming features, and that is one that I accept, so I thank the right hon. Gentleman for pointing it out.

The new parliamentarians of Great Britain are strangers to the ballot box, but very good friends of the former Prime Minister.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Following the right hon. Gentleman's point on gender balance, may I help the hon. Gentleman by saying that, among the hereditary peers, there are currently 91 men and one woman?

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con) *rose*—

Pete Wishart: I give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Sir Desmond Swayne: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. The new creations are exactly the savvy sort of people that we should have in the House of Lords. However, the reason why we are in this position of an unreformed House of Lords is that there was insufficient consensus in this place on how to replace it. Is he going to set out his plan for the other place?

Pete Wishart: If anything, that sounds like a manifesto from the right hon. Gentleman to get himself a good place in the House of Lords, and I wish him all the best in that ambition.

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) for mentioning the hereditaries, because that brings me on to my next point. Although the new appointees are bad enough, there are some cracking undemocratic horrors skulking in the corridors down the road. They are the aristocrats, the 91 Members of Parliament who have the opportunity to design, fashion, shape, issue and supervise our laws because of birthright—because they are the first son of a family that won a decisive battle in the middle ages. The one thing I do like about the hereditaries is that they bring an element of democracy to the House of Lords—did Members know that? It is the surreal and bizarre contest that they

[Pete Wishart]

have when one of their number dies. The earls, the counts, the barons, the lords and the ladies of the land get together to replenish their numbers. It is the weirdest electorate in the world. It may be the poshest and most exclusive electorate that can be found anywhere, but at least there is that element of democracy in the House of Lords.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Among the posh selectors was a group of three Liberal life peers who chose one of their number. On the point about bringing democracy to the Lords, would not a small improvement be a ballot of the life peers, so that we at least have a natural way of getting rid of some of them while perhaps injecting some democracy into their veins, despite them not liking it?

Pete Wishart: Only land-locked Lesotho has elders as a feature of its democracy. This is the mother of all parliaments for goodness' sake, and we still have people here because of birthright! It is absurd.

Michael Gove: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I have given way to the right hon. Gentleman before. [Interruption.] Oh, well, I will give way.

Michael Gove: Once again, I will have to correct the hon. Gentleman on a point of fact. This is not the mother of all parliaments. The original phrase the “mother of parliaments” refers to this country, not to this institution, and the “mother of all” is a prefix associated with the Iraq war. If he is going to pack so many factual errors into his speech, how can we possibly take him seriously as a constitutional or any other sort of authority? He was a marvellous player and lyricist for Runrig, but as a constitutional theoretician, I am afraid that, sadly, he falls short.

Pete Wishart: On a positive note, I am very grateful that we have the right hon. Gentleman in this Chamber to correct me. I always thought that he had an issue with experts, but, clearly, he is a self-appointed one himself. We will let him get away with it just now.

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): On that point, perhaps I can help my hon. Friend. The department of economics at Oxford has a breakdown of the average cost of each peer in the House of Lords. It is very interesting reading: £100,000 for Conservatives, £140,000 for Labour and £99,000 for Liberal Democrat Members of the House of Lords.

Pete Wishart: Again, that is probably average estimated figures.

There we have it. Those are the aristocratic Members of the House of Lords. Just to make it even more surreal—I think that somebody has mentioned this already—26 places are reserved for bishops in their cassocks. They are not just any ordinary bishops in their cassocks; they have to be Church of England bishops in their cassocks. Again, this is the only legislature in the world that has a place reserved for clerics other than the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The coup de grâce, the ultimate horror of the membership of the House of Lords, is not the aristocrats or the bishops. It is the fact that we still have 104 Liberal Democrat peers. Roundly rejected by the electorate, the Liberal Democrats are kept alive in that crypt on a political life support system. People of Britain, welcome to your legislators! We have aristocrats, bishops and unelected Liberal Democrats. Is that not a great contribution?

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): If the hon. Gentleman is serious about reducing the size of the House of Lords, as my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) mentioned a moment ago, has he thought of a system whereby we have indirect elections based on the number of votes cast in the general election, with each party having an electoral college, with perhaps a ceiling of 500 peers, as an interim measure? That would suit the hon. Gentleman's party and it would remove the outrage of 104 Lib Dem peers in the House of Lords.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable suggestion, but I am not going to suggest how we conclusively deal with the issue. All I am saying to the House today is that we must deal with it. We cannot continue to increase the numbers in the House of Lords while decreasing the numbers in this place. I would respect any suggestion that came forward, as long as it deals seriously with that.

While describing the other place and all its undemocratic horrors, we still have the audacity to lecture the developing world about the quality of its democracies. We have the gall to tick developing countries off about corruption, patronage and cronyism when we have a Chamber down the corridor that is appointed by a Prime Minister. How dare we suggest that to the developing world when we have such an absurd, chaotic system?

Because the House of Lords is a stranger to democracy, because it is in the hands of a small elite and because it is an appointed, created Parliament, there will always be a temptation to delve into the outer edges of corruptibility. The only qualifying characteristic and feature that some of the appointees seem to have is the ability to give large amounts of money to one of the main UK parties. This was tested to the limit by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) when he raised the question of cash for honours, one of the biggest political scandals of the past decades, where we saw a sitting Prime Minister being questioned by the police and some of his key members of staff and fundraisers actually elected. That is what we have done. We have created a Chamber that is immensely corruptible, and we should take that on board.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I intend to vote for the hon. Gentleman's motion this evening because I agree with much of what he is saying. He said that money was the only qualification. Does he accept that one of the other qualifications that appears to be gaining ground is to have been rejected by the electorate? On the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), I was always a big supporter of the House of Lords because it was full of people who were the most eminent in society. Now it is becoming full of second-raters and people who have been rejected by the electorate. Perhaps that is why the Lib Dems are not represented in this debate—maybe they are embarrassed about their representatives down in the other place.

Pete Wishart: They should be thoroughly embarrassed about their membership there because it is the only thing that sustains them as a political force.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I will vote with the hon. Gentleman tonight and I think it is a good motion, but I am not certain where this will lead. He talks about a reduction in numbers. Would not the best course be to abolish the other place? I had the privilege in a previous Parliament of proposing that, so that we start from zero. Will the hon. Gentleman outline a plan to replace the House of Lords?

Pete Wishart: I shall suggest certain things that we could consider to replace it. The House of Lords is unreformable and there is nothing we could do with it. It has got out of control. It is like a huge undemocratic leviathan cloaked in ermine that would continue to feed on patronage and cronyism. It has very few redeemable features.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, find myself entirely in agreement with the hon. Gentleman. Is not the real issue for constituents and our democracy not just the absurdity of the House of Lords, but the boundary review that sees the number of seats in this place being reduced, the use of an out-of-date register leading to people being disfranchised, a political system that does not represent our nations or regions properly in our constitution, and a Government who have taken away the powers of civil society to criticise them? There is a package of things damaging our democracy.

Pete Wishart: I thoroughly agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I am grateful for his support. I will come on to the reduction in the number of Members of Parliament in this House, because it is important. I thought it was important to link the issues of us growing an unelected House while shrinking the number of representatives of the people. It is right that those issues are linked, because they are going on concurrently. The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: May I make a bit of progress, if that is all right? I have been very generous in giving way. I will try to give way later.

I want to speak about one of the other major features of the House of Lords: the deference—all the forelock-tugging to all these lords and ladies, and this idea of the high and mighty. We still have this political culture in the 21st century of showing deference to these people in ermine and of knowing your place and respecting your betters. Imagine designing a Chamber where that was still a feature of how we conducted our parliamentary debates.

I actually looked for the House of Lords TV channel the other day, and I came across the fantasy adventure “Game of Thrones” instead. I was listening to some of the language being used, and it struck me that the House of Lords is so like “Game of Thrones”, but without the dragons, beheadings and the proper bending of the knee—that is how ridiculous that institution down the road is.

One of the first things we have to do is get rid of all this 13th-century, medieval deference and create a modern, 21st-century establishment, to make sure that we get proper representation in the second Chamber.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that there are countries around the world that we can learn from? Countries such as Australia, ironically enough, have upper Chambers that are based on ours, but they have managed to leap ahead and to have elected Chambers. Actually, the Queensland Parliament has abolished its upper Chamber, which is now a tourist attraction. Does my hon. Friend agree that if we do not make progress, we will fall behind in the world in terms of the democratic process?

Pete Wishart: Absolutely. My hon. Friend makes a good point. I would love to see that place as a tourist attraction. We could stuff some of its Members so that we could see them. They are all dressed like a demented Santa Claus. It would be fantastic: maybe we could have a Christmas fantasy or something as a feature of a visitor attraction. That is where we are, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point.

What is the Government’s intention when it comes to the House of Lords? Well, there seems to be only one ambition, and that is to stuff it full with even more cronies and donors. We have seen the latest additions. I do not know whether this is the Government’s intention—perhaps the Minister could clarify—but I get the impression they are trying to secure a majority in the House of Lords, because they are unhappy with the defeats they have experienced at its hands in the past few months. I have not done my sums properly on that, but I suspect that it would still involve another 30 to 50 new Members, taking its membership up to 900. That would bring it very close to overtaking the People’s Congress of China. Is that what the Government really intend to do?

At the same time—this is the point made by the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty)—the Government seek to reduce the number of elected Members of this House. This House—this nation—should be appalled at that prospect; we should be demanding that it is addressed and reversed. How on earth can we, as a Chamber, agree to the idea of stuffing that place even fuller, while the Government reduce the number of representatives of the people—us, the directly elected Members of Parliament.

Dr Murrison: I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has to say. I quite like his motion, as it happens; it certainly has the virtue of being better than the previous one we debated. He has hit on exactly the point, which is the oversized nature of the House of Lords. It is a serious point. Does he agree that, in the context of the diminution of the expertise that appointees to the House of Lords are able to bring, there is nothing more “ex” than an ex-expert? Does he agree, furthermore, that one way of dealing with that lack of contemporaneous knowledge and understanding that the Lords bring is to limit their term of office? As a short-term measure, we could create something called a “term peer”, which would reduce the numbers and make sure that those in the House of Lords are actually contemporary.

Pete Wishart: There is very little about that that I cannot agree with—it is a very good suggestion. The reason we brought this motion to the House was to invite such contributions from Members.

[*Pete Wishart*]

I know that lots of Conservative Members will not support our motion, but—I am taking this as a positive—I am beginning to sense a desire to address this, and we should work together as a House to do so. We first have to accept that there is something drastically wrong with the second Chamber—that it is not working and is starting to embarrass us. In the past, Conservative Members have always said that it is not an issue for them—“Why touch something that people are not concerned about?”—but I am beginning to sense a turnaround in that sentiment. A number of national newspapers have taken this up as a campaigning issue that they want to have addressed. As I have seen in my mailbag, more and more people are concerned about the quality of our democracy. If we allow a political circus like this to stand, we diminish our own role as the nation’s representatives. We are allowing it to continue as a feature of our democracy when we should be tackling it. I encourage hon. Members, even if they are not going to support us tonight, to look seriously at how we start to do so.

I was in the House when we previously looked at this—I am going back about 10 years now—and I voted for all the proposals that suggested replacing the Lords with a majority of elected Members. There was another failed attempt to address it at the time of the coalition Government. It is now incumbent on the Leader of the House—I am glad that he has joined us—to come forward with solid proposals on how we address this, because we have to do it: we cannot let it stand.

Today I, along with all my hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), who has left us, found out about our new constituencies. The Government intend to reduce the number of Scottish Members of Parliament from 59 to 53—six will be lost under their proposals to reduce the number of constituencies from 650 to 600. I had a little look to see how many Scottish Lords there are. I found 61 who have registered addresses in Scotland, and that is apart from the aristocrats and landed gentry who have lands and estates in my country. The number of Members of Parliament in Scotland has been cut from 72, when I was first elected, to 53, so we now have more Scottish peers than Scottish Members of Parliament.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that perhaps the starkest illustration of how bad things have become is that if the United Kingdom—or what was left of it at the time—tried to get back into the European Union at any point, it would be disqualified from membership because countries that were under Stalinist dictatorships 25 or 30 years ago are more democratic?

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, which I will let stand on its own merits.

The Government say that they are reducing the number of Members of this House to save money. Of course, if the number is reduced from 650 to 600, savings will be made—that will happen as a natural consequence of spending less.

Mr Jackson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, so I will try to make a bit of progress and come back to him later if I have time.

We are reducing the number of Members of this House to save money, but at no point do we look at what is going on down the corridor. As I said earlier, the cost of the House of Lords is now a cool £100 million—that is the operating cost for a year. Members of the House of Lords get £300 just for turning up or £150 for working from home, and these are tax-free allowances. That figure of £100 million works out at about £100,000 per peer. For the same cost as these 800 part-time peers, we could have 300 democratically elected and accountable peers on an MP’s salary.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Two of my constituents, Lord Forsyth of Drumlean and Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, sit along there in the House of Lords. Last year, Lord Forsyth cost £46,346 and Lord Robertson cost £19,708. I was on the front page of the local paper because of how much it costs for me to come down here and do my job and employ staff. I wonder when newspapers will print that kind of information about how much our Lords are costing us.

Pete Wishart: My hon. Friend makes an important point that brings me on to my next subject—value for money.

We know how hard we work in this place. We have constituents whom we have to represent and make sure that their interests are brought to this House. The Lords have none of that. Some of them barely turn up. Some of them have barely been in for a debate or made any parliamentary contributions at all. Yet we are prepared to have this huge expense to sustain that place while the number of Members of Parliament who come down here and work hard for their constituents day in, day out is being cut.

I want to say a couple of other things about the reduction in the number of Members of Parliament. The Government are in the process of taking us out of the European Union, and when the 73 Members of the European Parliament, who have significant powers, are no longer there, we will be expected to take up that work. An increased workload will fall on a smaller number of Members of Parliament when we no longer have Members of the European Parliament working for us in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Although the Government intend to reduce the number of Members of Parliament, they have absolutely no plans whatsoever to reduce the numbers in Government. Instead of attempting in any way to reduce the size of Whitehall, they have made sure that there are more Departments, more special advisers and more civil servants. If there is to be any reduction in the number of Members of this place, surely there should be a reduction in the number of people who serve in this Government.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a very interesting point. Our workload will increase if and when Britain withdraws from Europe and we no longer have any Euro MPs, and the change in the boundaries will increase the workload further.

Pete Wishart: Absolutely, and we have an increasing population. I still do not know the Government's case for the reduction in the number of MPs—well, I think I know why they decided to reduce the number of MPs. I think it was an attempt to stuff the Labour party, but the Labour party does not need any favours, help or assistance in that regard. It seems to be doing a pretty good job of that on its own.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is being very unfair on that point. I think that the decision was made to reduce the number of MPs because in 2010, when the policy came forward, there was a great deal of public feeling that MPs had become too expensive. It was a response to the national mood at the time.

Pete Wishart: Of course there is a national mood in favour of such a cut. If we were to ask any member of the public whether they would like to see the size of Parliament and Government reduced—I am sure I will find this when I go back to my constituency at the weekend—they would say, “Yes, of course.” My point, and I believe that the hon. Gentleman might respect this, is that we seem to be reducing the number of elected Members but letting the other place grow exponentially. That is the key point. I am beginning to get the sense that the public are starting to look at what we have got down the corridor and deciding that we have to do this. Enough is enough.

Mr MacNeil: My hon. Friend has mentioned that there are 61 peers from Scotland but the number of MPs is going down. Is that not simply more grist to the mill and another reason why people will, this time, vote for independence in the second referendum that will come within two years of the triggering of article 50?

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) has been generous to a fault in giving way, and I think that that is appreciated by the House. May I very gently make the point that 11 Back-Bench Members wish to contribute, and the Chair will be looking to call the Front-Bench wind-ups at approximately 6.40 pm? There will have to be a very tight time limit on Back-Bench contributions, a fact of which I know the hon. Gentleman will wish to take account in the continuation and conclusion of his eloquent contribution.

Pete Wishart: As you say, Mr Speaker, I was coming to my peroration. I have been as generous as possible when it comes to interventions.

Enough is enough. Surely, now is the time to address this matter. We have to look at what we are doing with the House of Lords. I am immensely proud of my party for failing to take places in the House of Lords, and I appeal to the Labour party to take no more places in the House of Lords. Several things have to happen almost immediately. There must be no more new Lords. We need a moratorium on appointments to the House of Lords. The Leader of the House must bring forward plans to reduce significantly the membership of the Lords, with a view to abolishing that place.

The House of Lords is a national embarrassment that should shame the country. It needs to be looked at and it needs to be reformed. Let us make this nation

proud by creating a second Chamber that represents this country. Let us start to look at ways to address this. No more cronies in ermine; let us have a democratic Chamber.

5.9 pm

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Michael Ellis): It is a pleasure to open for Her Majesty's Government in this debate, and a particular pleasure to debate with the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), if saying so is not too deferential for him.

I am grateful for the opportunity to debate this important subject. It is vital that our Parliament works effectively, and the House of Lords plays an important role in scrutinising and revising the legislation that governs us all. If I may say so, I think that the hon. Gentleman does a disservice to Members of the House of Lords who work very hard and are very valuable public servants. In many cases, they have been public servants for decades and devoted their lives to public service. In that House, there are leaders of industry and business who bring to it incredibly valuable expertise. There are Law Lords—formerly Lords of Appeal in Ordinary—as well as former Cabinet Ministers and Chiefs of the Defence Staff, so there is vast experience and expertise that is not available in this House or in many second Chambers in bicameral legislatures around the world. That House is replete with considerable expertise and experience.

Mr MacNeil: One of two things follow from what the Deputy Leader of the House has said. He is saying either that it is such a good arrangement down the corridor that we should abolish the Commons and repeat that arrangement in this place, or that other countries in the world should follow the same arrangement, in which case which ones would he advise to do so?

Michael Ellis: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that this country has centuries of history, and we should recognise that our system has evolved over those centuries. That does not alter the fact that the House of Lords has vastly experienced people from all fields of life—doctors, lawyers and the like—but we recognise, as was clear from the Conservative party manifesto last year, that it cannot continue to grow indefinitely.

We must keep the question of the size of the House of Lords in perspective. Members of the Lords are not full-time or salaried. Many peers balance professional lives outside the House with work in it, so they do not attend all the time. It is a mischaracterisation to portray it as though 800 Members were permanently in the House. In fact, when one looks at the average daily attendance in the last session—I invite hon. Members to do so—we see that it is below 500. The figure is 497, which is well short of the number of Members of the House of Commons. To use a journalistic phrase, 800 is the figure for the available talent.

Mr Jackson: Did my hon. Friend notice an omission from the witty and erudite speech of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)? He had the brass neck to complain about over-representation, but Scottish National party Members, who receive the same salary as English MPs and have Members of the Scottish Parliament in near-coterminous constituencies to take the burden off them, vote against the boundary

[Mr Jackson]

changes that will ameliorate the situation in which massive electorates in constituencies in England are represented by just one MP.

Michael Ellis: I had noticed that brass neck, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on making that point. At least 61 peers are registered as living in Scotland.

Mr Hanson: Will the Deputy Leader of the House answer one question? Does he support the principle of hereditary peers in the 21st century, or will he support the ten-minute rule Bill to abolish them that I introduced last year or Lord Grocott's Bill to end them that is now in the other place? Will he confirm that he could now do so?

Michael Ellis: As I have said, as was set out in the Conservative party manifesto, the Government recognise the need to reduce the size of the House of Lords. However, comprehensive reform of the House of Lords is not considered a priority in the current Parliament, given the other pressing constitutional matters, not least, I should say, the further devolution of powers to Scotland and Wales. We consider there to be higher priorities.

The House of Lords has not stood still in the past few years. In the last Parliament, it took forward some important reforms, with Government support. Although there is more to do, that Chamber has constantly evolved. The House of Lords Reform Act 2014 allowed peers to retire formally and permanently for the first time. It also provided for the expulsion of peers for non-attendance. Previously, a peer had to apply for a leave of absence. The Act was promoted by Lord Steel.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way because I have been trying to get in for some time. He tried to make a virtue of the fact that so many peers work part time. Does he not share my concern that that leaves things open to conflicts of interest in a way that even this place does not have? Does he share my concern that so many party donors are in the House of Lords?

Michael Ellis: I do not accept that characterisation at all. There is a proper process for appointments to the House of Lords by committee and a proper vetting process. The reality is that, as I have been saying, the House of Lords is a constantly evolving Chamber. The 2014 Act provided for the expulsion of peers—for example, for non-attendance—and for their retiring, a process that has seen some results. Further reforms introduced in 2015 empowered peers to expel Members for serious misconduct and suspend them beyond the end of a Parliament.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): I would like to go back to last year's Conservative manifesto and the desire to reduce numbers. Did David Cameron not singlehandedly put more than 230 peers into the House of Lords? That is more than 25% of the House of Lords appointed by him alone.

Michael Ellis: Tony Blair created far more peers than David Cameron. Until such time as there can be comprehensive reform, we have a system in place that is still being operated.

Stephen Doughty rose—

Michael Ellis: I am being generous, but I will give way.

Stephen Doughty: I thank the Minister, who is indeed being generous. A moment ago he said that not all the 800 or so Lords turn up, but the fact is that they can, and often do on some of the most controversial legislation. People were flown in, for example, to vote on tax credits, and the bishops voted on equal marriage legislation, which many of us found pretty unacceptable given that the bishops are only from the Church of England. The fact is that they can turn up. They have a vote in our system on our laws. Surely that is the fundamental principle: they have more votes than we, the elected House, do.

Michael Ellis: We have a process whereby we accept that the size of the House of Lords needs to be looked at, but there are priorities, and that is not a priority in this Parliament. Attempts were made in the last Parliament. This Parliament has pressing business. Although the size of the House of Lords is recognised as large, reform needs to be dealt with in due course, and preferably by consensus.

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): Before my hon. Friend moves on, will he give way on that point?

Michael Ellis: I need to make some progress, if I may. Time is moving on, as Mr Speaker said.

The coalition Government also introduced some small-scale reform under the Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015—the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) referred to bishops—which fast-tracks female bishops into the House of Lords by prioritising them in filling vacancies for the next 10 years. The reality is that there have been reforms. The first female bishop was introduced about a year ago in October 2015.

I should point out that the House of Lords has cut its operating costs by 14% in real terms since 2010. Its membership has changed, too. More than 150 peers have left the Lords since 2010, with more than 50 retiring since that facility was introduced two years ago. Indeed, there are 400 fewer Members of the House of Lords now than in 1998. The House of Lords is not as large as it was but is substantially smaller than in 1998.

It is right that the House of Lords continues to look at how it can work more effectively. Where further possible steps can command consensus, Her Majesty's Government would welcome working with peers to take reasonable measures forward in this Parliament. If that is possible in consensus with peers, we would welcome doing so.

At the same time, it is vital that we continue to reform parliamentary boundaries. The Conservative manifesto commitment was to

“address the unfairness of the current Parliamentary boundaries, reduce the number of MPs to 600 to cut the cost of politics and make votes of more equal value.”

It is crucial that votes are of more equal value. Without the implementation of the boundary reforms, MPs will continue to represent constituencies that were drawn up on data that will be up to 20 years old at the 2020 general

election, disregarding significant changes in the population. The principle of equal-sized constituencies, endorsed by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, is one that I would have thought Members on both sides of the House accepted. It is crucial to have votes of equal value across the United Kingdom.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Will the Minister give way?

Michael Ellis: I need to make some progress. There are a number of people who wish to speak and I have given way several times.

The reforms have already been delayed once by the Opposition parties and it is vital that they are not waylaid again by mixing them up with a discussion about reform of the House of Lords.

Mr MacNeil: The Minister says it is not a priority to deal with the House of Lords in this Parliament and that there are other issues. If he has other important issues—I can say this with authority, because my constituency is not affected—why is it so important to deal with the House of Commons? He wants a situation with fewer democratically elected parliamentarians, while he stuffs the other place. That does not ring true. We know full well that it is an attack on the Labour party, an attack on Scotland and an attack on Wales. That is the long and the short of it, and he might as well be honest about that.

Michael Ellis: There is a public demand for value for money and to reduce the cost of politics. In all areas of public life, savings have been made so that we live within our means. It is right that this House should find savings, too. By reducing the number of MPs, we will save up to £66 million over the course of a Parliament.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): The Minister is right to talk about the importance of democratic legitimacy. Does he accept that it is democratically illegitimate to have hereditary peers sitting and having any say in our democratic process? It gets in the way of the legitimacy of some of his other arguments when that very simple change could be put forward to help him carry through some of the arguments he is making about constituency equalisation.

Michael Ellis: As I have already said, the Government recognise the need to reduce the size of the House of Lords, but comprehensive reform is not considered a priority in this Parliament. I would have thought that the Scottish nationalists recognised the priority being given to other pressing constitutional matters, particularly the further devolution of powers to Scotland and Wales.

As I was saying, by reducing the number of MPs, we will save £66 million over the course of a Parliament. It is therefore right that we move forward with these proposals. The boundary proposals need not be tied with reforms of the House of Lords, not least as we do not believe that now is the right time to embark on comprehensive Lords reform. There are many different views on what form the House of Lords should take, and without any consensus there is no practical possibility, frankly, of taking such reform forward. There needs to be some practical realisation that, without consensus, it will not be possible.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend makes the point about reducing cost by reducing the number of MPs. Will he commit to reducing the size of the Government by the same proportion as the number of MPs he is trying to cut? If he does not do that, it will give the Government more control over Parliament, which to many of us is unacceptable. Of course, if he reduced the number of Ministers, he would save a bit more money as well.

Michael Ellis: The appointment of Ministers is ultimately a matter for the Prime Minister and I am certainly not going to comment on that. Ministerial numbers must reflect what the Prime Minister of the day feels she or he needs for the Government to work effectively.

Mr Rees-Mogg: On the number of Ministers, the maximum is set by legislation. It is not purely in the gift of the Prime Minister.

Michael Ellis: I recognise that—the Ministerial and Other Salaries Act 1975, I think—but that relates to the maximum, not the minimum. However, the appointment of Ministers is a matter for the Prime Minister.

There are many different views on what form the House of Lords should take and we have heard some of them this afternoon. Without consensus, as I have said, there is no practical possibility of taking such reform forward, and this was clear from the attempted passage of the House of Lords Reform Bill in 2012. It was withdrawn not for lack of commitment from the Government, but because there was no overall agreement about what that reform should look like. When there are so many pressing constitutional reforms, not least devolving more powers to Scotland and Wales and delivering all that is necessary for the UK's exit from the European Union, it is on those subjects that we should focus our attention in this Parliament. It would not be right to distract from or derail important reforms elsewhere by making House of Lords reform a priority. That is why we do not support the motion.

Kirsty Blackman: Will the Minister—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not entirely clear whether the Deputy Leader of the House concluded his oration or whether he was giving way.

Michael Ellis: I had concluded, but out of generosity, perhaps you will accept it if I give way on this occasion.

Mr Speaker: Very well, but it is very unusual. I do not think the word exists to “unconclude” one's speech, but if it possible to do so, the hon. Gentleman has done it. Let us hear the hon. Lady's intervention.

Kirsty Blackman: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

The Conservative party manifesto said that the Conservatives would

“address issues such as the size of the House of Lords”.

Why does the Minister think that the electorate thought that was less important than some of the other things in the manifesto? How can he get into the heads of the electorate? This was front and centre of the manifesto.

Michael Ellis: The Government have decided that it is not a priority for this Parliament to address that issue. The fact of the matter is that attempts were made during the last Parliament, as I have said, and there is

[*Michael Ellis*]

no consensus. There are high priorities, including exiting the EU and further devolution for Scotland and Wales. Those are the priorities. That is why we do not support the motion, as I said. That, Mr Speaker, is the conclusion.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the next speaker, let me explain that the time limit on Back-Bench speeches will begin at six minutes. Dependent on progress, it may have to be reviewed.

5.27 pm

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): I am absolutely delighted to participate in today's debate, particularly at a time when, owing to Conservative gerrymandering, the UK's democratic structures look more fragile than ever. Under the previous Prime Minister, as numerous speakers have said, appointments to the unelected House of Lords were made at a faster rate than under any other Prime Minister since life peerages began. Incidentally, the outgoing Member for Witney will be replaced tomorrow—hopefully by the Labour candidate, Duncan Enright. Perhaps we have not seen the last of the former Prime Minister—perhaps we might see him in the House of Lords in future.

Astonishingly, between taking office in 2010 and leaving this year, the former Prime Minister added 261 peers at an estimated cost to the taxpayer of somewhere in the region of £34 million. Frighteningly, it is thought that up to 20% of all appointments to the House of Lords have been people who have given substantial donations to the Conservative party. Others appointed include the former Prime Minister's cronies, his head of operations, the head of his No. 10 policy unit and the head of external relations.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the same could be said of the Labour party and the unions?

Ian Lavery: If the hon. Gentleman looked at the statistics on trade unionists, he would find that appointments by the former Prime Minister were completely different.

The bloated Lords now has over 800 Members and leaves the UK noticeably as the only bicameral country in the world where the second Chamber is larger than the first. Indeed, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), the only Chamber that is bigger is the national assembly of China. It is an absolute outrage. Let us be honest about it: we are a laughing stock in this regard. It is worth remembering, of course, that China's population is 28 times the size of the United Kingdom's.

Sir Desmond Swayne: I think that my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House may have misremembered. It was not that there was no consensus; there was a Bill on which we all agreed, or which certainly had the support of the House, but it was the hon. Gentleman's party that withdrew support for the programme motion. We could have had a reformed House of Lords, had it not been for the machinations of the Labour party.

Ian Lavery: I think there is more to the history of that than blaming the Labour party. I think it was the coalition Government that suffered a slight hiccup in their relationship at that point.

While what I have described was clearly bad enough, it came at the same time as the Government sought to reduce the number of elected Members of Parliament from 650 to 600. That was done under the guise of making politics cheaper, but it barely scraped the surface of the additional costs of the unelected Lords. Just where is the logic in reducing the size of the democratically elected Commons? If we want consensus, we can all agree to abolish the Boundary Commission review. We are being asked for consensus by the Minister, and that is fine, but if we want consensus in relation to certain issues, we should have consensus in relation to democracy. That is simple.

During the last Parliament, the attempt to rig democracy in favour of continuous Conservative control failed only because the Conservatives' coalition partners, the threatened Liberal Democrats, rebelled—a point that I made to the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne). They did not rebel over the much trumpeted 2010 anti-austerity policies. They were not terribly interested in opposing in-year spending cuts, increased tuition fees, or even the fundamentally illiberal “gagging Bill”. The truth is that the Liberal Democrats spat out the proverbial dummy because of the Government's failure to back their poor compromise on reform of the Lords, which they themselves sought to stuff with their own peers. [HON. MEMBERS: “Where are they?”] Absolutely. I was waiting for an intervention then, but, looking around the Chamber, I see that there is no one from the Liberal Democrats here to intervene.

The coalition agreement on Lords appointments would have meant an additional 186 peers, costing an estimated £24 million. All of them would have been Liberal Democrats or Conservatives. Interestingly, the Dissolution honours list contained more Liberal Democrats than their current parliamentary cohort. I hear people say that that is not hard to achieve, but it is nevertheless an important point.

Although the Liberal Democrat rebellion scuppered the 2013 review, the legislation was never repealed, and the unfettered Conservative Government have returned to the task. Their proposals to redraw constituency boundaries are grossly unfair, unjust, undemocratic and wholly unacceptable. They are based on an out-of-date version of the electoral register with nearly 2 million voters missing, a disproportionately high number of whom are transient and poorer voters: students, and families forced to move as a result of changes in the benefit system. The changes fail to take any account of the myriad bits of additional work that the vote to leave the European Union and a return of powers would bring.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has suggested that the Boundary Commission, and therefore the commissioners, are guilty of a gerrymander. May I invite him to reflect on that? We have independent commissioners who are looking at our parliamentary boundaries. To impugn their honour, their integrity and their independence belies the hon. Gentleman.

Ian Lavery: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that, but I did not in any way suggest that the commissioners were gerrymandering. My view is that the Conservative party—this Government—are attempting to gerrymander the boundary changes. They are the ones who want the reduction from 650 to 600. I do not believe that there is

any other party in the House of Commons that wants that. That is my point, and I wonder how reducing the number of MPs from 29 to 25 in my native north-east or from 59 to 53 in the west midlands fits in with the Tory devolution agenda. I am unsure, but perhaps the Minister will answer that at some stage.

Michael Ellis: Does the hon. Gentleman have an objection to equal-sized constituencies, because that is what we are seeking to achieve with these boundary reforms: equal-sized constituencies across the country, which we do not have now?

Ian Lavery: I have absolutely no objection to equal-sized constituencies, but I do have an objection to gerrymandering and changing the boundaries to ensure there is a distinct advantage to one party rather than another. But perhaps the Minister will respond to the point about devolution.

The Conservatives have once again done what the Conservatives do best: look after themselves and their party despite the real needs of this country. While on the Opposition Benches there is broad agreement about equalising the size of the constituencies, we cannot support this Tory attempt at what we would class as establishing perpetual rule. Let me make it absolutely clear: the Labour party will emphatically oppose the proposals of the Boundary Commission.

On the question of the second Chamber, it is my party that has always sought to reform the Lords. We passionately believe in the role of the second Chamber in our great democracy: we believe that no Government of any colour should be able to implement legislation without the proper scrutiny that a bicameral legislature provides. But while this is true, I must add that my party firmly believes that the House of Lords should be a democratic Chamber, not one appointed to through the patronage of the Prime Minister. We will not support any curtailment of the powers of Cross-Bench Lords and other measures designed to weaken the ability of the House of Lords to properly scrutinise, and where needed oppose, Government policy.

Under this Government, the use of secondary legislation has soared and is now being used for controversial and far-reaching policy changes such as tax credit cuts that traditionally have been introduced through primary legislation. Last year we were left with the sickening sight of Lord Lloyd Webber being flown back to the UK to try to defeat attempts to stop the Tory Government punishing hard-working British families through the Tory tax credit cut. I think it is appropriate at this point to put on record our sincere thanks for the great efforts and deliberations of Labour Peers and others who ensured that the attack on tax credits was defeated. It is vital that the Lords are able to continue to use the powers they have to scrutinise the Government's plans and prevent such disastrous Government policies from being introduced.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): The hon. Gentleman talked about fairness, but why does he think it fair that his constituency, which has an electorate of 62,000, should remain as it is, while my constituency has an electorate of 80,000?

Ian Lavery: I have already said I believe in equalisation, but not in the reduction in the number of parliamentary seats from 650 to 600. I firmly believe we should be

looking at the equalisation of constituencies, but that is not the issue here: the issue is the unfairness of reducing the number of MPs while at the same time stuffing the other place ram-jam packed with people who are unelected and unaccountable. That is totally and utterly unjustified.

It is inevitable that during this Parliament the Lords will be required once again to properly scrutinise, and if necessary overturn, the actions of a Government increasingly dominated by right-wing populism, although in this we must be careful about the recommendations of the Strathclyde report, which was a rapid response by the Government to these actions and designed to render the second Chamber toothless against such authoritarian measures.

In the wake of the Brexit vote, the House of Lords must be allowed to get on with its vital role of scrutinising legislation. The process is likely to throw up an enormous number of statutory instruments, and without the Lords they would probably go through on the nod.

Labour has long called for reform. In the reduction of the Lords and in government, we have sought to find consensus. It is important to remember that it was a Labour Government who cleared out most of the hereditary peers, but we fully acknowledge that fundamental reform is essential.

Given the vote to leave the EU, the Government's boundary review and the political estrangement felt by many voters, this is a timely debate. We live in a changed society in a modern age, where leaps in technology have resulted in an increase in people across the UK becoming more interested in political issues, but participatory democracy feels alien to many and, with a few noticeable exceptions, wanes every year. Many people feel that politics is unable to change their lives, their area or their country for the better. As parliamentarians and politicians, we face a huge challenge of how we widen democracy in this country and give people the power to make things better.

Some people may wonder why the SNP has chosen once again to focus on constitutional issues rather than its day job of governing Scotland, but I will leave that to its Members. It is very interesting that the party should take such an interest in matters relating to the House of Lords. In Scotland's devolved Parliament, no such second Chamber exists. The forensic scrutiny of the Lords in the UK is said to be provided by the Scottish Parliament's Committee structure, but sadly the political balance of those Committees allows the Scottish Government to proceed very much as they wish.

That said, I am happy to inform the House that the Labour party will vote in favour of the SNP motion, but this should be only the beginning. The Government have many questions to answer on the issue of democracy; perhaps the Minister will address them at some stage. Will the Government agree to abandon the proposal for boundary changes until a review of the bicameral system in its entirety has been conducted? *[Interruption.]* Somebody shouted "No" from a sedentary position. The Minister spoke just before me and pleaded for consensus on our democratic processes, but I am not sure whether the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) was present at that point. We need to look at the system in its entirety.

Will the Minister give a guarantee that those Tory MPs who may lose their seats under the proposed boundary changes will not be stuffed into the House of

[*Ian Lavery*]

Lords as a solution to the problems that the Conservatives themselves face as a result of those changes? When will a plan be put in place to deal with the unwieldy, unelected and unaccountable second Chamber, and to replace it with something more befitting the 21st century? How will we bring democracy back to the communities that feel abandoned by politics?

We have an opportunity to rebuild democracy in this country, making politics relevant to people's lives, and to rebuild trust. We need to put giving people a real say in their communities and workplaces at the heart of our work as public servants. Labour sees transferring power from Westminster, Whitehall and, indeed, the boardroom to our communities as imperative to the future of our democracy. We want real devolution of power, not the phoney Tory con of regional mayors, designed simply to pass on the blame for swingeing cuts. Democracy needs to be revived in every nation and region of our country, and in every community, town and city. It must be transparent, it must be fair and it must be accountable. It must be a major improvement on the current Tory plans. We need progress, and we need it very quickly. We need an agreed workable timeframe. Democracy cannot be seen to be ignored; it needs to be embraced. I am pleased to say that the official Opposition will support the motion.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I remind Members that we have a six-minute limit on speeches to start with.

5.45 pm

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate after three outstanding Front-Bench speeches from three individuals—the hon. Members for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) and my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis)—who had distinguished careers outside this place before they came here.

Many of us, I suspect, will be familiar with the political gambit that is the dead cat. Popularised by my friend and colleague Sir Lynton Crosby, the idea is that when one is in a position of deep political embarrassment one throws the equivalent of a dead cat on to the table. The purpose of so doing is to divert attention from what was just being discussed because, whatever the controversy that has been raging beforehand, people suddenly say, “Oh my God, there's a dead cat on the table.” The conversation having changed as a result, embarrassment—such as my own at my execrable Australian accent just then—is avoided.

In this debate, the House of Lords, perhaps appropriately for an ermine-clad Chamber, is the dead cat. The SNP has chosen a discussion of the future of the House of Lords for this Opposition day debate because of a wish to divert attention from a number of other issues. The question I have to ask SNP Members is this: when they think about the issues that their voters bring to them in their surgeries or by email or correspondence, what are they? Overwhelmingly, they will be education, health, law and order and the economy. Why is the SNP not

talking about those issues today? I will tell the House—*[Interruption.]* Order! The SNP is not talking about law and order because its centralisation of power in the hands of Police Scotland has been widely viewed as illiberal and is thought by local authorities in Scotland to have been a disaster.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Michael Gove: No.

We are not hearing about the NHS because there is an NHS crisis in Scotland. The SNP lost a vote in the Scottish Parliament not long ago as a result of its mishandling of the NHS in Scotland. Recently, efforts to ensure adequate recruitment of general practitioners in Scotland failed. Why are we not hearing about education from the SNP? *[Interruption.]* Just a minute. We are not hearing about education from the SNP because recently, and humiliatingly—

Richard Arkless: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I do hope it is a point of order, Mr Arkless.

Richard Arkless: I am curious about the right hon. Gentleman's assertions, Mr Deputy Speaker. The wording of the motion on the Order Paper is clear and I ask you kindly to bring him into line to discuss it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will make a better suggestion. I will decide who is in order and when. I would not waste any more time on interventions, however, as we are struggling for time and I want to ensure that everyone gets equal time.

Michael Gove: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

We are not hearing about education because the Scottish National party has had to execute a humiliating U-turn and its Education Minister, Mr Swinney, has had to adopt our policies on education by giving funding to schools—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Michael Gove: While at the same time adopting our approach to examinations.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. We allow a little bit of movement, but the right hon. Gentleman is concentrating purely on education when we are discussing the size of the House of Lords, and even I struggle to see the connection. I would have expected a connection by now, and as there is not one coming I am sure, Mr Gove, that you will want to get back to the subject of the size of the House of Lords and what we are debating.

Michael Gove: Indeed. One of the challenges, as has been pointed out by those on both Front Benches, is that when SNP Members put forward proposals for the House of Lords, they offer no alternative method of

scrutiny. They simply propose unicameralism. Not only that, but they do not observe the basic pragmatic principle of the British constitution that we should preserve what works. Like the monarchy, the House of Lords is an institution that works, despite the fact that it might not succumb to every rational imprint. I speak as a Minister who has been held accountable and who has been cross-questioned—[*Interruption.*] An ex-Minister, I should say. I have been cross-questioned by Select Committees in the House of Lords with a greater degree of pertinacity and effectiveness than I have found in any other cross-examination I have ever faced.

The logic behind the SNP's position is that if it objects to any constitutional model that does not fit its own preconceptions, it should object to the monarchy. The real thrust behind the SNP's position is that it opposes the institutions that bind the United Kingdom together and are a focus for loyalty in this country, such as the monarchy, because of its single-minded pursuit of separation and independence come what may. If SNP Members really object to unelected figures meeting in a fashion that results in democratically elected Members of Parliament finding the will of the people frustrated, why are they so keen to stay in the European Union? If they object to unelected, unaccountable and out-of-touch figures wielding power, why do they not object to the existence of the European Council in its current form? Again, the answer is that they are only interested in separation.

One final point. We scarcely heard anything from the SNP on the vital importance of ensuring that all parliamentary constituencies should be of equal size. Having parliamentary constituencies of equal size was a demand of the Chartists in 1838, yet we still do not have them. I may be a young man in a hurry, and I may be an impetuous radical determined to bring about change at a pace faster than many would account, but surely, after nearly 200 years, the Chartists' demands should at last be honoured. All votes should be equal, all constituencies should be equal and democracy should be honoured.

5.52 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): It is a pleasure, as always, to follow the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). It is just a shame that he has done a disservice to the House and to himself by refusing to discuss any part of the motion on the Order Paper. Let us consider the predicament into which the political class in this country has now gotten itself. Since the introduction of adult universal suffrage, there has been concern and sometimes embarrassment about the anachronistic nature of our bicameral legislature, in which one completely unelected House has the powers that it has. Over the decades, there have been attempts—many of them successful—to limit those powers and to assert the primacy of this House.

Now, however, we are embarking on a journey on which two things will happen simultaneously. The number of Members in the unelected House will increase to unprecedented levels and without any limit. At the same time, the number of people elected to make laws in this country will be reduced. In my view, that is a serial affront to the democratic values on which this country is based. That could be viewed as simply a matter of constitutional theory, but it is much more important than that. It speaks to the character of our

democracy and our country. It lowers the esteem in which we are held abroad and, most importantly, it lowers the esteem in which this legislature is held by its own citizens. I believe that this is one of the contributory factors to the anti-politics, the disillusion and the alienation that have emerged in this country, and unless we do something to counteract this, we are all going to be in a lot of trouble.

As it happens, we do believe in an elected second Chamber, but the case for a bicameral Parliament has to be argued; it cannot just be assumed to be the default position. In fact, 16 of the 28 member states of the European Union have a unicameral Parliament. That is the norm throughout Europe, so we cannot assume that bicameralism is automatically the default.

Simon Hoare: The hon. Gentleman makes a strong and telling point about the size of the upper House when compared with the number of elected Members. However, when the official Opposition in this place are in disarray and clearly not up to the job of official scrutiny, the bicameral system means that efficient scrutiny can be done in another place. Does he agree that we should cherish that safeguard?

Tommy Sheppard: I want to come on to that. A frequent argument for a revising or upper Chamber is the inadequacy of the first Chamber, and I want to look at some of the imperfections of this House. To start with, we may be elected and accountable, but we can in no way be described as democratically representative of the population who elected us. A system that results in a majority Government with 37% of the vote can never be described as such. Our system is also much more centralised than that of any comparable country. We in Scotland have been on a home rule journey, which we are anxious to speed up, but I actually feel for colleagues in England, who represent the bulk of the United Kingdom, about the absence of any meaningful regional or democratic local government beneath this level. If we actually looked at the matrix of governance underneath this place, we could relieve many of the pressures on this House.

Our procedures for policy review and scrutiny are not fit for purpose. This adversarial system—two sword lengths apart—often militates against a consensual or at least a majoritarian approach to developing public policy, which is why mistakes in this place often have to be rectified somewhere else. However, that is not an argument for the House of Lords; it is an argument for improving the procedures of the House of Commons. The truth is that we need to consider our legislature as a whole and bring in major reforms to both Houses of Parliament. If we do not do that, our system of governance will fall further into disrepute.

Mr MacNeil *rose*—

Tommy Sheppard: I cannot give way because of the time. To say that the House of Lords is justified because it compensates for the inadequacy of the House of Commons is completely wrong. In fact, it exacerbates many of those inadequacies.

Turning to the imperfections of the House of Lords, that it is unelected is taken as given, but it is also profoundly unrepresentative for an appointed chamber. It is old, male and almost half of its Members are

[Tommy Sheppard]

domiciled in the south-east of England. In no way does that even attempt to recognise our country. It is also very big—my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) noted that it is second only to the legislature of the People's Republic of China—and very costly, with each peer costing an average of £120,000 a year and its operation costing almost £100 million. If the Government are serious about reducing the cost of government, I suggest that they look first at what is happening along the corridor.

It is time to begin the process of change. We should be looking at having an elected second Chamber. Indeed, that pledge was in the Conservative manifesto, so it has ceased to be an argument of principle; it is one of priorities and the timing being right. The time is absolutely right to begin the process of considering change and I recommend that this House do so.

Michael Gove *rose*—

Tommy Sheppard: I think I will get into trouble if I give way.

I want to consider the boundary changes, because the two things must be looked at together—they are two sides of the same coin. No case can be made for reducing the number of elected Members of Parliament at a time when this Parliament's responsibility will increase as a result of leaving the European Union and the repatriation, in whatever form, of a vast amount of powers. At the very least, the pause button should be pressed until the Brexit plan is established and we see how this country manages to survive outside the European Union.

I commend the motion to the House. I am actually pleased with some of the comments from the Government Benches about being prepared to consider it. I point out that the motion does not call for the abolition of the House of Lords or any of the structures of the House of Commons or for electoral reform. It is a motion that says, "When you're in a hole, stop digging." It is one that says, "Press the pause button." Let us look at the plans for the future. Let us pause the reduction in the number of seats in the Commons. Let us pause the escalation in the size of the House of Lords. Let us see whether we can come back with proposals for reform that will command support from across the House and endear us much more to the people who put us here.

5.59 pm

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), and I should probably start with a declaration of interest, as my wife is a recently appointed life baroness in the Lords. I should add, for the benefit of Members opposite, that I believe she is now reconciled to the fact that before she was appointed I had voted repeatedly to abolish people like her, so it would be rather self-serving if I changed my mind now, as I hope everyone would agree. I am happy to inform the House that we are still talking even so. Although I instinctively support Lords reform, I oppose this motion. Why? It is because it uses Lords reform not as a dead cat, but as an excuse to delay boundary reform, a much-needed and overdue improvement to the plumbing of our democracy.

As we have heard, our current constituency boundaries are based on voter data that are already 15 years old or more. If we do not reform the boundaries now, they will be 20 years out of date by the next general election. As the old boundaries produced constituencies that varied tremendously in size, votes in one part of the country carried far more, or far less, weight than votes in another. It is a fundamental principle of our democracy that everybody's vote must count the same as that of their neighbour. It does not matter whether you are rich or poor, what colour your skin may be or what god you worship, my vote carries no more weight than yours, Mr Deputy Speaker, and yours is worth no more than Nicola Sturgeon's. Without that, our elections will not be fair.

Kirsty Blackman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Penrose: I am happy to give way once—

Kirsty Blackman: Is the hon. Gentleman in fact making an impassioned plea for proportional representation?

John Penrose: Not at all. I am making an impassioned plea for equal-sized constituencies and for votes to weigh the same. I can think of nothing more dangerous for our democracy, and nothing more corrosive of trust in politicians and the political system, than a sense that some favoured voters get a better deal than others in other parts of the country.

Chris Elmore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Penrose: I really must continue. So votes must carry equal weight, but without boundary reform they will not. Anyone proposing delays to the reform will inevitably face the challenge, unfair and unworthy though I am sure it would be in the case of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), that delaying reform has a party political advantage, too. That is because many smaller constituencies have historically been in areas with lots of Labour and, in some cases, Scottish National party, MPs, so it has historically required fewer voters to elect Labour MPs than Conservative ones.

In other words, some people—not all, but some—want to delay boundary reform because they want to hang on to a system that gave them unfair, unearned, unjustified and undemocratic privilege. They will not admit it in public, of course, but that is what is behind it. So I say to those people, particularly those in the political parties with proud and distinguished traditions of progressive politics and of standing up for what is right against the forces of reaction who oppose reform, please think very carefully before voting to delay boundary reform, for you will lay yourself open to the charge of putting party advantage ahead of democratic principle and fair elections. If I, as a Tory, can vote for fair elections, so can you.

Linking reform of the undemocratic Lords to separate, much-needed reforms for fairer elections to the democratic Commons is just wrong. It is a recipe for endless delay, and will only fuel the cynics who believe the whole system is fixed against them. The referendum vote on 23 June was, in part, a howl of frustration—a cry of rage against an unfair system where some favoured electors' votes count more than those of others. The sight of MPs voting to hang on to a cosy, unfair system

will only make things worse. It will corrode trust in our democracy even further, so I urge, even at this late stage, the SNP to withdraw this motion as fast as possible.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Just before I bring others in, may I say that we are going to have to drop to a five-minute limit, and I want to try to get everybody in on the same level?

6.4 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): On 14 January, I rose to introduce an Adjournment debate on this very issue, and I could easily reiterate the points that I articulated to the House then. Well, for the avoidance of doubt, I will and I will take great pleasure in it. All that has changed since we last discussed reform of the unelected, unaccountable House of Lords is that there are more of them—more party donors, more party hacks, less openness, less transparency, and more ermine.

At the same time, the reviews of the boundary commissions—yes, there is more than one—have sought to reduce further the number of elected Members to this House of Commons. While this House is reduced in number and relevance, the House of Lords, at its present velocity of expansion, will soon exceed the National People's Congress of China. It has already exceeded the size of the European Parliament, which is directly elected by more than 400 million European citizens. It seems that we are taking back control and handing it on a plate to the barons and baronesses of the unelected upper Chamber. At least on the SNP Benches, we have spoken and will continue to speak with one voice. In our manifesto at the general election, we placed our proposal before the entire community of Scotland. "Abolish it", we said and we won.

If we as Members are to work effectively and with electoral legitimacy—

Michael Gove *rose*—

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Forget it. The right hon. Gentleman can sit right down.

If we are to work with electoral legitimacy, Britain's upper Chamber should resemble less the National People's Congress of China and more the revising and advisory chamber of the people's Parliament of a 21st century liberal democracy.

Let us turn now to the hope of many Members of this House—a hope that is shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who should wear with pride his title of leading abolitionist—that any future reform of the upper Chamber should not only consider its size, but limit it and remove with haste its ability as an unelected and unaccountable Chamber to generate legislation [*Interruption.*] Members should listen; they might learn something. Once again, let me state that this is an affront to my constituents and an aberration at the heart of the British state.

I have previously likened the antics of the previous Government to a "Carry On" movie. Their antics had the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) cast as the arch-villain, Citizen Camembert, and the former Prime Minister as the good cop and leading man, the Black Fingernail. I do hope that the new cast of actors

are less like the Duke de Pommefrites. That said, however, we may end up with Citizen Bidet, and we all know where that ends—down the cludgie.

I continue to believe, in this parliamentary term at least, that this aspiration will probably be a lost cause given that the hierarchy of the Conservative party—and even those punted to the Back Benches—has a long-term love affair with the upper Chamber. Over the previous Parliament, 200 unelected and unaccountable peers were added to the Lords. Even the new First Lord of the Treasury has appointed 16 new Members, 15 of whom are Tories.

Of the peerage, let me turn again, as I did on 14 January, to a certain cadre. I will be louder this time, because they did not seem to hear me the first time. I am talking about the archbishops and bishops of the established Church of England. Many have likened their position to that of the theocrats of the Islamic Republic of Iran. My direct challenge is this—

Michael Gove *rose*—

Martin Docherty-Hughes: No, sit down, son. I have told you once and I will not tell you again.

Those bishops and archbishops have no place in the governance of the nation of Scotland. They have no right to vote, if such a thing should occur, on the civic or legislative life of our nation. Let me make myself clear. It would be easy for me to vent frustration, but I shall make one call tonight, which is to abolish it. Listen to what the nation of Scotland said at the last general election: get rid of them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I think we will go from one extreme to the other. I call Jacob Rees-Mogg.

6.9 pm

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is an enormous pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), who expressed himself with such vim and vigour.

The motion tabled by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) is an important motion and a proper subject for us to debate. It is something that we have been debating for hundreds of years. The earliest debate I can find for deciding to limit the House of Lords is in 1719, and we will all remember that the Parliament Act 1911 states that it is a temporary measure until a more democratic means of choosing an upper House can be found.

These problems are not new, and there are serious problems with the House of Lords. I do not think anyone would try to pretend otherwise. It is not by any means perfect and its imperfection is partly in its size, partly in its unaccountability and partly, as the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire so rightly said, in its Liberal Democrats. I do not say that as a cheap shot against the Liberal Democrats, though those are perfectly fun. I say it because the very large number of Lib Dems who are there, who are abusing their position in the Lords to thwart the will of the elected Government,

[Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg]

have made a real problem for the Government and for the democratic legitimacy of the House of Lords. There are unquestionably problems, but what is the solution?

What we have considered in previous Parliaments is a democratically elected upper House. That sounds very sensible in theory, but there is a fundamental problem for us in this House that if we have a democratically elected House of Lords, its powers will be equal to ours. Even if the letter of the law allows us to overrule the Lords, that will soon cease to be a political reality. A democratically elected House of Lords challenges the Commons, and if a democratically elected House of Lords is on a different electoral system, it might even claim a higher validity than we have and therefore the right to overrule us. Then we would probably have a gridlocked system like that in the United States, with the two Houses being unable to co-operate and an inability to govern and to get legislation through.

Mr Jackson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Liberal Democrats were complicit in the failure of their once-in-a-generation opportunity for House of Lords reform by bringing forward a ludicrous proposal for a 15-year non-renewable mandate, which would have challenged the authority and mandate of this House?

Mr Rees-Mogg: That was part of the problem. The other problem was that they were quite unwilling to set out what they would do between the conventions that both Houses have. If those conventions are legislated for, who is to determine whether the conventions are followed? Would that be the courts, and then would the courts interfere in Parliament? Or would the conventions be decided by consensus between the two Houses? In that case we would be back to the gridlock that I was warning about.

That is why the problem has not been solved. There is not a good democratic solution unless we are willing to downgrade the House of Commons, which I personally would be very much against doing. With our constituency-based relationship we have a wonderful system of democracy through this House. The hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) made a very powerful speech, but I disagree with him in thinking that the reform to constituencies is gerrymandering. It really is not. It is getting the numbers to be equal, which is a proper thing to do.

It would be wrong to fight the next general election on the electoral roll from 2000. That needs to be updated, and although the later the date the better—so I am not unsympathetic to the call to move it on two years later—that is not practical. It cannot be done on the absolutely last electoral roll, but by doing it every five years, we ensure that there is continuity in updating and a regular fairness in the size of the constituencies. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman on that point and think it is important, through that constituency link, to defend the primacy of this House, which is the democratic House.

That is why I am less worried than the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire about the failures of the House of Lords. Ultimately we are in charge. We can use the 1911 Parliament Act. We may decide to use that to do something on statutory instruments if the House of Lords challenges the Government on their democratically mandated implementation of policy. The democratic

right overrides the undemocratic element. That gives me certainty and security that the nation is not becoming the People's Republic of China, Lesotho or whatever other random examples have been brought up, because they do not have that democratic underpinning. Therefore, the size of the House of Lords is just a problem that we will have to live with.

In 1719, the main reason for opposing a limit on the numbers in the House of Lords was that a limit would make the Members who were already there more powerful because their power could not be diluted by adding more peers. That remains true today, because the one great authority this Chamber still retains over the House of Lords, via the Prime Minister, is not so much the 1911 Act, but the threat of creating many more peers, which was, of course, threatened in 1832 and in 1911—on both occasions to ensure the democratic will could prevail. We must maintain the ability to do that, even while recognising that the House of Lords is too big and has problems. However, this needs to be an evolutionary reform, which I would happily go into, Mr Deputy Speaker, but on another occasion.

6.15 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who always makes very substantial contributions when he speaks in the House during our deliberations. I rise in support of the motion from my SNP colleagues, and it is a pleasure to follow the lead of my good friend the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who gave us his usual majestic performance while opening the debate.

Since being elected, I have been immensely impressed with the robotic discipline of some Government Back Benchers when it comes to political messaging. The most infamous catchphrase during my first term here was “the long-term economic plan”. We have not heard much about that since the EU referendum, for obvious reasons. Another famous battle cry in my time here has been “cutting the cost of politics”. Today's welcome debate on House of Lords reform gives us the opportunity to deconstruct that myth once and for all, because it is impossible to divorce culling the number of MPs from the deliberate bloating of the upper House by this Government.

Over a quarter of Welsh MPs are set to be removed under the boundary review—proportionally more than in any other constituent nation of the UK or region of England. Wales faces a double whammy: a poorer constitutional settlement in terms of powers, when compared with our friends in Scotland and Northern Ireland, yet the largest cut in representation in this place. I have no problem with equalising the size of constituencies for this House, but for that to happen and to have my support, Wales must have the same constitutional settlement as the other devolved Administrations. However, the Wales Bill, which has just made its way from this place to the other House, is a terrible Bill if we look at the powers offered to other parts of the UK.

At almost 800 Members, the House of Lords is now the second-largest Chamber on earth—beaten to the top spot only by China's National People's Congress, which I am led to believe has nearly 3,000 members. China,

of course, has a population 28 times the size of the United Kingdom's. Between this House and the other place, Westminster has over 1,400 politicians, and there is nothing stopping that number climbing even higher; there is no limit on the number of peers the two big parties can send to the other place, whether that involves failed career politicians or just favours to old friends. The cost of running the Lords, as we have heard, is around £100 million per annum, according to the Electoral Reform Society. Each peer costs taxpayers in our respective nations £120,000. Culling the upper House therefore seems the most obvious way of cutting the cost of politics.

It is also important to remember that Members of the upper Chamber can become Ministers: they can not only amend our laws, but make them, and that point has been missing so far from the debate.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there are many defects in our constitution at the moment? One of the principal ones is the small number of Members of the Welsh Assembly. Their work has trebled, and they are under great strain—some of them are on three or four Committees. If we are to have the reforms that we need, it would be far better not to do things piecemeal and not to reduce the number of MPs only, but to have a convention, so that we can get a balance and reduce membership in other places, and that can be done only by an overall, comprehensive reform of the constitution.

Jonathan Edwards: I am very grateful for that intervention. I have often suspected that the hon. Gentleman—my honourable comrade—has mind-reading abilities, because that was exactly my next point.

The National Assembly for Wales, which is responsible for major public services in Wales—the health service, education, economic development and many other issues—has just 60 elected representatives. Discounting Welsh Ministers, that leaves only 42 Back Benchers to scrutinise a Government making vital decisions in my country. If the Wales Bill makes its way through the House of Lords and gets a legislative consent motion in the Assembly, although that might be in question, it would also have, for the first time, responsibility for fiscal powers in Wales. That is a clear case for increasing the numbers in the National Assembly.

Before the latest cramming of the Lords when the former Prime Minister handed out peerages to his friends, 27% of peers listed representative politics as their main profession prior to entering the Lords. Most of them had been MPs; it must be the only legislature in the world where losing elections helps people gain seats. Many colleagues have mentioned the Liberal Democrats. I am not going to attack the Lib Dems, but I remember that the Lib Dems filled two of the bottom Government Benches during the last Parliament, and when I recently went to see a debate in the House of Lords, they were all sitting there in the right-hand corner, much to my surprise. A further 7% of peers had been political staff, and twice as many had worked as staff in the royal household than as manual or skilled labour. It is hardly a Chamber that is representative of our various communities across the United Kingdom.

For as long as decisions affecting Wales are to be made in the other place, Plaid Cymru will continue to press for equal representation for us. However, we believe

that there is no role for patronage and an appointment system in a modern democracy. Following the Brexit vote, the UK faces a stark choice between two futures: do we return to a very centralised system based here in Westminster or move towards a more voluntary Union, as advocated by more sensible voices such as Lord Sainsbury in the other place? In my view, this place should turn into a Parliament for England, and the House of Lords should be reformed to become a confederal Parliament.

6.22 pm

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I am going to do something very brave and propose a solution to the problem down the corridor. I do not want to get rid of any of the lords, so I will not vote for this motion. Without wanting to be controversial, I have a bloodless solution. If we retired lords at 75 years of age, we would remove approximately 250 of them straight away. Let us not forget that the lords are there not to represent but to scrutinise. We do not want to get rid of every one of them, because there is expertise down there that can outweigh expertise in this Chamber—especially on the SNP Benches.

The average age in the Lords is 70, believe it or not, while the average age of those who actually contribute in the other place is 65. After that age, attendance drops off dramatically. We have to look at this in the round. If we reduced the Lords by 250 Members—those aged over 75—we would bring it down to approximately the size of the Commons. Those lords would then stay on to advise. They would not get paid or claim expenses, but go on to a higher Chamber called the Lords council, and advise their own Committees. They could then feed into the legislative process without any cost to the taxpayer.

Outside this Chamber, nobody is talking about the Lords—it is only us in here. We should not throw the baby out with the bathwater; we should look at a grown-up way of getting the numbers down. Once we have done that, over a period of 15 years, natural attrition will take its toll. The 250 who have been put into the higher status could still call themselves lords, still have the gravitas and the gratification they want, and still contribute. They will go, and we can have an apportioned system, with so many Conservatives, so many from Labour and—dare I say it?—so many from the SNP. We can break it into segments. They will be able to scrutinise sensibly in a cross-party manner. I hope to have brought some kind of sense to this subject.

6.25 pm

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I want to lay my cards on the table straight away and say that I support the motion and I support the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery). I have been here for nearly 25 years, and in that time I have voted on every available occasion to abolish the House of Lords. If I have not been able to abolish the House of Lords—self-evidently, I have not—I have voted for change in the House of Lords.

I will propose some changes that the Government could deliver, should they so wish, to improve democracy without achieving my ultimate objective of massive reorganisation of the formulation of the House of Lords. It is not tenable in the 21st century to have an

[Mr David Hanson]

unelected House deciding on policy. It is not tenable to have hereditary peers deciding on policy. It is not tenable to have hereditary peers who are elected by other hereditary peers, with very small mandates—sometimes as few as three votes—deciding policies that affect the lives of my constituents. At a time when the Government are seeking to reduce the membership of this House from 650 to 600 and to remove completely Euro Members of Parliament, whose powers and responsibilities will be transferred back to this House, it is not tenable for us to allow the House of Lords to continue unchanged.

The recently appointed Lord Speaker, Lord Fowler, is a former Conservative MP whom I remember being a member of the Cabinets of Mrs Thatcher and John Major when I first came here. He has said that there is no way the Lords can defend its current size of 820 peers and that

“we’ve been faffing around on this for some time now. And my fear would be that unless we take the initiative here someone else will”.

Let me suggest some simple initiatives. I will set the bar very low, because the Government’s position appears to be that they cannot make massive change, so they will make no change. A proposal to bring some things back into kilter is something that we in this House should support, and I suggest these three simple changes. First, let us remove from the House of Lords the 92 hereditary peers, 91 of whom, as I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), happen to be men and only one of whom is a woman. Those 92 hereditary peers are elected by as few as three votes.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): As the right hon. Gentleman has just said, those hereditary peers are elected. The motion states that the Government should “put in place plans to significantly reduce the number of unelected Lords”.

Is he proposing that the number of hereditary peers should stay the same, if he supports the motion?

Mr Hanson: If the hon. Gentleman listens to what I am saying, he will hear that I have three small points to make—three very low bars. The first low bar is the removal of the hereditary peers. The second low bar is not to fill any more vacancies with unelected peers until the House of Lords gets down to a reasonable size, below that of the House of Commons.

On hereditary peers, let me just say that one of those recently elected is the Lord Fairfax of Cameron, whose great-great-great-great-great-great-something grandfather got his peerage because he was the first Englishman to travel to Scotland to swear allegiance to the new King James I. I happen to think that in the 21st century, we should pick our legislators on more than the fact that one of their ancestors knew how to get to Scotland quite quickly. That is no way to run a modern House of Lords.

Lord Thurso, the last Member to be elected as an hereditary peer, was an hereditary peer but he renounced his peerage, came to this place and sat on the Liberal Democrat Benches until he lost his seat, when he suddenly rediscovered his blue blood. That is no way to run a modern democracy. In April this year, I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill to abolish hereditary peers. A Bill in

another place in the name of my noble Friend Lord Grocott is designed to do something very similar to what the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) has suggested: not to fill the position of hereditary peers who retire or die. Those are both simple steps that could be taken now to remove the hereditary peers. Those things would be part of a wider package in due course, but the Government could certainly do them now. I am sure that no right hon. or hon. Member of this House would object to a small Bill to meet those objectives.

My second suggestion is not to fill vacancies until the size of the House of Lords gets down to that of the House of Commons. What is wrong with that? I want massive change—I have voted to abolish the Lords—but in the absence of consensus, let us look at how we can reduce the number of Members over time. That is perfectly reasonable.

The third suggestion may be revolutionary, but it is an attempt to find a compromise. I agree with the Government that Members of Parliament should represent equal numbers of constituents. Let us do that, but let us keep 650 MPs and have a boundary review on that basis, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck said. In my part of the world, Wales, we would lose seats under such a review—we have 55,000 to 60,000 electors in each constituency—but we would have the same number of constituents and reasonable representation. But, no, this Government are seeking to reduce the representation from 650 to 600 Members, while in previous 18 months the former Prime Minister appointed 132 peers to the House of Lords.

I am sorry, but I happen to think we need radical surgery and radical change. I have three simple suggestions to get the ball rolling: remove the hereditaries, freeze appointments and consider keeping 650 Members of Parliament with equal numbers of voters, including—dare I say it?—in the Western Isles and the Isle of Wight, which are slightly different. Let us look at those things and make sure we make some radical changes on the road to democratising this Parliament and giving a lead to the rest of the world.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. There are four Members left to speak. With about 10 minutes available for Back Benchers, may I suggest they have about three minutes each?

6.31 pm

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to this very interesting debate. It is disappointing that SNP Members set their face against what could have been quite a consensual motion. I cannot support it because it conflates boundary changes with House of Lords reform, but we could have developed a consensus in the debate.

The House of Lords is of course an anachronism in a modern liberal democracy. We would not choose to invent it from scratch, were we able to do so, but we must nevertheless concede that its Members have the skills, knowledge and experience that we need. Because they have more time—they do not have the guillotine—and are not whipped so hard as we are, they can in some ways do the work of scrutiny, overview and improvement better than we can in this House.

We must also concede that the royal prerogative of absolute medieval monarchy has been transferred over the centuries from the king or queen through the House of Lords to the Executive of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, so there has been an accretion of powers. Under such an incremental approach, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), powers have been given away so that the upper House cannot vote against the Finance Bill—following the people's Budget of 1909, and the Parliament Act 1911—and its powers have been otherwise circumscribed.

The flaw in that argument is that we had an opportunity for a once-in-a-generation change. As I mentioned earlier, because of the ludicrous proposals put forward by the Liberal Democrats—the 15-year, non-renewable terms would have meant that authority was contested between the mandates of the two Houses—that opportunity was wasted, as most Government Members would never have supported them. The issue about the authority of the two Houses is still a problem. I do not buy the argument that unicameral Parliaments are therefore better. The reason why so many EU countries have them is that so much legislation, policy making and governance is done by the European Union rather than in their own countries, but that will end very soon—because Brexit does mean Brexit.

I am an agnostic on the House of Lords—I have not made up my mind one way or the other—but my concern is that it is beginning to infringe some basic constitutional proprieties, such as the Salisbury convention. Its Members have taken it upon themselves to cut across the views of the elected Government as set out in their manifesto, which is absolutely wrong and unacceptable. Of course, we have moved on in other ways. We no longer recruit the Executive from the House of Lords but mainly from the House of Commons.

I put to the House this prospectus. It is not necessarily for the Government to bring forward legislation to reform the House of Lords. It is for the Lords themselves to do that—mention has been made of Lord Fowler's views. I believe that the Lords are potentially in the last chance saloon, certainly with regard to their authority and the belief, faith and trust of the greater public in the system of which the Lords are a part. The challenge is for the Lords to reform themselves as they have done in the past. If they do not, I fear that another Government—although perhaps not one of my own political persuasion or political colour—will take drastic, draconian action. That will be damaging to the constitutional firmament and settlement of this country, in which to a certain extent the Lords have played an important role over many hundreds of years.

6.35 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): My disgust at the undemocratic, unaccountable, unrepresentative House of Lords has been aired in this place on a number of occasions. Let us be clear that there is absolutely no case in any kind of modern democracy for the number of unelected peers to so greatly exceed the number of democratically elected Members in this place. It is quite simply astounding that plans to slash the number of democratically elected MPs are proceeding, further widening the gross disparity—

Michael Gove: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Ferrier: No, I am not giving way.

Boundary proposals have been issued. Tomorrow, Scottish voters will wake up to the news of a complete reshuffle of Westminster constituencies north of the border and firm proposals to remove six of their MPs. People will rightly be outraged.

It is vital that the Government understand that outrage and acknowledge that frustration. The reason that so many formerly disfranchised voters registered en masse and voted yes in the Scottish independence referendum was that they were fed up with the unrepresentative nature of the democratic process. They felt that Westminster did not speak to them or for them. We stand for doing things the way they ought to be done—for having a vibrant, representative democracy that reflects our diverse society. Those of us in the SNP will never take seats in an appointed Chamber.

Around a quarter of Lords appointments since 1997 have been former MPs who lost elections or resigned. It is no wonder that so many people in the UK feel disillusioned and disfranchised when unsuccessful ex-MPs get returned to our democracy through the back door. Although rejected at the ballot box, the appointed peers are able to collect £300 tax-free per day just for turning up. Between February 2014 and January 2015, £21 million was spent on Lords' allowances and expenses. That will continue to rise as the already bloated House of Lords continues to see its ranks swell. We are told that the purpose of reducing the number of MPs is to cut the cost of democracy, so why is the cost of the Lords allowed to spiral ever upwards?

I would be doing a disservice to myself and my party if I did not acknowledge that some peers are incredibly hard working and conscientious. Some contribute a great deal to society, and I have had the pleasure of working with them in a constructive manner on all-party groups.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that part of the fundamental difficulty is that peers appear to be selected for who they know rather than elected for what they know?

Margaret Ferrier: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. That is the problem, and that is why there are so many of them.

The efforts of the Members of the House of Lords whom I was talking about do not go unnoticed, and so they should surely have nothing to fear from standing for election to a democratic second Chamber. There have even been occasions when the House of Lords has played an important role in blocking or amending legislation. Imagine how much more important a function our second Chamber could play in shaping legislation if it were fully elected and fully representative. More than half of peers are over 70. I know we are facing an ageing population but to even suggest that that is representative of wider society is absurd. Twice as many peers used to work for the royal family as have worked in skilled or manual labour. That simply is not right and cannot deliver the real-life experience needed in an effective second Chamber.

It simply is not right that the boundary plans proceed. We need plans to vastly reduce the number of peers and a full review of reform of the House of Lords. In the

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meantime, the Government must discard their plans to reduce the number of democratically elected Members of Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I apologise to the two speakers who cannot get in, but I have to call the Front Benchers. I am sorry about that, but the interventions have killed us.

6.39 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): This has been a really interesting and wide-ranging debate. We have heard a number of people propose changes to the House of Lords and ways in which we can go forward. What we have not heard is anybody saying that they think the House of Lords is wonderful and that we should keep it as it is. I think there is a general feeling across the House and across the country that, in the absence of abolishing the House of Lords, we need to reform the House of Lords.

I particularly enjoyed the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard). The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) was typically thoughtful in his contribution on this matter—I have previously enjoyed his contributions—and the speech from the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) was, erm, interesting.

Michael Gove: I am very grateful that a fellow Gordonian has given way. Can the hon. Lady clear up for me an area of doubt and uncertainty? The hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) said that the SNP spoke with one voice on the issue of House of Lords reform. He said that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) was an abolitionist and that that was SNP policy. However, the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) said he did not want to abolish the House of Lords, but merely wanted to reform it. What is SNP policy? If it is abolition, is the hon. Member for Edinburgh East out of line?

Kirsty Blackman: The manifesto we stood on said that the SNP would abolish the House of Lords and replace it with a fully elected second chamber. The motion we are putting forward today gives the Government a slightly more gentle way forward. It does not suggest full abolition at this stage. It suggests making positive changes.

I want to talk about a few things that were mentioned during the debate today.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): One of the rotten things about the House of Lords and the system of patronage is the fact that Ministers who are unaccountable to the electorate can be appointed by the Prime Minister. One recent example is Baroness Ros Altmann, who campaigned on behalf of the WASPI women. She then became a pensions Minister and suddenly had selective amnesia. Is that not just typical of the system that exists?

Kirsty Blackman: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I will come on to the make-up and appointments system of the Lords.

My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire pretty much had those of us on the SNP Benches weeping in hysterics at some of the things he pointed out. He was just highlighting the ridiculous nature of the House of Lords. It is absolutely ridiculous that in 2016 deference and fawning are required. We have people dressed in ermine robes and we are expected to genuflect to them. It is absolutely ridiculous that we live in a society where that is still okay.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare said that everybody is equal in this country when we vote. Everybody is not equal in this place. Those people in the other Chamber are somehow above the rest of us and that is not right. They have not been democratically elected to those positions and they should not have preferential treatment as a result of the appointments system.

The appointments system is—well, it is frankly ridiculous. We have a Prime Minister who was not elected to be Prime Minister. She was elected to Parliament—absolutely—but she was not elected to be Prime Minister of this country. Now, because of the appointments system to the House of Lords, she has the power to choose the people who will legislate. She has the power to choose the people who will sit in that other Chamber and make laws for this country. It is ridiculous that somebody can have this power without being elected to that position.

As has been stated by a number of my colleagues and Members across the House, appointments to the House of Lords are not always made on the basis of the people who best know what they are talking about. One Member mentioned that people may be experts in their field when they are elected, but their expertise very quickly disappears. I suggest that somebody who was a teacher 20 years ago is no longer the best person to be an expert on the education system, unless they have been particularly good at keeping up with changes. We have a whole House full of former experts—of ex-experts—and it is very difficult for us because we cannot get rid of them.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making some excellent points. Does she agree that there are plenty of other ways in which these experts can give their opinion, without being appointed for life?

Kirsty Blackman: Absolutely. I have been a member of a Select Committee in this House, so I am well aware that we are able to bring people who are genuine and current experts before such Committees to give evidence. We also have a great system whereby people can submit evidence in respect of legislation.

Let me make a couple more points on the make-up of the House of Lords. As of last year, there were only two Members of the House of Lords who were under 40, which is totally unreflective of society. On the cost, the Minister mentioned that there is an average attendance of about 500 each day. At £300 a day, that is £150,000 a day just on the allowances. Let us be clear that those allowances are totally tax free. They are not salary, but tax-free allowances—and the Treasury does not even get a cut of that £150,000. Most of those Members should be paying at least 40% tax. When it comes to making changes to the cost of Government and Parliament, I suggest that that might be a good place to start.

I want to be clear about the link in the motion between reform of the House of Lords and the Boundary Commission review. If the Government are serious about reducing the cost of Parliament and about making the UK and the nations that make it up more democratic, their attempt to reduce the number of MPs—comprising the truly elected Chamber—is completely the wrong place to start. To begin with, we have the first-past-the-post system, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East mentioned, is not democratic. There are so many wasted votes. A number of them do not count because people are voting for someone who can never get elected in the seat. A system of proportional representation would be a much better way of extending democracy than trying to equalise the numbers in each constituency.

If the aim is to make the political system in this and other countries more democratic, it would be possible to make the Government a bit more transparent. The Cabinet Office is tasked with making government more transparent, but it has failed spectacularly—and I do not mean only this Government; I am not blaming this one alone, because previous Governments have spectacularly failed, too. Governments like to be in power; they like to keep power for themselves, so they like to make sure that people are not very clear about what is going on.

There are a couple more things that could be done to reform the House of Lords. We could get rid of the hereditary peers and the bishops. We could also—I think this would be a great thing to do—stop the House of Lords being able to introduce primary legislation. Why is the so-called “revising Chamber” able to introduce primary legislation? That Chamber is appointed, not elected. Members of the House of Lords should not be lawmakers in the countries of the UK. They are supposed to be part of a revising Chamber, so they should spend their time revising, not bringing legislation forward.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in the debate, and the wide-ranging contributions that we have heard from across the House. I am particularly grateful for the support we have received from some Conservative Members, which is unusual and welcome. I thank all Members who have contributed, and I hope the House will support the motion.

6.48 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Skidmore): It has been an honour to listen to this well-attended and, at times, feisty and passionate debate. I must admit that I am somewhat surprised at the SNP’s obsession with this particular issue and that they would choose this subject for their Opposition day debate. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) noted, we could have discussed other issues. I lost count of the number of times that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) talked about ermine.

Let us look at the public mood on this matter. A YouGov poll of June 2012 asked a simple question on the proposition:

“Reform of the House of Lords is vital: it should be a priority to change the system”.

Only 18% agreed, with 20% saying the House of Lords should be left alone. The overwhelming majority—52%—said that it was not and should not be a priority.

The 2015 Conservative manifesto agreed with this principle by saying that it was “not a priority” in the next—meaning this—Parliament.

As the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons said at the beginning of the debate, the House of Lords has begun reform in the last few years. Important reforms have been introduced and they have been successful because they have been driven by the Lords themselves. Since the introduction of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014, for instance, peers have been able to retire simply by giving written notice to the Clerk of the Parliaments.

Jeremy Quin: The Minister has referred to reforms that have taken place over the past few years. Does he share my concern about the possibility that the motion, as drafted, could reduce the number of appointed peers to less than the number of hereditary peers?

Chris Skidmore: That is an interesting point, which I do not think has been made before in the debate. The motion could, in fact, suggest that the number of elected peers remain at 93, which would cause something of a constitutional abnormality.

Since the introduction of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014, peers have been able to retire. Such retirement is permanent, and cannot be rescinded. More than 50 peers have chosen to retire, including 16 so far in 2016. That important reform has had an impact not just on the numbers in the House of Lords, but on the way in which it operates. The Act also provided for peers to be expelled for non-attendance, and the House of Lords (Expulsion and Suspension) Act 2015 gave the Lords new powers to expel its members for serious misconduct. The cost of the Lords has also been reduced by 14% in real terms since 2010.

Let me now deal with some of the excellent speeches that have been made today. I welcome the return of the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) to the Front Bench. We once engaged in a debate together in Westminster Hall, but I am glad to see him back in the Chamber, and I am glad to see the rest of the shadow ministerial team as well.

When speaking of the number of peers who had been created, the hon. Gentleman conveniently forgot to mention that it was a Labour Government who created 408 of the current number. More recently, Labour used a peerage to appoint Baroness Chakrabarti to the shadow Cabinet. It is a shame that the hon. Gentleman decided to undermine her position here today.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath made a fiery speech highlighting the essential fact of the British constitution—what matters is what works—and the vital role of the institutions that make up our Union. He also cited a key fact about boundary reform, pointing out that the call for equally sized constituencies had been a clarion call since the Chartists and the People’s Charter of 1838.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose), my excellent predecessor, said that he was even willing to put his own marital relations at risk for the sake of his belief in reform of the House of Lords. He also said that boundary reform to bring about equally sized constituencies was an essential priority.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I am pleased that my hon. Friend is talking about equalising constituency sizes in the House of Commons, and also about the importance of a reduction in the number of Members of Parliament. Will he reflect on the fact that the United States House of Representatives has just 435 members, and the French National Assembly 577?

Chris Skidmore: That is a good point. I also recall that back in 2010, I think, the Liberal Democrat manifesto called for a reduction in the number of seats to 500. It is unfortunate that not a single Liberal Democrat is present today to discuss House of Lords reform.

The hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) made a lively and hyperbolic speech in which, perhaps somewhat disconcertingly, he demonstrated his expert knowledge of the “Carry On” movies. My hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) dated Lords reform back to 1719, but as a Tudor historian I can tell him that the issue of membership of the House of Lords and the detested appearance of so-called new-made parvenus such as Thomas Cromwell, the Thomas Audleys and the William Cecils suggest that today’s debate fits very nicely into the finest traditions of history.

My hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) spoke about the issue of retirement. I am pleased that that is already happening, as I mentioned earlier, but I think that if those in the other place have been watching the debate, they may be slightly concerned by his talk of attrition.

The right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) mentioned recent comments by the Lord Speaker, Lord Fowler, about the size of the House of Lords and the fact that it needs to take the initiative on the issue. The Government agree that the House of Lords is too large, but believe that it must be for the Lords themselves to lead the process. My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) raised the same issue, and I entirely agree with him. He also spoke about his agnosticism on the subject, and highlighted the need to protect historic precedents such as the Salisbury convention. I agree with that as well.

Let us be clear about the motion that we are discussing. This is not just about reform of the House of Lords; this is an attack on a Government’s manifesto commitment that we are determined to introduce—equal-sized constituencies and a reduction in the cost of politics in this House. At a time when many areas of public service have made sensible reductions and savings, the public will not forgive us if we do not put our own house in order.

Let us be clear: this motion does not seek simply to delay the boundary changes and boundary reform. We have already had a delay thanks to a motion, put down and voted on by Labour and Liberal Democrat Opposition Members. If we went into the 2020 general election with things as they are now, we would be elected on data and figures dating back to 2000 in England and to 2001 in Scotland. That status quo is simply unacceptable.

There is also an historical injustice, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath highlighted. There has been a clarion call to address unequal seats for nearly 200 years, and this Government are determined to enact the historic principle of equal seats. At the

moment, some seats are almost twice the size of others. For example, North West Cambridgeshire has around 90,000 electors and Manchester Central has around 87,000, compared with Wirral West, which has approximately 54,200, and Kensington, which has 55,400 electors.

The boundary changes will address the unfairness of these current parliamentary boundaries. In Scotland, the independent Boundary Commission publishes its provisional maps and figures tomorrow drawing up the new-sized constituencies. They are provisional data, and I would encourage anybody watching this debate to get involved in the consultation process; it is closing in England and Wales on 5 December. The independent Boundary Commission is currently touring the country and anyone who is interested in constituency boundary reform should get involved.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Does the Minister accept that consideration must be given not only to the number of electors, but to geography? Constituencies such as mine in Scotland already have a landmass of 12,000 sq km. When we have constituencies that are so large, how on earth are we supposed to represent and be visible to all our constituents? This is not just about the numbers of electors; it has to be about geography and fairness for the electorate.

Chris Skidmore: When legislating on this, the previous Government absolutely recognised that point, and there is special provision in the current boundary proposals published tomorrow to protect Orkney and Shetland and the Western Isles, even though those constituencies are particularly small in voter numbers, given the wide area that they cover. Those remain unchanged. But let us look at the numbers for Scotland. Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross has an electorate of 45,898. In comparison, Linlithgow and East Falkirk has an electorate of 83,593. That is a difference of 37,695. There are almost twice as many electors. I cannot believe the SNP is defending having one elector whose vote is worth twice that of another; that is an historical injustice that this Government are determined to correct.

Dr Paul Monaghan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): I am the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross. Why not reduce the size of seats to an electorate of 45,000 across the UK, instead of increasing them to 75,000?

Chris Skidmore: It is up to the independent commission to draw up the figures, but this Government are determined to ensure that we will be the Government to introduce the proposals first advanced in the clarion calls of the Chartists 200 years ago to have equal-sized constituencies and equal votes across the United Kingdom.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 245, Noes 278.

Division No. 70]

[6.59 pm]

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena

Anderson, Mr David
Arkless, Richard
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Beckett, rh Margaret

Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Philip
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glindon, Mary
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kyle, Peter
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.

McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Shannon, Jim

Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thomson, Michelle
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Marion Fellows and
Owen Thompson

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, rh 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
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex

Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, rh Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David

Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob

Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
 Chris Heaton-Harris and
 Christopher Pincher

Question accordingly negated.

7.12 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. On Monday, I asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign and whether the Government were going to take mitigating measures to compensate the worst-affected women. He responded that the Scottish Government could use their powers to compensate them. At the end of questions that day, I raised a point of order. I was generous in my choice of language and suggested that perhaps the Secretary of State knew something that we did not—namely, that powers over pensions were coming to Scotland. I asked the Secretary of State, through the Chair, if he would correct the record, knowing full well that section 28 of the Scotland Act 2016 specifically excludes the possibility of the Scottish Parliament having competence over pensions. I was somewhat enraged to receive a letter from the Secretary of State this afternoon

which assures me that his statement was correct. We all know that people spin from time to time, but that is disingenuous to say the least, and the Secretary of State should really come clean and recognise that he has misled the House. I ask for your support as to how we can—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. First, we should not say that a Member is disingenuous or that they have misled the House. Let me see if I can be helpful here. Obviously there is a disagreement over the views and the interpretation, and I think that there is a way to deal with this—*[Interruption.]* Just bear with me. This could be helpful. You know me better than that. Give me a chance. There is a way to deal with this through the Procedure Committee, but it might be better to have a face-to-face debate in Westminster Hall. Why not put in for an Adjournment debate where this can be settled in the best possible way?

Ian Blackford: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for your advice, but there is an important issue here. The Secretary of State is giving a level of competence to the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government that they do not have, and it is important that we in this House have the opportunity to call him to account. I say clearly that he was wrong and that he should correct the record.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I understand that he says he is wrong; the hon. Gentleman has made that point. What I am saying is that a face-to-face debate would be a much better way to put the case and get the answers. That is the way forward. There is also the option of the Procedure Committee, but I think that a face-to-face debate would be a much better way to set out categorically where the answer lies.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 2016 (Consequential Provisions and Modifications) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 13 July, be approved.—(*Graham Stuart.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Student Season Tickets on the Lakes Line

7.16 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I rise to present a petition regarding student season tickets on the Lakes Line on behalf of sixth-form students in Westmorland from Windermere, Staveley, Burneside and Kendal, calling for a fair price for rail travel to school.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that Northern Rail has taken a decision to remove post-16 students from the student season tickets system on the Lakes Line; further that students face a massive increase in the cost of travel, which will mean that the journey to Sixth Form in Kendal will become unaffordable for many; and further that an online petition on a similar topic has received 308 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage Northern Rail to rethink the decision to remove post-16 students from the student season tickets system on the Lakes Line,

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001953]

Railway Stations: Car Parking Charges

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Graham Stuart.)

7.17 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise in the House the specific issue of the increase in parking charges at Rugby station that took place on 5 September and was imposed by the operator of the west coast main line, Virgin Trains. At the same time, I want to consider the broader consequences that the lack of restriction on rail operators' ability to increase car parking charges may have on our transport network.

There are many reasons why this topic is of great importance to Rugby. The rail connection is important to our local economy. Businesses locate there for many reasons, one of which is good access to London—Rugby benefits from a 50-minute journey time on the west coast main line to Euston. The number of people who commute to London, Coventry and Birmingham and use the line on a daily basis is increasing. That increase can be seen in how much the station is used, which has pretty much doubled since 2007-08, when 1.16 million entries and exits were recorded, to 2.04 million in 2014-15.

The provision of parking at Rugby station has increased as passenger numbers have increased, but a significant milestone in the development of Rugby station was the west coast main line modernisation that took place in 2008. The vast improvement in reliability and journey times was welcomed by the many people in Rugby who use the line. Prior to the modernisation, the parking was originally on the south side of the station—the town side—in car parks one and two, but there has always been a tradition of private operators making use of vacant sites in the vicinity. In many cases, that competition kept prices down, and of course residents and commuters have also used on-street parking, which has led to the substantial use of resident parking permits around the station.

Significant additional and welcome capacity was provided on 1 September 2009, when a new multi-storey car park was delivered, providing 535 spaces, over five levels and with CCTV. The delivery of that car park coincided with an increase in the daily rate from £6 to £7, and in the cost of an annual season ticket from £655 to £858—a 31% increase. That was met with a lot of complaints, particularly from the Rugby Rail Users Group. I must pay tribute to the RRUG for its campaigning for services and facilities at Rugby station. In the face of that complaint, and of the competition from the locally run, independent vacant site opposite the multi-storey, the rise was reversed and the price went back to £6. It has been held at £6 for a number of years, as a consequence of the competition provided by the local, independent operator.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman will know that Rugby is not too far away from Coventry, so many people commute from Coventry to work in Rugby and vice versa. The cost of peak-time parking in Coventry has increased by about 33%, while weekday off-peak parking was recently axed at Coventry and some commuters can be paying about 140% more. That has been allied to the recent price

increases in rail tickets, the abolition of student facilities and the abolition in respect of senior citizen railcard holders, so the cost is considerable. During the same period, wages over the past five years have probably increased by 10% whereas prices for rail tickets have increased by about 30%, including parking.

Mark Pawsey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, because the increase that he refers to in Coventry took place at exactly the same time as the increase that took place in Rugby. I am sure he will share my concern that we received less than a month's notice from Virgin about the new price increase that became effective on 5 September—I received a notification on 9 August. Not only was that inadequate notice, but it came at a time when many people were on holiday, which led to a great number of emails coming into my inbox from constituents who were bothered about not only the short notice, but the fact that the increase in Rugby was 50%, with the daily rate increasing from £6 to £9. More importantly, at Rugby the off-peak charge of £4 has been abolished, with the annual charge increasing at the same time from £735 to £950—a 30% increase.

One of the first things I did, as a diligent MP, was to write to Virgin, asking it for justification of the increase it had imposed, and to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), whom I am pleased to see in his place. In its replies, Virgin argued that the rate it had previously applied was a discounted one, which is certainly true, as the rate had decreased from £7 to £6 a day in the face of local competition. It also argued that the car park was usually full by 9 am and so there was no benefit from having an off-peak rate. Virgin also spoke about local comparisons, but the rates it quoted to me were mostly from car parks at other stations—Virgin referred to Coventry and tried to imply that its car park offered better value for money because it had better facilities.

Mr Cunningham: The car park charges have increased from £5 to £12, which is a considerable increase, by any stretch of the imagination.

Mark Pawsey: I am very much aware that the situation in Coventry is rather more serious in that the hon. Gentleman's constituents have to pay a greater increase on a higher price than my constituents do in Rugby.

The Minister was very kind in his reply. He expressed some sympathy with my case and referred to his own experience on the west coast main line, using Preston station. He pointed out that, regrettably, car park charges are not covered by the franchise agreement, and that the franchise operator is able to choose to increase charges as it sees fit. He also told me that his team had been made aware by Virgin that one of its objectives was to discourage non-rail users. That certainly may be the case in the hon. Gentleman's constituency where the station is much closer to the town centre, but I am not sure whether the same case can be applied to Rugby where the station is much more distant from the centre.

Let me deal with points that were made by the operator. Many of the comparisons that it gave me were for car parks that it operated itself. For example, it cited that of Coventry, which is closer to the city centre.

There are many locally operated car parks where the prices are considerably cheaper. For example, Warwick Parkway on the Chiltern line charges £5 a day. In looking around, I found one or two other areas where commuter stations have significantly cheaper prices. For example, commuters in Hungerford, Berkshire, are charged just £2.40 to park their car. I wonder whether the more relevant comparison for Virgin might be other car parks in and around Rugby. In the John Barford multi-storey car park in the town centre, there is a daily rate of £5. Virgin says that the removal of off-peak rates demonstrates that there is a need for further provision. I wonder whether it is taking advantage of the fact that the car park is pretty full by hiking up rates quite substantially.

I do not accept the premise that the places in Rugby are taken up by non-rail users. The station is too far from the town centre. In any event, it is not difficult for the operator to link the car park ticket to the purchase of a rail ticket, thereby making certain that non-rail users are excluded.

Mr Cunningham: The point about Coventry station being nearer the town centre is a bit of a misnomer. Most people who use that station come from the outskirts of Coventry—a mile and a half or two miles from some of the more distant parts of Coventry—and, to some extent, from some of the surrounding areas. That is a bit of a red herring.

Mark Pawsey: I hear the hon. Gentleman's views, but it should not be difficult to link the price of the parking to the purchase of a rail ticket. That would ensure that the provision that has been made for rail users is actually taken up by rail users.

One thing that is certainly happening as the price has gone up in Rugby is that people are going on a wider search for free parking. In my constituency, we had a real problem with people parking on a newly developed road, on Technology Drive, which led to all sorts of road safety problems. We have now managed to introduce double yellow lines there. I did ask one driver why they parked there. They said that they were doing so to save £6. Now that saving is £9, and there is an even bigger incentive to look around further for places to park.

The rate of increase imposed by Virgin is unreasonable. I accept that there might have been a need for an increase, but 50% is very substantial. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, commuters' salaries have not increased at that rate. Many constituents have told me that the cost of parking often exceeds the price of rail travel. The shorter the journey, the greater the proportion of their journey cost is taken up in parking. That applies to people going to Coventry and Rugby. If I park my car on Sunday evening to travel to work and return to Rugby on Thursday, I pay five times £9, which is £45, to park, but a super off peak ticket including zone 1, which has some restrictions on use, costs £38. It is crazy that the cost of parking should exceed the cost of rail travel.

I do recognise the need for the operator to recover its investment cost. The car park was clearly expensive to develop, but the increase is disproportionate. It involved no consultation and inadequate notice. I wonder whether the operator takes seriously its role of providing parking as part of an integrated transport network. At Rugby

station there is lots of travel advice and there are lots of leaflets, but I could find no information about parking charges. To a non-regular user, £9 will come as a shock.

I fear that high parking charges will lead to greater congestion on our already busy road network. I was interested to read the article in *The Sunday Times* at the weekend drawing attention to congestion having increased by 40% in four years. High parking charges are an incentive for people to use their cars, especially for shorter journeys. For a Rugby resident who travels five days a week, it would cost £45 per week to park their car, whereas the use of the M6 or the A45 is free. We are forcing people off the rail network, into their cars and on to the motorways. In addition, high charges for car parks encourage people to be dropped off and collected at the station, which adds to congestion around stations. At Rugby station, access is already a challenge, and high parking charges are only making the problem worse.

In his reply, the Minister told me that the Government have control over fares, but not over parking. The Government regulate roughly half of all rail fares and do so to make sure that rail fares are reasonable, to protect passengers from market abuse and to ensure that passengers are treated fairly. Is it not reasonable to apply that principle to car parking charges as well? In the light of the recent changes at Rugby station, is it fair and reasonable for the charge to be increased by 50%?

Mr Cunningham: Another factor is the investment in Coventry and Warwickshire. I know that the hon. Gentleman has done as much work on the issue as the Coventry MPs. Any leader of a local authority will be asked about parking because that adds to costs, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows. It is an important factor in the development of the local economy of Coventry and Warwickshire.

Mark Pawsey: Absolutely. We want to see more effective use of our public transport network. What is wrong with including car parking and the ability to control car parking charges in the franchise? There is a strong case for a joined-up approach to protect passengers. I look forward to the Minister's response.

7.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) on securing this debate, on a subject close to his heart. As he pointed out, he wrote to me only last month to set out his concerns and those of the Rugby Rail Users Group. As he rightly points out, I park at Virgin Preston on the west coast, where price rises—admittedly, of only 20%—came in last July, so I am not personally insensitive to the points that he makes.

I am sure my hon. Friend will be aware that station car parking is not a simple matter, particularly in view of the fact that we have more than 2,500 stations of all sizes across the country that link the railway with the communities and people they serve. Clearly, they provide the first and last impression of the railway and often of the communities themselves, so every station needs to provide passengers with a safe, accessible and comfortable experience. A good station should also serve the wider community with social, retail and leisure facilities. Stations

[Paul Maynard]

can and should go beyond their traditional role as portals to the rail network, and should be fully integrated, as my hon. Friend mentioned, into local transport networks to make multimodal travel far simpler. They should be catalysts for local development and play an important role in supporting local economic growth.

I urge all local enterprise partnerships and councils to think about how they, too, can support the provision of better car parking across the rail network. In that context, we can all recognise just how crucial car parks are, not least in enabling passengers to access the rail network, by parking their cars close to the station in a safe, convenient car park. That is why it is important that train operators have the flexibility to set commercially viable car park fees.

If fees are too low, the operator will provide lower returns to the Government, thereby increasing the taxpayer contribution to the railways. If fees are too high, however, the car park will be underused, and that, too, will lead to lower premium payments to the Government. A commercially flexible rate allows maximum revenue to be derived from car parking income, which reduces the requirement for taxpayer support for the franchise. It is important to stress that car park charges are not just a tool for revenue generation, but provide an important foundation for investment in not just trains but stations.

Let me try to specifically address the issues in Rugby. As my hon. Friend recollects from our reply to him, the Government do not own the car parks; train companies and others—local councils, for example—do, and that varies across the country. I am sure Virgin will have noted his criticisms of the communication strategy it adopted and of whether it has adequate capacity at Rugby and, indeed, at Coventry and other stations across its network.

Virgin West Coast has received a number of complaints from passengers that the station car park was always full. On investigation, it became apparent that the charges were much lower than in the surrounding areas and that the station car park was being used by non-rail users. I should just stress that my comments in my reply were specifically about Rugby, not about Preston, and that is what we were told by Virgin.

In a bid to be more helpful than that reply might have indicated, let me say that my hon. Friend might be interested to know that the Rail Delivery Group, which represents the train operating companies, is looking at how to better measure the passenger experience, because the group, along with the Government, recognises that it does not just start when a passenger boards a train. The group is looking at the entire range of ways that the passenger interacts with the railway network. That will include not just buying a ticket before they get to the station, but such things as car parking, ease of access, the likelihood of finding a space and ease of payment.

All that work will inform Transport Focus as it looks into how to better design the national rail passenger survey. That survey, in turn, has a specific impact on franchise design and the way in which we hold train operating companies to account. If a franchise fails to meet satisfaction levels in the national rail passenger survey and underperforms, it will suffer financial penalties. As we constantly refine the survey, issues such as car

parking will form part of that and may well become something on which we choose to judge train operating companies.

As more spaces become available for those who wish to catch a train, I hope we can start to bring fees into line with those in other car parks in all local economic areas. We want to encourage investment in car parking and, moreover, to drive better value for money across all station facilities. That can partly be done through franchise competitions, and that will include the forthcoming west coast franchise competition, where we will challenge bidders to innovate in how they seek to provide car parking. We will look at how they want to improve facilities at stations for all users.

We are already doing a lot to improve car parking as part of the wider passenger experience. Train operating companies will need to take a much longer-term view of managing station assets than they do at the moment—over 40 years, rather than just the existing franchise length. That will include car parks, and it will mean incremental improvements continually to the quality and standard of the facilities on offer. Investment patterns will now start to mirror not just a train operator's franchise term, but the lifespan of the bit of infrastructure that the train operating company will be investing in. That will not mean just a lack of potholes; it might mean more innovative ways to deliver car parking that meet the passengers' needs.

We are also conducting a review of security and safety in our car parks and stations, because a well-lit, well-maintained car park, covered by CCTV, provides passengers with reassurance not only that they are safe at a station but that the price of their parking fee and travel ticket has been reinvested back into the railway.

Innovation is also crucial. That is why I am looking to train operating companies to make it easier for the passenger to pre-book a parking space, so that they have certainty when they arrive at the station that they will be able to park without difficulty; nor will they need to delay their journey or risk missing their train by having to use complicated coin-operated payment machines that may or may not be out of order. We will also seek to make far better use of station travel plans, which my hon. Friend mentioned, so that passengers understand the options that are available to them in how they reach the station that best meets their needs and is the most sustainable method of transport.

Mark Pawsey: I welcome the Minister's remarks, but will he address the broader integrated view? There is a grave danger that if car parking charges are disproportionate, that will encourage more car use and encourage people to seek to park for free around the station, causing problems for residents.

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The impact will differ from station to station across the network. The stations that I am familiar with all have their own quirks and differences in terms of how local people utilise them, approach them, park, drop passengers off, and so on. This can have a substantial impact on the local road network. It is very important that train operators work together with local highway authorities to plan the local road network immediately around the station to make sure that no passenger is inconvenienced. I can think of many cases at peak

hours where, all too often, we have traffic jams. I hope that train operating companies will hear my plea for them to work far more closely with the local highway authority to plan traffic flow and ensure that, wherever problems can be minimised, we seek to do so.

As I keep saying, we need to continue to invest in our station facilities.

Mr Jim Cunningham *rose—*

Paul Maynard: I will happily give way. I was about to talk about Coventry.

Mr Cunningham: The Minister said that he hoped that the train operators would take note of what he says. May I suggest, in the nicest possible way, that it would not be a bad idea to take our concerns to a meeting with the train operators' representatives?

Paul Maynard: I should praise the hon. Gentleman for almost being psychic in predicting what I was about to say. I am more than happy to have that conversation next time I meet Virgin West Coast, which I try to do as frequently as I can. Only today, I heard about some of the interesting plans in Coventry for a new boulevard into the town centre and potential new car parking facilities that, by expanding capacity, might allow costs to come down. Coventry is having an interesting time. I gather that in Rugby there is also substantial investment in cycle-rail facilities, which help to ensure that people have more options in how they get to the station, including bicycle hire. That is a good step forward.

Mr Cunningham: The Minister will know that in Coventry we have the NUCKLE project, which we are hoping to get started very soon. That has taken about 10 years to get off the ground.

Paul Maynard: I am always happy to hear news of Coventry's progress. My visits to Coventry are probably in my diary as we speak, without my even knowing about it. I look forward to going there.

I recognise that capacity, as much as anything else, is often key in car parks around stations. It is important to design them to allow extra decks to be placed on top with greater flexibility, because demand is going to keep on growing as more and more people use our railways. We also need to redesign stations themselves better to reflect passenger flows through them. Many of these stations are Victorian and often have not been updated since that time. We will always need to invest in our railways and to change and adapt to face that increasing demand.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby recognises that such extensive change cannot happen overnight, but I hope that he and his constituents will see the change in the station environment at Rugby—as at Coventry and elsewhere—that long-term investment can bring. I hope that I have laid out some aspects of how we are seeking to re-evaluate the entire spectrum of the passenger experience, so that we capture every interaction between passenger and rail network to make sure that, where there is dissatisfaction, we as a Government not only become aware of it but start to use it as a tool to drive up improvements on behalf of the passenger through the franchising mechanism. I will be more than happy to report back to him once I have spoken again to Virgin West Coast.

Question put and agreed to.

7.44 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 19 October 2016

[MRS CHERYL GILLAN *in the Chair*]

Almshouses

9.30 am

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered alms houses and their role in housing policy.

I acknowledge at the outset the assistance I received from Charlie Corlett, who interned in my office over the summer, in preparing my contribution to this important debate.

For the past four years, I have served on the housing and care committee of my city livery company, the Merchant Taylors; we take responsibility for the 130 or so almshouses that the livery company owns and manages in Lewisham and Lee in south-east London. At a time when public policy urgently demands greater housing availability, we should not forget one of the more traditional social housing classes. The almshouse sector thrives and should properly be regarded as having an important part to play in the ongoing housing ecosystem of the 21st century.

Almshouses are the oldest form of social housing. They collectively house some 35,000 of our fellow citizens in dwellings managed by roughly 1,650 charities. The tradition of almshouses began as far back as the 10th century, during the reign of King Athelstan; the oldest still in existence, the Hospital of St Cross in Winchester, was founded between 1133 and 1136. They were originally devised as places of residence for the poor and elderly, and some almshouse charities now provide care for other groups such as ex-armed forces personnel and those with limited financial means. In many rural areas in the UK, almshouses are the only source of housing for those in need and therefore play an important role in the social housing landscape.

With fewer new homes being built, house prices still increasing and an ever ageing population, the need for almshouses has never been greater. I also think that a number of philanthropists would regard an investment in almshouses as an appropriate way of making a contribution in the longer term, particularly in the light of the safeguards that I will come on to later in my speech. I hope that we can raise the profile of almshouses through the all-party group on almshouses, through debates such as this one and through sensitive Government policy, and I will come on to a couple of issues that I hope the Minister will address.

Let me give some background. Almshouses play an important role in providing not only dwellings for the vulnerable or elderly but an additional level of care that cannot be found in other forms of social housing. Most of the charities that run almshouses still provide wardens, who have been shown to be pivotal in the reduction of the social isolation that is all too prevalent among elderly people. It is also especially important that residents have someone to call if they are in need. That very

personal relationship between trustees and residents is expressed strongly by the Almshouse Association, a support charity representing 95% of all almshouse charities in the UK. Prince Charles, a patron of the association, has observed that there is a “unique bond” between trustee and beneficiary, and that many trustees are willing to give something substantial back to their community because they grew up nearby. There are also communal areas in many schemes where the tenants can socialise.

With four fifths of almshouse charities in the UK running fewer than 20 dwellings, each charity can provide a higher standard of care for its residents. Almshouses, especially for the elderly, strike the right balance between the required level of care and the dignity and independence that could be ignored in an alternative form of accommodation. As the broadcaster David Dimbleby, who is vice-patron of the Almshouse Association, puts it:

“Almshouses are communities of people choosing to live together for their mutual comfort and support. Where old people’s homes can often have an air of despair, of the elderly being abandoned by their families, almshouses speak of optimism and confidence in old age.”

In general, almshouses have played an important role in creating a stable environment for people who need an intermediate option between common social housing and care homes.

The Almshouse Association does a significant amount of work on the preservation of its ancient buildings. My experience with the Merchant Taylors is of a mix of housing: we have some very modern new build on a particular site in Lewisham, but literally a stone’s throw away there is one of our most popular listed buildings, which goes back to the 1820s, and which the company had at a time when that part of what was then Kent, and is now a bustling inner-London borough, was made up of open country.

In an appeal made on the Almshouse Association’s 65th anniversary, its chairman Simon Pott condensed its motives into three simple points:

“supporting member charities in providing good quality housing for those in need, promoting the welfare and independence of residents and preserving the historic tradition of almshouses for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Almshouses also make a significant contribution to our national heritage: 35% of their buildings are listed. Simon Pott states that the almshouse movement today is “vibrant” and “progressive”, and I vouch for that. The durability of these institutions throughout the past millennium and the critical role they play today are reason enough to justify the support that they rightly receive.

I was delighted to launch the all-party group on almshouses last month with the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), who apologises for not being able to come down from west Yorkshire today because of the important by-election in her neighbouring constituency of Batley and Spen tomorrow, but who is here in spirit. I know she supports, on a cross-party basis, much of what I am saying today. In setting up the all-party group, we wanted to draw attention to almshouses as a vital component of our housing sector, and to highlight some of the legislative challenges that they face in the 21st century, a number of which I shall draw to the Minister’s attention today.

[Mark Field]

A portion of almshouse charities are not registered social landlords—RSLs—and that can create specific challenges in relation to part 3 of the Housing Act 2004 and the national planning policy framework. The Act allows local authorities to designate geographical zones that feature particular types of deprivation, within which providers of residential accommodation can be required to hold a licence for each dwelling that they own or manage. Local authorities can charge a fee for such licences. The rationale for that policy is to identify rogue private landlords and clamp down on some of their worst practices.

Unfortunately, unless almshouse charities are RSLs, they can be inadvertently caught out by that legislation. It would be unfortunate for them to be regarded as being risky, as if they were rogue landlords. Consequently, such charities, many of which have only a handful of properties under their auspices, can be forced to pay tens of thousands of pounds for licences for the homes they provide, even though they manifestly do not exhibit the characteristics of rogue private landlords. They cannot pass on the costs of the licence to residents, since that would cause financial hardship and would probably be forbidden under charity law.

The Almshouse Association made a submission to the Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation on houses in multiple occupation in December 2015. It asked for a statutory instrument to exempt almshouses from the legislation, but I understand that to date there has been no progress on that. Can the Minister confirm that we will get that legislation in place as soon as possible?

Almshouses have been caused difficulties by some local authorities' interpretation of what constitutes affordable housing under the national planning policy framework. In cases where almshouses are not formally registered as providers of social housing, a number of councils have required almshouse charities to meet section 106 obligations, when the charities themselves have been developing new almshouse dwellings. That approach is clearly paradoxical, since the dwellings fit the statutory definition of social housing in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. The Almshouse Association made a detailed submission to a DCLG consultation in February, but as I understand it, a formal and final response is still awaited.

On almshouse charities that are RSLs, there is concern about the impact of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, which obliges rent for tenants to be cut by 1% per year for four years. Under the Act, "tenant" was understandably defined in a way that included almshouse residents, but the definition of "rent" included the modest contribution that residents are asked to make to maintenance costs. In that instance, the Government were responsive to the concerns of the Almshouse Association and exempted RSL almshouses from the obligation for at least a year. The association is anxious to ensure that that correct exemption is made permanent.

The Minister will be aware of the proposal to cap housing benefit at local housing allowance rates for residents of registered social landlords. That will potentially have a significant—indeed, devastating—impact on the finances of some almshouse RSLs, as charity law prevents them from charging a weekly maintenance contribution, which would put residents in financial hardship. In recent

years, many almshouse charities have built high-specification accommodation for pensioners under the affordable homes programme, which assumes that charities will be able to charge residents up to 80% of the local market rent. The charities committed to the affordable homes programme on the assumption that a weekly maintenance contribution at that level would be covered by housing benefit. When that concern was raised with the Government, a short-term exception was made once again, but understandably, almshouse RSLs would like to see the arrangement made permanent and explicit.

Given the historical roots of so many almshouses, it goes without saying that most almshouse charities were founded long before the Equality Act 2010 came to pass. However, a significant number of almshouses have constitutions that, alongside the basic criterion of need, restrict the beneficiary class, perhaps by age or gender, or sometimes by religious belief. In order to make such restrictions lawful, the charity must, of course, satisfy a plethora of Government bodies that the restriction is a proportionate means of satisfying an existing housing need—something that such bodies can understandably be a little jumpy about endorsing. The Almshouse Association recommends that the issue be overcome through an amendment to the 2010 Act effectively stating that, in the context of their charitable rules, almshouses are deemed to meet the test.

All that only goes to highlight a somewhat wider problem, whereby housing legislation and the associated regulation increasingly conflicts with charity law, making it difficult for trustees to be absolutely sure that they have achieved full compliance. That goes well beyond the issue of almshouses. New charitable legislation has come into being, but ever more legislation does not, of course, mean that the loopholes are being closed, and sometimes new problems arise.

Almshouses are a vital contribution to the social housing landscape in the UK, providing care and decent living standards—really, they are rather better than decent; in large numbers of cases, they provide superior living standards—for vulnerable groups of people in all corners of our nation. I trust that the Minister will take up some of the issues that I have raised. I made sure he was aware in advance of what I wanted to say, so hopefully he will provide satisfaction on some of the points. On others, though, he may have to go back to his Department. I hope that, alongside the establishment of the new all-party group, my speech will mark a fresh chapter in Parliament's understanding of the almshouse movement and, beyond that, ensure that it will thrive for many centuries to come.

Moreover, as I have said, I hope that more knowledge of almshouses will inspire a new generation of philanthropists to make their contribution, in this century, to alleviating the problems of housing shortage, especially, but not exclusively, for the less well-off in our communities. We have to recognise that the housing crisis—I shall use that term, for want of a better one, although I know that it is, to a certain extent, subject to political dispute—means that we have to use every tool in our toolbox. Our landscape will not be covered with almshouses tomorrow—we will not go from 35,000 to 350,000 overnight—but they are part and parcel of that effort.

Philanthropists should feel that, through almshouses, they can make a longer-term contribution to solving the genuine problem we have with housing shortage. They can last through many generations to come. It would be

a wonderful development if modern almshouses were to sprout up in villages, towns and cities in the decades ahead. I hope that this debate will help to start the process of making sure that we, as opinion formers and policy makers, can make the almshouse movement strong for this century and beyond.

9.45 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) on setting out the case so clearly for us all. He made sure that the issues that are specific and perhaps peculiar to almshouses are on the record. I am not aware of any almshouse charities in Northern Ireland, but the issues the right hon. Gentleman discussed are important. It is also important to put on the record our need for such organisations to deliver throughout society, which they very clearly do and must continue to do. I thank those who prepared the background information on this debate. It is very detailed and helpful and will help with my contribution. I shall make only a brief speech, but it is important that we put on the record the importance of almshouses and of charity.

Over the years, people with compassion have stepped in with charity when Governments have perhaps been unable to help. There are around 160,000 general charities in the UK. According to the “UK Civil Society Almanac 2012”, charities have a combined income of some £37 billion. That is money raised from charitable giving, charity shops and fundraising events, and by volunteers actively trying to make people’s lives better. That is the core issue of this debate, as has been made clear. Charities provide for and help people when they are abandoned by others—such help has to be encouraged at this time.

Almshouses are charitable organisations, some of which are also registered social landlords, and mainly specialise in housing for the elderly. They specifically set out to help those who are vulnerable and in need of help and care that they cannot get or are not getting through the welfare system. There is a specific role for the work that almshouses and charitable organisations do for the people they target and on whom their help is focused.

Of the 1,700 almshouse charities throughout the country, more than 30% occupy listed buildings, and many have celebrated anniversaries of over 400 years. Such anniversaries are important to record and acknowledge. Another feature of their rich heritage is that many almshouses lie in the heart of towns and villages, which ensures that they remain closely integrated in the local community. It is important to recognise the added benefit of their location, which ensures that residents are close to shops and services. In other words, they are in the right places and have the right focus in local communities.

The majority of today’s almshouse residents will be of retirement age and of limited financial means, and will have lived in the vicinity of an almshouse charity. Residents pay a weekly maintenance contribution, which is similar to rent but different in law, and less than a commercial rate. I hope the Minister will be able to respond to the concerns raised by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster on the specific circumstances of almshouse residents.

Almshouses make a real difference to the quality of the lives of their patrons. The House must recognise that and make the appropriate allowances. They help to fill a gap, which is why I support the representations made by the right hon. Gentleman and others on the Government’s intention to cap housing benefit entitlement for residents at local housing allowance rates and the requirement to reduce rent levels by 1% each year for four years from April 2016.

I am given to understand that, as a general rule, the rents charged for supported housing are higher than the rents charged on other social housing units. Thus the impact of capping housing benefit entitlement for residents of supported housing has caused particular concern, which is the reason for the debate. The whole point of these charities is to provide the additional care and support that is needed, and capping housing benefit in this way will make things even less affordable for those who need a little help to feel a little safer in their community, or even to stay in the community in the specific place where they are living.

About 17% of older people are in contact with their family, friends and neighbours less than once a week and 11% are in contact with them less than once a month. These figures underline the need for consideration—perhaps special consideration—of almshouses. Two fifths of older people say that television is their main company; for some older people, it is their only company. When there are so few community hubs, it affects the quality of life of almshouse residents, so almshouses should be protected.

It is a well-known fact that residential care is an expensive business. It is my belief that this cap will be a false economy, as it may leave some people feeling that they have no other option than to go into a home. For those who do not have a large pension, which will include those who benefit from almshouses, the cost of their going into a home will be met by the taxpayer.

With respect, I do not see any great saving in this change. I am sure that the Minister, when he responds to the debate, will say that that is not the case, but in my 31 years of representing the general public in an elected capacity, I have seen too many cases where the refusal to put a care package in place has led to people being put in residential care, at a much greater cost and causing much greater difficulty for those people physically, emotionally and financially. That must be taken into consideration.

I conclude by saying that our elderly people need help and consideration, and I feel that these proposals to cap housing benefit are not necessary or useful in any way, shape or form at this time. Therefore, I fully support my colleague and right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster, if I can call him that, in bringing forward this matter for consideration in this House, and I look to the Minister for a positive response. We have a duty in this House to help those who need help, and legislatively we can help them. Let us hope we can do that as a result of this debate.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): I do not think that we have any other speakers from the Floor, so we will move to the wind-ups.

9.51 am

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mrs Gillan.

I start by thanking the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) for securing this interesting and informed debate. While I have always taken an interest in housing issues in general throughout my political career—I started as a councillor in West Lothian many years ago—and in supported accommodation in particular, I must admit that prior to this debate being announced I was unaware of almshouses. I suspect that that will not be uncommon among the general public and indeed among other MPs.

My research shows that there appear to be only two almshouses charities in Scotland: the John Menzies (Southern) Limited Employees' Benevolent Fund, which is based in Edinburgh; and the Ellen Carter Almshouses charity, which is based in Hawick. Both of them are outwith my area, but I will do more research to find out about them after this debate.

As was shown by the examples given by other right hon. and hon. Members during the debate, almshouses clearly play a valuable role. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, they give us compassion and charity, which are two key aspects that should not be outwith the housing market at all; indeed, they are the basis for providing homes for people.

The Scottish National party is pleased that the UK Government have abandoned plans to reduce the housing benefit for vulnerable people who stay in supported accommodation, which would obviously include almshouses and women's aid refuges, which is another form of accommodation that is particularly important to me.

Local housing allowance rates do not consider the additional cost to refuge providers or other providers of supported accommodation of leasing accommodation from social landlords, nor the associated service charge costs. If they had not received the existing level of housing benefit to cover their costs, refuges may have been forced to close.

It is estimated that 62% of housing association tenants in Scotland rely on housing benefit to help them to pay their rent, which highlights just how significant housing benefit is. I am delighted that the cuts from the application of LHA rates to supported accommodation over the 2016-17 to 2019-20 period will not be made. I congratulate the Government on taking that stance. Instead, we are told by the UK Government that from 2019-20 onwards they will introduce in relation to England

"a new funding model which will ensure that the sector continues to be funded at current levels".

I welcome that because obviously it will result in additional funding being given to the Scottish Government to support the supported accommodation sector.

In the last Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government exceeded their target of building 30,000 affordable homes by completing 33,490 affordable homes, with 22,523 of those completions being of social rented homes. Building more homes has been made a national infrastructure priority by the SNP Government. Over the course of the next Scottish Parliament, the SNP Government will build 50,000 new affordable homes, 35,000 of which we have pledged to make social rented homes. Ensuring

that everyone in Scotland has access to good-quality housing is a vital part of the Scottish Government's drive to ensure economic growth, promote social justice, strengthen communities and tackle inequality.

The Scottish Government have a number of innovative schemes for funding and building more of these homes. So far, we are the only UK Administration to invest in charitable bonds—more than £40 million has been invested in charitable bonds, providing the development finance for 581 affordable homes and generating more than £9 million for charities. I wonder whether that is an example of an approach to housing funding that could perhaps benefit almshouses throughout the wider UK and indeed throughout Scotland, because, as I have said, we have only two almshouses charities at the moment.

The Local Affordable Rented Housing Trust is another scheme. It is helping to provide 1,000 affordable homes across Scotland. Launched in October last year, it was set up to provide long-term, mid-market rented housing across the country. Overall funding for the LAR will be more than £100 million, with a loan of £55 million from the Scottish Government being matched by private investors. We also have the National Housing Trust initiative, which was launched in 2010. It was the first Government guarantee-backed housing programme in the UK.

As well as building more homes, which is absolutely fundamental, the right to buy was abolished for all social housing tenants in Scotland by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014. That will preserve housing stock for the future and means that social landlords will receive a steady rental income. It also allows landlords to issue short secure Scottish tenancies to address antisocial behaviour and help homeowners in genuine need.

In conclusion, while almshouses clearly have a significant role within the housing policy model, in the Scottish context they are currently relatively minor. However, there is definitely more that can be done. More knowledge of almshouses would be useful—I would certainly be interested in joining the all-party group on almshouses—because it is an interesting approach. The comment was made that we can have more modern almshouses. That could fit in with different funding models and provide a valuable social context.

I thank the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster for securing this debate and I am delighted to have been able to take part.

9.57 am

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under you, Mrs Gillan, in my first debate on the Front Bench.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) on securing this debate and thank him for the courtesy of sharing with me in advance what he was going to cover. This is not the first time that he and I have spoken about housing issues in London in this Chamber, even in the short time I have been in Parliament. I also thank the Almshouses Association for its briefing for this debate and welcome the formation of the all-party group on almshouses, under the co-chairmanship of the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch).

As the right hon. Gentleman described so eloquently, almshouses have been around for centuries—long before the advent of council and housing association housing—and, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) clearly described, they continue to play a valuable role in the provision of housing in this country. They particularly benefit people such as pensioners and people with disabilities, those on low incomes, and occasionally members of other specific groups, such as ex-services personnel. In my constituency we have several almshouses. The Isleworth and Hounslow Charity manages 80 units, spread over six sites, for couples and single people. It is an amalgamation of a number of small almshouses and distributive charities. The oldest, Ingrams, was endowed in 1664; the newest, Tolson House, which is part-funded by the Homes and Communities Agency, was opened in 2012.

One of the strengths of almshouses is their local connection. They often have local trustees and many provide on-site staff, a social focus and a support element. In addition to the human side of providing homes, the older almshouse charities preserve an important part of our nation's built heritage. So while almshouses may be historic, they are very much alive and vibrant and play an important role in the mixed housing economy in our communities, particularly for those who cannot afford to buy their own homes.

Before I address the specific points raised by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster, I want to set the place of almshouses within the wider context of all supported and social rent housing. We have seen six years of failure, leading to the greatest housing crisis this country has seen for many decades. Housebuilding is at the lowest level under any Prime Minister since 1923. Rough sleeping has doubled. Private rents have risen faster than incomes. The number of new Government-funded social rented homes has fallen by an astonishing 98% since 2010, and housing benefit has risen by more than £4 billion a year in cash terms despite a series of punitive cuts. The pressures on all providers of supported and social rent housing could not be more difficult, and almshouses have not been spared.

Having set the scene, I would now like to turn to each of the points that the right hon. Gentleman raised. First, on the issue of licensing, he seeks a statutory instrument to exempt almshouses from the relevant legislation. Local authorities have discretion over fees and the licensing regime, which is there to catch rogue private landlords. I am sure that almshouses are able to work with their local authority to ensure that the licensing regime does not bring them into the ambit of something meant for a completely different purpose. However, I understand that there are some set categories for exemptions that almshouses have to follow and that presumably do not include non-registered almshouses. That is the reason for the concern that the right hon. Gentleman expressed. If he is suggesting that local authorities should have more discretion than at present to amend who is covered by the licensing regime, we would have some sympathy with that.

Secondly, on the national planning policy framework and planning obligations, the right hon. Gentleman says that some local authorities have interpreted non-registered almshouses as essentially being private developers that are therefore required to carry out section 106

obligations to provide affordable housing when that is essentially what their core business is anyway. It could and indeed should be a matter for local negotiation. Section 106 agreements are locally negotiated and agreed. Having spent some years as the chair of my local authority's planning committee and many years as a planning committee member, I am well acquainted with the powers of the planning system and the ability to have local discretion according to local circumstances and need. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that some clarity and guidance on this area from the Department would perhaps be helpful to almshouses and planning authorities. We need to deliver much needed affordable housing more urgently. We share the belief of the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) in the importance of delivering many more good quality, truly affordable homes, and soon.

Thirdly, the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster raised concerns from almshouses that the rent cut for social rent housing might impact on almshouses once the first-year exemption is over. Opposition Members regret that the arbitrary rent cut has potentially compromised the building of new affordable homes and damaged the relationship between providers and the Government. It has led to plans for the development of new affordable housing being scaled back at a time when there have been devastating cuts in social housing investment since 2010.

Finally, the shadow Secretary of State for Housing, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), has led opposition to the cuts to the local housing allowance for supported housing since last December. It is dangerous and damaging to cap housing support for some of the most vulnerable people and to uprate it by a measure of inflation—the consumer prices index—that explicitly excludes housing costs. The National Almshouses Association is not alone in expressing concern about the Government's plans to introduce a cap on the amount of rent that housing benefit will cover. It will mean that housing benefit for social sector tenants cannot be higher than the local housing allowance rate for private rent tenants.

The measure was due to apply to tenancies signed after 1 April 2016 and to come into force from 1 April 2018 onwards for everyone else. However, in March, following pressure from the shadow Front-Bench team, the Government announced a one-year exemption for tenants of supported housing. In July, my shadow Front-Bench colleagues secured an Opposition day debate in which they called on the Government to fully exempt supported housing from their cuts to housing benefit and to consult with supported housing providers to identify ways in which all vulnerable people who need supported housing can access it.

In September, immediately before the conference recess, the Government announced through a written statement that they would be deferring the application of LHA rates to social rents for supported housing further, until 2019-20. However, the Government will be going ahead with the cut to supported housing providers from next April. The written statement raised more questions than it answered. The policy is delayed, but the cuts will go ahead. There is no figure on the new funding pledged, yet the Budget scored the so-called savings at £990 million.

[*Ruth Cadbury*]

Furthermore, Government announcements on the LHA cut have stalled the development of many new supported housing schemes.

I am concerned that the Government decision to delay detailing their cuts to supported housing will leave tens of thousands of the most vulnerable people without the certainty they need to live their lives. The written statement lacked important details on the top-up funding that will be devolved to local authorities and on the new funding arrangements. The continuous delays in outlining a complete package of support for almshouses and, indeed, the whole supported housing sector are unacceptable. It is vital that supported housing is fully exempt from these cuts. Otherwise, as the hon. Member for Strangford has so clearly explained, we risk pushing more pensioners into the far more costly care system.

In conclusion, almshouses, along with all providers of social and affordable housing, deserve to be treated by this Government with the same degree of respect as they afford their residents.

10.6 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I welcome the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) to the Opposition Front Bench. I start by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) on securing this important debate on almshouses. He has a great passion for housing issues, particularly in relation to London. I welcome the opportunity to highlight the important role that almshouses have played for many years and, as we have heard, centuries. They continue to play that role in providing affordable housing for communities across the country.

The creation of the new all-party group on almshouses rightly reflects the importance of these organisations, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his new role as co-chair of the all-party group. I understand it had its inaugural meeting on 14 September. The group has a remit to promote the issues affecting almshouse charities and their continuance, development and strengthening throughout the UK. This debate is an excellent start to the all-party group's work, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend and commend him on his efforts on behalf of the wider almshouse movement.

The tremendous dedication and work of the trustees and other volunteers who run and maintain these important organisations are fine examples of community spirit and localism that directly impacts the lives of residents. As a former leader of Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, I am aware and proud of the huge contribution that the Nicholas Chamberlaine Trusts' almshouses have made to Bedworth in the neighbouring constituency of North Warwickshire since 1840. The almshouses were designed by the notable Victorian architect Thomas Larkins Walker to house the poor of the town. The charity was established in 1715 as part of a bequest by Nicholas Chamberlaine, who was the rector of Bedworth for 51 years. With 28 homes still housing those in need, it is clear that this almshouse trust and others across the country continue to play a most valuable role in supporting vulnerable residents, particularly in many rural areas, as

my right hon. Friend detailed. As he noted, almshouses also make a critical contribution to our national heritage by maintaining many listed, important and fine buildings that might otherwise be neglected.

On the points made by my right hon. Friend and other hon. Members about the legislation affecting almshouses, the Government have listened carefully to the concerns raised by almshouses that are registered providers of social housing about the potential impact of requiring them to implement the 1% per annum social rent reduction set out in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. This important measure reduces housing benefit costs in the social rented sector in England, which had increased by 25% over the previous decade. However, we recognised that there were particular circumstances that could make it more challenging for almshouses to absorb this reduction. We therefore announced last month that the one-year exemption that had previously been granted would be extended for the full four years of the social rent reduction. I can reassure my right hon. Friend that regulations to that effect will be in place shortly.

We also recognised that the application of the local housing allowance rate might have a bigger impact on almshouses and other specific types of housing. We announced last month that we will extend the deferral until 2019-20 while we consider whether any additional arrangements will be necessary for this group, alongside the new funding model for supported housing that will then be introduced. These decisions have been warmly welcomed by the Almshouse Association.

On the LHA rates, I can reassure the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), who may have seen our statement that was laid before the House, that our solution for supported housing includes a commitment to provide the same quantum of funding as at present, which is an extremely important point.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster also raised the issue of selective licensing. Licensing is intended to apply to most private landlords operating in a particular area, including registered charities. It is intended to raise standards in the private sector and provide a level playing field between landlords. Around 20% of almshouses are registered providers of social housing and, as my right hon. Friend said, are therefore exempt from licensing since they are subject to other regulatory controls. The remainder, although almost exclusively registered charities, are private landlords. The Government are not convinced that there is a compelling case for those providers to be treated differently from other private landlords operating in areas that are subject to selective licensing.

I am grateful for the Almshouse Association's response to our consultation paper on extending the licensing of houses in multiple occupation, in which they raised particular concerns about licence fees payable under selective licensing schemes. We published our response to the consultation yesterday. Local housing authorities can charge fees to cover their costs in administering a selective licensing scheme. The Government do not regulate the fees that are charged. However, it is important to recognise that the fees must be reasonable and transparent, and, in particular, should cover only the cost of running the scheme; they should not raise additional revenue above and beyond that.

Mark Field: My concern is that those fees are a pretty strong disincentive for new or existing almshouse providers to expand in areas—often the most vulnerable areas—where there is a more acute need for social housing. Everyone wants to ensure that rogue landlords are properly brought to book, but the licensing fees are substantial. The sorts of almshouse charities that we are talking about may have only a dozen or so properties under their auspices. Given that it is meant to be a small number of areas that have licensing arrangements, almshouse charities might think twice about continuing to undertake their work in areas of acute social need. That would be a regrettable and unintended consequence of what is being proposed.

Mr Jones: My right hon. Friend is probably aware of a Government White Paper on housing, which I will talk about in more detail in a moment, that will be published shortly. I am sure that he will feed his further concerns into the work that the Government are conducting.

Exempting almshouses from fees and offering substantial discounts is within local authorities' discretionary powers. As the legislation stands, providers can speak to their local authorities about licensing fees and whether the local authority is willing to give an exemption or a discount. Before a local authority introduces a licensing scheme, the legislation requires them to take reasonable steps to consult organisations that are likely to be affected by the designation, and they must consider any representations made in accordance with the consultation. I would encourage almshouses and other private landlords to put their case to local authorities at that stage.

Mark Field: All of us would like local authorities to have as much discretion as possible, but we have to be realistic when it comes to the charging of fees. Given the financial constraints that all local authorities are under, it is unlikely that a local authority will exercise much discretion when faced with the prospect of losing substantial fees. I am afraid the Minister has not provided as much comfort as I would like, but I take on board his point that we can make full representations as part and parcel of the White Paper process. Almshouses do not have a special status, but they are recognised as an important part of the broader ecosystem, and some of the understandable protections required for tenants and local authorities alike should not necessarily apply, given the historic importance of almshouses, in contrast to the rogue landlords that much of the legislation is designed to try to deal with.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): As we have plenty of time, I am being generous, but I remind Members that interventions are supposed to be short.

Mr Marcus Jones: My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster has made several points, and he can feed those into the housing White Paper process.

On the national planning policy framework, which was mentioned, there was a consultation last December on changes to the framework, with a view to increasing the supply of housing. Any changes that will be made in the framework will be undertaken through the White Paper process. Again, I encourage my right hon. Friend and other hon. Members to feed into that. The impact

and implementation of section 106 agreements will again be looked at in the forthcoming housing White Paper, and I encourage my right hon. Friend to look into that.

I was a little disappointed by some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth in the wider context of housing, because her party presided over the lowest ever level of house building in 2009. House building has picked up significantly since then. From 1997 to 2010, the stock of affordable homes in this country fell by 420,000. Since 2010, the coalition Government and the current Government have created 293,000 affordable homes. In this Parliament, we are continuing that, with a programme for another 100,000 affordable homes to rent. During the 13 years that they were in power, the Labour Government built fewer council houses than this Government have in the last six and a half years.

Ruth Cadbury: Perhaps the Minister could explain something relating to the net gain or loss of social rented housing since 2010. In my area, the right-to-buy discount is so high that council houses have been sold through right to buy at a faster rate than new social rented housing, both council and housing association, has been built by our local authority. On his comment about the number of council houses built under the last Labour Government, it is true that council house building was low, but housing association new builds were very high. We also delivered the better homes programme, in which a high proportion of council homes were brought up to the decent homes standard—they had been neglected for many years before that.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. I do not want Members to slip into bad habits just because we have a reasonable amount of time.

Mr Marcus Jones: It is quite obvious that the number of affordable homes declined steeply during the period of the last Labour Government. We are trying to address that, as well as the legacy of the biggest financial crash in living memory, which has caused significant challenges in bringing forward new homes. We are now on the right trajectory.

It is clear that in this Chamber we all share the same appreciation, respect and admiration for the almshouse movement and its volunteers. I look forward to continuing to work with that movement and my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster, and his colleagues on the APPG. We recognise the value of almshouses, and the support that they provide, and the crucial work that they do, in many of our communities, and are keen to see that continue.

10.22 am

Mark Field: As the most senior Member in the Chamber at the moment—other than yourself, Mrs Gillan—I apologise if I have led colleagues astray with the bad habit of extremely long interventions. I have made speeches that are shorter than some of the interventions that we have been able to make today. I would not wish the lack of attendance in this debate to give rise to the sense that there is any apathy or dissent about this issue. There is a lot of consensus, which has been seen in most of the contributions.

[Mark Field]

I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for his contribution about the view from the other side of the Irish sea. On Scotland, I am sorry that there are relatively few almshouses in Scotland. Mischievously, I might wonder whether there was no great tradition of philanthropy in Scotland; more to the point, it may be that, with a different legal system, housing tenure developed in a different way north of the border. As the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) rightly pointed out, there are some almshouses in Scotland.

I know this is not exactly my party's policy, but I agree with the SNP view that we need to ensure that increasing amounts of social housing—this would certainly apply to almshouses—should not be subject to right to buy. One way that we will encourage people—philanthropists, as I have said—to put money into the sector and get into it in a big way is if they are assured that the properties will not be subject to right to buy and that those charitable measures will be maintained in perpetuity.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) on her debut. I think she will find that this particular debate was rather more consensual than some of the more fractious outings she will get in future in her role. There is some merit in making sure that all parties are aware of speeches in advance, and I would always advise colleagues to do it, particularly in these sorts of Westminster Hall debates, because it enables us to address the issues. I am sure the hon. Lady recognises, as another central London MP, going down Sutton Lane and other parts of her constituency where there are almshouses, that they are very much sought after and remain an important part of her community.

Finally, I thank the Minister. It was very useful to be able to put my speech forward in advance. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) for doing her dutiful work as the Parliamentary Private Secretary and making sure the papers got passed on. I have found comfort in much of what the Minister said. There are one or two issues that we will have to look at again, but I hope the work of the APPG and the association will play an important part in ensuring that almshouses are not a forgotten, Cinderella area in the housing White Paper, but are in the mind of the Ministry going forward.

Mrs Gillan, thank you so much for allowing us to speak at length, albeit not at as much length as we thought we were going to. That gives you a quick half hour for coffee as well, which is a perfect solution for a Wednesday morning.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered alms houses and their role in housing policy.

10.25 am

Sitting suspended.

Glenfield Hospital Children's Heart Surgery Unit

11 am

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of Glenfield Hospital's Children's Heart Surgery Unit.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. The future of Glenfield's children's heart surgery unit is a hugely important issue not only for my constituents and patients in the east midlands but for people across the country—Glenfield currently serves patients from 296 parliamentary constituencies. The Minister will know that 34,000 people have signed an online petition to save the unit, and I understand that many thousands more have signed the paper petition. That shows the strength of local feeling.

Like the hospital, I support NHS England's desire to achieve the highest possible standards for children's heart surgery across the country. NHS England's standards rightly state that it must be able to

"reserve the right not to commission services from a provider that is so significantly at variance from the standards as to cause safety/quality concerns. Such a decision would only be taken following a risk assessment of the costs and benefits of both closure and non-closure."

However, there is no evidence that Glenfield is at significant variance from the standards—in fact, quite the opposite. According to independent assessments, Glenfield has among the best clinical outcomes in the country, including for mortality rates and readmission rates, which are significantly lower than those in other centres. Clinicians at Glenfield rightly say that it makes no sense to close a centre that is already achieving precisely the good clinical outcomes NHS England wants.

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on achieving this debate, which continues the public debate we have been having in the county and the city in respect of the hospital. Does she agree that the hospital and its children's heart unit not only has a regional and national reputation of the highest order but is a world centre of excellence, and for it to be closed or for any of its services to be decreased would be little short of wanton destruction? I urge her to urge the Minister to take that message firmly back to his Department.

Liz Kendall: I completely agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I am sure that not only the 57 patients from his constituency who are currently receiving treatment but the thousands of patients who receive ongoing care, including for extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, which I will come back to, rightly value the high standards at Glenfield. It would be a huge and terrible mistake to close the centre.

In a recent letter to the hospital, NHS England raised concerns that more complex cases are being referred to Birmingham from Glenfield. I take issue with that. I would like the Minister to confirm that, in fact, only four such cases have been referred to Birmingham in the past three years, and that it is a professional obligation to seek second opinions when that is in the best interests of patients. That is enshrined in General Medical Council good practice guidelines and was recommended by the

paediatric and congenital services review group in its recommendations in 2003. Few complex cases are referred but, when they are, it is in the best interests of patients. That should not be used as a reason to close the unit.

A second part of the standards that NHS England has set out is ensuring that sustainable numbers of children have surgery in each unit every year. The aim is to have 375 operations per year over the next three years, with 500 a year in the longer run. I want to make this clear: the hospital has told me and NHS England that it is on track for 375 cases this year and that, if it does not quite achieve that, it will not be by significant numbers. It therefore rightly asks: "Why put a centre on track to reach those standards at risk by this proposal?"

On the longer term goal of achieving 500 cases a year, there is an important question. More than 500 children in the east midlands need congenital heart surgery every year but do not all go to Glenfield. NHS England claims that that is due to patient choice. Some patients in Peterborough or Northampton will choose to go to places such as Great Ormond Street, but the claim that all patients in Northampton choose to go to Great Ormond Street while all patients from Peterborough choose to go to Leicester suggests the goals are more about historic referral patterns than about genuine patient choice.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate and for all the campaigning she is doing on this important issue. I could raise many constituency cases, but I will raise just one. Scarlett from Kirkby was minutes from dying by the time she arrived at Glenfield. Her mum, Zoë, told me that she would not have made it any further than Glenfield. Keeping Glenfield open is a matter of life and death for so many children.

Liz Kendall: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. She is absolutely right. Many patients and their families have told me that they simply would not be alive if they had had to travel much further. If the proposal goes ahead, the east midlands will be the only region in the country without a children's heart surgery unit. It does not have to be this way, because if we properly manage the number of referrals across the east midlands, there will be enough for Glenfield and other surgery units to keep going. It is a balance between getting the right numbers and having quick access to a centre.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for initiating the debate. May I reiterate the point made by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero)? My constituents who have contacted me about the hospital live a long way from Leicester—some of them live virtually on the South Yorkshire border, many miles away—and have used the hospital not just for routine surgery but for emergencies. They already have to drive 60 miles to get to Leicester, but if they had to go to Birmingham or Great Ormond Street, it would put lives at risk.

Liz Kendall: I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns. We have to be aware that it is not just about the essential, vital emergency care and surgery when it is a matter of life or death and whether children can reach

a centre in time. It is also about ongoing care and support. It is not just that they have one or two operations when they are little; they need care and support right through into adult life.

We must remember that children are part of families, and families have obligations. They have other children they need to get to school and they have work commitments. To throw that up in the air when they have those arrangements and their children need ongoing care and support is denying those patients choice.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is doing an excellent job in presenting the case. My young constituent, Jack Phillips, will be celebrating his first birthday later this month thanks to life-saving open heart surgery at Glenfield. His dad, Christopher, wrote to me:

"At such a devastating time having the support of our family who were able to visit from Nottingham regularly while we were in Leicester was vital to us."

Is that not one of the issues about a centre being within easy reach of other parts of the east midlands?

Liz Kendall: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have to think about people's needs in the round—the need for high-quality surgery; ongoing care and support; and, critically, help for those families for whom this is a terrible, frightening and ongoing experience. Making the east midlands the only place without a heart surgery unit does not make sense.

It does not have to be this way. In its own standards, NHS England says:

"Networks will need to establish systems to ensure that referrals...between centres are managed in such a way as to ensure that each clinician is able to achieve their numbers".

Its own standards say that people need to work together so that everyone can achieve the best. However, at the moment NHS England is not developing the work. I am a long-standing champion of patient choice, but the current proposals deny choice to patients from across the country who use Glenfield children's heart surgery unit on an ongoing basis.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for securing this important debate. The Glenfield children's heart unit is vital not only to my constituents but, as she said, to people across the east midlands and beyond. She has alluded to the significant progress that the hospital has made in just the past year in driving up the number of referrals and operations. That significant progress gives me confidence that it is on track to meet its target. Will she join me in urging the Minister to press NHS England to pause, look at the excellent clinical outcomes and the progress on increasing referral numbers, and think again, to keep this hugely important children's heart unit open?

Liz Kendall: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point. The clinicians at the unit and the hospital bosses have striven continually to improve patient care. They are not complacent for a second. They bust a gut to keep making improvements. Those improvements will, I am sure, be recognised and acknowledged by the 58 patients in the hon. Gentleman's constituency who are receiving continuing care at Glenfield. He is right to say that NHS England needs to look in

[Liz Kendall]

detail at the improvements that have been and are being made. When NHS England came to the centre in September—I was more than a little disappointed that it had not made a visit before it launched its proposals to close the unit—it found that some of its perceptions were wrong.

One important standard for improving care is co-locating—bringing together, in other words—the different children's services, which includes not just surgery but other heart support, paediatric intensive care and wider services available to children. NHS England initially marked Glenfield down for not having plans to co-locate services. I am afraid that that was completely and utterly wrong. On coming to the centre it discovered that there are indeed such plans. I would like the Minister to confirm that University Hospitals of Leicester trust has plans to complete the co-location of all the services before April 2019, and has secured all the capital budget necessary to build its new children's services hospital. To put all that at risk when the hospital is trying to improve services would be a big mistake.

Finally, I want to discuss the impact on other services in Leicester and the region of closing the children's heart surgery unit. It is extremely important. As I said earlier, NHS England has itself said that it would not put forward proposals to close the unit unless it had done a risk assessment of the costs and benefits, including the knock-on effect on other services. It has not yet done that. I am concerned about two services in particular. Glenfield has a world-leading extracorporeal membrane oxygenation service. Essentially, if someone has a weak heart and needs surgery on it, ECMO enables oxygen to be pumped back into the blood during the operation. Glenfield's is only the second ECMO service in the world to treat more than 2,000 patients. It conducts 50% of the entire ECMO activity in the UK. It also has the country's only national patient transport service enabling people who need ECMO to be transferred swiftly from anywhere in the country to Glenfield. The huge benefits of that service were seen during recent flu crises.

Lilian Greenwood: I thank my hon. Friend for being so generous in giving way again. My constituent, Alice Parker, was born at Queen's Medical Centre 17 years ago. Her condition was so grave that her mum, Vicki, was told to expect the worst, but thanks to the expertise of staff at Glenfield who provide ECMO, Alice is now studying for her A-levels at Bilborough College and hoping to go to university to study biochemistry. Vicki describes the centre as "a true national treasure", but actually, as my hon. Friend has said, it is an international treasure and it is vital that we do not lose the service.

Liz Kendall: That is right, and in fact Glenfield's ECMO training is currently being provided not only to people from three other UK centres, but to people from seven other countries. NHS England seems to think that that work can be picked up and transferred somewhere, quickly and immediately, without loss of quality. In fact, as I know from speaking to many clinicians and nurses, that is not as easy as NHS England says.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this important debate. Given that Glenfield's outcomes are among the best in the

country, and having listened to accounts of the expertise it offers, I wonder whether she will, with me, encourage the NHS to rethink its decision to close it.

Liz Kendall: Absolutely. It would be a big mistake and it does not have to be this way. The unit is improving its care. It already has some of the best outcomes in the country. If we manage the referral patterns, we can ensure that Glenfield and other units continue to improve their care and support. I am sure that the 41 patients from the hon. Lady's constituency who are currently being treated at Glenfield will appreciate her speaking out.

UHL is one of five tier 1 providers of acute specialised services in the midlands and the east region. Our amazing paediatric intensive care unit is part of a network of centres covering 17 million people. Any significant change in the number of children with complex heart problems being moved away from UHL will have a serious impact on the PICU and destabilise the network. That is not my view—I am not a clinician—but what the clinicians in the hospital tell me, yet so far NHS England has failed to publish any risk assessment of those knock-on effects on Glenfield's ECMO or paediatric intensive care. The continuing uncertainty about the unit is terrible for the clinicians who are working there and trying to improve care. The threat of closure may be one of the reasons why it is not receiving as many referrals as it normally would, but it is also deeply destabilising for the families whose children need ongoing care and support.

Sir Edward Garnier: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for letting me intervene on her twice. I concur with the point she made: the situation makes it very difficult to attract clinicians, nursing staff and technicians to such a hospital. We need the expertise but, if there is a state of confusion or uncertainty, things become more difficult. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) wanted to make that point—he has many constituents who work in or use the hospital—but unfortunately, owing to parliamentary business, he was unable to be here at 11 o'clock.

Liz Kendall: I know the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) would have spoken up on behalf of the 94 patients in his constituency who are receiving ongoing care and support.

It is a miracle that Glenfield is providing such incredible standards of care when it has been under the cloud of uncertainty for so many years. It makes no sense to close a unit whose clinical outcomes are already among the best in the country. It makes no sense to deny choice to hundreds of patients who are treated or want to be treated at Glenfield, and their families, when, if services worked together to achieve the number of referrals that we need, our unit and others could benefit and improve. It makes no sense to leave the east midlands as the only region in the country without a children's heart surgery unit, or to put at risk a world-leading ECMO unit and a vital, high-quality paediatric intensive care unit that supports millions of patients across the midlands and the eastern region.

The Government must think again. They must look in detail at the current evidence from the hospital about its outcomes; they must listen to the views of patients;

and they must balance all of those issues—high-quality surgery, ongoing care and support, the knock-on effect on other services and whether other units in the country would be able to treat all those extra patients before they have made huge improvements, which will take time. It does not make sense. It does not have to be this way. We can work together to save the unit and improve care for everybody.

11.20 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) on securing the debate and on speaking with such evident passion and knowledge on the subject. I think she has impressed us all with her grasp of the issues. I also congratulate all other hon. Members, from both sides of the House, who managed to secure an intervention during her speech. They made their points clear, with some personal testimony from constituents who have used these facilities, and also made clear how important it is to the region of the whole, in their eyes, that the facility continues.

The future of congenital heart disease services at Glenfield hospital is an important subject, not just regionally but as part of the national plan to ensure that we have world-class heart facilities for infants and children in this country. It is a matter that has been around for some time, and I understand the point the hon. Lady and others made about how unsettling the uncertainty around the future of services is for the dedicated staff who work in those units. It is appropriate that we try to bring these discussions to a head in an orderly, thoughtful and timely way, so that that is not prolonged.

It is worth emphasising that NHS England's review is about ensuring that CHD services are delivered with high quality and that they are consistent and sustainable for the future. The common standards, which have been agreed by clinicians, other experts and patients, are the driving force to make sure every patient benefits from the same excellent care. It is worth reminding hon. Members present that the proposals for changes to adult and children's congenital heart services at Glenfield and the other centres across the country are at present just that: proposals. They are not final decisions. NHS England will be consulting on the proposals in the coming months, so it is not appropriate for me to respond in detail to all the concerns raised here today.

The hon. Member for Leicester West asked some specific questions, some of which I will be able to address but most of which, I regret to say, I will not. Those will be drawn out when we come to the consultation, so that the points she made about the current performance of the hospital can be brought to attention through the consultation process.

Liz Kendall: I am soon to meet the Minister at the Department of Health. If he is not able to answer the specific questions I have raised, perhaps he can come back to me on those issues at that meeting next month.

Mr Dunne: The hon. Lady has put her points on the record. I will be able to respond to some next month, but some will be part of the consultation, which we anticipate will get under way in the new year.

I am trying to put this in context, particularly in relation to the amount of time that we have been considering how to create excellent centres of congenital heart surgery for children across the country, which has been the subject of concern for more than 20 years. Clinical experts and national parent groups have repeatedly called for change, and there has long been an overwhelming feeling that change is needed. Added to that is the fact that children's heart surgery has become ever more complex and technically demanding. Surgeons now operate on babies who may be only hours old, which demands a highly-skilled and technical team of doctors and nurses who maintain those skills through regular practice. That is why standards are being progressively raised for each surgeon over time, as the hon. Lady referred to.

As I am sure everyone involved in the Glenfield debate is aware, the process of consultation began quite a long time ago. A Safe and Sustainable review was launched in 2008 by the Department of Health under the previous Labour Administration—of which the hon. Lady was a member—to start addressing these issues. The decisions that came out of that review were challenged in court, via referral to the Secretary of State and subsequently to the independent reconfiguration panel. As a result of those challenges, the Safe and Sustainable review was halted. Responsibility for reviewing children's CHD services was then handed to NHS England, which decided that its new review of those services would also encompass services for adults.

NHS England's review team consulted extensively with patients and their families, clinicians and other experts before publishing the new standards for CHD services, which only came into effect in April this year. Hospital trusts providing CHD services were then asked to assess themselves against those standards and report back on their plans to meet the standards within the set timeframes. In July this year, following those assessments and further verification with providers, NHS England announced its proposals for change.

In the case of Glenfield, NHS England is minded to work with University Hospitals of Leicester to safely transfer CHD surgical and interventional cardiology services from there to appropriate alternative hospitals. The rationale for that is that NHS England is currently of the view that Glenfield does not meet the standards to be a centre for surgery and interventional cardiology, and is unlikely to do so in the future. The hon. Lady eloquently expressed her belief, presumably based on conversations with the hospitals and with clinicians, that they are on track to meet those standards. That will be important evidence to make available to the consultation, and I am sure that she and other hon. and right hon. Members will do so over the months of the consultation. NHS England's assessment is based on information provided by the trust itself about surgical numbers, surgeons and their expertise, and which specialist services are located together. It has not come from the centre; it has come from the trust itself.

There is no plan to close Glenfield as a provider of CHD services, other than in relation to surgery. NHS England is instead proposing to continue to commission specialist medical services that make up much of the pre and post-surgical care required by people with congenital heart disease. Closing the medical services for CHD at the hospital is not mentioned under any of the proposals. That has understandably prompted much concern,

[Mr Dunne]

including about the impact that such a transfer might have on issues such as children's extracorporeal membrane oxygenation—ECMO—services and paediatric intensive care services, as the hon. Member for Leicester West identified. As I understand it, when the review was undertaken in 2008, Glenfield was not only the first hospital in the country providing ECMO services but was the leading hospital. There were not many others. Today there are five centres offering ECMO services, so Glenfield is not in quite as strong a position as it was a few years ago.

The hon. Lady referred to the petition on Glenfield and the many hundreds of thousands of people who have signed it, which demonstrates the strength of public support for maintaining the service. It shows how passionately people feel about these issues and their strong desire to defend their local services. At this stage I reiterate to those people that no final decisions have been made. We need to wait and see what comes from the next stage of the process, and I am sure the petitioners will make their views known during that. I appreciate that hon. Members may be frustrated that I cannot answer all their questions at this stage. The hon. Member for Leicester West has referred to the meeting we will have in the coming weeks. I look forward to that and to attempting to answer some of her questions.

I remind hon. Members that this is not about cutting costs—that allegation has not been made by anyone during the debate, which I appreciate. It is about trying to improve the standard of service for some of the most sick infants and children in the country, and to ensure that we have a robust, sustainable pattern of expertise in a slightly smaller number of hospitals. Precisely where we get to in deciding which hospitals should provide those services in future will come through the consultation that will take place. The intent is for a formal, three-month public consultation that will conclude in the spring, with decisions being made next summer. I am sure all hon. and right hon. Members present will participate in that debate and I look forward to hearing their contributions.

Question put and agreed to.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Education (Merseyside)

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We will need to start the winding-up speeches at 3.40 pm. At least six Members have indicated they wish to speak. You can do the maths. I will not impose a time limit, but if colleagues are courteous to one another, you will all get in; otherwise, you will not. It's as simple as that.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered education in Merseyside.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I welcome my hon. Friends from across Merseyside to the debate—I include the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), who is an hon. Friend on this occasion—as we all speak up for education in Merseyside. We have an opportunity today to do a number of things. The first is to celebrate the many excellent things that are happening in education across the Liverpool city region. The second is to identify some of the challenges, and the third is to seek answers from the Minister on a number of key issues.

I would like to start by thanking and paying tribute to the hard-working people across the education service in Merseyside, including the teachers, the support staff, the governors who give their time voluntarily and, above all, the children and young people. I want to address some issues that relate to my own constituency and then speak a little about challenges facing the city of Liverpool, before finishing with some observations about opportunities for the city region.

Let me start with the early years, which are so vital. We know that people's life chances are shaped when they are very young. We know the impact of poverty and family background. One of the greatest achievements of the previous Labour Government was Sure Start and the creation of children's centres, which play a crucial role in my constituency. Liverpool has faced massive cuts in its funding from central Government. The city council's cuts from central Government are as high as 58%, yet the council has sought to protect children's centres. At the moment, the council is seeking funding from the clinical commissioning group to enable children's centres in Liverpool to continue, which I very much hope is successful.

I want in particular to talk about nursery schools. I have two nursery schools in my constituency: Ellergreen and East Prescott Road. Both were judged outstanding by Ofsted, yet both are in fear of their funding being under threat. I know that the Government have promised an additional £55 million nationally for nursery schools over the next two years, but I seek assurances from the Minister today that the long-term funding that is so vital for our nursery schools will be provided, so that their excellent work in providing quality early years education is protected.

I have some great primary schools in my constituency. We know that school readiness in Liverpool is significantly below the national average. Communication, language

and literacy levels are well below the national average. That is why the schools rightly place a great emphasis on literacy and numeracy. I contacted the Liverpool Primary Headteachers Association ahead of today's debate, to ask its members for some thoughts. They expressed a number of fears that they wanted me to share with the Minister. They fear that the new assessment framework in primary schools might increase the likelihood that teachers are teaching to the test. Their fear is that we are not sufficiently recognising the great progress made in our primary schools, as well as rightly looking at the outcomes. They have a significant concern—of course, this is not only in my constituency—about recruitment of school leaders in the primary sector. In particular, they mentioned recruitment and retention of newly qualified teachers and subject specialists in our primary schools.

We have a fantastic set of special schools in my constituency. Two weeks ago, I met students from Sandfield Park School in my constituency to discuss the future of education in Liverpool. That was part of a superb initiative by the Liverpool Schools Parliament, which gives a real voice to children and young people in the city of Liverpool. I would like to mention Jeff Dunn, the council officer who leads that great initiative.

Whenever I visit schools and colleges, one of the issues that comes up most consistently is information, advice and guidance, and in particular what is available for those in the 14 to 19 age range. There are issues of quality, consistency and impartiality. Availability of good information, advice and guidance is crucial at both 14 and 16. It is particularly important that we address this issue for those who are not going down the A-level route. That issue has been raised with me by colleagues in further education and by the excellent university technical college and studio school in Liverpool.

There is a school in my constituency that I have mentioned before, and I mention it again today because it is an example of best practice. Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School provides superb advice and guidance from age 11. It issues year 7 students with a passport, which is updated through their years at school. It has industry days, where people from different occupations are invited to come in and talk to the boys so that they can learn about potential occupations. That is a fine example, but sadly it is still too rare. Will the Minister tell us what the Government are doing to encourage and spread best practice across the board in information, advice and guidance?

Connected to that, we still have not got the issue of high-quality technical, practical and vocational education right in this country. I see great work in the City of Liverpool College, in the Alt Valley Community Trust and its North Liverpool Community College in my constituency, but whenever I talk to leaders in further education and in technical and practical education, they talk about spending cuts in FE and uncertainty—for example, about the implementation of the apprenticeship levy.

I am keen that the most academic students have the best opportunities they can. Last year, I established the Liverpool to Oxbridge Collaborative. I am working with eight local secondary schools to ensure that the most academically able students have the information and advice they need, and that they have the opportunity to visit Oxford and Cambridge and get help with their

applications and interviews. I have been struck by the enthusiasm that the students who have been identified to be part of the project have shown, by the amazing support they have had from their parents and by the commitment of the schools and teachers to it. The goal is simple: the most academic pupil at a comprehensive school in my constituency in north Liverpool should have the same chance to get into our best universities as students at the top private schools. They will get the full support if they make that choice.

Of course, education is not only about young people. Lifelong learning is critical. I am struck in my constituency and across Merseyside at the positive work that trade unions do in promoting education—for example, via Unionlearn, the Trades Union Congress learning and skills organisation. I am also proud to be a patron of the Workers Educational Association, which does fantastic work in Liverpool and across the country.

In 2012, the Mayor of Liverpool, Joe Anderson, set up an education commission. He invited my noble Friend, Estelle Morris, to chair that commission, and its report, "From Better to Best", was published a year later. Over the last two decades, we have seen a significant improvement in the quality and results of schools across Liverpool. GCSE performance has moved from well below national average to much closer to it, reaching a peak in 2012 of 56.8% of students achieving at least five A* to C grades including English and maths. However, those results started to fall back after 2012, to 48.6% last year. I am encouraged that the provisional results suggest we have turned the corner, with Liverpool schools' results going up to 51% this year. That is still below the national average but it is an improvement on last year.

A lot has been done since the Mayor's commission. The Liverpool learning partnership is a very exciting innovation that recently gained charitable status. It is a membership organisation, and its members are the schools of Liverpool. Almost every single school is a member, including academies and free schools and the further education college. It is taking forward a number of programmes, such as "City of Readers", which takes up the challenge that Estelle Morris set to make Liverpool the United Kingdom's foremost reading city; "Liverpool Counts", which seeks to focus on numeracy; and the new cultural education partnership. The aim is to work with schools, local authorities and School Improvement Liverpool. It is an excellent example of collaboration and I urge the Minister to study the strengths and achievements of the Liverpool learning partnership and to learn lessons for policy in other parts of the country.

Last year, the Mayor and Councillor Nick Small, the cabinet member for education, asked me to chair a strategy group to establish a Liverpool challenge. The vision is straightforward. How do we make reality of the mayor's education commission report? How do we move from better to best? What can Liverpool schools learn from one another? What can the world of education in Liverpool do to learn from the world of work and what can we learn from other parts of the country?

When I was a Minister, I had the privilege of leading the London challenge. I recognise that Liverpool in 2016 is very different from London in 2003. There is not the extra money there was at that time and the context is of course different, but I believe we can learn from School Improvement's experience in other parts of the country and indeed of the world. I am delighted that we

[Stephen Twigg]

have engaged the support of Sir Tim Brighouse, who worked with me on the London challenge, and the Education Development Trust, led by Steve Munby, to support schools in Liverpool to achieve that further improvement.

The goal is simple. To use the Sir Tim Brighouse's phrase, we want to improve on previous best. There are many components, and one is to ensure we have the money to improve on previous best. There is real concern across Liverpool about the potential effect of the proposed change to the schools funding formula. I tread with care, because I realise that other parts of Merseyside might benefit from the proposed change, but I am focusing on the city of Liverpool, where estimates suggest we could lose £300 per child when the formula changes.

I know that the new Secretary of State has delayed introducing the new formula and I welcome that delay. I urge the Minister to listen to Liverpool schools' concerns so that we do not lose out when the funding formula change happens, because it is vital to have the money we need to be able to deliver the quality education that children and young people have every right to deserve.

Finally, I want to say something about the role of Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) is here today. Devolution provides great opportunities for local communities, local people and local authorities to work together to achieve real improvement.

On education, the existing devolution agreements are positive. The adult skills budget is devolved, which is critical because of the number of adults across the city region with no formal qualifications, and is significantly higher at 11.5%, compared with a national figure of 8.6%, which is a national scandal, but our percentage is higher. Having the adult skills budget devolved is crucial, and we have some powers over apprenticeships and post-16 education and training, including leading on a local skills strategy. These things are important. The metro mayor, working with the combined authority, can truly drive a skills agenda that meets the needs of employers and citizens across the city region. Will the Minister do all he can to ensure that the city region has the resources it will need to do that properly?

I urge the Government to go further. I served as a Minister in the Department for Education, and it is fair to say that, whoever is in power, it tends to be rather centralist in its approach to policy. It was thus when I was there and it remains so now, particularly with the planning and commissioning of new school places around the country. Decisions are made at the centre. That is wrong and goes against the spirit of devolution, which is that decisions should be made close to where the people affected by those decisions live. Liverpool's city region is of the right scale and size to be able to plan for future school places. Will the Minister work with the city region to explore devolution of the regional schools commissioner's work?

Ultimately, the Liverpool challenge, which is about the city of Liverpool, could be taken up across the whole of Merseyside. It would be a more successful challenge if that were done because there are lessons to be learned from different parts of the city region.

This debate deliberately has a broad title to enable colleagues to participate and to raise a wide range of issues. I have focused on just some of those issues: funding, the pace of change and the narrowing of the curriculum. I want to finish by making an observation and then reiterating my six questions for the Minister.

The observation is that teacher morale is really important and morale in our education system now is at an all-time low. That concerns me enormously because money and resources are critical and the accountability framework has a massive impact. The curriculum matters and assessment matters, but having highly motivated and committed teachers, support staff and leaders in our system is surely the most important ingredient of a successful education system. Will the Minister reflect on that? We all have a responsibility to ensure that morale is raised across our education system.

Will the Minister safeguard funding for nursery schools nationwide? Will he encourage best practice on information, advice and guidance? Will he learn from the collaborative approach of the Liverpool learning partnership? Will he protect the Liverpool schools budget as the formula changes? Will he look at the Liverpool city region and, in particular, ensure it has the resources to deliver the local skills strategy and move to give it powers to shape the commissioning and planning of school places? Those are reasonable demands to enable a good education system across Merseyside to become a much better education system.

I welcome the opportunity to raise these issues today and look forward to hearing from my colleagues and the Minister.

2.46 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I welcome the opportunity that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) has given us for this timely debate.

I want to make three points about education in our city region. First, I wish to raise a problem that confronts the governors and teaching staff at St Aloysius Catholic Primary School in Huyton. Its June 2015 Ofsted report stated:

"Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve very well. The progress that they make in all subjects is accelerated because of the high expectations of their teachers and good-quality support from skilled teaching assistants."

There are 310 pupils on the roll at St Aloysius, six of whom are in receipt of an education, health and care plan. The first 12 hours of each plan are funded by the school, but some of the children's needs are so significant that the school has to provide additional hours of support, causing further strain on its budget.

In 2015-16, the cost to the school of providing one-to-one support for those six children was £115,300—approximately 10% of the school's overall budget. Effectively, this means that the teachers engaged in this resource-intensive area of the school's work are not available to teach the other pupils. The cost of funding these plans, alongside investing time, money and support from educational psychologists and a range of therapists, is to the detriment of the school's overall budget. That is a growing problem, as other schools, recognising St Aloysius's strong commitment to children with special educational needs,

are increasingly referring more children there, at the same time relieving their budget of the additional costs involved. Will the Minister note that schools that refer children with special educational needs to St Aloysius still receive that part of the general budget for special needs that all schools receive, even though they may not have any children with such needs? That is clearly unfair, and I ask the Minister to look at the problem, which, though it certainly affects St Aloysius, is, I suspect, not unique to that school.

My second point is about educational attainment in Knowsley. In early years and primary schools, outcomes for children have historically been close to or in line with national thresholds, but at the end of key stage 4, when children sit their GCSEs, Knowsley falls significantly behind national standards. To help to tackle that issue, Knowsley Council has set up an education commission. I hope that the Government will engage with that commission and support the work that it is doing to try to raise attainment levels.

I am sure that we all agree that improving social mobility is essential for improving the economic prospects of local residents and breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. I welcome the Government's recent announcement on the creation of new opportunity areas across England, which will see £60 million spent on school improvement in six social mobility coldspots. However, I was surprised, given Knowsley's usual placement in the indices of multiple deprivation, that it was not selected as one of the pilot areas, so will the Government consider how areas such as Knowsley could be supported with similar targeted investment shaped around improving social mobility?

There are a couple of more positive educational developments in Knowsley. One is the Shakespeare North Trust, which has been carrying out plans to build a Shakespearean playhouse in Prescot. Its plans support the Arts Council's goal for children and young people, which includes ensuring that every child has the chance to visit, experience and participate in high-quality, extraordinary work, and the chance to know more, understand more and review the experiences that they have had.

A further positive development is Knowsley Safari Park's Bio-Inspire project, which will engage children of all ages in learning about the world around them, extending their innate interest in animals and wildlife to teach them about science, technology, engineering, humanities and art. I hope that the Government will be able to support that project also.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the constant obsession of successive Governments with the branding of schools, whether we are talking about academies, free schools or, more recently, the proposals to expand grammar schools, and with decoupling secondary education in particular from local authority involvement. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham) will have more to say about that in a moment. Far too much time and energy has been committed to issues of governance and what schools are called, at the expense of a 21st-century cold hard look at the actual education that is required to equip young people properly for the world in which we live.

In an interview in last Sunday's edition of *The Observer*, the chief inspector of schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw, gave a thoughtful account of the direction that we need

to take in education reform if we are to serve the needs of future generations more effectively. Ruling out blanket solutions, and viewing the proposal for more grammar schools as an unnecessary distraction, he also drew attention to the post-Brexit challenge of the

"need to develop vocational education in the system so the country produces young people with skills to replace immigrant workers".

That is not to say that core academic skills, and the ability for those who want to do so to follow a more traditional academic education, are not important—of course they are—but rather to argue that in some cases, there should be available a post-14 education that prepares more fully those who choose the option of vocational education.

The oft-repeated mantra about the need for lifelong education, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby referred, needs to be developed beyond windy rhetoric—that is not what his speech was—into a concrete reality. In future, instead of education being a time-specific, one-off choice, as it too often is at present, it should be lifelong and flexible—in other words, an education for the 21st century.

2.54 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on having started this crucial debate. I do not know about you, Sir Roger, but I think that we hon. Members often find ourselves talking in this place about things we do not know a great deal about. Happily, I do not think I am in that position today, because I spent 30 years teaching in a variety of schools on Merseyside. I was married to a supply teacher who taught all over Merseyside. I have been a member of a local education authority and a school governor. I have had four children educated on Merseyside, and I even started my education in, I believe, the constituency of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, at Corinthian Avenue Primary School, if it is still there. The hon. Gentleman is nodding his head, so it must be.

I want to make just a couple of observations. Liverpool and Merseyside are seen as problematic in educational terms, but as Michael Wilshaw said in drawing attention to some of the problems:

"Are you really telling me that they lack swagger and dynamism? That they cannot succeed in the way London has succeeded? These are the cities that built Britain. They pioneered a modern, civic education".

When I think of the history of Liverpool and Merseyside education, I think of a number of cracking schools, or schools that have been very good quality. Some of the names are now historical; some of the names have been changed, and sometimes the structures of the schools have been changed, but I am thinking of St Francis Xavier's College, Liverpool Collegiate School, Quarry Bank and even Ruffwood in its pomp. I also think of Blue Coat, Alsop, Holly Lodge, the Liverpool Institute, which I know has gone but which my dad went to, as did two members of the Beatles, Prescot Grammar School, which I attended, De La Salle, St Margaret's, St Julie's and so on. There are a lot of good schools in that mix, and a lot of very eminent people were pupils at those schools. Incidentally, many of the schools that are now wholly private, such as Blue Coat, started off as schools with a particular impetus to address the needs

[John Pugh]

of the most deprived children in Liverpool. There is a great academic tradition there, and we ought not to be in any way shy about declaring that.

Unfortunately, there has also been quite a mediocre tradition, in terms of technical education, and there is another less commendable tradition in the area: many families and many generations across Merseyside have seen education as a necessary evil—as a time-consuming interlude before the real world of work. In the past, that meant the docks, car factories, wholesale distribution or whatever. We can call that low aspiration, but at one time it was a perfectly realistic aspiration, because there were those jobs. Sadly, there are not those jobs now. The world has moved on, but attitudes have not shifted across Merseyside quite as quickly, so there is a problem that we need to face up to. The problem is that it is a low-skill economy. Despite all efforts in the past to do a great deal about that, not a lot has changed over the last few decades. There is low educational attainment in certain areas. What worries all of us, including, I know, the Minister, is the tale of girls and boys who simply do not achieve what they should, and who face a problematic employment future.

I know that the solution is pretty complex. It is multifactorial; schools are only part of the solution. We have to address such issues as housing, employment and family structure. However, it strikes me that the educational fix is pretty clear; it was well laid out by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby. Good early-years education is crucial, as is family support alongside that for those people who are unable to support their children in the way that we might hope. Strong school leadership is pivotal, and explains the destiny of some of the schools that I mentioned. Morale, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, is also crucial, because it is no good having a great leader if he is not followed by troops who are persuaded that he is doing the right thing and are supportive of the task. Capital and revenue resource clearly makes a difference, and underpins the success of programmes such as the London Challenge. Also necessary is an intolerance of failure, which the Minister has voiced on several occasions.

The interesting thing about that solution, which I think we would all recognise and buy into, is that it is, as the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) said, very little to do with most of the Government's initiatives at the moment, which are all to do with structure. How changing schools to grammar schools or academisation actually delivers these things eludes me. What seems deficient—the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby mentioned the Liverpool city region—is a vehicle for local delivery, something that could make a London Challenge in Liverpool, because ensuring that there are good schools across the area cannot be done piecemeal. It is easy to get some good schools here, some indifferent schools there, and some sink schools elsewhere.

We need a powerful strategic player, and traditionally that has been the local authority's role. As the Minister will not be slow to point out, some local authorities have failed. To be fair to the right hon. Member for Knowsley, over the years Knowsley has struggled badly. Equally, mayors can fail; for whatever reason, Mayor Anderson has not delivered on the 2012 ambition he set himself. Local authorities are a key player and need

to be burdened with that task. Too often, historically, local authorities have been slightly obsessed with what we might call their premium brand; the mayor always showed up to the grammar school for speech day, but was not necessarily there when other schools had similar events. We need local authorities in this because we have to ensure equity of outcome, proper prioritisation across the piece, and that what is delivered in education is economically and socially relevant.

Wholesale educational improvement, which the debate is about, is a community task—it is a community treasure when delivered—but it is definitely in the whole community's interest. I fail to see how we can do that without reinventing the LEA in some form or other, to give proper strategic leadership to the task presenting itself to us.

3.1 pm

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) not only on securing this important debate, but on the important work he is doing on education in Liverpool. His input there is absolutely invaluable. Education is vitally important in developing the potential of every individual; it is also important for the future of the city of Liverpool, and other areas in Merseyside, because unless people's potential is developed and their skills can be utilised, the city does not prosper.

I note my hon. Friend's comments about the background to this debate: the very high cuts to local government funding in Liverpool. He quoted the figure of 58%, but if the plans to 2020 are carried out, there will have been a cut of 65% to core funding in the city of Liverpool since 2010. To add to that, changes in the education grant formula are of extreme concern for the future. Although Liverpool City Council and the Mayor of Liverpool, Joe Anderson, certainly oppose those cuts, and are very vocal about them, they do not just say what they are against; they are very clear that they are willing to innovate.

That innovation has taken place in Liverpool, whether in building new schools when the conventional sources of funding have been denied, or in looking at the needs of the under-fives and protecting Sure Start centres, children's centres and nurseries. There is a particular threat to the future of children's centres, which are absolutely vital in preparing children for school and supporting families. Both those functions are absolutely essential. I applaud the city council's efforts in working with the local NHS, through the clinical commissioning group, to try to secure funding from that group to go with local authority funding, and I hope that the Government are able to support that in any way they can. That is another example of innovation and thinking outside the box: looking at how we can put different sources of funding together to benefit the people we represent.

Further education is of particular importance. It is about developing a wide range of skills, aptitudes and interests, and also about giving people a second chance. Often, students who were not able to succeed in school—perhaps the educational system failed them, rather than the other way round—are able to see new possibilities when they go into further education and, in particular, college. It is absolutely essential that they be given support there.

Some 87% of students who attend the City of Liverpool College are from deprived areas. The abolition of the education maintenance allowance and other financial issues have landed a great blow on those people. When we look at ways of supporting individuals' learning and education, we sometimes miss some of the basics. Sometimes people are struggling with difficult family situations, and when they do not have the means to survive, day by day, that inhibits their educational potential. It might not inhibit the potential of people who are already fully committed to education and have full confidence in themselves—those individuals can survive hardships—but people struggling to get self-confidence who are being encouraged to see new ways ahead sometimes struggle against the odds when their basic financial needs are not met. I ask Ministers to look again at that area.

There is a specific problem relating to the high proportion of students going to that college who have inadequate English and maths GCSEs. There is a problem in getting them to the required standards with the funding that is available, so I ask Ministers to look at that. There is also an ongoing issue about funding sufficient numbers of apprenticeships in that area. The Government have recently made statements saying that funding will be available, but I again ask Ministers to keep looking at that. Colleges should not be constantly concerned about adequate funding for apprenticeships. When students have commitment and want to make a real improvement to their life, they should be helped to do it.

Finally, I must mention the other vital area: higher education. In Liverpool, we have four outstanding higher education institutions. Liverpool John Moores University has made an outstanding contribution, not only to Liverpool, but to the country. It was the first university to combine what it then called employability—learning the practical skills of how to do a job properly—with academic understanding and analytical knowledge. It was the first to pioneer that, and it offers a range of very exciting courses. The University of Liverpool is an outstanding Russell Group university. It is outstanding in its teaching, research and the number of Nobel prize winners associated with it, particularly in the area of science. Liverpool Hope University has become an outstanding university, nationally recognised, and it should be encouraged in its work.

I must declare that I am a member of the council of the fourth organisation I will mention: the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts. It is an outstanding higher education institution developing the creative arts, as well as interest in the creative arts, knowledge, practical ability and theoretical understanding, together with employability. Many of the stars of today were educated at LIPA. It might be worth remembering that LIPA began with support from the European Union. That is how it got where it was, and now it raises funds by other means. It is absolutely outstanding, and I hope that Ministers are able to support it. It is a credit not just to Liverpool, but the world; it operates internationally.

I will bring my remarks to a conclusion because I know other hon. Members wish to speak. I hope that Ministers are able to develop the points that I have made and to give their support, where Government support is needed, to go with the innovation and enthusiasm that comes from the city of Liverpool itself.

3.8 pm

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): You might recall, Sir Roger, that during the Finance Bill Committee, as a Whip I was grateful for your guidance in my silent role. I hope that will continue now that I am trying to find my voice from the Back Benches.

First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on securing this debate. I am grateful to him for enabling us to discuss these important matters. Too often, policy discussions are London-centric. This debate provides a good opportunity to highlight the great work being done in Merseyside and my constituency of St Helens North, and also to raise concerns about aspects of current Government policy and the detrimental impact it is having in our city region.

I want to focus my brief remarks on further and higher education and apprenticeships, but at the start let me say something about early-years education and funding. As other hon. Members have said, we know that early childhood is a crucial stage of life in terms of a child's physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. It is a time when children need high-quality personal care and learning experiences.

In answer to a recent parliamentary question that I asked the Secretary of State for Education, it was revealed that three and four-year-old children in St Helens get almost £1 an hour less spent on them than children in the rest of the country: 21% below the national average. St Helens gets just £3.61 per child per hour from central Government towards the education of three and four-year-olds compared with the national average of £4.56 per hour spent on each child in England. With the exception of the Liverpool City Council area, the entire Merseyside region fares badly. The extreme cuts to local government, which will mean that by 2020 my council area in St Helens will have had its grant cut by more than it collects in council tax, merely exacerbate the problem of underfunding for children in St Helens. They should have the same rights and get the same opportunities as those in the rest of England, and that means they should have the same amount spent on them.

At the other end of the educational journey for young people, there are 10 further education and sixth-form colleges on Merseyside providing high-quality education and training to 57,000 students. St Helens College, if I might humbly say, is one of the best in the entire north-west and we are very proud to have it in our borough. Statistics from the national Association of Colleges show that the economic return to taxpayers from colleges on Merseyside is £5.40 for every £1 invested, and Merseyside colleges work with a huge range of employers to meet their needs: 5,500 in the city region and nearly 10,000 nationally. Although the excellent work undertaken by colleges should be commended, the system is under immense pressure.

Various issues currently affect colleges and schools in the region and their ability to meet the Government's ambition of a good education that works for all. Chief among them, of course, is funding. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, school spending is expected to fall by at least 7% in real terms by 2020, which would be the largest fall over any period since the 1970s. That has left St Helens College and schools in my constituency facing something close to mission impossible as they struggle to cope with a large increase in student numbers,

[Conor McGinn]

leaving staff under huge pressure. This is at a time when there is a chronic shortage of teachers across education after six years of missed Government targets for recruiting new trainees and with a hugely demoralised profession. The number of teachers quitting—some 50,000 last year—is at a record high. Our teachers should be valued and supported; they should not have their reputation and their profession traduced by the Government.

Skilled jobs and apprenticeships are an important part of education in my constituency and are a vital route into employment. They give an opportunity to learn and develop skills for the workplace while earning a living. St Helens chamber of commerce—one of the best in the country—supports local employers to deliver good quality apprenticeships. There are still concerns over the take-up of apprenticeships among 16 to 18-year-olds in Merseyside, and we need to ensure that the apprenticeships on offer are of a high quality and provide young people with the training and skills that they need.

As well as vocational training and apprenticeships, for many in the region, going on to university or higher education is the chosen route to employment. However, statistics that I have obtained show that the percentage of young people in St Helens going on to higher education has dropped by more than 6% since 2012, and the percentage of children from disadvantaged backgrounds on free school meals going on to further education has dropped by 21%. That is deeply concerning because the Government's own assessment shows that the cuts will have a disproportionate effect on disabled people, women, older learners and people from industrial areas such as St Helens. The Government talk a good game about aspiration and creating a northern powerhouse, but in terms of encouraging people into higher education, that seems to be little more than rhetoric, certainly for the people in St Helens.

I will conclude shortly and allow colleagues the opportunity to speak. It is clear that more needs to be done so that people in St Helens North and the whole of Merseyside get the good-quality education they deserve. The area-based review of further education currently being undertaken will hopefully identify the shortfalls and offer solutions. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), Labour's candidate for mayor of the city region, is passionate about education and creating opportunities, and I look forward to working with him to progress this agenda in all parts of the region, which I know he is committed to.

There should be fair and equal funding for children and young people across the country. Merseyside should not be left behind. I will work constructively with anyone who has a commitment to education and who wants to give children and young people the best start in life, but I am bound to say that the current Tory education policies are failing children, parents and teachers. While the Government obsess about school structures and bringing back selective education, budgets are falling. There are chronic teacher shortages and not enough school places. A good education should not be a privilege. It is every child's right. I will continue to campaign in this House and in St Helens so that children and young people in my constituency and across Merseyside get the education to which they are entitled and which they deserve.

3.15 pm

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on securing this important debate. I am pleased to see the Minister in his place today. He has previously met me and other Knowsley MPs to discuss the current lack of sixth-form provision in the borough. Perhaps he will comment on progress in today's debate.

My constituency spans parts of two local authorities: St Helens and Knowsley. We celebrate the success of Carmel sixth form, which has good numbers going to the redbrick universities, as does Rainhill High School and St Helens College, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn). Schools in St Helens South and Whiston are improving year on year, and I congratulate Cowley International College, where I was a long-term governor, on its successful Ofsted rating of good.

A Social Market Foundation report showed that disadvantaged schools are more likely to have unqualified, inexperienced and inappropriately trained teaching staff. Many schools across the region are struggling with recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and suffer from high staff turnover. In Knowsley, a part of my constituency, schools are particularly struggling to recruit quality teachers in science, technology, engineering and maths subjects. One highly incentivised recruitment programme for maths teachers attracted just one applicant. Quality teaching is a critical factor in pupil attainment. The recruitment crisis will only compound the ongoing attainment gap and inequality in education.

Teacher shortages mean that schools are forced to use supply teachers who are often not qualified in the subject matter to fill the void and at a much greater cost, further challenging financially constrained schools. The crisis has grown under this Government, and schools and local education authorities need support to tackle the problem now. Over the past five years, freezes to the dedicated schools grant have led to real-term cuts in funding. At the same time, schools have had to increase employer pension and national insurance contributions.

Research by the Association of School and College Leaders shows that 70% of schools are planning to cut the number of courses they offer. Lucy, a St Helens resident and pupil in my constituency, is a talented musician who plays the flute. She is presently studying grade 7 and was on course to reach grade 8 by the time she leaves school. However, owing to funding cuts, her school principal tells me it is no longer viable to run the music GCSE course, leaving Lucy and other children absolutely devastated. I hope the cuts do not spread out and affect our search for funding towards our theatre in Prescot in Knowsley.

Instead of focusing on giving headteachers the resources and support they need to recruit and retain permanent quality teachers and to improve the maximum attainment of pupils, the Government go on to waste millions on free schools in areas that do not need more places. We do not understand that where we serve our constituents.

The Government are obsessing over a return to the 1960s grammar school selective system, but grammar schools are not the answer to the problems of our local education systems. Evidence from the Commons Library

shows grammar schools are not the golden ticket to social mobility that the Government would have us believe. In practice, grammar schools will create a magnet that draws more quality teachers and pupils away from comprehensives, leaving additional challenges of recruitment and retention, and therefore affecting the attainment of our pupils.

Evidence shows that grammar schools fail children with statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans more than any other group. Just 0.1% of grammar school entrants have an SEN statement, compared with 2.8% of the total pupil population. Thousands of children with special educational needs are on the autism spectrum. The new special educational needs and disability code of practice states that support will routinely be put in place quickly when issues are picked up. However, access to diagnosis is a problem and routinely takes more than a year. I urge the Government to focus robustly on identification and speedy diagnosis.

Shamefully, evidence from the National Autistic Society shows that one in six pupils waits more than three years to get support, depriving them of the opportunity to get the best from their education. I urge the Minister to ask the Government to look again at how the new SEND system supports children with autism, and to look to provide local authorities with additional support in improving identification, delivery and transition in those children's education.

There are local reports of a lack of provision for some of the hardest-to-help young people—especially care leavers and young offenders. Many people would turn their eyes away from them. Budget constraints mean that some providers are reluctant to take on pupils who need additional intensive support. Free and grammar schools will not select those children; they will be left to other schools to pick up, adding further to their challenges. I urge the Minister to consider those children, provide additional specific funding and focus on meeting their needs. They should not be left behind as they are at present. The Government should allow more flexibility in current funding, to ensure that those learners can remain in supported provision, to help them progress according to their individual needs.

Our local authorities and schools are committed, and are working hard. Governors work tremendously hard and parent support is high—it is needed in some areas. However, huge cuts to budgets mean that schools simply do not have the resources that are needed. It is high time the Government chose to spend efficiently in education. They should look at the needs that exist now, instead of going for frills that we simply cannot afford, while some children are denied the education that they should be entitled to. That is the only way we shall do away with inequality in education provision.

3.22 pm

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I am delighted to speak on this important issue, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on securing this important debate. Often in Britain, and all too often on Merseyside, the place where people are born seems to determine where they end up in life, but education is a tool that offers young people the hope of going on to achieve their full potential. It can provide the ladder of opportunity for the next generation and education policy should primarily

be designed to do that. It should not be a political football for any Minister or Secretary of State, attempting to impose a narrow sense of ideological entitlement on others. Schools in my constituency, and indeed across our city region, are proud of what they have achieved. The tireless work of our teachers, governors and staff has been mentioned by many hon. Members today. They devote their lives to getting the best out of children, but it has to be said that educational attainment is stronger in some areas of the city region than others.

I note the criticism of the mayor of Liverpool, Mayor Anderson, by the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), but the city mayor has been asked to achieve something with one hand tied behind his back, partly because of some savage cuts inflicted by the coalition Government of which the hon. Gentleman was a member.

Conor McGinn: Surely not!

Steve Rotheram: Surely yes.

The excellent work of many in our schools is often hamstrung by factors outside their control. Research by the House of Commons Library suggests that in my constituency just 38% of students get five A* to C GCSEs, including English and maths. With a national average of 53.8% that puts us well behind, but that in no way reflects the effort of the schools and teachers. Although it is only 10 miles away, Wirral's figure is seven percentage points above the national average, at 61%. It is easy to imply that schools need to do more and be better, as the Prime Minister said today. There has not been a Secretary of State in the past 50 years who has not trotted out the tired old mantra that we need more good schools, but improvement cannot be achieved without the collaborative efforts of parents, teachers and governors and, most importantly, it cannot be achieved without the Government's political will to invest fully in children's future.

For far too many pupils there is poverty of aspiration. In many cases we have failed to convince young people from working-class backgrounds that they can be the doctors, nurses and lawyers and even, God forbid, the political leaders of tomorrow. I bet that that is not the case in many of the schools that many on the Government Front Bench went to. The Government's idea of harking back to the 1950s and an elitist education system by returning to the dreaded 11-plus will do nothing to increase the life chances of the majority of young people.

The grammar school system is designed to achieve the best not for all but for the selected few. How can the Prime Minister advocate grammar schools when she stood on the steps of Downing Street a few weeks ago and promised the British people that she would lead a Government that works for everyone? Grammar schools will segregate, not educate. They will polarise communities, not promote social cohesion. Grammar schools would once again stifle the prospects of many of the children who would inevitably see themselves as failures if they did not pass the entrance exam. As Ofsted's chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw put it, grammar schools will "put the clock back". The desire for selection at 11 years old tells us all we need to know about the Government and how they see our precious education system. It is a microcosm of their entire political ideology. It will deliver for the few, not the many.

[Steve Rotheram]

As my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby highlighted, teachers have voiced their concerns about upcoming Government proposals such as the prospect of a national funding formula and the added pressure to offer a more restricted curriculum because of the baccalaureate and progress 8. However, the new devolution deals provide an opportunity to transfer decision making and accountability to a local level. We currently face a situation in which the Government seek to devolve powers over industrial strategy and economic growth to metro mayors while fragmenting delivery and centralising accountability in the education system. That does not make sense. We have a ludicrous situation in which local education authorities continue to have statutory responsibilities under legislation such as the Education Act 1996 while having been deprived of any levers to pull to fulfil those duties and influence outcomes. For example, every secondary school in Knowsley is now an academy and is therefore much more accountable to the Secretary of State, through the schools commissioner, than to locally elected politicians, but—guess what?—local politicians get the blame when they are threatened with the withdrawal of A-level provision in the borough.

The problem in Merseyside is not the level of attainment of the top 20%; it is the level of attainment of the rest. We need an education system that lifts the attainment of all, not just those who are gifted and talented. That is why I am calling for the return of an element of local accountability. Education provides the building blocks for achieving the economic success we so desperately need, so the Minister should make the regional schools commissioner accountable to the metro mayor. I would appreciate it if he would address that issue specifically. That would afford the incoming metro mayor—and here I must declare an interest, Sir Roger—the opportunity to create a city region education strategy that could work collaboratively as the catalyst for sharing best practice. If elected metro mayor, I will introduce a pathways to excellence programme in our city region and help to raise educational attainment in each of the six districts, lifting the level of aspiration across all our communities, with no borough and no child left behind.

As metro mayor I want to harness the pool of talent that we have. I want to attract global businesses to locate into our area, offering the high-skilled, high-paid, high-aspiration jobs we need, as well as developing the new businesses that will lift our economy. However, developing a world-class workforce has to start at an early stage, and that has to be in our schools. The metro mayor does not have the responsibility, through the devolved powers they can use, to affect that, which is why we need a joined-up, consistent devolutionary approach between the Government's industrial and education policies. I hope the Minister specifically addresses that point when he gets to his feet.

3.30 pm

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your stewardship, Sir Roger. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) for securing this debate and for giving us the opportunity to make contributions that cover a wide range of issues.

I want to start by picking up a theme that has been developed by the Opposition—that is, the question of grammar schools. Grammar schools are a complete and utter distraction from the things that we need to get to grips with in the short, medium and long term. We need to put that on the record. It is not ideological; it just does not work. People talk about going backwards. This is not just about going back to the '50s—we will be going back before that and it really is not acceptable.

In a debate such as this, the question is where we begin with such a vast area to cover. There is the whole range, from early years right the way through to university education. I wanted to look at the issue systematically in my neck of the woods, so I wrote to a number of education charities and asked them whether they would be prepared to talk to me about an analysis—research potentially in collaboration with one of the local universities—of my constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) referred to the fact that more than 35% of students in his constituency get grades A to C. The situation is broadly similar in my constituency, at about 40%. I want to tease out some issues related to that, because our schools do fantastic work. Teachers, governors and parents work hard. Day in, day out, they do the work that we ask them, but we can ask of them only so much.

I want to look beyond the narrower situation regarding education and try to determine what the other factors are. I have an idea what they are. In fact, a local group of headteachers came up with their views, serendipitously, and I will be working with them to tease them out. The issues were pupil welfare—diet, dental health, deterioration in accommodation, behavioural problems, mental health issues and stresses relating to the bureaucracy, as it is put. They have stresses and strains all over the place, and this is in an area with a partnership that has 24 schools, most of which are judged to be good or better, with two outstanding schools. One of those outstanding schools has had five outstanding Ofsted inspections on the trot, which I think is unprecedented. At this point, I pay tribute to the former headteacher of that school, Brian Mulroy, who died recently. He spent his life in education and was one of the men who got the school to that status. I put my thanks on the record for the work that he did, and he is not the only one who does such work and who puts their time and effort in, day in and day out.

What happens when the Government introduce things that result in the problems we have had with Concentrix recently? Hard-working families have been put under even more stress because their tax credits have been drawn away from them, and as a consequence, their children have not got free school meals. Whether we like it or not, that has an impact on children's education. Those sorts of policies are not doing anybody any good. The late Chris Woodhead said that my constituency was doing fantastically against all the odds, and that is because we care for our children. Teachers and families do, and everybody tries to do their best, but they can do only so much.

The Government have to get to the stage where they stop the centralised control of education. Frankly, what Dorset does in relation to Dorset is a matter for Dorset. I do not care. Within parameters, it is for Dorset and any other place to get on with their education systems.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton in saying that we have to stop the atomisation and fragmentation of the education service, and the shilly-shallying around with structures yet again. We have to bring that responsibility back—that might mean bringing it back to the city region in collaboration with renewed and reinvigorated local education authorities. I support my hon. Friend and look forward to working with him on that.

We also have to put the resource in. There is something wrong when we have the situation we have in Merseyside. This is not about picking on other local authorities, but my local authority is the lowest-funded authority in Merseyside per pupil: we get about £300 less than Liverpool. However, we get £1,000 less than Westminster, and there is something wrong with that type of allocation of funding. Westminster is getting about £1,000 more per pupil than my constituency—that is quite shocking and it is just not acceptable. The Government should be getting to grips with that rather than fiddling about with grammar schools and the national formula. The history we have with this Government shows that they will fiddle the formula, which is exactly what they did with local government.

If we are to have a regime, let it be a localised one. If we are to have a funding formula, let it truly be a funding formula and let the children of my constituency get as much money as they need to get a decent education. That is the key.

3.36 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and, for once in a while, to be in a room where we are not defending or advocating for airports in our constituencies.

If I may allude to the physical layout of the Chamber, the Minister should not feel too isolated. A lot of great speeches have been made from the Opposition Benches, but I am always reminded of a story that came to me from a speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth). There was a very controversial planning application in his area in the late 1960s for the safari park. He has talked with passion about work involving Shakespeare and the educational outcomes for the safari park, but the local councillor at that time was all on his own in supporting the development. One young, angry Knowsley resident stood up in a room of 700 and asked, with his baby in his arms, “What happens when one of those lions or tigers gets out on to the high street?” The crowd roared. This old councillor in his 80s—in Huyton, which was Harold Wilson’s constituency—rubbed his hair, sucked on his pipe and said, “Well, it’ll just have to take its chances, along with the rest of us.” If the Minister is feeling isolated, how does he think I feel as a Mancunian with all these Merseyside MPs right behind me? However, I have to say that since we built the ship canal in 1894, thanks to Daniel Adamson, the entente cordiale between our two great city regions has improved no end, so it is great to respond from the Front Bench in this debate.

Mr George Howarth: I gently mention to my hon. Friend that it is not usually a good idea to steal somebody’s lines when they are sitting behind you. [*Laughter.*]

Mike Kane: Let us get on to the real issue at hand.

In my opinion, the Government have failed to build an education system—as a former teacher, I see this day in, day out—that provides opportunity for all. They are increasingly obsessed with structures—which matter—more than the outcomes for young people. My hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) talked about shilly-shallying, and it is shilly-shallying of the first order. They are not tackling the key challenges facing our system: declining budgets and chronic shortages of teachers and places, as alluded to by a number of Members. They are failing to invest and our schools are facing, for the first time since the 1990s, real cuts to their funding.

As a teacher doing my teacher training course after Tony Blair got elected in 1997, part of my day job was going round with a bucket to try and catch the rain coming in from the roof. At the end of that Labour Government, if the roof had not been replaced, the school had been rebuilt, and the only thing going through the roof was children’s attainment. We have a very proud record of achievement in those 13 years.

There is still no certainty about how Merseyside will be affected by the Government’s proposed changes to the national funding formula. The Government continue to add to that uncertainty, despite the written ministerial statement on 21 July that the Secretary of State would set out proposals in Parliament in the early autumn. The Secretary of State still has not done that. It is important that the Government ensure that schools do not lose out as a result of changes in the funding formula.

Although the Labour party supports a fair national funding formula, we believe that it should be achieved by investing in all our schools, rather than by taking money away from some schools to give to others. The independent Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that school budgets will fall by 8% over the course of this Parliament, as the budget was protected in cash terms, rather than in real terms, meaning that the schools budget is at the mercy of rising pressures and pupil numbers, and the impact of inflation on its true value.

With inflation today rising to a two-year high and many predicting it will rise again in the wake of Brexit—particularly a chaotic Brexit without single market access, which is the course we are pursuing—schools are facing real-term cuts. We have already warned that the Government’s proposed new school funding formula will hit areas such as Liverpool. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) pointed out, Liverpool has seen a 65% cut in core funding. Labour supports fairer funding, but areas such as Liverpool are likely to take the big hit. There should be mitigation in the system to protect school standards and ensure that a loss of funding does not hamstring local areas.

If the northern powerhouse strategy is to mean anything, it must enable local communities to tackle the root causes of low attainment and it must improve special educational needs provision, as highlighted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley. However, there was no SEN provision whatever in the Government’s recent schools paper, which included grammar schools. My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Marie Rimmer) pointed out that we need SEN provision within our school system, particularly for people with autism. If the Government were really committed to fair funding, they would invest in schools instead of cutting schools’ budgets for the first time in nearly two decades.

[Mike Kane]

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on a terrific speech and on getting the subject on the agenda. I also congratulate Mayor Anderson, who appointed a commission for the city. We welcome, in principle, the introduction of the Liverpool challenge, and I hope the Minister matches our welcome.

The shadow Secretary of State has often mentioned how effective the London challenge was and how it provides a model for steps we could take to improve schools, with a focus on investment, leadership and collaboration. It would definitely be good to praise the initiative, which shows how Labour, in Labour areas, is taking steps to improve schools for all children, while the Government are pushing grammar schools, which would cause most children in our communities to lose out, as highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle.

I remember the introduction of the Manchester challenge in 2008. That was cut when the coalition Government came into power, because of austerity. The reason that the London challenge was successful and improved schools right across the region in which we currently sit was that it lasted for longer and more money was put behind it. The outcomes showed that we can improve every area of the country if we match that provision.

Labour has called for more powers to be developed in local areas to help to tackle educational underperformance. The elected metro mayor of Liverpool would be a good place to start. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), but he says that if he is elected as Liverpool's metro mayor next May—and I hope he will be—he will start with one hand behind his back because of the current powers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby talked eloquently about the principle of subsidiarity. The Government seem to have nationalised the school system and privatised it at the same time. Today, the BBC is showing that the Government are taking away councils' powers to set their own standards for maintained schools. That is a ridiculous system. Subsidiarity tells us that the best decisions are made close to the ground by the people who need to be involved. Labour will go back to that principle when we form a Government.

Peter Dowd: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government are well and truly supportive of subsidiarity when it comes to Europe and Britain, but that they take a different view of Westminster and the regions?

Mike Kane: It is astonishing to think of the work that the Liverpool and Manchester city regions have done over the last few years—a devolved spatial strategy, business rates retention, a devolved skills strategy, a devolved housing strategy and devolved health and criminal justice strategies in Manchester—and yet for whatever reason we cannot seem to devolve the schools system. We already have regional Ofsted quality inspectors, so it is not beyond the wit of man to get a proper deal in place so that local politicians have more say and can help to improve standards.

The Education and Adoption Act 2016 goes in the opposite direction, further centralising powers in Whitehall and fragmenting our schools system, rather than giving

local areas the powers and responsibilities to ensure a step change in our schools' results. Sir Michael Wilshaw, the chief inspector of schools, said that secondary education in our cities, particularly in Liverpool, is going into reverse, as the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) alluded to.

The chief inspector of schools also called on local politicians to act urgently and champion their schools. How do we do that? How do we show leadership? My hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, West Derby and for Bootle, and others, have championed those schools, but there should be powers as well. It is not the first time that the chief inspector of schools has highlighted concerns about secondary education in the north of England. In his annual report last December, he described his alarm over the emerging educational divide between north and south.

Turning to early years funding, it is clear that the Government's proposals to offer 30 hours of free childcare a week are unravelling. As my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) highlighted, this is the most critical time. In theory, a 30-hour free childcare entitlement would see a welcome reduction in childcare costs for families. However, it is clear that the Government's reforms are risking the sustainability of early education providers and the quality of provision available.

We have seen the decimation of Sure Start units in our cities and, currently, 750 nursery providers across the country are under threat. Many providers are unsure how they will meet their financial and statutory commitments, which is unsurprising given that their situation was precarious even before the proposals were announced. Freedom of information requests reveal that nearly 75% of councils have been given funding levels over the past five years that have failed to keep pace with inflation.

Figures published by the Department for Education in its consultation on the new funding formula state that about 40 local authorities face further falls in rates. As a result, hundreds of nurseries across the country are publicly expressing their fears, with a comprehensive survey from the Pre-school Learning Alliance showing that 750 providers fear being put out of business by the current Government plans. That would be a disaster for areas such as Merseyside. Maintained nursery schools account for many of those providers, as they have had no supplementary funding guaranteed beyond two years as outlined by the Government. The Minister should take this opportunity to end the anxiety and uncertainty that exists for many childcare providers by offering the extra financial support that will allow them to cope with the pressures created by the Government's new funding formula.

In conclusion, Labour remains fully committed to ensuring that all our young people are given the opportunity to succeed on whatever educational path they choose, and that their opportunities are based on what they aspire to, not on what they can afford.

3.49 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on securing this debate. I am sure he will agree that all of us in this room share the

same ambition to see a country that works for everyone, in which all schools improve and every child has the opportunity to go to a good school and to fulfil their potential.

I welcome the shadow Minister to his post. This is our first debate together in Westminster, and I am sure there will be many more such occasions, with him remaining firmly on that side. Over the last six years, 600,000 new school places have been created. We have spent £5 billion on creating those new places, and we have committed a further £7 billion over the next period to create another 600,000 school places. There are 15,000 more teachers today than there were in 2010. There are 456,000 teachers in our schools, a record number. We are spending £1.3 billion in the next period, across four bursaries, to attract the best graduates into teaching and we are spending £40 billion on schools, which is a record high. Of course, all that can happen only if we have a strong economy and proper stewardship of public finances. We are addressing the historical unfairness of the school funding system. We have consulted on the principles of a national funding formula and we will move to the next stage in the autumn.

I have had the opportunity to visit probably more than 400 schools across the country over the last 12 years, and I am convinced that there are two components without which a school cannot be great. The first, of course, is high-quality teaching and leadership. A supply of high-quality teachers is needed at all levels, and we are continuing to focus on recruiting the best graduates, particularly in subjects such as science, maths and foreign languages, with the generous bursaries that I mentioned. We are ensuring that leaders have access to high-quality leadership development training, including through national professional qualifications, and we are introducing a new teaching and leadership innovation fund worth £75 million over three years. Thanks to the hard work of teachers and the reforms we have introduced over the last six years, there are now more than 1.4 million more pupils in good and outstanding schools than there were in 2010.

The second component needed for a great school is a stretching and knowledge-based curriculum. The national curriculum focuses on the key knowledge that schools should teach. It has been benchmarked against the highest-performing education systems in the world and will enable pupils to acquire a secure understanding of the key knowledge they need to go on to the next stage of their education, to contribute to our culture and to participate fully in our society.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby mentioned careers guidance. The Careers & Enterprise Company is working with local enterprise partnerships and with schools to boost employer engagement and help schools with their careers advice. The Careers & Enterprise Company's enterprise adviser network allows it to share best practice—he asked about this—through all regions, particularly in disadvantaged and rural areas of the south-west and north-west.

The hon. Gentleman is right to ask how the new schools funding formula will affect schools in Liverpool and the Greater Merseyside area, and we are firmly committed to introducing a fair national funding formula for schools and high needs from 2018-19 onwards. We are taking the time to ensure that the formula is right. We have protected the core schools budget in real terms so that as pupil numbers increase, so will the amount of

money for our schools. We are launching the second stage of the consultation in the autumn. At that stage we can say what the funding impact will be for schools in all areas.

The Government are also committed to protecting pupil premium rates for the duration of this Parliament. Schools in Liverpool are receiving more than £30 million this year through that funding stream to support the attainment of the most disadvantaged pupils.

Stephen Twigg: I was recently at Our Lady and St Swithin's Catholic Primary School in Croxteth in my constituency. One issue raised there was the impact of the provision of free school meals across key stage 1, which is resulting in fewer parents informing the school that their child would have been entitled to free school meals anyway. There is therefore a decline in pupil premium figures. Is the Minister familiar with that? If so, what are the Government doing about it?

Mr Gibb: We often hear that, and we are encouraging schools to encourage parents to register for free school meals, even though their child gets a free school meal anyway, so that their school does not lose the funding.

The right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) mentioned St Aloysius Catholic Primary School and funding for children with special educational needs. We have committed to reforming the funding system for pupils with high needs by introducing a national funding formula from 2018 for high needs as well as for schools. In 2017 we have protected local authorities so that no area will see a reduction in its high needs funding, which is in the context of our overall protection for the core schools budget in this Parliament. We have allocated an additional £93 million of high-needs funding for 2016-17.

Mr George Howarth: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. My key point is that under the current arrangement schools are getting an allowance even if they have no children with special educational needs, whereas schools that have large and growing numbers of children with special educational needs do not get enough from the allowance to cover their additional costs.

Mr Gibb: I hope all those issues will be addressed by the reforms to our funding system.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) mentioned funding for apprenticeships. We are spending £2.5 billion on apprenticeships by 2020, which is double the 2010-11 budget in cash terms, and we will top up employer levy contributions by 10% and provide 90% of the funding for employers that want to buy more apprenticeships.

It is important that children get the best start in life, which is why the Government are spending an additional £1 billion a year on the early years free entitlement, including £300 million a year to increase the national average funding rate. The Government are working to ensure that early years funding is distributed fairly and transparently throughout the country. On 22 September we concluded the consultation on the fairest way to distribute early years funding, and the proposals included a new approach, namely an early years national funding formula. The consultation has now closed and we are analysing responses. We will respond in the autumn.

Stephen Twigg: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way because I realise that time is tight. Will he address the specific issue of nursery schools? I think he will agree that nursery schools often provide a fantastic start for children, particularly in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods.

Mr Gibb: Yes. I have been addressing that by talking about the extra money for early years. As part of the consultation, we released indicative funding rates for local authorities and indicative and average hourly funding rates for providers in each local authority area. Based on our proposal, 75% of local authority areas stand the gain funding. The indicative rates show that the impact of the proposals in the Merseyside region will be mixed. It is therefore right that we look at each local authority area, rather than the region overall.

The Government are providing supplementary funding for maintained nursery schools for at least two years, as the hon. Gentleman knows. We know that maintained nursery schools bear costs over and above other providers because of their structure, and many also provide high-quality early education to disadvantaged children. The additional funding will provide much-needed stability to the nursery sector. We will be consulting on the future of maintained nursery schools in due course.

Thanks to the academies programme, schools have been released from the constraints that too often inhibited great teaching. The autonomy provided by the structural reforms has freed schools to innovate and pursue improved evidence-based teaching methods. Rather than a centralising approach, this is actually the ultimate in devolution.

Headteachers and other system leaders have seized this opportunity. As of the beginning of this month, there are 5,758 open academies and 345 open free schools, university technical colleges and studio schools.

About a fifth of primary schools and two thirds of secondary schools are now academies. As the Secretary of State said to the Select Committee on Education in September, the Government want to see all schools become academies over time, and it is our hope and expectation that schools will want to continue to take advantage of the benefits that academisation can bring both to their own school and to others in the local area and throughout the country. We will continue to convert all schools that are failing to deliver an acceptable standard of education.

Steve Rotheram: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Gibb: I am hesitant to give way because I have literally two minutes to go and I want to respond to some of the other points. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

We also want to see good and outstanding schools choosing academy status so they can benefit from the freedoms associated with it. We will be building capacity across the country. We are also working with the archdiocese of Liverpool and the diocese of Liverpool to ensure that there are rapid improvements in other schools, such as the Academy of St Francis of Assisi in the constituency of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby. The Education and Adoption Act 2016 strengthens the Department's powers to ensure that every failing school, whether maintained or an academy, receives the support it needs to improve. The Secretary of State will not hesitate to use these powers so that underperforming schools and academies are swiftly turned around.

Let me conclude by briefly talking about further education. A strong further education system is essential to ensuring that everyone in our society is empowered to succeed. We need to equip FE colleges to be high-status institutions that can confer similar advantages to traditional academic institutions.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Ministry of Defence Future Accommodation Model

[MRS MADELEINE MOON *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Ministry of Defence's future accommodation model.

It is an honour to have you in the Chair for this debate on a most important subject, Mrs Moon. I asked for this debate to bring clarity and reassurance to our armed forces personnel and their families about their future accommodation provision. There is a Government commitment in the armed forces covenant to providing personnel and their families with good-quality accommodation, in the right location and at a reasonable price. I receive correspondence daily from families who are deeply anxious about the direction of the future accommodation model—FAM. There is a strongly held view among military families from every rank, in every service, that the Ministry of Defence intends to allow the present system, and its poor provision of existing service family accommodation, to degrade, so that the options put forward by FAM will seem less unpalatable.

The stated reason for looking at a new, more modern accommodation model is that service personnel want more choice over where, how and with whom they live, and greater support for those who would like to buy a new home. According to the MOD, FAM

“is aiming to provide a flexible system that meets different needs at different times—not dictated by rank”—

rank is not a factor now—

“age or marriage.”

Given those stated aims, which are laudable and forward-thinking for the modern family, will the Minister tell us why the MOD is not simply looking to expand the accessibility of service family accommodation—SFA—to that new, wider service personnel audience? The MOD states that FAM is designed to save costs, because the way accommodation is now provided means that there have to be a large number of vacant homes at any one time to allow for rotation, which means greater costs for the MOD, but in the same breath, it states that FAM will not reduce the total pot of money used to subsidise housing.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate; given the interest in it, perhaps a longer debate would have been worth while. She makes her case well, and I invite her to extend her view to cover veterans. In the light of her interest in the military covenant, will she challenge the Minister on that angle, too?

Mrs Trevelyan: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. That is a wider debate; we will see whether we can persuade the authorities to allow us to have that wider conversation.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the key problem is the price that service families have to pay for their

accommodation? It has been creeping up and up, and I am not aware—perhaps she can enlighten me—whether the Armed Forces Pay Review Body has factored that into its annual determination.

Mrs Trevelyan: I am afraid that I am not privy to the details of the pay review body's work, but perhaps the Minister will answer that question for us later. I would also be grateful if he set out the present annual net cost of the SFA offer, to give the military families watching, who are very concerned, some idea of the funding available if they have to work with one of the proposed new options. We need to look starkly at what the FAM proposes, in terms of realistic housing accessibility from the private rental and purchase housing markets; realistic cost implications for families; and the real impact of the military community being broken up, leaving families unsupported at times of deployment.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): This is a huge issue for military families and serving people in particular. Does my hon. Friend agree that if we do not get this right, it will have a catastrophic effect on our retention figures? We will find even more people leaving the service, which would be pretty awful, to say the least.

Mrs Trevelyan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One key reason why I ask the Minister to reconsider the FAM is that it is unlikely to save the MOD money, because of the national housing shortage, and is likely to create a massive retention risk to our already undermanned and overstretched armed forces. Will the Minister tell the House exactly what he believes the existing housing offer costs the MOD in total, after rents received?

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this wonderful debate, which is timely and important. Does she agree that one of the challenges is the inconsistency in the quality of accommodation? New accommodation in Stafford is extraordinary, but if it is made subject to a market rent, it will not be affordable to most service personnel.

Mrs Trevelyan: I thank the hon. Lady for raising one of the key questions. One of the great anxieties that families come to me with is the fear that the realities of private rental markets will be too costly to cope with, both for the MOD and individual families.

Will the Minister tell us what ongoing saving he wants to see in order to justify the vast upheaval and risks that bringing in the FAM would cause? Failing to meet our armed forces covenant commitment on housing by inventing a set of proposals that military families are appalled by, rather than extending the existing imperfect but workable service family accommodation model, will result in a mass exodus of experienced and highly trained military personnel.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): My hon. Friend visited RAF Odiham not long ago. I am sure that she will recall that 95 bed spaces have been condemned there, and 97% of the 674 still available are grade 4—the worst-quality accommodation. Does she

[Mr Ranil Jayawardena]

agree that that is a false economy, because so many spaces are no longer being used and are no longer sought after?

Mrs Trevelyan: I recall our visit to RAF Odiham well; we were frightened nearly to death in a Chinook. Getting housing provision right—particularly behind the wire, as at Odiham—is critical to keeping those highly trained personnel. An ambitious young Army officer said to me just the other day:

“Is FAM aiming to encourage home ownership, with tools such as Help to Buy, or force personnel into home ownership? If it's the latter, that just isn't going to work.”

Let us turn to the FAM survey, which was apparently sent out to all serving personnel—some 190,000 men and women. First, I ask the Minister why that survey was not made mandatory, as surveys are a great deal of the time; there was a recent mandatory survey on the language skill sets of serving personnel. Anyone would think that the MOD was happy to mandate, where that suited its agenda, but that for the FAM, despite housing being a vital component of the offer for our armed forces and their families, a lower response rate better suited the MOD's case for driving change, regardless of military families' complex housing needs and views.

Moreover, more than 40,000 people have been excluded from answering the survey because they are deemed to be a member of a protected group, including the special forces, the military provost guard service, those based in Northern Ireland, those on full-time reserve service contracts, those under 18 and unspecified others working with those groups. Apparently the MOD will ask their opinion separately, but that has not yet happened, and those groups quite rightly feel more than a little aggrieved that their views have not yet been sought. Their families are living with uncertainty about the future of SFA, just like all the others. Will the Minister set on the record when those 40,000 or more personnel will get their chance to have their say?

Secondly, of those who received the survey, many were unable to access it because their service number, which was being used as their access token, failed to be recognised by the survey designers' coding. Will the Minister confirm how many personnel fell through the cracks as a result of that failure? The message received by personnel was:

“If your service ID is rejected during login it means you will be unable to complete the FAM survey, because either it is not a valid armed forces service ID or you are part of a group that is not covered by the survey.”

Unsurprisingly, at that point many personnel stopped trying and simply gave up. I would find it quite insulting to be told that my service ID was not valid, and I know that many of those who put their life on the line for us all did, too. It would be helpful if the Minister clarified how many tried to access the survey but could not get in, and how many started it but failed to complete it because, as one engineer said to me,

“the whole survey just seemed like they had made up their minds that there will be change and we'll have to lump it.”

Thirdly, many were put off from doing the survey because, as one nurse put it:

“‘This is a completely anonymous survey, please use your service number to log in’ doesn't make me feel secure about speaking out.”

By my maths, if the Department has recorded 27,997 completed submissions, that is about a 14% return. If that is to be the basis of the evidence, we need to look closely at the questions that were and were not asked. Here we get to a key problem with the survey, and the Minister's clarification on this point today would be helpful in reducing the sense of *fait accompli* that so many service families have shared with me. The survey that personnel saw on screen gave four choices; SFA remaining was not there as a fifth choice. Much later in the survey, question 24 asked:

“If SFA were available to you with the same cost as the renting package, would you want to live in SFA instead?”

That was not mandatory or part of the options offered for the FAM. As one pilot said to me,

“we were annoyed that there was no option to keep SFA, forcing us to tick another option. In a few years, when this goes ahead, they will say ‘you asked for this, look at the survey results’”.

It turns out that those who failed to get past the service ID challenge, but then nagged the team running the FAM survey, eventually received an email that asked “which of the potential new options”

for the FAM

“do you think you would go for & why? Or would you still want to live in SFA? And why?”

If we are to give any credence to future decisions taken on a housing offer that moves away from SFA, it is vital that we are clear about who replied to which questions. A rifleman asked me whether the aim of the survey was simply to justify the dismantling of SFA, and said that to claim otherwise would be a lie, as the survey would have asked wider questions if its aim was not to justify the dismantling. Perhaps the Minister can reassure that young man and the other 196,000 personnel on that point and say that data from the survey will not be used as the basis for dismantling SFA, as so few serving personnel have been asked whether SFA is a model that they would like continued.

The Army Families Federation's “Big Survey” report on the future of military housing highlights the critical importance of SFA in the offer; only 22% of those surveyed said that they would definitely remain in the Army if SFA was reduced and a rental allowance was offered in its place. How much has the MOD paid to Deloitte to create and manage the survey? Did Deloitte or the MOD design the impractical proposed solutions, which bear little relation to how most of the military family actually live? Will the Minister confirm whether any working group with representatives from family federations, service personnel, spouses from all ranks, SSAFA, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation and industry experts was set up? Is FAM and its four options—single living accommodation without family; renting near work; owning near work; or owning away from work, and therefore renting too—what such a broad group would have come up with?

As one naval wife said to me:

“Filling out the survey just feels like MOD justifying its forced changes and we are some part of sanctioning that. That's why I haven't filled it out”.

Although our Navy personnel are more likely to own their own home than those from the other services, because they are away from their families for six to nine months at a time, even the Naval Families Federation survey on FAM indicated clearly that more than 50% would prefer to live in SFA than receive a rental allowance.

An RAF wife who has moved her family seven times in 15 years highlighted just why the flexibility of SFA is so important to retention:

“Many occasions we have been posted with less than a month to move. With having to look for work, schools and everything else they want to put the pressure on me to look for a home? We don’t know the area and rely heavily on the knowledge that a quarter is in a good position with community support from other service families. The new FAM will isolate us all from that network, as well as putting strain on our family life. Seems as though the armed forces are losing the one thing that appealed to families and that was that they would look after us.”

The RAF Families Federation survey on FAM supports that family’s view, with 95% of those surveyed saying that being able to move with the serving person and live together as a family is important, and 63% highlighting the value of the accommodation being sourced and provided by their employer.

Another part of the jigsaw is the question of the footprint strategy that the MOD will publish shortly. Part of the DIO’s remit was to reduce the built footprint of MOD assets by 30% by 2020. That is 30% of all property by square footage. Although the SFA portfolio was sold off to Annington Homes back in 1996, the leaseback arrangement set in place means that the DIO keeps all the maintenance and improvement responsibility for as long as it keeps these properties on its books. The MOD negotiated with Annington Homes a 58% rent discount on all the properties, which will come to an end in 2021.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman has not been present to hear the whole speech.

Jim Shannon: I was chairing another meeting. I have come straight from it, Madam Chair.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): It is generally accepted that interventions should be from Members who are present for the whole speech. Is the hon. Lady happy to give way?

Mrs Trevelyan: I am going to run out of time, am I not?

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): It is up to the hon. Lady.

Jim Shannon: Just very quickly.

Mrs Trevelyan: Go on then, as fast as you like.

Jim Shannon: I asked to intervene because I am concerned that in Northern Ireland the MOD might be demolishing some of its houses in Ballykinler. The hon. Lady is being very constructive in addressing the issue; we need to see the same in Northern Ireland. Instead of demolition, there should be retention for the future.

Mrs Trevelyan: We are looking at the issue in Northern Ireland as well.

Will the Minister give us details of any negotiations that have started with Annington Homes on a new rental framework, which would ensure that a continued

level of subsidised rents could be provided to military families? My concern is that the MOD intends to hand back the bulk of the homes, and then allow Annington to rent them to service families on a private rental market arrangement, whether behind the wire or not. That would meet the 30% reduction target, but would no doubt do nothing to reduce the overall costs of subsidising housing—that is, if the MOD actually intends to price the FAM offer at a level that families find acceptable, and that allows them to choose to remain in the armed forces.

I hope that the Minister can persuade me that I am wrong, but my deep concern is that the DIO was set a financial rationalisation target without any reference to the retention risk to our human capital, and that no one in the MOD is balancing out the potential financial savings of bringing in FAM with losing the security and support of SFA. In my opinion, and that of many of our leading military leaders, our armed forces personnel are working at unsustainable levels of undermanning. If we reduce SFA—with its security, safety and community for families, and with the practicalities it offers, despite the shortcomings of the present maintenance contracts for short notice postings and so on—we risk losing many experienced personnel to the private sector, and we open up a long-term retention problem, thereby reducing the effectiveness, flexibility and world-renowned reputation of the British military.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs Trevelyan: I will not, as I do not have time.

If what I just described were to happen, it would have financial and military implications for a generation. The British people would never want to hear that the MOD had put cost saving over operational effectiveness, most especially for our human capital: the men and women who put their lives on the line for us.

The MOD’s strategic defence and security review 2015 states that Joint Force 2025 and Britain’s defence will continue to depend on the commitment, professionalism and skills of our people. Recruiting, retaining and developing the right people is therefore a top priority for the MOD. The SDSR talks about a new accommodation offer to help more service personnel to live in private accommodation or own their own homes. Perhaps the Minister can answer the question that goes to the heart of whether the Government believe in the armed forces covenant commitment, which is summed up by a highly qualified and valued member of our armed forces—I have the greatest honour of being his voice today:

“Is the implementation of FAM a deliberate attempt to destroy and de-professionalise our armed forces? Given that housing is a tiny proportion of the MOD budget, why get rid of the SFA, which means so much to so many?”

4.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) on securing this debate. I know that she, like me, cares deeply about the wellbeing of our personnel. Her constructive contribution to the

[Mark Lancaster]

Public Accounts Committee report will help significantly to improve service accommodation. She asked an awful lot of very detailed questions. I can assure her that I will not be able to cover them all in the 12 and a half minutes remaining. I shall therefore start, if I may, with an apology, and an assurance that for any detailed questions I cannot cover—there will be many—I will write to her. I appeal to my hon. Friends present that, if they can limit their interventions, I may be able to attempt to respond to the debate.

I am not going to pretend that the Government record on accommodation has been an unqualified success in recent years. It has not. Issues with CarillionAmey have been well documented, not least by the PAC. Things are improving, but there remains much to do. Like my hon. Friend, I am absolutely determined to see this through and to ensure that improvements to our service family accommodation are carried through.

Nevertheless, the focus of the debate is not on the past but on the future. As our troops return from Germany and we look to rationalise our estate, we have realised that there is an unprecedented opportunity to do more for our people—an opportunity to give them greater stability, so that they do not feel they are being asked to up sticks at a moment's notice.

4.18 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.29 pm

On resuming—

Mark Lancaster: Our future accommodation model is part of the mechanism for achieving this goal of greater stability. Its benefits are not well understood, so I would like to use today's debate to explain why I believe it will be a vast improvement on what has gone before.

First, it will be fairer. As the Public Accounts Committee acknowledged, the current model has failed to move with the times. Let me give just one example. A married senior officer will be assigned a four-bedroom home even if they have no children or other dependents, and will usually pay just £350 to £450 a month for it. By contrast, an unmarried member of the junior ranks, with a partner of 10 years and two children, is entitled to nothing more than a single bedroom in a block. If they move out to the private sector to live with their family, it could cost them well over £1,000 a month. I am determined to make the model based on need, not rank, and I am determined that it should reflect modern society.

Secondly, the model will be more flexible. Times have changed. The sort of arrangements people were happy with when I joined the Army in 1988 are no longer applicable today. Some want to live closer to their spouse's workplace. Some want to live among the civilian community. Some want to own their own home. Some, who are single, want to share with a friend or get on the housing ladder. Currently, however, our personnel have to like it or lump it. If they choose to go it alone, we cut the purse strings and they get nothing—they get no assistance, whether financial or otherwise, from the MOD. That simply is not fair and does not make business sense to a Department looking to release parts

of its estate and expand in other areas. Why spend on new accommodation if it is not even wanted in some parts?

In future, we are going to give service personnel the choice of who they live with, where they live and what sort of home they live in. No longer will it be a one-size-fits-all model. We will now support servicemen and women who want to live in the private sector by subsidising rent, taking account of the geographic differences in rent when they are required to move. Alternatively, we will help them to buy a home. We have already made a start on that through our forces Help to Buy scheme, which the Government have extended to 2018.

My last point is that our future model will be affordable. I do not mean that it is an exercise in indiscriminate cost cutting, but the current regime is characterised by chronic wastefulness. To answer the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed directly, we spend about £1 billion on our accommodation and get about £200 million back in charges.

One in five service homes is empty at any one time to ensure, as I have described, that the right home is always available to the right rank. We spend £2 for every £1 of subsidy our personnel receive. We spend about £1 billion in total on accommodation, but nearly a quarter of personnel do not benefit from that. With the majority of our accommodation already owned by third parties and the cost to the MOD linked to market rents, costs are set to rise, but we can do better, not least because the money can be recycled back into the defence budget.

On the subject of affordability and efficiency, some are concerned that any savings we make could be undermined by a lower rate of retention—my hon. Friend made that point—and by dissatisfied personnel choosing to leave the armed forces earlier. In response to that, I would say that this programme is about finding the best way to make things better for our men and women. It is not about weighing up any savings we might make in accommodation against the cost to retention. We hope that our changes would diminish that risk, rather than exacerbate it. We are planning to begin piloting the future accommodation model towards the end of 2018.

Let me make three things clear. First, we are not getting rid of all service family accommodation. We know that there are benefits to the existing system—not least the sense of community it generates. In some areas, the absence of a significant rental market would make the system's removal unworkable. In other areas I have visited, such as Ludgershall on Salisbury plain, we will be building new service family accommodation due to an increased demand as a result of the Army coming back from Germany. If we plan to scrap all service family accommodation, why are we building new service family accommodation? These are the sorts of myths that we have to try to tackle. I recognise that part of the problem has been the communication piece, and I hope that this debate will begin to address that.

What is clear is that the solution needs to be tailored to each location. What might work in London will not work in Benbecula. The amount of service family accommodation retained will differ from location to location, based on demand, operational constraints and achieving the best value for money, but reducing service family accommodation will give us more flexibility and allow us to support more personnel to live how they want to live. We are looking at options that would not

guarantee service family accommodation for everyone who wants it, but that is exactly the case today. I cannot guarantee service family accommodation for everyone who wants it, which is why we have other ways of providing accommodation. I can guarantee that we would support those personnel to find and live in a home.

Secondly, we cannot take these decisions without listening to what our people want. That is why we have been consulting extensively with service personnel, taking on board the findings of the Public Accounts Committee report and the Families Federation accommodation surveys, which also include our own survey. My hon. Friend mentioned that, and I will come back to her in detail on some of the questions she asked about the survey. Personally, I do not think that 28,000 responses is a particularly poor response rate. If Members spoke to Ipsos MORI, it would say that the surveys are based on the percentage of people who reply. The statistical analysis can then be used to form the opinion, in the same way that we have opinion polls for general elections, although they were not particularly successful.

To expand on the subject of our survey, some people have suggested that it was written in a leading way, to draw people down a specific path. I would like to put that notion to rest by saying that that was unequivocally not the case. It was in fact written in consultation with Ipsos MORI and Defence Statistics with the aim of producing an unbiased set of questions, as all surveys worth the paper they are written on should be. Clearly my hon. Friend does not think the survey was unbiased, and I take that on board, but that was definitely the objective. The survey's purpose was to understand people's choices when presented with future accommodation model options. It also included a question asking whether respondents would prefer to remain in service family accommodation, but the programme is not about the future accommodation model versus service family accommodation; it is about coming up with a more flexible model that suits the varied needs of all.

Thirdly, at this point I should be clear that no final decisions have been made. Nothing is set in stone. The whole purpose of the consultation at this point is to offer a series of options, to listen to our service personnel and to try to find a model that suits them. It is all about putting our people first.

We have had a well-informed and valuable debate today. We all share the same fundamental desire to ensure that those who serve us are well provided for. The views of my hon. Friends—several have contributed—and those of our constituents will continue to shape our plans, but I have no doubt that the future accommodation model will provide our people with greater choice and greater stability. The old system is outdated. We are updating it so that it is fit to meet the needs and expectations of modern families in the 21st century. I am absolutely determined to deliver a system of accommodation for our service personnel that is fit for the 21st century and, crucially, for them.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Ministry of Defence's future accommodation model.

South-west Agriculture and Fishing

4.38 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Before I call Scott Mann to move the motion, I remind Members that this debate will end at 5.41 pm. If Members wish to speak in the debate, could they please stand after Scott Mann has sat down so that I can be sure who is here to speak and who is here to intervene? I will give priority to Members from the south-west.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of the UK leaving the EU on agriculture and fishing in the south west.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon, and I am grateful to be able to introduce this debate today. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary on her appointment in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Our farmers work incredibly hard in the south-west. They are the beating heart of our economy. I, like many, campaigned to leave the European Union to help our farmers and fishermen get a better deal. I believe that they have suffered under the EU and that Brexit will offer them more freedom and prosperity. South-west farmers manage 38% of Britain's dairy herd and directly support over 8,000 jobs, with thousands more employed in the wider agricultural sector. The farmers and fishermen in the south-west will be directly affected by Brexit—I believe for the better.

There will be big benefits for fishermen in leaving the EU. They have suffered under the EU and its common fisheries policy and taking control of our territorial waters will only benefit. They get a very thin slice of the pie when it comes to quotas and that must change.

For farmers, the situation is slightly different and it is right that we try to offer them confidence as we head towards the exit door. They rely on the EU for farm subsidies and for tariff-free trade. Importantly, they also count on the EU for foreign labour, which is a particularly sensitive issue. On one hand, farmers say they want to continue having migrant workers; on the other hand, millions of people are calling for lower immigration. It is imperative that we strike the right balance.

In place of the EU's common agricultural and fisheries policies, I would like to see a British agricultural policy and a British fisheries policy. The National Farmers Union would like a domestic agricultural policy that establishes a stable consensus on what farming can deliver for the economy, consumers and the environment. It is imperative that we continue to guarantee farm subsidies and I was pleased that the Chancellor has done so until 2020, which gives south-west farmers some much needed certainty. Farm payments must be processed faster than currently—I have had so many farmers complain to me about the Rural Payments Agency and the penalties that are imposed on them without any prior communication or justification.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very strong case for the south-west. My constituency, Taunton Deane in Somerset, is very reliant on farming. Does my hon. Friend agree that farmers do not want their livelihoods to be jeopardised during the

[Rebecca Pow]

two-year period of negotiations on how to leave the EU? They are asking for leeway, and whether we could still remain within the single market during that period.

Scott Mann: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I will come on to the single market later in my speech. We need to be on the side of farmers, not working against them. A better subsidy system can certainly be achieved in the short term to install confidence.

We need actively to promote British produce at home and abroad. Leaving the single market is a fantastic opportunity to turn our attention to food producers and to become less reliant on imports, which can leave us at the mercy of currency markets. By making our agricultural sector much more diverse and profitable, Britain's food chains could become more sustainable and less reliant on imports.

One avenue open to the Government is food procurement for our public services. Out of the EU, the Government could choose British food produce to supply our civil service, our schools and our armed forces. A policy and ethos of British food for British institutions would help our farming sector grow and be at the very heart of Government.

It is imperative that our farmers have access to labour. Certainly in the short and medium term, our farmers need access to workers from the EU. Just like British workers, EU migrants work incredibly hard—this debate is a good opportunity to highlight the contribution that they make to the economy in the south-west. According to statistics from the National Farmers Union, approximately 57% of workers in the meat sector and 40% in the egg sector are from within the EU. As we move forward, it is important that we balance the flow of migrant seasonal workers with the need to control immigration. I believe we can do both out of the EU. The National Farmers Union is in the process of drawing up its Brexit policy. One of its suggestions is the introduction of a seasonal agricultural permit scheme that would grant 12-month visas.

A British agricultural policy should champion agricultural employment, with joined-up initiatives from Whitehall for young and unemployed people to help them find work on farms. With such a policy we could end the nonsense of the three-crop rule and farmers being unable to bury their dead stock.

I would like a British fisheries policy that tears up the EU's awful common fisheries policy. Restricted by the 12-mile limit, our fishermen have been treated extremely unfairly. It is time we addressed that and took back control of our territorial waters. Our south-west fishermen have felt like second-class citizens for far too long. We absolutely must stop that. British fishermen must be given priority, in parallel with the UK Government overseeing the management and conservation of fish stocks and quotas.

Under a British fisheries policy, Britain could extend its exclusive economic zone from 12 to 200 miles from the shore, as specified by the UN international convention on the law of the sea. With those waters, Britain could absolutely have control over its quotas, permits and conservation. Currently, the fishermen in the south-west are getting a very raw deal. For example, of the 4,500 tonnes

of cod that can be landed, our fisherman only get 8%, while French boats get 74%; and of the 7,200 tonnes of haddock that can be landed, we only get 10%, while the French receive 67%. Those are not isolated examples—the same can be said for pollock, plaice, sole, hake and whiting.

Away from the sea, it is vital that we support our fishing communities in Cornwall, the south-west and around the rest of the UK. I have already had assurances from the fisheries Minister and his Department that they will offer support for fishing communities, and I hope the Minister will give me the same assurance today.

One big issue for fishing in the south-west is whether we allow European boats in UK waters and vice versa. There is definitely a balance that needs to be struck, as fish migrate around the coastline. With up to 80% of the fish caught in the south-west being exported to EU countries, it is important that we strike that balance, so that exports are not harmed and we maintain a good relationship with our EU counterparts. That said, our ability to strike free trade deals will also open up global markets for our high-quality shellfish and wet fish.

We need our farmers and fishermen in the south-west to have confidence in the process as we withdraw ourselves from the European Union. In the short term, we need to build confidence as an existing member. In the medium term, we need to lay out how we will secure and enhance our fishing and farming sectors. In the long term, we need policies in place that are more democratic and supportive, where our fishing and farming voices can be heard, and which are fully accountable to this place, Westminster, and not to Brussels.

There is so much potential for our farming and fishing sectors in the south-west. Over the next two years, I look forward to hearing how the Government plan to give a fairer deal and how we can grow our economy in the south-west as a result.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Order. Because of the number of Members who have indicated their wish to speak, with the authority of the Chairman of Ways and Means I am imposing a time limit of four minutes on speeches by Back Benchers. If many interventions are made, I may have to reduce that limit.

4.48 pm

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I will endeavour to stick to that time limit, Mrs Moon.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) on securing this debate. As he rightly says, leaving the EU has massive potential implications for agriculture and fisheries. I was very pleased by the assurance given by the Secretary of State in the House last week, in response to my question, that she would guarantee the current standards in environmental protection, so I will put those issues to one side for a moment.

The hon. Gentleman pointed, very rightly, to the importance of free trade within the European Union to both our agricultural and fisheries sectors. We export almost 40% of our lamb to the rest of the EU. He mentioned that we export 80% of the fish caught off the

south-west. In my view, the best shellfish, crab and lobster in the world comes from the coast around Devon and Cornwall, but sadly, most of it goes straight to markets in France and Spain. I was not surprised when I saw the headline in the *Western Morning News* this week, which made very clear that our farmers' main priority in the whole debate is that we remain members of the single market.

My first question for the Minister, therefore, is whether she is committed, as her first priority for the UK, to remain as a member of the single market. That is vital not only for tariff-free trade, but for access to the important labour mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, on which a lot of our farming and food industry completely depends.

If the Minister and the Government are not to accord importance to staying in the single market, I would like to know why not. If, as seems to be the case, the Government have already given up any hope of staying in the single market because of their wrong-headed and self-damaging obsession with cutting migrant labour, what levels of tariffs would she expect to be imposed on the sorts of the goods that we have been talking about, both agricultural and from fisheries, and what level of damage does she anticipate that that will do to our farming and fisheries sectors?

We have heard worrying reports that the Secretary of State for International Trade wants us to leave the European customs union. That would be an absolute disaster for our agriculture and fisheries sectors, and hit our economy with a fall of 4.5% in our overall GDP and a far worse fall for agriculture and fisheries. Has the Minister assessed the impact that leaving the customs union would have on our fishing and farming sectors? I will also be grateful if she could give us some idea of the expected impact on consumer prices, and imported food prices in particular, not only from the collapse in the value of the pound owing to uncertainty about our access to the single market, but from the increased prices that west country consumers will pay for goods if we leave the European Union, or are outside the single market or, even worse, outside the customs union.

Finally, given the importance of all those questions to the future of the important sectors that we are discussing, will the Minister guarantee to publish a full cost-benefit analysis of the possible and potential options for our future relationship with the rest of Europe and the world, so that the public and Members of the House may make a considered judgment before we are asked to vote on anything? Does she agree that it would be absolutely unacceptable for the Government, without consulting Parliament, precipitately to invoke article 50 as soon as March before we have clear answers to those important questions on which the future of our farming and fishing industries depend?

4.52 pm

Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con): I can make my points to the Minister short. On farming, may I first make a plea for any priority for domestic agriculture policy to include the concept of food security? Food security has been a principle much spoken of but rejected by successive Governments, including the one in which the preceding speaker, the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), served so honourably and in

such a distinguished capacity. However, food security is vital, and therefore a vital component of any domestic agriculture policy.

Equally importantly, it is also vital for us to promote our agriculture in a way that we have failed to do in recent decades. The Dairy Council is the organisation charged with the promotion of the health benefits of dairy products, but it is not charged with the kind of marketing and advertising function that we see in countries such as New Zealand. I therefore urge the Minister to take from the debate my suggestion, and that of many dairy farmers throughout the country, that we need an agency or organisation that is devoted to the activity of marketing and promoting the fantastic dairy products of this country. The Dairy Council is not an organisation that is suited to that end because it is based on a research function rather on a marketing one.

We need to get behind British agriculture; we need to promote and advertise it in a way that we have not for many years; and we need a domestic policy that prioritises food security and domestic production. We also need a policy that decides very quickly what we will and will not support by way of direct Government grant.

On fishing, my plea to the Minister is to let any policy we design be based on local, sustainable fishing fleets that support coastal communities. This is our opportunity to ensure that a domestic fishing industry revives in the coastal communities that have been so hard pressed in recent years. It is our opportunity to deploy intelligence and flexibility, and to do away with blanket bans—despite the plentifulness of certain species of fish in the Bristol channel, we have a ray ban, a spurdog ban and bans that fishermen local to the area know are not right or intelligent. Instead, such bans should be flexibly designed. Any policy must support the interests of those fragile coastal communities.

The key areas and priorities that I urge the Minister to take away, therefore, are promoting, getting behind and marketing our British agriculture; and support and sustenance for coastal communities and local, sustainable fishing fleets.

4.55 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as ever, Mrs Moon, to see you in the Chair.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) on securing the debate. It will not surprise him to hear that I do not agree with him about the benefits of the vote on 23 June for British agriculture and fisheries. The food and farming sectors face very real threats from Brexit. I appreciate that there are opportunities too, but I am already worried about the extent to which people have seized on the idea of those opportunities, because to some extent they fly in the face of what we know to be the Government's agenda. In particular, in the context of protecting the natural environment, the Environmental Audit Committee, of which I am a member, is already looking at the impact of Brexit on the managed landscape and the natural environment. Yes there are certainly opportunities to improve how we do things, but I am less than optimistic that those opportunities will be seized.

It is also important to stop using the European Union as an excuse for some of the deficiencies in policy. For example, the allocation of quotas between

[Kerry McCarthy]

the smaller and larger fleets is to a large extent in the hands of the UK Government—the decision can already be made by them without the need for agreement with our European partners.

In the two and a half minutes I have left, I will talk about labour and workforce issues, and what restrictions on freedom of movement would mean for the sector. It has been estimated that 90% of British fruit, vegetables and salad are harvested by 60,000 to 70,000 seasonal migrant workers, many of whom come from the accession countries of eastern Europe. The vast majority come from other EU countries, and we need to answer the question of what would happen to the labour supply if we placed restrictions on freedom of movement, and whether it is something that can be dealt with through seasonal visas.

There is a fear that ill-thought-through restrictions on freedom of movement will mean that crops go unharvested, hitting food supplies, food production and farmers' incomes, eventually putting them out of business. As we have heard, food sovereignty—food security—is a real issue in this country. At the moment, we produce less than 60% of the food that we eat, and 40% of the fruit and vegetables that we consume come from the EU. Things that can be grown here ought to be grown here, but that needs a supply of labour as well.

Last week, in Parliament I attended an interesting event organised by the Food and Drink Federation. Food manufacturers were talking about the impact of Brexit on them. I must admit that I had not realised the extent to which they depend on a skilled workforce from other European countries. They said that 27% of their workforce are non-UK EU citizens. Of course, some of those are at the lower end of the scale, filling the jobs that people perhaps do not want, or perhaps people are not prepared to work for below the living wage. Those businesses estimate that they will need 130,000 new skilled workers by 2024 and they were not confident that the Government's existing policies on apprenticeships and on encouraging people to study the relevant subjects at university would pay off. They are already having difficulty recruiting and, understandably, their employees are already worried.

We had a debate in the main Chamber today about what will happen to EU migrants who are currently working in this country and whether they will be allowed to remain. What restrictions on freedom of movement will mean for both low and high-skill jobs is a real issue. I hope the Minister is discussing that with her colleagues in the Department for Exiting the European Union, the Home Office and the other Departments involved.

4.59 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I congratulate and commend my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), who is my neighbour, on securing this important debate. Since the result on 23 June, I have met large groups of both fishermen and farmers, and although we all recognise that the journey ahead will not be easy or smooth, what they are asking for is quite straightforward and should easily be accommodated. Their priority is simply for experts in their sectors to be sat around the negotiating table so their expertise is fully understood and contributes to the debate about how we move forward beyond 2019.

Fishermen in the south-west ask that we finally recognise that fish stocks in the west of England are different from those in other parts of the UK, where fishermen target a particular catch. When fishermen in the west of England put their nets out, they often do not know what they are going to catch. It is a mixed fishery, and the quota system has struggled to recognise and accommodate that. Those fishermen ask that we properly recognise their challenge when it comes to fishing in a mixed fishery. They also ask that they get a fair share of the total allowable catch. We all understand and know about the weighting against UK fishermen. Fishermen in other European countries are able to catch a much larger share in UK waters than UK fishermen, who are sometimes allowed to catch as little as 11% of a particular species. UK fishermen are asking that that situation is made fair.

I turn now to what farmers and food producers are asking for. I understand that under current EU regulations, as my hon. Friend referred to, we in the United Kingdom are not able to tell our public sector organisations that they must prioritise buying British produce. Because of that legislation, and because those organisations are not allowed to choose British producers over those from other European countries, UK food producers potentially lose out on billions of pounds. It would be fantastic to know that, during the negotiation and as we move forward, the Government will lead the way in buying British wherever possible and do everything they can to ensure that the British public know where their food comes from and the farmer receives a fair price. That alone will help significantly to mitigate the challenge that farmers and food producers face.

Both farmers and fishermen have requested that the Government promote fishing and farming as worthwhile jobs with secure futures. Parents often do not see that fishing and farming have futures for their children, and we need to do much more to encourage young people to take up those skills and increasingly high-tech fishing and farming jobs.

Finally, however we manage the movement of labour from outside the UK's borders into the UK, we must not impose unnecessary barriers to foreign workers. We must strike the right balance so that our farmers and fishermen continue to enjoy the skills and labour that are available from countries around the world.

5.3 pm

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), who is a fellow south-west MP, on securing this important debate. This is the second debate in just over a week to which south-west Members have turned up en masse—to stand up first for tourism and now for agriculture.

I cannot claim to have any significant commercial fishing in my patch, but I have a lot of farming and I know how concerning the impact of Brexit is to farmers. There has been a lot of uncertainty in the last few years, with low prices, the poorly administered basic payment scheme and the prospect of a significant change to the agricultural subsidy regime once we have left the EU and therefore the common agricultural policy. I welcome the Chancellor's announcement that the current agricultural funding under pillar one of the CAP will be maintained until 2020, but despite that commitment the UK

Government will spend less on agricultural subsidy because we currently get such a bad deal from the CAP. That must be music to the Treasury's ears. The end of the decade is not that far away, so the Government need to start articulating the long-term vision for farming in the UK now.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): We have heard many voices from the south-west but none yet from Dorset. Although Dorset is the smallest county in the south-west, it represents nearly 10% of the agricultural workforce. Does my hon. Friend recognise that there are opportunities for the CAP system to be reformed, which farmers have been calling for, specifically in relation to the timing of payments, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) mentioned?

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Order. For hon. Members' understanding, James Heappey gains an extra minute.

James Heappey: I agree very much. I will come back to the importance of getting the voices of individual farmers heard. This is a question not just of subsidy—although that is clearly what most farmers will be listening for most keenly—but of access to seasonal manpower and markets, and the regulations that will be in place to facilitate that access. I therefore welcome the initial announcement that all existing EU legislation will be brought forward as UK law and thereafter amended and improved in the UK's interest. That at least gives farmers the reassurance that the standards and regulations under which they operate will not change in a blink.

As for access to the single market, I detect a little inconsistency among the farmers in my constituency. Many in my patch have called for greater protection of the UK market to reduce imports of cheaper, and frankly less tasty, produce from elsewhere. I am not sure that we should go down the route of protecting the market, because many an agricultural sector is exporting enthusiastically and we would like to see more do so. Instead, our challenge is to promote UK produce in the UK and abroad. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall that a first step in addressing that challenge should be to ensure that British-produced food and drink is prioritised in procurement for public services.

I also agree with my hon. Friend about the availability of migrant labour. As was said during the debate last week about the tourism industry, there is high demand for seasonal migrant labour to be able to come through. The points system that the Government moved away from—thank heavens—would not have achieved what our farmers and holiday parks need. We do not just want rocket scientists to be given permits to come and work in the UK; we want agricultural workers to come in on seasonal work permits too. That will clearly require a dynamic system for ensuring that we award the right number of seasonal agricultural work permits to meet the demands of the agriculture industry at any one time.

However people voted back in June, the CAP was bloated and broken. We now have a real opportunity to set up a system of our own that subsidises where necessary to ensure food security and make our agriculture

industry more resilient, with more exporters and more profit. But a word of caution: there is a real danger that in the post-Brexit policy bun fight, the large, well-funded lobbying companies will have the loudest voice. We need to make absolutely sure that farmers, who are notorious for suffering in silence in the solitude of their tractors, get a seat at the table to come forward with their ideas about what the market needs to look like post-Brexit. Farmers have incredible expertise, and it would be far better to hear them contributing to this debate than the well-funded lobbyists up in London.

5.8 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) on securing this debate. Like him, I see Brexit as a great bonus for farming and fishing in the south-west. It is a win-win—but so it should be, because we have significant investment in agriculture and fishing in the south-west. Some 72% of Devon's land is farmed, and £2.7 billion of turnover in the south-west is due to agriculture. A third of all dairy and beef, and a fifth of all sheep and lambs are also from the south-west. Whatever happens post-Brexit will make a big difference for us in the south-west.

I entirely endorse the comments made about the CAP by my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heappey). It simply did not work, and it rewarded people in the wrong way. I am not suggesting that we should in any way remove its environmental role. We should continue that, but we should make it relevant and appropriate while ensuring that we encourage production. Many farmers I speak to say that there is absolutely no incentive to produce more. That cannot be right. We also have to get the balance right between the large landowner and the farmer with a small landmass to farm who has been short-changed against the big landowners in all sorts of different ways, in part because across Europe the farmers tend to farm across much larger tracts of land, and what works for them does not necessarily work for us.

Going forward, we certainly need to see better, targeted support that is more appropriate to the nature of our agricultural community, which is not the same as that of France and Germany. We also need to ensure that the regulations are properly scrutinised, because at the moment we have rules about the size of gates, the height of hedges and how much space is left between the hedge and crop, and much of that we do not need. There are similar issues. While we clearly want to ensure that animal welfare standards are at their highest, my farmers tell me that much of the red tape around what we need to do are unnecessary and so easy to get around that, frankly, they are rather pointless.

I totally agree with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox) about marketing and labelling, because I think very few people really understand what that tractor means. We could get a proper scheme going, with proper support to encourage supermarkets and others to really promote British, and we could have legislation that made it clear where the word "British" or "produced" can and cannot be used, because it is unclear and the European rules are different from those we have here.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that leaving the EU provides an opportunity for the UK to be more self-sufficient in

[Steve Double]

food? Currently we are at just over 60%. We have a great opportunity for UK farmers to sell more of their products in the UK and for us to be less reliant on imports.

Anne Marie Morris: I totally agree. There is a huge appetite to buy local; it is just that people do not know how to do that. Those of us who live in rural communities are privileged in a way, because we have all sorts of farm shops and we all know about them, but those who live in the cities do not get the same opportunity, other than when there is a local market or whatever. There is certainly an issue in trying to bring the best of rural England to the cities and other parts of the country so that they can understand and see the benefits—certainly in taste—that we can bring them.

There are other things we could do, such as introducing a crop insurance scheme that looks at the challenges farmers face when over a year we have bad weather and a crop fails. If we did that, we could have checks and balances to help our farmers. However, we need something that really works and not something that creates a milk mountain—that would be the wrong way forward. Of course, we need to invest in science, because if we are to move forward and increase our market share and footprint, we need investment in research to go ahead.

With regard to the fishermen, I entirely support all that my Cornish colleagues have said. The quota system does not work. I am not suggesting that we should cut off anyone from fishing in our waters, but it needs to be fairer, because at the moment the French quota for plaice is twice as big as ours, for Dover sole it is two thirds more and for cod it is five sixths more than ours. That really is not acceptable.

We need a fair quota system. We need also sustainable fishing—at the moment that is largely ignored in large parts of Europe—and to deal once and for all with the discard problem, because although the EU has talked about that for many years, we still have not resolved it. There is much to do, and I am absolutely sure that the British Government can put agriculture and fishing first.

5.13 pm

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) for securing the debate, which is particularly timely for me because I have my catch-up with the National Farmers Union at Crealy park in East Devon on Friday. We will hear a lot over the coming months and years about the threats and opportunities of Brexit and it is up to us as parliamentarians to ensure that the opportunities trump the threats.

The threats are pretty obvious to the farming and fishing sectors. There are threats of access to markets—we do not know what shape they will take—and we have heard about freedom of movement issues, and of labour in particular, in the south-west, be that for people working in the poultry business or picking vegetables or daffodils further west. However, it seems to me that none of us will lament the passing of the common agricultural policy or the EU common fisheries policy.

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to answer the question: does farming have a future? That is a question that, if we get it right, we will no longer have to ask ourselves. This is a time to shape our farming, shape

our fishing and shape our countryside, to show people that there is indeed a future. It is self-evident, of course, that we continue with arrangements as they are for now. It does need the Secretary of State to confirm this; we can continue with the status quo until we sign the decree absolute in the divorce from the EU. It is what happens after that is important, as we change the existing legislation to reflect what we want for UK policy.

I think this is genuinely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our farming industries and I very much hope that Ministers in the Department will not spend the next few months or years talking to lobbyists or large organisations, but talking to the practitioners on the ground. I hope they will talk to the supermarkets and finally get some sense out of them in promoting British products at fair prices. I hope they will talk to the Environment Agency and Natural England and other organisations to ensure they are refocused to support a farmed countryside, not the sanitised version of the countryside as evidenced weekly by programmes that the BBC so loves, such as “Countryfile”—or, even worse, by the absurd Chris Packham.

Rebecca Pow: My right hon. Friend is making a strong case. On that note, does he agree it is important that policies are developed that allow agriculture and the good industry to grow and, as he says, create a healthy, sustainable environment with the soil, air and water, ticking all those boxes at once? As he says, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Sir Hugo Swire: Yes, and not all from the EU has been bad—that is the point. When we come to examine some of the legislation, and particularly some of the wildlife and environmental legislation, I strongly suspect that we will want to adopt quite a lot of it for ourselves. I very much hope Ministers will come to my constituency and speak to the principal and staff at one of the finest land-based colleges left in the country, Bicton. It should not be one of the few land-based colleges left in the country; we should have them all over the countryside. I hope the Minister or her colleagues will come and speak to them.

I hope Ministers will come and talk to dairy farmers such as Peter and Di Wastenage—who were farmers of the year in the *Farmers Weekly* awards in 2015 and who run a magnificent dairy herd—and address the issue of how we tackle the scourge of bovine TB and finally eradicate it, particularly in the south-west. I hope they will also discuss how we can deal with flood prevention and balance that against the needs of farmers.

I hope, finally, that we will discuss issues that are important in tourism but equally important to running farming businesses: rurality, services and broadband. Farmers need broadband. They are not only isolated in their tractor cabs, non-complaining. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heap) has found so many non-complaining farmers—I would like to find out where they are, so perhaps he could tell me. Of course, farmers do get on with the job, but when they come home to fill in those myriad files—many of which I hope a new British farming policy will render redundant—they do need modern communications.

I think 75% of the countryside is already farmed. Let us make sure it is farmed properly and let us make sure it is farmed in the interests of the agricultural community. Let us make sure we have sustainability balanced with

environmental requirements and deal, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox) said, with the issue of food security. On balance, yes, there are threats, but the opportunities more than outweigh the threats. We should be talking up British farming and British fishing because in the south-west it is our lifeblood.

5.18 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Time is short, so I will congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) on bringing forward this debate, and endorse the many comments he and others have made about the importance of our farming industry. I would like to touch on: issues for our fishing industry, particularly fairness, markets, support and sustainability; our coastal communities—the Minister, whom I welcome to her post, will understand that, as she represents a coastal community—marine science; and the importance of talking to fishermen and farmers as policies go forward.

First is the issue of fairness—that is what fishermen are looking for. When 73 million of the channel fishing quota goes to British fishermen and 211 million goes to French fishermen, clearly that is out of balance. Fishermen tell me that they are unable to access waters within France's 12-mile limit, but others are able to access waters within our 12-mile limit, so that again is an area in which we have an opportunity to make significant changes. Also, will the Minister comment on the issue of quota hopping? That has long been a source of concern to our fishermen.

This is not just about our fishing communities and fishermen; it is about the onshore sector, markets and access to those markets. Will the Minister join me in congratulating Brixham market and Brixham Trawler Agents? Last week, Mike Shaw and his team topped the £1 million mark for the value of the catch landed through Brixham market. That market was worth more than £23 million to our local economy in the past year. However, the majority of the produce that goes through that market is for export, principally to the European Union. Clearly, it is absolutely vital that we protect those markets, and that we do not drive the producer sector away from Brixham and other areas in the south-west to the European Union. I hope that the Minister will focus on that, as well as access for the important workers in that industry.

Many hon. Members have touched on support for our coastal communities, our fishermen and, indeed, for Brixham market and others. Although many grants have come from the European Union, we all accept that the money is recycled from our own resources. It will be terrific if we have more flexibility to use that money in a way that is right for our businesses and communities. Will the Minister comment on whether those processes will speed up, and become more transparent and less bureaucratic? We have a huge opportunity to do that.

There is also the important issue of sustainability. We will exit the common fisheries policy at a time when it finally seems to be getting its act together; the 2014 reforms have really started to make a difference. Continuing to look at this by sea basin area will be important. Clearly, under the United Nations arrangements, we will still rightly be bound to liaise with our neighbours when coming to these agreements; we cannot just

unilaterally make changes. It is important that the Minister acknowledges the importance of having a commitment to a maximum sustainable yield and to protecting our marine environment.

We must also look at pollution controls and safety at sea. Those who put their lives on the line for us to put fish on our plate deserve an absolute assurance that safety will be foremost in the Government's mind going forward.

5.22 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) on securing the debate. While speaking within the terms of reference of the debate, I will also make some comments on Europe. In 2015, the UK's deficit in trading goods and services with the EU was £69 billion, while the surplus with non-EU countries was £30 billion. The figures are clear. What is not clear are the steps that must now be taken to secure trade deals for companies.

We must remember that when article 50 is invoked and we leave Europe, the seas around the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will be open to all those who fly the British flag—to us in Portavogie, in my constituency of Strangford, as well as those in Brixham and in Looe; we look forward to working with our fishing comrades in the south-west. We must also remember that companies such as Rich Sauces service places as far away as America, while Pritchitts and Lakeview dairies are looking to markets in the far east. Those are farm products that are farmed and produced at home. We look forward to those opportunities, as do those in the south-west of England.

For years, red tape has bound farmers. Common-sense farming was no longer allowed, and farming became a pen pusher's dream and a worker's nightmare. I commend the Government, and the Minister in particular, for guaranteeing current EU farm subsidies, which make up some 50% to 60% of UK farm income, until 2020. The fishing industry has been slowly choked to death over the years. Our fishing boats have been forced to stay at home with no compensation while every other Tom, Dick and Harry fishes our seas. Our sea is heaving with fish—that is clear for all but the scientists to see—while our boat equipment is not suitable for fishing the seas that our fishermen need to fish, because the EU says so.

I will focus on where we go from here. For our fishermen, the answer is: we go back to work. We go back to fishing our seas sensibly, ensuring that we do not overfish them, that we do our part for marine conservation, that vessels have high safety standards, and that the fishing industry has the ability to thrive once again. We must also ensure that our fleets have the ability to access international waters, and that there is freedom, within whatever policy is put in place, to let fishermen do their job.

The Government, led by the Prime Minister, have a lot to do, and we encourage the negotiation team. The UK as a whole has a lot more to do to ensure that we ignore the uncertainty and make the most of this opportunity. We must feed into this process positively to ensure that our fishermen, our farmers and our expert food industry are able to grow from the decision to leave Europe, which I fully support and which they support as well. We can again stand on our own two feet,

[*Jim Shannon*]

and we will do so knowing that we are striving at all levels, regardless of personal opinions, to deliver for all in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

5.25 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I thank the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) for securing this important debate. He talked about why farmers are at the beating heart of our community and of the huge contribution that they make to the British economy. I know that is very important; I have a lot of farmers in my constituency. He also touched on the difficulties farmers have recently faced with Rural Payments Agency payments, and said that they really need Government support as we move forward towards Brexit. He also stressed the importance of maintaining good relationships with our friends in the European Union; we need to do that to secure the future of our farming and fishing industries.

The importance of this debate is shown by the number of contributions from hon. and right hon. Members. My right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) talked about the importance of free trade with the European Union. The hon. and learned Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox) discussed the need for food security—a point that came out strongly in the debate; it was picked up by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), who also expressed concerns about what will happen to the seasonal workforce.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked about the importance of the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. He followed the hon. Members for St Ives (Derek Thomas), and for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), who talked about the particular challenges faced by the fishing industry in the south-west. The hon. Member for Wells (James Heapey) asked a pertinent question: what is the long-term future of our farming industry? The hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) asked for better-targeted support, which we will of course need.

I regularly meet farmers from across my constituency. They are concerned about their livelihoods and how much support they will receive in the future. There may well be new opportunities, as has been mentioned, but it is also clear that there are substantial challenges ahead. As we know, many rural and coastal communities have benefited from EU funding through the common agricultural policy payments, no matter how much that agreement is disliked, and also from funding for regeneration in our coastal communities and town centres.

The implications of Brexit for our fishing industry are highly uncertain. Figures from the House of Commons Library show that the UK was allocated more than €240 million in funding between 2014 and 2020, which was matched by the Government. I ask the Minister if that level of funding will continue following Brexit. It was said during the referendum campaign that regaining control of territorial waters would allow Britain's fishing industry to thrive, and that leaving the EU would mean cutting red tape for farmers. Will the Minister give us a progress report on how she is getting on with that?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter also mentioned the collapse of the pound, and we know that inflation has risen sharply. That will have an impact on producers through, for example, fuel bills, and also on consumers, through the price that they pay for food. We still do not know what rural Britain will look like post-Brexit. We hope that it will not get worse, but it may by 2019. The media in the south-west are reporting that farmers and fishermen are already concerned about the Government's stance and about how the Government will defend their interests. What will the Minister say to reassure farmers and fishermen, not just in the south-west but across the country?

This country has benefited from billions of pounds of investment from the EU structural funds. Will the Government pick up that slack? Experts have forecast that Cornwall could, between now and 2027, need £1.1 billion of funding to match the EU structural funds payments. Will the Minister tell us if the Government will match that expected funding? Will they match the funding expected between now and 2017, which is the next tranche? I understand that civil servants are already becoming cautious about signing off projects that may not be completed before 2019. Will the money promised be ring-fenced and locally delivered? Rural and coastal communities have already been badly hit as a result of Government funding cuts.

We see significant uncertainty at a time when fishermen and farmers really need the reassurance of continued vital investment in the rural communities of which they are such an important part. We also need infrastructure investment for better transport, better phone signals and, as the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) mentioned, better broadband.

How do the Government propose to replace and reform the current system of direct payments through the common agricultural policy? How do they propose to replace the funding provided through the EU's rural development programmes? How do they propose to replace the EU funding for agricultural research programmes? Will they guarantee that the common fisheries policy regulations will not just be enshrined in UK law through the great repeal Bill, but will be retained, to give certainty to the fishing sector over future policy? Finally, how do the Government intend to make up for funding for the fishing sector derived from the European and maritime fisheries fund, once the UK has left the EU?

I know that there are a lot of questions for the Minister. I hope that she can give me answers today, but if not, I would greatly appreciate written answers.

5.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) on securing this timely debate. My hon. Friend the Minister of State had intended to cover this debate but regrettably is unable to be here today. The subject would be especially apt for him, as he represents a constituency in the south-west—a constituency of which he is very proud—where these issues are highly relevant.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) is here supporting me. She is a great asset to our Department with her

insight into this topic and especially the fishing industry. No debate in Westminster Hall would be complete without a comprehensive contribution from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who yet again showed an ingenious way of linking his issues to those of hon. Members in the south-west. It is also a pleasure to welcome the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman). I believe this is her first Westminster Hall debate in her role as shadow Minister, and she made a very good job of it—well done to her.

Our priority is to ensure that we leave the European Union in the best way for the United Kingdom. That includes ensuring that our farming and fisheries sectors have a vibrant future, while recognising that the great repeal Bill offers, in the short term, the stability that the industry needs, which the hon. Member for Workington asked about. I assure Members that DEFRA will play a lead role in discussions and decisions on leaving the European Union. The right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) brought up several issues about markets and article 50. He will be aware that the Government have not yet made any decisions on those matters, although we are clear that we believe we can trigger article 50. He will also know that there is an ongoing legal case at the moment, where the Attorney General is representing us.

We now have an unprecedented opportunity to redesign our policies, as my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) said, to ensure that our agricultural and fisheries industries are competitive, productive and profitable, and that our environment is improved for future generations. Representing a rural constituency, I know that these are really good opportunities for us, particularly in the south-west, which has a long and proud farming and fishing history. Agriculture is vital across our country. Our farmers produce high-quality food to world-leading standards. Our farming heritage has shaped our landscape, defining us as a country, and contributes to a food chain worth £108 billion. It is all the more important for the south-west, with farming contributing even more to the south-west economy than the national average.

The Government have already recognised the importance of providing certainty to the agricultural and fisheries industries. In the summer, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the agricultural sector will receive the same level of funding that it would have received under pillar 1 of the CAP until the end of the multi-annual financial framework in 2020. He later announced that all structural and investment fund projects, including agri-environment schemes and the European maritime and fisheries fund—known as the EMFF—signed before the autumn statement will be fully funded, even when those projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU.

We have also confirmed that the Government will guarantee EU funding for structural and investment fund projects, including agri-environment schemes and the EMFF. Projects signed after the autumn statement that will continue after we leave the EU can continue if they provide good value for money and are in line with domestic strategic priorities. The hon. Member for Workington should therefore be assured. That provides the necessary certainty and continuity to our rural communities while we develop a new approach to supporting agriculture and fisheries and protecting our

precious countryside and seas, which I hope gives some assurance to my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston).

As Members have set out, there are a number of similar issues and opportunities affecting agriculture and fisheries, but I will address each separately to give both their deserved airing. We recognise the need for early certainty for the agricultural industry, which is why the Government were clear on the commitment on pillar 1 to 2020 and have offered further guarantees under pillar 2. There are clear opportunities to support our farming sector to become more productive and more resilient to risks specific to the industry.

Operating outside the EU framework means we also have the opportunity to better realise some of the connections between agriculture and the environment. As Minister for the environment, I know some of these issues rather well, and I am looking forward to realising some of the great opportunities. More than 70% of our land is agricultural. There are substantial opportunities to deliver for the environment and tackle some of the totemic issues we face—air quality, water quality and biodiversity, to name just a few. We will want to embed key principles, building on strong foundations, to take a modern, open approach, using data and innovation to drive productivity, maximise new opportunities and ensure we minimise bureaucracy and red tape.

I must reiterate that although some EU rules can be burdensome, while we remain in the EU they still need to be met for farmers to receive their basic payment scheme payment. I am led to believe that 99.5% of BPS payments have been made. If there are any outstanding issues, hon. Members can contact my hon. Friend the Minister and bring them to his attention.

We are committed to developing two 25-year plans for the environment and for food and farming, as set out in the Conservative manifesto. I assure hon. Members that we will be working closely with the industry and the public on what is needed to drive agricultural and environment policies forward. There has been a wide range of contributions and thoughts on a future agricultural support system.

Mr Bradshaw: Will the Minister give way before she concludes?

Dr Coffey: I am not concluding.

I assure hon. Members that there will be opportunities to contribute to shaping such a system in due course, but I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is already working hard on it.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox) referred to food security. I assure him that the UK has a high degree of food security, as shown by the 2010 UK food security assessment, which analysed the different global factors impacting UK food supply. One reason for our high food security is the size and competitiveness of the industry and diversity of supply. In terms of marketing, my hon. and learned Friend will be aware of the Great British Food Unit, which was launched earlier this year to promote exports, support inward investment and champion the excellence of British food and drink at home and abroad. It will be helping more and more companies to send their food and drink around the globe—including, I am

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

sure, the 13 protected food names with south-west heritage, such as Dorset blue, Gloucestershire cider, Fal oysters and west country beef and lamb. Just yesterday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched an ambitious plan to boost our exports up to 2020 while she was at a Paris food fair. She assures me that some of what she tasted was absolutely delicious and she did not need any dinner.

With regard to fisheries, the Government are committed to supporting the fishing industry so that it becomes more economically and environmentally sustainable. I recognise the important role the fishing fleet plays in the south-west, which is home to the largest number of fishing vessels in England. In particular, I am aware of Newlyn, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas). The south-west has a diverse fleet, catching a wide range of quota and non-quota species, and it is an important contributor to the wider food chain. With more than £100 million of fish landed by the south-west fleet in 2015, it plays a vital role in the local economy and provides much needed support to coastal communities, including Brixham harbour, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes referred and where last summer I enjoyed a pleasant beer watching the fish being brought in, while avoiding the seagulls.

Exit from the EU presents us with an opportunity to improve the way waters around the whole of the UK are managed, although it is important to note that even after we leave the EU, we will remain members of the UN and of other conventions. The UN convention on the law of the sea has quite clear provisions on the exclusive economic zone but also clear commitments to co-operate with other countries where there are shared fisheries. Operating outside the common fisheries policy will give us the opportunity to establish a new fisheries regime that better meets the UK's needs, including, I hope, those of the south-west.

As with agriculture, we want to set some common principles for our fisheries policy. The UK has had some

success in reforming the common fisheries policy to make it more sustainable with an agreement to fish to maximum sustainable yield and to end the wasteful discarding of unwanted fish. Ensuring that we continue to fish our waters sustainably will remain a priority, but there are of course areas where we might consider doing things differently—for example, making changes to technical regulations to better suit the specific conditions found in UK waters.

Mr Bradshaw: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Coffey: I want to address the labour issue. I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman, but I am happy to speak to him afterwards.

I assure hon. Members that I have heard their concerns today on labour as we leave the EU. DEFRA is aware that migrant workers from other EU countries will be one of the issues that will have to be resolved as part of our exit negotiations and future relationship with the EU. Our Ministers are currently working with colleagues across Government to understand all the issues and explore options.

On recruiting people into the industry, I remind hon. Members of our intention to develop thousands more food and farming apprenticeships. I am aware that Seafish, which has a national remit, has made progress on increasing the number of apprenticeships offered in the industry. My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall referred to five fishermen who did a fishing course in Looe in August. All five have jobs to go to, which is great news.

I assure hon. Members that DEFRA officials are working with the Department for Exiting the European Union. We will continue to listen and I look forward to future debates.

5.41 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 19 October 2016

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):

On 26 February 2015, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the then Secretary of State for Education, having considered the report of the inspection by Dame Louise Casey CB and the advice note from Sir Michael Wilshaw (HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills), concluded that it was both necessary and expedient for them to exercise their intervention powers, as Rotherham metropolitan borough council was failing to comply with its best value duty. Due to the extent and the gravity of the failings in the council, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) rightly decided that the intervention should be broad and wide ranging. It was directed that commissioners should exercise many of the authority's functions until the council could exercise them in compliance with its best value duty. A team of commissioners was appointed to exercise all executive functions of the authority, as well as some non-executive ones, including licensing.

On 11 February 2016, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) returned certain functions to the council, including education, housing and planning. He was satisfied with the progress made and that the council was able to exercise the identified functions in compliance with the best value duty. Returning these functions was the start of building effective and accountable political leadership and represented a clear milestone on the road to recovery. I am pleased now to be able to report on further progress made.

In his 10 May and 11 August 2016 progress reports, Lead Commissioner Sir Derek Myers recommended that the licensing functions should be returned to the council and laid out strong and compelling evidence for this. The collective evidence demonstrates that the key objectives of the intervention, in relation to licensing, have been delivered. It is my assessment that the weaknesses in licensing identified in the Casey report have been addressed and the service is now functioning effectively. Officers and members have recognised the need for and implemented fundamental cultural change, and advisory board members, in particular the chair, are more capable and confident in their role. This marks significant progress, as licensing was one of the council's services implicated by the Casey report as contributing to child sexual exploitation in Rotherham.

On the basis of this progress, I am now satisfied that the council could exercise the licensing function in compliance with its best value duty and I am consulting on revising directions accordingly. The commissioners will continue to have oversight of the service to ensure continued compliance with this duty.

I am placing a copy of the documents associated with these announcements in the Library of the House and on my Department's website.

[HCWS204]

EDUCATION

Primary Education

The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):

The Government are committed to building a country that works for everyone and that means having the highest aspirations for all children. But we know that when it comes to their education, if a child starts behind other children, all too often they stay behind. When children leave primary school they should have acquired a firm grasp of the basics of literacy and numeracy. I know that all parents and teachers want this for our children too.

Summer 2016 saw the first pupils taking the new assessments in English and mathematics at the end of primary school. They were set against the new national curriculum which has been benchmarked against what the highest-performing countries around the world are teaching their children. As a result, the new assessments rightly raised the bar on what we expect pupils to have been taught by the age of 11, better preparing them for secondary school and beyond. In the past, although we saw high proportions of children meeting the previous lower standard at the end of primary school, too often it did not translate into good qualifications at the end of secondary school.

Although the new assessments this summer were rightly more challenging, teachers and pupils rose to that challenge. Sixty-six per cent. of pupils met or exceeded the new "expected standard" in reading, 70% did so in mathematics and 74% did so in writing.

The pace and scale of these changes has been stretching. Our objective is to make sure that children are ready for the next stage of their education. We know, and Ofsted inspectors understand, that the 2016 assessments and results mark a break with the past and are not comparable with the preceding years. In recognition of this, I am reaffirming the commitment that no more than 6% of primary schools will be below the floor standard in 2016.

It is right that we do more to identify schools where pupils are not fulfilling their potential and 2016 saw a greater emphasis on pupil progress in the accountability system. To take the next step, we are laying regulations around "coasting", so that schools not making enough progress get the focus and support that they need to improve. We expect a small proportion of primary schools to be defined as coasting this year.

Because of the changes to primary assessment, I want to be clear that no decisions on intervention will be made on the basis of the 2016 data alone. Regional schools commissioners and local authorities will work together with the current leaders of the small minority of primary schools below the floor or coasting to help and support the schools to move forward in a positive direction.

It is important that we now set out a clear path to a settled system where our collective focus can be on achieving strong educational outcomes for all children. There has been significant change in recent years, but

the timeline from this point will bring greater stability, with no new national tests or assessments introduced before the 2018-19 academic year.

As part of this I am setting out steps to improve and simplify assessment arrangements. First, we have worked closely with the profession to improve the guidance for the moderation of teacher assessment. It is important that we have a consistent and reliable approach across England. This new guidance will be accompanied by mandatory training for local authority moderators. Secondly, the key stage 1 grammar, punctuation and spelling test will remain non-statutory for schools this year, with tests available for teachers to use if they choose. Thirdly, we will not introduce statutory mathematics and reading resits on children's arrival in year 7. Rather, we will focus on the steps needed to ensure a child catches up lost ground. High-quality resit papers will be made available for teachers to use if they wish, as part of their ongoing assessments. In addition, we will introduce a targeted package of support to make sure that struggling pupils are supported by teachers to catch up in year 7.

While the steps set out above will make improvements in the current academic year, we also need to now set out a longer-term, sustainable approach. Early in the

new year we will launch a consultation on primary assessment and the implications for accountability. This will cover key issues, including the best starting point to measure the progress that children make in primary school, and the role and operation of teacher assessment. While we take time to consult on assessment arrangements, the early years foundation stage profile will remain in place for the 2017-18 academic year.

Last year, the Government commissioned Diane Rochford to lead an expert review into the assessment of pupils working below the standard of the national curriculum tests and to make recommendations that ensure they have the opportunity to demonstrate attainment and progress at primary school. I am grateful for the work of Diane Rochford and her team and we are publishing their report today. Its recommendations will also form part of the consultation.

I look forward to engaging with parents, teachers and unions on these issues in the coming months.

[HCWS203]

Petition

Wednesday 19 October 2016

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts

The petition of residents of Stockport,

Declares that as a result of the way in which the 1995 Pension Act and the 2011 Pension Act were implemented, women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age; further that hundreds of thousands of women have had significant changes imposed on them with little or no personal notice; further that implementation took place faster than promised; further that this gave no time to make alternative pension plans; and further that retirement plans have been shattered with devastating consequences.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born in the 1950s (on or

after 6 April 1951) who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Ann Coffey.*]

[P001957]

The petition of residents of Bolsover,

Declares that as a result of the way in which the 1995 Pension Act and the 2011 Pension Act were implemented, women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age; further that hundreds of thousands of women have had significant changes imposed on them with little or no personal notice; further that implementation took place faster than promised; further that this gave no time to make alternative pension plans; and further that retirement plans have been shattered with devastating consequences.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Mr Dennis Skinner.*]

[P001958]

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Wednesday 19 October 2016

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**not later than
Wednesday 26 October 2016**

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