Thursday
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HOUSE OF COMMONS
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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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House of Commons

Thursday 27 October 2016

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

New Writ

Ordered,

That the Speaker do issue his Warrant to the Clerk of the Crown to make out a new Writ for the electing of a Member to serve in this present Parliament for the Borough Constituency of Richmond Park, in the room of Frank Zacharias Robin Goldsmith, who, since his election for the said Borough Constituency, has been appointed to the Office of Steward and Bailiff of Her Majesty's three Chiltern Hundreds of Stoke, Desborough and Burnham in the County of Buckingham.—*(Gavin Williamson.)*

New Southgate Cemetery Bill [*Lords*]

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Thursday 3 November.

Oral Answers to Questions

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Attorney General was asked—

Cybercrime

1. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What recent steps the Crown Prosecution Service has taken to set out its approach to prosecuting cybercrime. [906823]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): The Crown Prosecution Service has this very month published guidelines on crimes involving social media, and it will publish a broader cybercrime strategy and guidance for prosecutors this autumn. All CPS prosecutors already have access to training on how to deal with cybercrime.

Chi Onwurah: Last week's internet of things bot attack, which brought down Twitter and Spotify, among other sites, was the result of tens of millions of household devices, such as baby monitors and televisions, being hijacked by cyber-criminals. This Government have been perilously slow to recognise the real harm that online scams and viruses do to our constituents. What is the Solicitor General doing to ensure that the CPS can respond to internet of things attacks?

The Solicitor General: The hon. Lady will know that the Government have in place many measures to deal with prevention; she is quite right to talk about the internet of things. When it comes to prosecution, I am confident that the CPS understands the international nature of this crime, particularly the exploitation by organised crime groups of cybercrime across the world and the need for co-operation with other jurisdictions to deal with it. Our cybercrime strategy will address a lot of the concerns she has expressed.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Do we not rely too much on prosecution guidance when it comes to cybercrimes, such as online abuse, when there is no substitute for clear primary legislation? Will my hon. and learned Friend carefully consider the proposals of the Law Commission's 13th programme of law reform, which looks at offensive online communications, and will he advise our right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor that this should be a top priority?

The Solicitor General: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for the work she has done and continues to do to tighten up the law on offences such as revenge pornography. I believe it is incumbent on the police and on prosecutors to use the existing law more thoroughly, but if there is a case for further reform, the Government will of course look at it very carefully.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Solicitor General seen that over 100 Members of Parliament have now signed a letter to President Obama on the case of Lauri Love, who is going to be extradited to the United States to face trial for hacking into government files? Does he realise that this young man is on the autism spectrum, has severe mental health challenges and may not survive such a journey?

The Solicitor General: I am very conscious of that case, as I have a strong interest in autism issues. I have to emphasise that it is of course a matter for the courts—there has been a court procedure relating to this issue—so I am loth to make direct comment on the case, but I am certainly following it very carefully.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): There is little doubt that there has been a huge increase in cybercrime of all sorts over the past few years. Does the Attorney General think we have the specialist knowledge we need within all our law enforcement agencies to tackle the problem?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. It is vital that the investigatory and prosecutorial authorities understand the global nature of cybercrime. I am confident that the new strategy, to be published very shortly, will address the very concerns that he has raised.

Vulnerable Witnesses

2. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that vulnerable victims and witnesses are enabled to give effective evidence. [906824]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): Vulnerable victims and witnesses can already give evidence from behind a screen or via a video link. In addition, having piloted pre-trial cross examination, which allows vulnerable witnesses to pre-record all their evidence ahead of the trial, we will be rolling it out nationally.

Fiona Bruce: I thank the Minister for that reply. What special arrangements are there to support vulnerable children and under-age witnesses, in particular in cases of abuse or of a sexual nature?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend is right that those witnesses are of particular concern. I am sure she will be pleased to learn that those kind of witnesses will particularly benefit from pre-recorded cross examination; where it has been trialled—we have trialled it in three court centres so far—about three quarters of the cases have been cases of a sexual nature, and most of the witnesses have been children.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the Attorney General agree that we have to address the issue of having to go to court for initial proceedings, where victims may come face to face with the accused at a very early stage? Victims feel fear when facing the accused. Will he outline what will be in place to help them?

The Attorney General: The hon. Gentleman is right that that is a serious concern for many of those involved in these kinds of cases. That is precisely why the measures I have described are of benefit. If all of a witness's evidence is pre-recorded, they will not come face to face with the defendant at all. That is a huge benefit.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): With the rise of social media, victims and, in particular, witnesses fear intimidation from the online community. Will my right hon. and learned Friend take into consideration protections in the digital space as well as the physical courtroom?

The Attorney General: Yes, indeed—my hon. Friend makes an important point. We have to deal with a context that is very different from anything we have experienced before. It is important for people to understand that social media is not ungoverned space. The law applies there as it does elsewhere. If those using social media engage in behaviour that would otherwise be criminal, they will find it is criminal there, too.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I thank the Attorney General for outlining protection for vulnerable victims in the criminal courts. What progress has been made in providing special protection measures for vulnerable victims within family courts?

The Attorney General: We need to look carefully at how we might read across some of the things that are clearly working well in the criminal courts to other types of court. The hon. Lady is right to highlight that. There is huge scope for us to understand more about how people can give their best evidence. That, after all, is what court systems of all kinds should be looking for.

Leaving the EU: Devolved Administrations and Prosecutions

3. **George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): What discussions he has had with devolved Administrations on the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on the ability to prosecute criminals. [906825]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): The Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office regularly engage with Scotland's prosecution service and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. The Government recognise the importance of retaining good co-operation with European countries on prosecutions, and will continue to engage with the devolved Administrations to seek the best arrangements possible on leaving the EU.

George Kerevan: Post Brexit, will the Government seek to continue to use the European arrest warrant? If not, what will they put in its place?

The Attorney General: As the hon. Gentleman will anticipate, I am not going to prejudge the outcome of the negotiations and discussions we will have. It is of course right that the European arrest warrant and other measures like it are of huge benefit not just to this country but to our European partners as well. For that reason I am optimistic that we will be able to put in place measures that benefit both sides.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Once we are freed from the freedom of movement rules, will the Crown Prosecution Service seek to prosecute EU nationals who commit crimes in this country and to ban them from returning to this country, which we are not able to do at the moment?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend will know that at the moment the CPS does indeed prosecute European nationals who commit crimes in this country. Some of the measures I have just described are of assistance not just in returning those individuals to be tried in this country but in gaining the evidence necessary to secure their conviction. As for the measures taken thereafter, sentencing decisions are of course for the courts. We will look carefully at what other measures might become available to the courts once we have left the European Union.

Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme

4. **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the unduly lenient sentence scheme. [906826]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): The number of sentences considered by my office under the unduly lenient sentence scheme has increased by over 108% since 2010, from 342 to 713 requests in 2015. Of those, 136 were referred to the Court of Appeal as potentially unduly lenient, with the court agreeing to increase the original sentence for 102 offenders.

Mike Wood: Stalking causes enormous harm and distress to victims, and the Government have rightly strengthened the law in this area. Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider extending the unduly lenient sentence scheme to cover these crimes?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend will know that as a party we have a manifesto commitment to extend the unduly lenient sentence scheme. A number of offences are surprisingly not included in the scheme at the moment. We need to look carefully at the whole range of criminal offences to decide what should be inside and what should be outside the scheme, but he certainly makes a good case for the types of offences we might consider including in the future.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Given that the need for an unduly lenient sentence scheme has been conceded, the public are very confused as to why some offences are covered and some are not. Would it not be simpler to have a scheme that covered all offences?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend makes a tempting proposition to give my office a good deal more work. There is no doubt that one of the advantages of the unduly lenient sentence scheme is that it is available to the public. It does not require the intervention of lawyers and it is, I hope, easy for the public to access. It should also be easy for the public to understand, and I am therefore in favour of drawing the line between cases within the scheme and those outside in a logical and easily understandable place. I would also say that it is important to bear it in mind that, even with an extended version of the scheme, we are talking about a very small minority of cases where judges err in this way. As I said, last year 102 cases were considered under the scheme to be unduly lenient. That is out of about 80,000 sentences passed in the Crown courts that year.

Leaving the EU: International Co-operation

5. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Whether he has made an assessment of the potential operational consequences of the UK leaving the EU on how his office interacts with its international counterparts. [906827]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): We are leaving the European Union, but co-operation with our European and global allies will remain important. My office will continue to engage internationally to promote the rule of law, a shared understanding of international law and global co-operation on criminal justice.

Alan Brown: I thank the Attorney General for that answer, but is not the stark reality that Europol's director stated that the UK will be demoted to second-tier membership? Will that not undermine the UK Government's plans to tackle and prosecute money laundering crimes?

The Attorney General: Again, I do not think we should pre-empt the outcome of any discussions that will follow, but, as I said earlier, I think there is an understanding, not just in the United Kingdom but in the rest of the European Union, that the sort of co-operation on crime and security that we have now benefits both sides and will need to continue in order to make sure that we are all safer and more secure, and that we can successfully capture and prosecute the sorts of offenders he describes.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Is it not fallacious for the remoaners to always say that once we have left the European Union, we will not have access to European institutions? Is it not the case that Europol, the Erasmus programme and the Eurovision song contest all have members who are not members of the European Union?

The Attorney General: I do not think that by grouping them together my hon. Friend is describing Eurovision as a criminal enterprise—although there are those who may say so. It is important, as he says, to recognise that leaving the European Union is not the same as leaving Europe, and it is certainly not the same as being unprepared to co-operate. We will be co-operating with a whole range of partners, because, as I have said, it will be in our mutual interest.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): Given the warnings from Rob Wainwright and given the Attorney General's duty to the legal profession, will the Attorney General confirm that he will be making the case on Europol, the European arrest warrant—and, indeed, the Eurovision song contest—in the Brexit Tory Cabinet?

The Attorney General: I am unwilling to commit to making the case for the Eurovision song contest, but it is very important that all in this House understand that the Government are committed to continuing our internationalist perspective and to keeping this nation and its citizens safe. I do not think the hon. Gentleman will hear, from any member of the Government, the view that we can do so without co-operating internationally. We will seek to do that just as successfully and just as fully as we have done in the past, inside or outside the European Union.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): How is my right hon. and learned Friend interacting with the Government of Romania? He will know that the Heritage Foundation has recently issued a report saying that the courts in Romania are subject to chronic corruption and political influence.

The Attorney General: I am not going to comment on the status of other court systems. What I will say is that part of the engagement that this country has abroad on the rule of law, in a variety of different countries, is designed to ensure that the long experience that this country has in running effective, efficient and fair court systems is transmitted to others where they ask for our help, and I am sure we will continue in that enterprise.

Prosecution of Sexual Offences

6. **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions on ensuring that prosecutors are able more effectively to prosecute cases of rape and other sexual offences. [906828]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): I regularly meet the Director of Public Prosecutions to discuss this and other topics. The Crown Prosecution Service continues to prioritise rape and serious sexual offending and has taken steps to ensure that prosecutors are able to prosecute these cases effectively. Those steps include increasing

the number of specialist staff in its rape and serious sexual offences units, providing specialist training for prosecutors and developing closer working arrangements with the police.

Vicky Foxcroft: A constituent of mine is a victim of rape. A complete lack of communication and action from the police has left her unable to move on and recover from the horrific ordeal. After a year and a half, the case—which the superintendent deemed "a professional embarrassment"—has finally been brought to the CPS. However, this might not be the end of my constituent's torment. Does the Attorney General agree that communication with victims is vital in effectively prosecuting offenders and that the Director of Public Prosecutions should ensure that every victim is kept updated, that their views are taken into account on key decisions and that a high level of communication is upheld?

The Attorney General: Yes I do agree, and what the hon. Lady describes clearly does not sound acceptable or in line with the standards we would all expect. There are two things that I think are important. The first is that the prosecutors should be involved as early as possible, so that advice can be given to the police about the development of an investigation with a view to prosecution. The second is to ensure that when a case comes to court, we continue the communication that we should have had up to that point with victims and witnesses and that people are given to understand what is going on around them. Courts can be very confusing places, and we only add to the distress if we do not take the trouble to explain the process to those who are, through no fault of their own, suddenly involved in it. That is one of the things we will look to do better.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I welcome the increased number of prosecutions for rape, but will the Attorney General outline what more can be done to improve the consistency across different areas and also the prosecution rate?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend is right that although we should welcome the increased volume of prosecutions that are taking place, there is still a divergence in the way in which this is done across the country. For that reason, the CPS has set up a national delivery board and is looking at ways in which we can understand why those differences exist and is attempting to resolve them. As my hon. Friend says, this is also a matter of making sure that prosecutors are properly trained, as they are, and have the resources they need to do the job well.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): As this is my first question in this role, I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and the fact that I am a non-practising door tenant at Civitas Law in Cardiff.

The Attorney General will be aware of the grave recent concern about the admissibility of a complainant's previous sexual history in rape trials. Does he agree that single, high-profile cases can give rise to wider perceptions about the law, partly because of the level of coverage they receive, and will he undertake to tackle those wider perceptions?

The Attorney General: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. It is good to see him across the Dispatch Box. He will be pleased to learn that this is probably the only part of Parliament where he does not have to apologise for being a lawyer.

There is concern about the subject that the hon. Gentleman has raised, and we need to accept that that concern is sensible and deal with it. We need to look at a number of things. We need to understand more about the decision in this particular case. We need to understand whether a change in the law is appropriate and, if not, whether it is sensible to look at the guidance that is given to judges about when such evidence is admissible and at the guidance that judges give to juries about how that evidence should be used. We need to do all those things before we are in a position to understand what, if any, changes are needed.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am grateful to the Attorney General for his welcome and I look forward to debating with him and, indeed, my fellow Welsh lawyer, the Solicitor General, across the Dispatch Box.

Prosecution lawyers will, of course, deal with these applications for the admissibility of a complainant's sexual history before the courts. I am glad to hear that the Attorney General has committed to looking at the guidance given to judges and at what judges say to juries. In addition, will he look at the guidance given by the Crown Prosecution Service to the lawyers who appear before the courts and regularly deal with these applications?

The Attorney General: Yes, I will. He will know that in the case he raises the Crown Prosecution did indeed oppose the admission of this evidence at the Court of Appeal stage. It is certainly worth looking at all the guidance and indeed at the whole picture. This provision is, as far as I am aware, not routinely used, but we must be confident that the message sent to those who are willing but currently worried about reporting these sorts of offences is not that they are not encouraged to do so—quite the reverse; they are. We need to ensure that those messages are clear.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Sex and Relationship Education

1. **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Whether the Government plan to update its guidelines to schools on the provision of sex and relationship education to include (a) LGBT relationship issues and (b) sexual harassment in schools. [906852]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Justine Greening): We want to provide all young people with a curriculum that prepares them to succeed in modern Britain. That is why I want to make sure that sex and relationship education really is fit for the world that children live in today. I agree that we need to look again at how schools deliver high-quality and age-appropriate sex and relationship

education. We are carefully considering all the options, including updating our guidance, and I shall provide an update shortly.

Vicky Foxcroft: The Women and Equalities Committee has recommended that the Government amend the "Keeping children safe in education" guidance to include the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. When do the Government plan to release the updated guidance, and will they consult the specialists working in the field of sexual harassment and violence against women and girls?

Justine Greening: I agree that we need look at ensuring how this guidance is brought up to date. From my perspective, the key is making sure that our young people have the right information and get the right advice, and that through this guidance and the quality of teaching in schools we produce the right attitudes for the young generation growing up in our country. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight the need to get that done effectively; that is precisely what I intend to do.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): The Select Committee report to which the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) referred uncovered a shocking truth—that most girls in secondary education have experienced physical or verbal sexual abuse. Four Select Committees are now calling for sex and relationship education to be made compulsory. What more evidence is the Minister looking for?

Justine Greening: I do not disagree with my right hon. Friend's point. The Women and Equalities Committee report was an excellent one, to which we shall shortly respond. I have spoken about the nature of what we need to look at, and there are also questions such as what sex and relationship education comprises and how it can be taught at a high quality. As my right hon. Friend suggests, where it is taught and the breadth of schools in which we expect it to be taught are also relevant questions. About nine out of 10 secondary school teachers say that they have seen children bullied on sexual harassment grounds, which is totally unacceptable. We need to make sure that we take the next steps forward through a thoughtful and measured approach that responds to today's world.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I would like to thank all the women, parliamentarians and campaigners who come before us to get equality and justice in this country. I am sure that we all want to take that forward.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): As do the men.

Sarah Champion: Good. The Minister for Women and Equalities has an admirable record of supporting sex and relationship education, and I welcome her comments today. Giving all children good-quality education in respect of themselves and others and encouraging healthy friendships is the cornerstone of preventing abuse, hate crime, intolerance and relationship violence. This approach is supported by five Select Committees and all the leading charities. When will the Minister introduce sex and relationship education for all children from key stage 1—regardless of where they are educated?

Justine Greening: I welcome the hon. Lady to her new role, particularly as she is the MP who represents my home town of Rotherham. The different ages at which children need to start understanding relationships means that what we teach in schools must be age-appropriate. Of course, SRE is mandatory in all secondary schools. Primary schools have more flexibility, but the hon. Lady is right to emphasise that if we want to get this right, we need to start at an early age so that children can understand relationships with one another.

International Men's Day

2. **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): What plans she has to commemorate International Men's Day. [906853]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage): Some women might be forgiven for thinking that every day is International Men's Day, but this year it falls on 19 November. The theme will be "Making a Difference for Men and Boys", and there will be a focus on the very important issue of male suicide. As with International Women's Day, it will be up to Back Benchers to bid for parliamentary time for a debate on the subject, and I encourage them to do so. Of course, I welcome any initiatives that support gender equality and its meaning in people's lives.

Philip Davies: So the answer is that the Minister has no plans. Perhaps her Department ought to take International Men's Day as seriously as the Prime Minister has. She has said:

> "I recognise the important issues that this event seeks to highlight, including men's health, male suicide rates and the under-performance of boys in schools. These are serious issues that must be addressed in a considered way."

Why is International Men's Day not as important to this Minister as it is to the Prime Minister?

Caroline Dinenage: Let me gently say that I think that my hon. Friend is being a little unfair. The role of the Government Equalities Office is to tackle inequality wherever we find it. All parents of sons throughout the country, including me, will be conscious of and concerned about the issues that the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, the Prime Minister have mentioned. However, I am also aware that there are parts of the world where girls are routinely subjected to genital mutilation, forced marriage and sexual violence. For me, equality is not a zero sum game.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that International Men's Day will give fathers of daughters an opportunity to ask, for instance, why those daughters may have to wait another 30 years for equal pay, and will give men a platform on which to ask why there continues to be a problem of violence against women and girls? Does she agree that it will give men an opportunity to express concern about those subjects?

Caroline Dinenage: International Men's Day in the United Kingdom takes a very gender-inclusive approach, which is why issues affecting women and girls are also involved. The hon. Gentleman made an important point about the gender pay gap. We welcomed reports this week that it has been reduced again, and is now narrower than it has ever been. However, he was also right to

point out that, while focusing on the very important issues that International Men's Day raises, we must never forget all the women around the world who are suffering every single day.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): No doubt, in seeking ways of celebrating International Women's Day, the Minister has looked around the world to find out which countries do it best. Which countries best celebrate International Men's Day, and will she note the example that they provide?

Caroline Dinenage: I know that 60 countries celebrate International Men's Day in various ways, focusing on men's health and wellbeing, discrimination against men and any inequalities that they face, improving gender relations, and promoting gender equality. That creates a safer world for everyone, and is always to be commended.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The aim of International Men's Day is to promote gender equality and highlight positive male role models. In the United Kingdom, two women are killed by a partner or ex-partner every week. Action is urgently needed to tackle deeply ingrained and damaging inequality. Does the Minister agree that we should support campaigns to tackle misogyny and sexist attitudes, and that men have a crucial role to play in that?

Caroline Dinenage: I could not have put it better myself. The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the fact that last year 81 women were killed by violent partners or ex-partners. In fact, 19 men were killed by violent partners or ex-partners as well. The Government are absolutely committed to tackling violence against women and girls—it is of the utmost importance, which is why we have put more money into it than ever before—and we will not rest until that happens.

Women's State Pension Age

3. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): If the Government will take steps to provide further transitional support to women affected by the increase in the state pension age. [906854]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes): The Government will make no further changes in the pension age or provide financial redress in lieu of pension. A total of £1.1 billion has already been committed to lessen the impact of the changes on those who will be most affected, so that no one will experience a change of more than 18 months.

Jeff Smith: It is clear that the members of the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign and their many supporters around the country think that the Government have not done enough. Will the Minister commit herself to publishing all assessments of the impact of the 2011 changes, and any analysis that has been undertaken of possible transitional arrangements at the time of the Pensions Act 2011 and in the period since then?

Caroline Nokes: The Government have made available £1.1 billion for transitional arrangements because of these changes. This is about undoing an historical unfairness by equalising the state pension age, which both men and women should welcome.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): The Scottish National party commissioned independent research by Landman Economics that found the inequalities facing many of the WASPI women can be rectified if the UK Government implement the report's recommendations for the sum of £8 billion, rather than the previously cited £30 billion. Will the Minister urge her Treasury colleagues to prioritise this issue ahead of the autumn statement?

Caroline Nokes: A range of potential options have been proposed by a number of different campaigns, but nothing that is specifically aimed at those most disadvantaged by the state pension age increases, and none of them has proposed something significantly better or, indeed, affordable and at an acceptable cost to the taxpayer.

Caste Discrimination Consultation

4. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What progress the Government have made on the publication of its caste discrimination consultation. [906856]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Justine Greening): We have said we will issue a public consultation on how best to provide legal protection against caste discrimination later this year. My hon. Friend takes this issue very seriously and represents his local communities views and concerns in respect of it.

Bob Blackman: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. In excess of 85% of British Hindus consider having caste as a protected characteristic in equality legislation unnecessary, ill-considered and divisive. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that in the forthcoming consultation she will look at all measures, including the abolition of caste as a protected characteristic in the legislation?

Justine Greening: This will be an open consultation. We know and understand how sensitive and emotive this subject is, and that there are very strong opinions on both sides of it. We need to look at the best and necessary level of legal protection against caste discrimination, and the findings of that consultation will help inform us on what to do to provide the appropriate legal protection.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In the consultation process, will the Minister outline what steps have been taken by diplomats, ambassadors and embassies to combat caste discrimination, and is there an estimate of the success of these steps?

Justine Greening: My old Department, the Department for International Development, working hand in hand with the Foreign Office does huge work not only to advocate but to take action on the ground to help groups fighting for equality, including fighting against caste discrimination. We do that in the countries where it is most prevalent. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, these are generational issues that take time steadily to shift, but we believe we need to keep pushing on them to move things forward.

BAME Representation on Boards

5. **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the number of BAME people on boards and at senior executive levels of FTSE companies. [906858]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage): A diverse boardroom that reflects its customers and wider society is likely to perform better and make better decisions. The Government are very supportive of the private-led diversity initiative chaired by Sir John Parker, who is currently considering how to increase ethnic diversity in FTSE 100 companies, and we expect the group to report on its findings next month.

Rehman Chishti: I thank the Minister for that answer. I am chair of the all-party group on communities engagement, and fewer than 4% of directors in the 150 largest FTSE companies have ethnic minority backgrounds. Will the Government support a target of increasing the percentage of board members or directors with black and minority ethnic backgrounds to 10% by 2021?

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend rightly points out this unsettling statistic, but, as with the fantastic work to get more women on boards, we support the principles of increasing the ethnic diversity of the boards of the FTSE largest companies through a business-led voluntary approach because we believe there is a strong business case for better board diversity. We need to tackle the root cause, which is why we have established the Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith review looking at the obstacles faced by businesses in developing BME talent across the board, from recruitment right through to executive level.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): It is a little disappointing that the Government have not put as much resource into developing issues around the Parker review as women on boards, and there has been a significant drop in diversity on boards since the Government established the review, which will report in November. Many organisations, including the Executive Leadership Council, have board-ready visible minorities ready to hit the road running. Will the Minister work with me to reverse the trend?

Caroline Dinenage: We are very happy to work with anybody who wants to see greater board diversity and, indeed, greater diversity in business all through the pipeline. The Government are clear that we want absolutely everybody to reach their full potential in life, regardless of their background, gender or race. Valuing diversity in the workplace is not just the right thing to do; our economy cannot afford to waste the talent of a single individual.

STEM Industries

6. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the number of women working in science, technology, engineering and maths—STEM—industries. [906859]

The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening): Increasing the number of women in STEM industries is not only vital for our economic growth but part of how we can support our ambition to eliminate the gender pay gap. We are supporting girls to choose STEM subjects and careers by improving the quality of teaching in STEM subjects and increasing the proportion of girls' A-level entries in maths and science. We are also raising awareness of just how exciting and valuable STEM careers can be for our young people through STEM ambassadors and through publishing online guidance called "Your Daughter's Future".

Peter Aldous: I am most grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer. The east coast energy internship is a new scheme supported by the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Ogden Trust. As a result of undertaking one of the internships, Felicity Levett, a student at Lowestoft sixth-form college, is now pursuing a career in offshore renewables. Does my right hon. Friend agree that such schemes should be promoted more widely so that everyone, regardless of gender or background, can realise their career ambitions?

Justine Greening: I strongly support what my hon. Friend has just said. I am well aware of all the work that has been going on in his local community to encourage girls to get into STEM. His constituent is a shining example of the great steps that girls can take once they follow this path, and we will be promoting a whole range of fantastic opportunities to encourage more young people, particularly young girls, to follow her example.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Men continue to dominate apprenticeships in the fields with the best earning potential. In 2013, nearly 13,000 men started engineering apprenticeships, but only 400 women did so. Will the Minister commit to ensuring 50:50 recruitment in STEM-focused apprenticeships?

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady makes a really important point. At the moment, we are seeing success in getting girls to take STEM subjects at GCSE, where the rates for girls and boys are broadly comparable. It is when we get to A-levels that we see more boys than girls doing maths, for example, although the rate for girls has risen. We need to ensure that we improve those statistics and strengthen the careers advice that can encourage girls to follow these paths.

Welfare Polices: Disabled People

7. **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): What assessment the Government have made of the effect on equality for disabled people of the Government's policies on welfare. [906860]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes): The UK is recognised as a world leader in disabled rights and equality, and the Government continue to spend about £50 billion a year to support sick and disabled people. That is about 2.5% of GDP. According to OECD figures, that is more than is spent by other countries including Germany, France and the United States of America.

Chris Law: But we still have not seen the publication of the long-awaited Green Paper to map out what employment support will be made available for those with disabilities. Can the Minister provide an explanation for the continued delay? Does she agree that this does not look like the action of a Government who want to provide "an economy that works for everyone"?

Caroline Nokes: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we will soon publish a Green Paper that will explore a whole range of options for long-term reform across different sectors. The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), is working incredibly hard to ensure that that happens soon. We are going to target the factors that contribute to the disability employment gap and engage with disabled people, their representative organisations and a wide range of other stakeholders. There will be an opportunity for hon. Members to feed into that consultation process, and I urge the hon. Gentleman to do so.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Disabled people are twice as likely to live in poverty as a result of their condition, and the situation has been made worse by this Government's £28 billion social security cuts, which have affected 3.7 million disabled people since 2012. Sick and disabled people are also more likely to be hit by social security sanctions and forced to use food banks, as the film "I, Daniel Blake" so poignantly showed. Today's report by Oxford University proves the link between the Government's punitive sanctions and the rise in food bank use. What action are the Minister and her DWP colleagues taking to tackle these injustices, as the Prime Minister calls them?

Caroline Nokes: This Government are committed to providing support to the people who need it, which is reflected in the fact that spending to support disabled people and people with health conditions will be higher than in 2010 in real terms in every year until 2020.

The hon. Lady mentions "I, Daniel Blake". I have seen the film. My first visit as a Department for Work and Pensions Minister was to a jobcentre in Newcastle, and I can tell her that the front-line DWP workers whom I met do not recognise their portrayal in the film. The film raises important issues, which we shall debate, but we must remember that it is a dramatic interpretation. I also recognise none of its portrayals of DWP staff.

Topical Questions

T1. [906835] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Justine Greening): This Government have been clear that we want to build a country that works for everyone, which is why we are so determined to close the gender pay gap. I am therefore pleased that the Office for National Statistics recently released figures showing that the gap has narrowed significantly from 19.3% to 18.2%, reflecting the hard work of so many, not least the business community. That also reminds us that if we are to keep closing the gap, and close it completely, we must keep driving progress forward. That is why we extended the right to request flexible working and introduced a new system of flexible parental leave. We are also introducing mandatory gender pay gap reporting for large employers from April next year.

Philip Davies: Baroness Cox has long campaigned in the other place for the abolition of sharia councils, largely because of the unfair way in which they treat many women. Will the Government support Baroness Cox's private Member's Bill on the issue and ensure that Muslim women enjoy the same protections under the law as everyone else and do not feel pressured into having their cases determined by a sharia council rather than a British court?

Justine Greening: I assure my hon. Friend that that issue is of utmost importance. We know of concerns about sharia councils, including those raised in Baroness Cox's Bill, and take them extremely seriously. The Government will respond to the Bill on Second Reading and will continue to consider the issue in the light of the findings of the independent sharia review, which was launched in May by the previous Home Secretary, now Prime Minister.

T5. [906839] **Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Figures just out from NHS Digital show that 28% of women aged 16 to 24 have a mental health condition. Alarmingly, reports of self-harm among that age group trebled to 20% between 2007 and 2014. Despite that, a survey of 35 mental health trusts carried out by Agenda, the alliance for women and girls at risk, showed that just one had a specific women-only mental health strategy. What action is the Minister taking to address that serious issue which is affecting women in our country?

Justine Greening: As constituency MPs, we all see such issues locally, and the House is holding a worthwhile Backbench Business debate later on the broader topic of young people and mental health. This country has a long way to go to deliver on our ambition to ensure that mental health provision is on a par with the rest of our healthcare provision. As the hon. Lady highlights, that should include understanding the different levels of mental health challenges faced by different parts of our community, of which women and girls make up 50%.

T2. [906836] **Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Reports this week indicate that female entrepreneurs, such as Clover Lewis of Clover Lewis Swimwear, struggle to access start-up capital. Male entrepreneurs often receive up to 90% of all available start-up funding, but the return on investment with female entrepreneurs is on average much better than with men. What steps is the Minister taking to stimulate lending to address that anomaly?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage): I am so pleased that my hon. Friend mentions Clover Lewis Swimwear. I have met Clover Lewis, who does outstanding work creating swimwear for women who have undergone mastectomy surgery. We are absolutely committed to supporting women to start and grow their own businesses, and I am proud that Britain has been named as one of the best places in Europe for female entrepreneurs.

My hon. Friend will be as pleased as I am that 40% of the loans given out by the Government's StartUp loans company since it was established have gone to women, providing funding to more than 15,500 women and totalling £87 million.

T6. [906840] **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State welcome the Women into Tech initiative, which just goes to show how many women can get into business in tech? Will she help our campaign to improve the numeracy of girls and young women, as that is the key link between success in management later and everything else?

Justine Greening: We had a question earlier about STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths—and the importance of ensuring that girls are taking those. It is important not just for those wishing to pursue a career in engineering, for example; these subjects, and maths in particular, open up all sorts of doors for our young girls. That is why it is so important that the kinds of initiatives the hon. Gentleman has just talked about are in place to help deliver on those aspirations.

T3. [906837] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): A recurring theme for the Science and Technology Committee is the lack of progress being made in achieving gender balance across the scientific community, both in business and academia. What work are my right hon. Friend and her Department doing to remove barriers faced by women? What steps are being taken to ensure that work is integrated with ongoing efforts in the universities sector, particularly Athena SWAN?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is right to say that business needs to work hand in hand with the Government on this, and the Women's Business Council has been enhanced by this Government to now include representatives of and membership from the science, engineering and construction industries. That is very much linked in with not only my Department, but the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. We have particularly welcomed initiatives such as Athena SWAN, which are doing so much to move this agenda steadily and progressively forward.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Gypsies and Travellers suffer particularly poor outcomes across a range of measures, but too many Government Departments and agencies are still not recognising them as distinct ethnic groups in accordance with the 2011 census categorisation. What can the Secretary of State do to encourage the use of that categorisation right across government—national and local?

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Lady is right to raise this important issue. The Select Committee on Women and Equalities has recently announced that it will be examining it, and I know it will do so with its customary rigour and intensity. We look forward very much to hearing what the Committee comes up with.

T4. [906838] **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Online misogyny and other abusive online behaviour is damaging young people's self-esteem and is even undermining their mental health. Does the Minister agree that social media platforms must face up to their responsibilities to keep young users safe online?

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. This is something that all parents worry about, and social media platforms must take some responsibility for it. This year, we invested almost half a million pounds in the Safer Internet Centre to provide advice on how to keep children safe, and we are developing guidance on cyber-bullying for schools, which will be published shortly.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The Secretary of State may be aware of the closure of the only UK lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender charity, Broken Rainbow, in August. Sadly, this very much mirrored what happened to Kids Company, with the closure being reported by Patrick Strudwick of BuzzFeed. Will she work with me, him and others who are interested in this to put pressure on the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and the Charity Commission to have a full review of this and make sure that LGBT people in this country have access to domestic abuse support?

Justine Greening: I am happy to talk to the hon. Lady further about the specific issue she has just raised, which is of concern. Only last night, I was at the *PinkNews* awards, which celebrates a huge amount of the work that is happening on the ground to push forward on LGBT rights. It is important that this work can continue.

T7. [906841] **James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): The new head of John Lewis, the head of the National Crime Agency, the Prime Minister and, with any luck, the next President of the United States of America are all women at the top of their fields. Does the Minister agree that having strong women at the head of organisations is one of the best ways to encourage women into professions, and what is she doing to promote that?

Caroline Dinenage: I am delighted to agree with my hon. Friend, as we cannot overestimate the value of role models at every level and in every sector, inspiring girls and other women to follow them. We now have more women on boards than ever before. There are now no all-male boards in the FTSE 100. Women in key roles, such as the ones my hon. Friend mentioned, provide massive inspiration to girls and other women, as indeed does having a female Prime Minister.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): I come back to the issue of STEM subjects. We do fantastic work in west Cumbria in encouraging women into the nuclear industry, and it would be great if the Minister could recognise that and look at how we can work it. However, often when I go to meetings at a senior level I find that I am the only woman in the room or, if I am not, that there are only one or two of us. What can we do to encourage women to come right the way up through to the senior level?

Justine Greening: It is about building the ladder at all levels. We have talked about the importance of STEM subjects, and there will be a national college that will focus on skills for the nuclear industry, which is the next stage. As the hon. Lady says, many of us have been to

meetings where we are the only woman at the table, and we need to play our part as role models to encourage the next generation to aim high.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Standing Order No. 143

1. **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Whether he has had discussions with his ministerial colleagues on the scope of Standing Order No. 143(1)(ii) and 143(1)(vi). [906842]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): I have had no such discussions to date, but while we are a member of the European Union, our obligations remain in place, as does the scrutiny reserve resolution, so the scrutiny Committees will be able to examine and interrogate EU dossiers in the usual way.

Helen Goodman: Does the Leader of the House agree with the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) that the document to trigger article 50 is one that the European Scrutiny Committee would recommend for debate and possible vote in the main Chamber? If he does, would that be before or after the Prime Minister has served the notification?

Mr Lidington: As the hon. Lady knows, the Government take the view that the triggering of article 50 is a matter for the Executive to determine. This, as the House knows, is an issue that is being contested in the courts at the moment, and we are currently awaiting a judgment.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I applaud the initiatives that the Leader of the House is taking to ensure maximum debate about Brexit and the establishment of the Select Committees. Will he ensure that there are no procedures of this House that could block the will of the British people to leave the European Union?

Mr Lidington: The Government's intention, whatever side of the referendum debate individual Ministers took, is that the will of the British people has been clearly expressed in a referendum with a very high turnout, and that the House voted by an overwhelming majority to enact the European Union Referendum Bill and hand that decision to the British people. That mandate from the British people now needs to be respected.

Standing Orders: Reform

2. **Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): What plans he has to bring forward proposals to reform the Standing Orders of the House. [906843]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): Standing Orders undergo frequent revision. The Procedure Committee, the Clerks and the Government monitor their use to ensure that our Standing Orders reflect how business in the House is conducted in practice.

Ian Blackford: Yesterday, the Leader of the House announced a review of last year's change to Standing Orders, which implemented the absurd English votes for English laws process, which disfranchises non-English MPs. Will he restore equality for MPs by removing the over-convoluted and shamefully partisan EVEL procedure from Standing Orders, and make sure that all MPs in this House are equal?

Mr Lidington: I shall take that as a first contribution to the consultation that the Government have initiated. I am disappointed that Members from the Scottish National party seem unable to comprehend that it is a matter of justice that legislation affecting only England should command the support of a majority of Members of Parliament from England.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Do the Standing Orders not need to be changed to reflect what goes on today? Despite your valiant efforts, Mr Speaker, we have far too many subjects to cover today, which prevented me from railing against the madness that prevents gay men from donating blood unless they say they have been celibate for 12 months.

Mr Lidington: As I think my hon. Friend has demonstrated, an ingenious Member of Parliament is able to find numerous ways in which to place the points about which he is concerned on the record.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) is a notable practitioner of what I call the shoehorning technique, which is to shoehorn the matter of concern to oneself into any question whether it naturally fits or not.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): My hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) is absolutely right that EVEL has been a bureaucratic, cumbersome and misunderstood nightmare, which has divided this House on the basis of nationality and geography. Given that the Government have a majority in both England and the rest of the United Kingdom, what difference has this useless apparatus made to any legislative outcome that we have considered in the past year?

Mr Lidington: The changes are a demonstration of the Government's commitment to ensuring justice is done to Members from all parts of the United Kingdom. The EVEL arrangements apply only in respect of legislation, amendments or statutory instruments that cover matters that are devolved in Scotland, over which this House has no say and no jurisdiction, but which are a matter for this House to determine in respect of England, and it is only right that English Members should exercise the veto that these arrangements provide.

IPSA: Members' Budgets

3. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority on changes to hon. Members' budgets; and if he will make a statement. [906845]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): Mr Speaker, I attended a meeting of your Committee for IPSA on 18 October, and the agenda included discussions on IPSA's current consultation exercise.

Sir Henry Bellingham: Has the Leader of the House had a chance to examine IPSA's proposed changes to zone 3 accommodation funding limits? May I make it clear that they do not affect me, because I do not claim any London rent from IPSA? However, does he agree that they could have a damaging effect on MPs with young children? Does IPSA not understand that, apart from on Monday, when we sit late, on virtually every other evening many MPs are kept here until well after the House rises?

Mr Lidington: The points my hon. Friend makes about the pressures of parliamentary life on Members' families are true, and I think they are true of Members right across the House. As we all know, IPSA is an independent body, and it will, I am sure, consider carefully the representations from hon. Members and others, and then come to a decision at the end of its consultation.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House, and all Members of the House, will remember so clearly the dreadful killing of Jo Cox only in June. Since that time, has he had any intelligent communication and conversation with IPSA about how Members are better protected here, in their constituencies and on their travels between them?

Mr Lidington: As I hope all Members of the House know, Members' security was the subject of very urgent consideration following the shocking murder of our late colleague. Under the leadership of the Chairman of Ways and Means, a new package of security measures has been made available to all right hon. and hon. Members, with a fast track for delivering those security improvements, where they are needed.

Private Members' Bills

4. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Whether he plans to provide an opportunity for the House to vote on the proposals from the Procedure Committee on reform of the private Members' Bill system. [906846]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): As I confirmed to the House on Tuesday, and to the Procedure Committee last week, the Government are currently considering the Procedure Committee's report, and will respond in detail within the normal two-month timeframe.

Patrick Grady: Before Christmas, there will be important private Members' Bills on the minimum wage, disability equality, awards for valour, and violence against women. To save us all a repeat of last Friday's farce, can the Government just tell us now which ones they plan to talk out?

Mr Lidington: If the promoters and sponsors of any of those Bills command widespread support across the House, they should ensure that their supporters turn up on the day and vote, whether on procedural motions or on the substance.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): While the Leader of the House is right on that point, there are reforms to private Members' Bills that are important, and we need the House to look at them. We need the Government to bring forward a package of proposals, which we could then amend and vote on in the House. We need to have a debate and a vote on this. Could he please arrange that?

Mr Lidington: As my hon. Friend knows, the Procedure Committee has, indeed, proposed such a package. The Government will want to consider the Committee's recommendations carefully, including its recommendation that the decision on this be placed before the House. We will, as I said earlier, respond to the Committee in detail in due course.

6. [906849] **Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): Sticking with the subject of the private Member's Bill from last Friday, the Leader of the House said on Tuesday that there was no complaint during the debate. I was there, and I was complaining—I was one of dozens who were complaining—about the farce that was opening up in front of us. Does he stand by the actions of the Minister in this case, or does he agree with me and with people across the country that it was an absolute farce—a shameful, embarrassing disgrace?

Mr Lidington: No; as I said on Tuesday, there was no argument last Friday that any hon. Member on any side of the argument was engaged in filibustering. When 2.30 pm came, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), as the Minister responsible, had spoken for only one minute more than the Bill's promoter and for a shorter time than one of the Bill's main supporters. He sought to respond in detail to the many questions raised, and he gave way seven times to interventions. It seems to me that he behaved in a thoroughly reasonable manner.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): In order to guarantee the fairness that the Leader of the House spoke about earlier, is it not time that English votes for English laws was extended to private Members' Bills?

Mr Lidington: That sounds to me like a further interesting submission to the Government's consultation.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Laurence Robertson. Not here.

Business of the House

10.35 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 31 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill [*Lords*].

TUESDAY 1 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Investigatory Powers Bill.

WEDNESDAY 2 NOVEMBER—Opposition day (11th allotted day). There will be debates on Opposition motions, including one relating to community pharmacies.

THURSDAY 3 NOVEMBER—General debate on the effect of the UK leaving the European Union on financial and other professional services, followed by debate on a motion on living wage week and the implementation of the national living wage, these subjects having been determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 4 NOVEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will include:

MONDAY 7 NOVEMBER—General debate on exiting the EU and workers' rights.

TUESDAY 8 NOVEMBER—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the forthcoming business.

I am sure that the Leader of the House, and you, Mr Speaker, will join me in paying tribute to Jimmy Perry, who sadly died last week. He is one of the great Britons who brought fun into our lives. He was the writer and creator of "Dad's Army", and he also won an award for the theme song. I am sure, Mr Speaker, that we are a similar sort of age; I grew up watching this brilliantly written and acted series. The BBC, when left alone to be creative, fulfils its Reithian mandate to educate, entertain and inform.

You will recall, Mr Speaker, that the programme had some memorable catchphrases, and it struck me that we could hear those catchphrases ringing around No. 10. We could hear the cry of, "Don't panic, don't panic!" or, as the Prime Minister slaps down her recalcitrant and wayward colleagues, we could hear her muttering, "Stupid boys." When we ask the Government's position on Brexit, we hear the infamous, "Don't tell them, Pike."

May we have a debate on the great repeal Bill? Will it have just one clause or a series of clauses? Will it enact the whole of EU law into UK law? Will there be no enactment of EU law, with each item brought in through secondary legislation? The Prime Minister says that she wants us to be a fully independent sovereign nation. I thought that we were, because we passed the bedroom tax, reorganised the national health service and gave taxpayers' money to free schools—all that was done over here, not in Europe, in the past six years.

Labour Members respect the result of the referendum, but we want to do what is in the best interests of the British people, including keeping them safe, because organised crime and terrorism know no boundaries. The Prime Minister said on Monday that she wants co-operation on our shared security interests with Europe. May we therefore have a debate in Government time—the European Scrutiny Committee has also asked for this—on whether we opt into or out of the new Europol regulations? The Government will need to make a decision shortly, so we need to debate this before they do so.

I want to raise a fairly parochial matter: the closure of the New Art Gallery and libraries in Walsall. I invite the Leader of the House to visit the gallery—and you, Mr Speaker: perhaps on one of your outreach visits you can see what an incredible space it is, with art and culture free for everybody, of all nationalities. I plead with the Leader of the House to make representations to the Chancellor, who has recently signalled a change in his austerity policies, on providing a proper settlement for local authorities so that Walsall and others can fulfil their statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Sixteen thousand children in Walsall live in poverty, and many of them cannot afford books or the internet. We want to give them opportunities and aspiration.

Next week could see a strike at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, under a female Prime Minister and against the background of a report from the World Economic Forum that puts the UK in 20th position on the gender equality gap. Bizarrely, the commission has created 22 posts at deputy director level or above, and two additional executive directors have been appointed at a cost of £250,000 or more. Consultants who were brought in to implement the restructure cost the commission £240,000 last year alone, yet lower-paid staff face compulsory redundancies, and a 25% cut is planned to the commission's budget. We need an urgent debate on why that body, which looks at discrimination and is so vital at this time, is cutting staff when, according to the World Economic Forum report, it will take 170 years to close the gender pay gap if we carry on at the current rate.

The Prime Minister says that she wants to remove the European Communities Act 1972 from the statute book, but I would be grateful if the Leader of the House could tell her that she cannot do that—all that she can do is repeal it. In any event, the Act is printed on vellum, so it will last 5,000 years. On that issue, will the Leader of the House meet me to discuss how a vote won in the House in 1999 and earlier this year can be overturned by a Committee of the House? This is not a Wallonian moment; it is about respecting the democracy and sovereignty of this House.

Mr Lidington: I will try to touch on the subjects that the hon. Lady has raised. As she knows, the Equality and Human Rights Commission has operated, under Governments of all parties, at arm's length from direct control by Ministers, for good reasons. However, I will certainly ensure that her comments are drawn to the attention of the relevant Minister, and I am sure that they will have been noted by the chief executive and the directors of the commission.

I thought that in the hon. Lady's comments about poverty and the gender pay gap, she might at least have acknowledged that it is this Conservative Government who are insisting that large employers publish details of the gender pay gap. We had 13 years of a Labour

Government in which that issue was not tackled at all. I was disappointed, too, that in her comments about poverty, whether in Walsall or elsewhere, she omitted to mention that yesterday's figures from the Office for National Statistics show that, last year, the pay increase for people on the lowest wages in our society was, thanks to the national living wage, significantly greater than that for any other group, and well over twice the rate of the pay increase for the wealthiest in society. I hope that Walsall Council can preserve its museum and arts centre, and I hope to have the pleasure of visiting one day. Local authorities, just like central Government Departments, have to take rigorous decisions about priorities when setting their budgets for any particular year.

I note what the hon. Lady says about the Europol regulation. As the Prime Minister has said repeatedly, and as she demonstrated throughout her six years as Home Secretary, she and the entire Government are committed to continuing very close working relationships between the United Kingdom and other members of the European Union—and, indeed, European countries outside the EU—on police and justice matters. It is in our common interest to maintain those relationships as we prepare to leave the European Union. The hon. Lady will have to wait until the Queen's Speech to see details of the EU exit Bill, and I doubt that she would have expected to hear anything different at this stage.

I am happy to talk to the hon. Lady about vellum, although it has come to a pretty pass when the chief subject chosen by the Opposition Front-Bench team for their attack on the Government is the use of calf or goatskin for the enrolment of the official copies of parliamentary statutes.

I am happy to join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to the late Jimmy Perry. It was a wonderful gesture when, during the changing of the guard ceremony outside Buckingham Palace earlier this week, the military band played the theme tune to "Dad's Army" as a tribute to Mr Perry. When I look at the faces of Labour Members, especially during Prime Minister's questions, the phrase that comes to my mind is, "They don't like it up 'em!"

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Will the Leader of the House allow us time to talk about the value of allotments? Healthy fruit and veg are important, but in areas that are not protected by a town council, or by neighbourhood or local plans, people are building on allotments, and we do not want to see any more of that.

Mr Lidington: I think that the principle of support for and recognition of the value of allotments is shared by many Members on both sides of the House. I endorse what my hon. Friend says. The commitment is such that the majority of Labour Members keep urging their party leader to spend many more hours on his allotment.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. May I also pay tribute to Jimmy Perry? I would hate to say, "We're all doomed!", but perhaps we are under this Government.

We are always looking for things to commemorate at business questions, and they do not come any bigger than congratulating Candice on winning "The Great British Bake Off". May I also congratulate the first hon. Member who will table an early-day motion on that subject?

Last week I suggested a couple of definitions of Brexit. I thought that the words "soggy" and "crispy" might be useful; of course, there has been no end of other suggestions. The shadow Chancellor has referred to a bankers' Brexit, but I like the idea of a flexible Brexit, as announced by the First Minister of Scotland—a flex-Brex, if you like—where the nations of the UK take their own distinct approach. We are starting to see some useful debates about Brexit, so how about a debate that allows the nations of the UK to determine what we require from leaving the European Union?

It has come to my attention that a petition is kicking around to ask the House to hold a debate on, and organise a process for, kicking Scotland out of the Union. What could possibly go wrong with such a petition? Imagine the prospect of it getting into the hands of somebody who wanted to make mischief. What would happen if it got 100,000 signatures and one of my hon. Friends managed to secure a debate on it? Will the Leader of the House join me in appealing to the good people of this nation, "Do not sign this petition!" to ensure that that disaster does not come to pass?

We have been waiting a long time for the Government to introduce a Green Paper or Bill on their work and health programme. That important proposal will plug the gap in disability, so is the Leader of the House in a position to tell us whether we will see it soon?

Mr Lidington: On the hon. Gentleman's last point, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions regards that Green Paper as a very high priority. It will bring together a number of approaches proposed by the Government which, I hope and believe, will command a lot of cross-party support. We certainly hope that it will be published in the near future.

On our departure from the European Union, as the plenary session of the Joint Ministerial Committee demonstrated earlier this week, the Prime Minister and the Government remain committed to the full involvement of the three devolved Administrations in the preparation of our negotiating position, and we want to maintain that engagement in the months ahead. There will be opportunities in the debate that I have announced today, and in subsequent general debates about various aspects of our EU membership, for Members from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to make all the points that they wish to make about the interests of the nations that they represent and particularly of their constituents.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): May we have a debate on making better use of natural resources? Is the Leader of the House aware that, in the next few days, we will go through the ridiculous ritual of putting our clocks back, thereby plunging the nation into darkness and misery by mid-afternoon? Can we look again at the benefits of using summer time in winter, which would reduce road accidents and boost tourism?

Mr Lidington: For many years, my right hon. Friend has been a strong advocate of changes to the arrangements for summer time. As he knows, there was no agreement between different parts of the UK on the way forward.

[Mr Lidington]

On such a subject, the unity of the UK, and respecting the interests of all parts of the UK, are important. The Government have no plans at the moment to bring forward changes in legislation.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): Last week, I met primary headteachers and parents in my constituency who were very concerned about the fiasco over the content and administration of SATs last year. May we have a full debate on the whole issue to avoid such chaos and upset in future years?

Mr Lidington: Last year, some quite far-reaching changes to SATs were introduced. The Government's belief is that the changes will drive an improvement in overall standards among our school children, which we very much need. However, in recognition of the disruption that was caused to the lives of teachers and headteachers, the Government have agreed that any further changes should be paused. That explains why, for example, we have decided not to proceed with the proposal that children should be retested at the end of their time at primary school.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): May we have a debate on the importance of protecting our green belt and on the requirement for local authorities to maintain an adequate brownfield register to prioritise development? In my region recently, the Greater Manchester spatial framework has called for the development of large swathes of the green belt, with my constituency of Cheadle set to lose much of its natural landscape.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend is a formidable champion of the green belt and of the interests of her constituents in particular. I am sure that she will be ensuring that their voice is heard loudly at all stages of the consultation on and public examination of the proposals that she describes.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): As someone who resides in and represents a constituency 55° north of the equator, I can say that British summer time works for us, so I hope that there is no plan to change that.

I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business. May I point out that we have an application on the stocks—he will have heard the exchanges during Women and Equalities questions—for a debate on Thursday 17 November on International Men's Day? If that could be accommodated, the Backbench Business Committee would be grateful.

Could we have a debate in Government time—this issue affects many of my constituents—on the way in which the Department for Work and Pensions is administering universal credit and the claims from our constituents? There are catch 22-style hoops to jump through and almost Kafkaesque rules that are designed to disallow and to delay legitimate claims from constituents. May we have a debate in Government time about that? The number of people who are going many weeks without any means of supporting themselves is a scandal.

Mr Lidington: I will do my best to accommodate the hon. Gentleman's Committee in respect of the business on 17 November, although he will appreciate that I cannot give a firm promise today.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about universal credit, it is being phased in precisely to try to identify any potential flaws and to minimise the risk of teething troubles. I will report his concern to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, but we have to remember that universal credit not only is a much simpler method of administering a complex and old system of welfare support for people in need, but has so far demonstrated that it is pretty effective in helping to get people who are able to work back to work, and in providing support for people who need it.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): May we have a debate on the use to which these premises are put, following reports that, outrageously, a Member of the House of Lords presided over an event at which Israel was compared to the Islamic State and the Jews were even blamed for their own genocide? May we discuss that and whether we should issue an apology for these outrageous comments to the Israeli Government and the Jewish people?

Mr Lidington: I read the newspaper reports of the event in question, and I confess that I was genuinely horrified by the speech that was reported. I do not want to treat every newspaper article as gospel, but I think we should all be very concerned about what happened. Since this event appears to have been organised by a leading member of the Liberal Democrats, I hope that the leader of the party launches an immediate and thorough investigation, so that we can get to the truth and any appropriate disciplinary action can be taken.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Does the Leader of the House recognise that the acute financial crisis in Walsall, which has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), cries out for ministerial action? This crisis has arisen because, for the past six years, the amount of central Government money going to the borough has been reduced by over 60%. Libraries, essential services and the New Art Gallery, which was opened by the Queen at the beginning of the century, are now all in danger of being closed or slashed to the bone. It is totally unacceptable. What are the Government going to do to save the situation, given that the crisis now occurring is entirely due to the way in which they have treated this borough during the past six years?

Mr Lidington: I will certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's concerns about his borough to the attention of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, but I must put it to him that very difficult decisions about spending have to be addressed by both central and local government as a consequence of the irresponsible borrowing policies pursued by the Government whom he supported for 13 wasted years.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): Mr McGonagle from my constituency has contacted me about being issued with a parking ticket by UK Car Park Management, despite the fact that the car was not his. I have attempted to contact the company five times to resolve the matter, but I have not even received the courtesy of an acknowledgment. Will the Leader of the House allow us to debate the regulation of private parking companies?

Mr Lidington: I note what my hon. Friend has said. He has obviously put this case on the record today. He may want to apply to you, Mr Speaker, for an Adjournment debate on it.

Mr Speaker: Very wise.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): May we have a debate entitled "Project Fear" so that the Leader of the House, and the former Chancellor in particular, can reflect on the wisdom of presenting the case against leaving the European Union as a short-term apocalyptic, emergency-budgeted disaster, as opposed to concentrating on the medium-term damage that will certainly be done to this country through withdrawal from the European single marketplace? Given that the Leader of the House was up to his neck in "Project Fear", will he give the House an assurance that never again will there be such a blatant abuse of Treasury statistics and forecasts in any future referendum that may come along?

Mr Lidington: I must say to the right hon. Gentleman—this probably embarrasses him now—that he and I were on the same side in the referendum campaign. To be honest, there is little point in our conducting post mortems on the referendum campaign. Whatever the reasons that led people to vote the way they did, the turnout was at or above general election levels and the outcome, although the margin was narrow, was decisive and clear, and is respected not just by parties in this House, but by the other 27 Governments in the European Union. We now have to get on with the task of negotiating the best possible deal for British citizens and for British business in these new circumstances.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): At this time of year postal volume starts to increase. It is therefore high time we had a debate on the future of the sorting office in Bacup. If that were to close at Christmas, my constituents would have a 15-mile round trip to collect parcels, which is completely unacceptable.

Mr Lidington: I know that my hon. Friend will be vigilant in defending services available to his constituents. On Tuesday 8 November we have oral questions to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. He may be able to pursue the matter further then.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): The crisis in adult social care continues to grow, as highlighted by the Care Quality Commission a couple of weeks ago. May I again ask the Leader of the House whether we can have an urgent debate or a statement from the Government, so that they can outline their plans to address that crisis, in particular with regard to local government funding?

Mr Lidington: It is certainly a priority of my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary to ensure that we plan a future in which health and social care are closely integrated, to ensure the best possible service to all our constituents. Average lengths of stay in hospital have fallen since this Government first came to office. Although there are difficulties and challenges—I do not pretend otherwise—that suggests that the local health and social services managers are responding to the challenge well. Since the hon. Gentleman mentioned the CQC, I note that it has said that more than 70% of adult social services should be rated as good or outstanding.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Will the Leader of the House provide me with some guidance as to the best way that my constituents can get value for money from their local council? It was reported this week that that council had spent £750 million on traffic consultants in four months; on top of that, it has wasted a lot of money on a very expensive bus lane that lasted for only 21 days, painted double yellow lines across the middle of a road and spelled "school" incorrectly on a sign. Will he let me know what I can do about this dysfunctional council?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend is doing a service to her constituents in highlighting those examples of wasteful expenditure. They demonstrate the fact that this is a question not just of central Government grants to local authorities but of local authorities' getting things right and not making mistakes or getting their priorities wrong in the way that she has described. In the medium term, the answer to her constituents is to secure change by voting for a Conservative-majority council.

Mr Speaker: Order. We have had an enjoyable Cook's tour of South East Cornwall, but I am not quite sure it constituted a business question. Nevertheless, it is permanently on the record, and colleagues can study it in the long winter evenings that lie ahead.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Earlier this year, Greenwich clinical commissioning group awarded a contract for the provision of musculoskeletal services to CircleHealth without adequate public consultation and seemingly without an impact assessment by either the CCG or NHS England. May we have a debate about the adequacy of the procedures that Greenwich CCG followed in awarding that contract and about patient involvement in the commissioning process more generally?

Mr Lidington: If the hon. Gentleman has evidence that the proper procedures were not followed in this case, and would like to send me that information, I will be happy to pass it on to Health Ministers. My general point would be that although it is of course important that there is adequate public consultation and all proper process is followed, it is right that clinical commissioning groups should be free to decide whether they go to voluntary sector providers, charitable sector providers or, in some cases, private sector providers, on the basis of what will give the best quality free treatment to the patients they serve.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Two years ago, there was a tragic accident at a fireworks depot in Stafford in which people lost their lives. Surrounding businesses were greatly disturbed and had to close for some time. I understand, however, that even now it is not a requirement for anyone who is applying for a licence to hold fireworks to show that they have business insurance policies that protect against these sorts of occurrences. May we have a debate on that, and on what kind of support is given to both people and businesses affected by such tragic events?

Mr Lidington: In view of the fact that we are approaching 5 November, my hon. Friend might want to seek an Adjournment debate on this subject. I will draw his

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concerns to the attention of the appropriate Ministers. I think we are all aware, from our constituency experience, of cases where people have suffered the most horrific injuries as a result of either abuse of fireworks by hooligans or a ghastly accident. All sensible safety precautions ought to be taken so that people can avoid such a risk.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Mr Speaker, you talked of the long winter evenings that lie ahead. Long winter days also lie ahead. May we have a debate on how we ensure protection for our security, police and doorkeeper staff as they stand, looking after us and protecting us, in the many draughty places in this building in the freezing cold? I am particularly concerned about the police officer who has to stand at the entrance to the underground station, the exit from the colonnade and the exit from Portcullis House. This is a particularly cold and draughty place, and standing stationary for a few hours is pretty cold. Can we look at that?

Mr Lidington: The hon. Lady's question reminds us all of the debt we owe to all staff, including contracted staff, in the House of Commons, especially those responsible for our safety and security. I am sure you, as Chair of the House of Commons Commission, Mr Speaker, will take a look at the particular problem identified by the hon. Lady.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Yesterday, our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister emphasised the importance of building local consensus around local government reorganisation. May we have an early debate on this matter, so the Government can indicate how they will facilitate this process, for example by insisting that any consultation should be honest, open and transparent, which is certainly not what the consultation in Dorset has been so far?

Mr Lidington: I heard my hon. Friend's question to the Prime Minister yesterday, and her answer. He spoke fiercely in support of his own local authorities and I am sure he will persist in that campaign. I think that an Adjournment debate, either in this Chamber or in Westminster Hall, might be the right way in which to pursue that particular course.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am not so sure about "Dad's Army", but one of the other shows was "Hi-de-Hi!". I am not quite sure who to cast the Leader of the House as, whether Gladys Pugh or Peggy Ollerenshaw—or maybe just the camp host.

I want to ask the Leader of the House about the proceedings in the House of Lords last night. As he will know, the Government's answer to everything at the moment, in relation to last Friday and to Leveson part 2, is to put it in the Bill in the House of Lords. The Minister in the House of Lords last night was unable to say whether we are going to have Leveson part 2, which has been guaranteed many times in this House. Will the Leader of the House make sure that this does now happen?

Mr Lidington: The key point about Leveson 2 is that the Government have been consistent in saying that we would not announce a decision on that until the completion of all criminal proceedings arising out of the phone tapping allegations. We have not yet come to the end of those proceedings, so it would not be right at the moment for the Government to come forward with the decision.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: A further 25 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. I am keen to try to conclude proceedings on this statement by 11.30 am, so there is a premium on brevity from both Back Benchers and Front Benchers.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Yesterday we celebrated the accession of Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, to India. On the subject of light, over this weekend we celebrate Diwali. Will my right hon. Friend join me in wishing Hindus, Sikhs and Jains everywhere a very happy Deepavali and a happy, peaceful and prosperous, but above all else healthy, new year?

Mr Lidington: I wholeheartedly endorse my hon. Friend's call for Diwali greetings to go to all people in this country of Indian heritage who will be celebrating that great feast. As he mentioned Kashmir, I think there would perhaps be no better way to mark the festival of Diwali than to see progress towards the much yearned for settlement in Kashmir that would finally bring about peace and an end to the tension and conflict that has beset that beautiful part of the world for far too long.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): May we have a great debate on how this Government seem to enjoy spending lots of money in the south of England and to dislike spending any money in the north of England? This is holding back infrastructure projects that would boost the northern economy, such as the M65 link between east Lancashire and the north-east and Scotch Corner, which would transform parts of the northern economy. When are we going to have a serious debate about this?

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman ought to go and talk to some of the Labour council leaders in the north of England who have worked closely with the Government to champion the northern powerhouse project, which includes many important infrastructure projects. I note, too, that leaders in the north of this country have broadly speaking welcomed warmly the Government's announcement about airports this week.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Last Thursday I thoroughly enjoyed attending the Corby sports awards, an annual event when we all come together and celebrate sporting achievement in our town. May we have a debate next week on grassroots sport and the vital role that volunteering plays in it, not just in my constituency but across the country?

Mr Speaker: Especially the hon. Gentleman, who is grassroots sports parliamentarian of the year, which he is too modest to mention, although I can do so on his behalf.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend is renowned for his modesty on these matters. I am happy to add my congratulations to yours, Mr Speaker, and I suspect

that most of us are somewhat in awe of the YouTube video of the Sports Minister demonstrating her footballing skills, which appeared online in the past 24 hours. There will be an opportunity on Thursday 3 November for questions to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. That will give my hon. Friend the opportunity he seeks.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): May we have a debate on the Government's policy on light rail schemes? We do not know what the policy is. In Leeds, we have a crazy situation whereby the Government made the brave decision to say that Leeds could keep £173.5 million and not waste it on the trolley bus scheme, but now seem to be allowing Leeds to fritter the money away in another way, when what we really need is light rail, so may we have a debate on this important issue?

Mr Lidington: I cannot offer the hon. Gentleman a debate in Government time in the near future. He may have other opportunities through the Adjournment debate procedure, but I will ask the relevant Minister to write to him about the Leeds scheme.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): May we have a debate on school crossing patrols, and will the Leader of the House join me in praising the wonderful road safety role that lollipop ladies, and indeed lollipop men, play in our communities come rain or shine?

Mr Lidington: While I cannot offer a debate, I am happy to endorse my hon. Friend's tribute to lollipop men and ladies. Many of us over the years have had children of our own who have benefited from the additional safety that they provide to children in going to school and crossing busy roads.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): May I join others in impressing on the Leader of the House that we should have a debate or statement in Government time on the cuts to the Equality and Human Rights Commission? Given that the industrial action involves the lowest-paid staff under threat of compulsory redundancy, surely it is time to have a debate.

Mr Lidington: I direct the hon. Gentleman to the possibility of an Adjournment debate or perhaps, if there is sufficient support in the House, to a Backbench Business Committee debate on the subject. As I said in reply to the shadow Leader of the House, the commission is rightly at arm's length from Government decisions—we do not as Ministers interfere in its day-to-day operations—but I hope the commission will always have regard to the need to provide value for money for the taxpayer and to work to try to improve morale among its own staff.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): May we have a debate on the ability of local authorities to introduce blanket traffic regulation orders to stop the problems that often occur in many residential and urban areas of parking on grass verges and other examples of inconsiderate parking?

Mr Lidington: I will draw that issue to the attention of Transport Ministers. Part of the problem is that, as suggested by our own constituency experience, different constituents who argue on opposite sides about any particular location. I shall ask the Minister with responsibility for parking to write to my hon. Friend.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): One disturbing aspect of the Panama papers revelations was that more than half of the companies for whom Mossack Fonseca acted were in British-linked tax havens. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has commenced negotiations on new treaties with Crown dependencies, but no provision has yet been made for this House to consider the outcome. In the interests of transparency, can we have a debate here to ensure that these tax treaties are properly scrutinised and thoroughly understood before they are ratified?

Mr Lidington: There are opportunities, particularly through the Select Committee system, to pursue those issues in much greater detail and to question Ministers about arrangements with all the relevant British overseas territories. I hope that the hon. Gentleman would, however, acknowledge that this Government have taken more determined and effective action than any of their predecessors to improve the standards of transparency and reporting on behalf of our overseas territories, and to pioneer international agreements to try to stamp out tax evasion and limit tax avoidance.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate—it may need to be a long one—on how out of touch the BBC is with the general public in the United Kingdom? A freedom of information request that I have just had returned confirms once again that over the last year the BBC bought more copies of *The Guardian* than any other national newspaper, despite it being only the eighth most popular daily with the British public. In fact, the BBC bought 75,000 copies of *The Guardian* last year—it seems to be single-handedly keeping that newspaper afloat. Does this not show how out of touch the BBC is with the general public across the country? Should we not expect the national state broadcaster in this country to be more in tune with, and to represent, the people it is supposed to represent?

Mr Lidington: There will be a chance at next Thursday's Culture, Media and Sport questions to pursue concerns about the BBC. It is for the BBC itself to answer questions about its newspaper subscriptions. I do think, however, that evidence suggests that most people in this country value the programmes that the BBC produces on both television and radio, and that although we should certainly be on the lookout for any examples of wasteful spending or abuse of the sort my hon. Friend has described, we should not neglect the reality that the BBC is a formidable soft power asset for the influence of the United Kingdom globally.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I am amazed that the Government have not so far produced a statement on the British Steel pension scheme. It would be warmly welcomed if that could be rectified. This week, we saw the deficit written down from £700 million to £50 million. This scheme is an integral part of the British steel industry for the future. What are Ministers doing about arranging talks, and what support will they give to the BSPS in the future?

Mr Lidington: The future for the British Steel pension scheme is linked to decisions that Tata Steel needs to take about the future of its steel-making operations in the United Kingdom. Last May, the Government consulted on options to make changes to the pension scheme. We got more than 4,500 responses, and we continue not only to consider those, but to speak to all interested parties about the sale of the steel business, the implications for the pension scheme and the wider implications for the pension industry. These are delicate and sensitive talks. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the fate of many jobs hinges on them. We will respond in due course, but we think that it would be premature to make such a statement now. Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions are coming up, so the hon. Gentleman might be able to raise the point again then.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): In the light of the proposed restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster, may we have a full debate on the need to optimise the commercial and operational benefits of a "decant"? I have some 20 years' commercial experience in this sector. May I ask what we are doing to harness sector skills, including specialist apprenticeships—I see that the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills is present—given the scale of the project and given the availability?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend has made a very good point. We will certainly have a debate, and, if a Division is called, a vote, to decide whether we wish to approve the approach set out in the Joint Committee's report. It will take place as soon as possible, but I am not in a position to announce a date today.

My hon. Friend also made a good point in drawing attention to the fact that the Committee's report itself said that the project would, if approved, provide huge opportunities for British industry—both manufacturing and service industries—as well as an opportunity to develop specialist skills and involve apprentices in the way that she has described.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Royal Bank of Scotland allowed someone to withdraw £500 from the account of my constituent Calum Cheshire, at a branch which he had never visited and which was far from his home, because that person was able to reproduce his signature from a long-lost driving licence, and apparently their eyes looked similar. No bank card or PIN was required, and the bank will not give Calum his money back. May we have a debate on the duty of banks to refund customers' money that they give away in error, and the lack of protection offered to customers by the financial ombudsman?

Mr Lidington: Obviously it is difficult for me to respond in detail without knowing the specifics of the case, but if the hon. Lady would care to write to me, I will pass the correspondence to the responsible Minister and ask for a reply to be sent directly to her.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May we please have a debate on the operation of the Child Maintenance Service? Notwithstanding the change of name, the problems that beset the Child Support Agency have been replaced with a new set of genuine complaints. For instance, fathers are being assessed on the basis of their gross earnings of two and three years ago, although they have provided the CMS with evidence that they are now on a lower wage.

Mr Lidington: I will flag my hon. Friend's concerns to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. It is in all our interests for the Child Maintenance Service to work efficiently and fairly in ensuring that children receive the support to which they are entitled. Let us never forget that the children should be at the heart of child maintenance policy. However, I agree with my hon. Friend that it is also important for the CMS to get its calculations right so that people do not end up being saddled with bills that they are not actually supposed to be paying.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The chairman of Network Rail has said that there is a funding gap which could mean that the Swansea to London electrification project will not be completed. May we have a statement on the delivery of this important large-scale project? So far, we have had four years of probably expensive procrastination on the Swansea to Cardiff section. Wales deserves better, and the impasse needs to be resolved.

Mr Lidington: My right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary is currently considering the priorities that he wants to set for transport infrastructure in the years to come. Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is preparing his autumn statement, which will address some infrastructure issues. I hope that we shall be able to provide greater clarity, not just for the hon. Gentleman but for the whole House, before very much longer.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Following the results of a BBC Radio 5 Live survey in which 8% of football fans said that they would stop following their teams if they signed a gay player, and the unfortunate comments of the chairman of the Football Association, who has advised people against coming out as gay at the moment, may we have a debate on homophobia in football and in male team sports more generally?

Mr Lidington: I think that if the hon. Gentleman has an opportunity to raise his concern during the forthcoming session of questions to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, he will find that Ministers wholeheartedly endorse his call for homophobia, and, in particular, the expression of some pretty vile homophobic sentiments and slogans, to be driven out of sport altogether. It has no place in sport.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): In many parts of the country the number of women accepting invitations for cervical and breast-screening tests is at the lowest level for 18 years, and the all-party group on women's health heard there are significant barriers to accessing these tests, particularly for black, Asian and minority ethnic women, women with mental health problems and learning difficulties and working women. May we have a debate in Government time to understand how Parliament can ensure women are given every opportunity to attend these life-saving tests?

Mr Lidington: I will certainly draw the Health Secretary's attention to the hon. Lady's concern. As her question suggests, for some of those hard-to-reach groups it is

not simply a matter of having screening services available; it is also about making sure the women know about, and feel confident enough to use them, and sometimes there are cultural or other reasons why people may feel unwilling to do so. So I agree we need to work through all the relevant agencies to give women that confidence to come forward.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): When we come back from a recess on a day that is not a Monday we sit on Monday hours, from 2.30 pm to 10.30 pm. Should a similar principle not apply when we rise for a recess, and may we on Tuesday 8 November sit on Thursday hours, from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm?

Mr Lidington: I will give some rapid thought to that question, but at the moment the plan is to continue with the hours we normally sit that day.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Did the Leader of the House hear a senior American military commentator this morning say President Putin is delighted about the British Brexit decision and likes to see Europe feckless and weak? If that is the case may we have an early debate on the growing aggression from Russia and the fact that Russia is clearly trying to intervene in American politics at present, and did the Russians intervene in the Brexit vote in June?

Mr Lidington: I agree completely with the hon. Gentleman about the aggressive approach taken by the Russian Government at present, which we have seen demonstrated both in the cyber-attacks he describes and on the ground in Ukraine and through the stationing of missiles in the Kaliningrad Oblast. I hope it will be some reassurance to the hon. Gentleman to know that yesterday NATO announced details of the rapid deployment forces to be stationed in the Baltic states and Poland, and that the UK will be the lead nation in Estonia and a supporting nation in the Polish contingent. That demonstrates this country's continuing commitment to European defence and security, which will continue even as we prepare to leave the EU and afterwards.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): My constituent Kerrie Hamilton told me how she suffered a traumatic experience at the hands of her Atlantis Group landlord, with men barging into her Stockton home and bullying her, while Mrs Olwyn Murdoch, in her 70s, told me how Atlantis staff are hounding her for money even though she no longer lives in their property. Both have long tales of woe including welcome local council interventions and a recorded conversation in which the wife of the owner, John Sykes, tells Mrs Hamilton no one could prove bullying because he is so powerful and runs a charity. May we have a debate on rogue landlords and how we can better protect tenants from such behaviour?

Mr Lidington: There are various legal rules that landlords have to follow if they are seeking lawfully to evict a tenant, and in my experience the courts do test the arguments landlords put forward. In this case it may be that the tenant felt so intimidated that they were unable to avail themselves of those remedies. If the hon. Gentleman writes to me about his constituency case, I will draw it to the attention of the housing Minister.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It was Mother Teresa who said:

> "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."

In northern Iraq, Yazidis are living in tents rather than in the trailer units that are provided for others. They are not receiving rations of basic food or support. There are many Yazidis and Christians living in extremely poor conditions outside the UNHCR camps in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Will the Leader of the House arrange a statement or a debate on this important issue?

Mr Lidington: The Government are giving assistance to people in need in northern Iraq through our international development and aid programme. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the reason that those people are in such dire circumstances is that they have fled the terrorist genocidal regime of Daesh in parts of the north of that country. The sooner the Iraqi and peshmerga forces are able to re-establish control over Iraqi territory, the sooner we will be able to bring hope and the restoration of normal life to those people.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): London has HS1, HS2, Crossrail 1, Crossrail 2 and a new runway at Heathrow, and of course the £30 million of Government money that is being wasted on a garden bridge. Meanwhile, the M56 is jammed every day and we have had no commitment on an HS2 hub at Chester. May I add my calls to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) for a proper debate about why the Government's priorities seem to be focused on the south-east while we in the north and the north-west lose out?

Mr Lidington: I do not blame the hon. Gentleman for wanting to get more spending for his own constituency. That is a perfectly proper thing for him to seek here. However, he needs to acknowledge the Government's commitment to the northern powerhouse, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) initiated and which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has recently confirmed. I hope that, when the autumn statement is made, the hon. Gentleman will find ample demonstration in it of our continuing commitment to the prosperity and growth of our great northern cities.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Government are proposing to close down the Dungavel immigration and removal centre, not to improve immigration policy but as part of a flawed value-for-money exercise. Half the workforce live in my constituency, and they feel that they have been left high and dry. May we have a debate in Government time on how the Government have conducted this matter, on their wider estate rationalisation and on how they engage—or do not engage—with the workforce and the unions?

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman might wish to seek an Adjournment debate on the constituency implications of that decision, but as I think he knows, the Government's intention is that Dungavel will be replaced by a new centre located close to Glasgow airport, which will be much more convenient for ensuring that those people who are in this country illegally and

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who have been properly served with deportation or removal notices can be removed to their country of origin.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): I attended the launch of the Thin Red Line appeal on Monday. It is an initiative to raise funds for the refurbishment of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders regimental museum at Stirling Castle. What opportunities exist to debate and draw attention to this fine cause, which seeks to properly honour and commemorate that renowned Scottish regiment?

Mr Lidington: I should like to salute the proud record of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's tribute will receive unanimous support from Members representing all political parties in the House. He has seized this opportunity today, and there might be another opportunity to discuss the matter, either in a forthcoming Adjournment debate, at Culture, Media and Sport questions or perhaps in questions to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Points of Order

11.33 am

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you give me any advice in my capacity as Chair of the Defence Committee? Both my Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee have been extremely worried about the forthcoming major cuts to BBC Monitoring and the potential closure of Caversham Park, the centre where BBC Monitoring and Open Source Enterprise, an American organisation, exist side by side to the great advantage of many Government Departments. The Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry had to conclude without getting a responsible Minister to give evidence. My Committee has been trying in our inquiry since 14 October to get a responsible Minister, whom we gather should be from the Foreign Office or possibly the Cabinet Office, to come to us. This is a serious matter that is worrying a great many people in the military and intelligence communities. We look to your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, as to what we can do to compel a Minister to do his job and come before us for scrutiny, which we must do in order to do our job.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for advance notice of his point of order. As he knows, the Chair is unable to compel Ministers to appear before Select Committees, but he has chosen the timing of his point of order well—the Leader of the House, who is very attentive, is here and will no doubt take those concerns to the Government.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. At questions to the Leader of the House before business questions, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) the Leader of the House—in all sobriety and apparently without any hint of irony—presented the behaviour of the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), last week in talking out a private Member's Bill as nothing more than answering questions from Members in the normal course of a debate. Every Member present knows that the reality—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a continuation of a debate rather than a point of order. The hon. Gentleman will have to use other avenues to pursue his grievance.

BILL PRESENTED

TECHNICAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Justine Greening, supported by Secretary Greg Clark, Secretary Damian Green, Ben Gummer, Damian Hinds, Robert Halfon, Mr Nick Gibb, Edward Timpson, Caroline Dinenage and Joseph Johnson, presented a Bill to make provision about technical and further education, and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 82) with explanatory notes (Bill 82-EN).

Privileges

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I inform the House that the Speaker has not selected the amendments on the Order Paper.

11.36 am

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): I beg to move,

That this House—

(i) approves the First Report from the Committee of Privileges (HC 662);

(ii) having regard to the conclusions of the Committee in respect of Mr Colin Myler, considers that Mr Myler misled the Culture, Media and Sport Committee by answering questions falsely about his knowledge of evidence that other News of the World employees had been involved in phone-hacking and other wrongdoing, and therefore formally admonishes him for his conduct; and

(iii) having regard to the conclusions of the Committee in respect of Mr Tom Crone, considers that Mr Crone misled the Culture, Media and Sport Committee by giving a counter-impression of the significance of confidentiality in the Gordon Taylor settlement and by answering questions falsely about his knowledge of evidence that other News of the World employees had been involved in phone-hacking and other wrongdoing, and therefore formally admonishes him for his conduct.

That the matter of the exercise and enforcement of the powers of the House in relation to select committees and contempts be referred to the Committee of Privileges.

This case was referred to the Privileges Committee by the House on 22 May 2012. The Committee was tasked to investigate the conclusions in chapter eight of the 11th report from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Session 2010-2012, on "News International and Phone-Hacking". The Committee found that Mr Colin Myler and Mr Tom Crone misled the Culture, Media and Sport Committee by each answering

"questions falsely about… knowledge of evidence that other News of the World employees had been involved in phone-hacking and other wrongdoing"

and made a finding of contempt in relation to each of them. The Committee also made a finding of contempt in relation to Mr Tom Crone being found to have

"misled the CMS Committee in 2009 by giving a counter-impression of the significance of confidentiality in the Gordon Taylor settlement. He was involved in the settlement negotiations and knew that NGN's desire for confidentiality had increased the settlement amount."

The standard of proof employed by the Privileges Committee was whether the allegations contained in the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report were significantly more likely than not to be true. The other allegations made against Tom Crone, Les Hinton and News International did not meet the evidentiary standard set out by the Committee. I thank the Committee for its diligent work, particularly given the necessarily long pause in the inquiry while legal proceedings were under way.

The findings matter because Select Committees play an important role in parliamentary and national political life. Ultimately it is voters who lose out when witnesses fail to provide reliable evidence. Decisions that shape and affect our constituents' lives are made by the businesses, organisations, and of course Ministers whose work is overseen by Select Committees. Scrutiny happens effectively only because of the powers and privileges afforded to Members of Parliament. Without them, the ability of MPs to serve their constituents properly is undermined. The findings of the Privileges Committee that Parliament has in this instance been knowingly misled are of serious concern. The fact that questions were raised by parties to this inquiry regarding the use of Parliament's powers and the proper jurisdiction of the House is troubling.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): News International tried to get the shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and me thrown off the Select Committee inquiry into this issue when we were serving on the Committee. These people were lying through their teeth—that is absolutely clear. Does the Leader of the House think the penalties put forward in this motion are commensurate with the systematic lying by people at News International during that inquiry?

Mr Lidington: I am going to deal with the question of penalties a little later in my speech.

I said that the questions raised by parties to the inquiry about parliamentary powers and proper jurisdiction were troubling. In its report, the Committee of Privileges cites submissions from lawyers acting on behalf of the *News of the World* journalists. Those legal representatives claimed that the House does not have penal powers in respect of contempt of Parliament. It is regrettable that Parliament and its powers have been challenged in such a way. Although Parliament has chosen not to exercise penal powers for many years, there is no doctrine of desuetude in English law or, I believe, in the law of any part of the United Kingdom. It is for Parliament to make a judgment about the best course of action in addressing that challenge, and for that reason the motion refers

"the matter of the exercise and enforcement of the powers of the House in relation to select committees"

to the Committee of Privileges for further consideration. Without such a formal referral from the House as a whole, under our Standing Orders that Committee could not consider the matter further. Of course, in practice there have been relatively few instances where the authority of the House has been challenged—at least in recent years—so the House has had little need to exercise its powers.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Does the Leader of the House accept that as the two men concerned have made it absolutely clear since the Committee's report was published that they have no respect for the decision of the Committee and for the processes of Parliament, merely admonishing them through a motion, rather than requiring them to appear before the House, will, to all intents and purposes, undermine respect for Parliament, not enhance it?

Mr Lidington: I take very seriously the points that the hon. Gentleman has raised, and he and I have discussed this matter outside the Chamber. I will come on in a little while to explain why I think that to move now towards trying to take the further action that he wishes to see would not be the right approach—certainly not at this time.

One reason why the House has had little need to exercise its penal powers is because refusing to attend Select Committees as a witness or otherwise committing a contempt of Parliament itself causes reputational

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damage for the perpetrator. We should not underestimate that impact. Being designated as having committed a contempt of Parliament or having even been described as not a "fit and proper" person to hold a particular office or exercise a particular function can cause reputational damage to the individual and can also cause commercial damage to the organisations they represent. We should not lightly underestimate the incentive that that provides to witnesses to give evidence to Select Committees and to speak truthfully when they do so.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and other Members in this House, including my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), would like to see us go further now: they would like the people found in contempt to be summoned to the Bar of the House. I agree with them that those who hold Parliament in contempt should not escape with their reputations unscathed, but I have concerns that moving in that direction immediately, without further careful consideration by the Committee of Privileges, would itself pose reputational risks to Parliament. The Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege was clear in its 2013 report that an admonishment can

"take the form of a resolution of the House, without any requirement for the contemnor to appear in person."

Of course the convention in this House has been that the Leader of the House and the Government will normally table and support resolutions brought forward by the Committee of Privileges in order to uphold the authority of that Committee. In this case, it is the Committee that, having examined the evidence in great detail, has chosen to call for the formal admonishment of the two journalists concerned. It has chosen not to recommend to the House that the two journalists be summoned to the Bar of the House to be admonished in person by Mr Speaker.

Chris Bryant: I am sorry, but some of what the Leader of the House has said is inaccurate. This is a matter for the House, not for the Government. Historically, the Committee of Privileges has brought forward a report. It has heard people at the Bar of the House, and then the House has made up its own mind. For instance, in 1947 we decided that the Committee report was right that Mr Heighway should be heard at the Bar of the House. He implicated Mr Allighan, a Member of the House, and both of them were then found guilty of contempt. Mr Allighan was removed from the House for six months. I just say to the Leader of the House that, as a House, we should be free to do what we want, and not be bound by the Committee of Privileges.

Mr Lidington: I do not differ from the hon. Gentleman on that point. The House is free to make whatever decision it wishes, but the fact that he has to cite a case dating back to 1947—I respect the argument that he is bringing forward—suggests that to summon someone to the Bar of the House is not a step that we should rush into today without some pretty careful consideration.

Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the last time this House admonished two people—they were Members of this House—they were not called to the Bar of the House, but admonished by a motion on the Floor of the House?

Mr Lidington: The right hon. Gentleman, who is Chair of the Committee of Privileges, is absolutely right in what he says.

The former Clerk to this House, Lord Lisvane, made his view on this matter clear when he sent written evidence to the Liaison Committee. He said that the approach of summoning someone to the Bar of the House would, in his view, risk being a pantomime. The problem that I have in moving today to accept the arguments put forward by the hon. Member for Rhondda, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley and others is that we would be testing, without some careful thought and consideration, the House's power to enforce such a summons at all. The Serjeant at Arms does not have a power in law to take someone by the shoulder and force them to attend the House if they choose not to do so. Indeed, I have seen advice that suggests that, under such circumstances, the Serjeant at Arms or their team would themselves be at risk of criminal proceedings were they to seek to effect the forceful attendance of somebody summoned to the Bar of the House.

I know that there are also some Members who believe that we should go even further than just summoning individuals to the Bar. They would like to take the radical step, which has been taken by some other jurisdictions, of enshrining the penal powers of the House in statute. It is a model that has been adopted to a greater or lesser extent by some other democratic legislatures. The United States Congress claims an inherent power to punish contempts, but it relies on the courts of the United States to enforce it. The information that I have is that the courts consider such requests from Congress, but they do not grant every such request, and they examine and test to their satisfaction the evidence on which a request is based.

In Australia, there is a criminal offence of contempt of the legislature, with powers to deal with such contempt, such as fines or imprisonment; but there are fundamental consequences to legislating and, as a result, risking drawing in the courts in a way that may start to encroach on parliamentary privilege and the principle laid down in the Bill of Rights in 1689 that proceedings in Parliament, whether in this Chamber or in Committees, may not be questioned in any court of law. As the House knows, these are issues that the Government have previously considered—in their 2012 Green Paper on parliamentary privilege and in their response to a 2013 report by the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege.

Now, it is ultimately, as the hon. Member for Rhondda said, for the House to decide how it wishes to deal with contemnors, by directing the Committee of Privileges to look into the issue by virtue of Standing Order No. 148A. However, I think the right way to proceed—and my advice to the House today—would be to ask our Privileges Committee to examine these questions of the exercise of penal powers carefully; to hear representations —from those such as the Members who have intervened on me—to go further; and then to come back with a report and, if the Committee thinks appropriate, recommendations to the House, so that we could take a decision at that point, after serious examination of our traditions and practices, of the law in this country, including human rights law, and of the practice of other democratic jurisdictions.

11.51 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement, and I agree with him. I also thank the Privileges Committee for its diligent work.

The Committee of Privileges adopted a procedure that met high standards of fairness, while being proportionate and properly parliamentary. The standard of proof applied by the Committee was whether the allegations were significantly more likely than not to be true.

It is always a serious issue when witnesses mislead a Committee, and it undermines the Committee process. It was right that the Culture Committee referred this matter to the Privileges Committee. Members should be able to question witnesses without fear or favour, affection or ill will. It is right that the exercise and enforcement of the powers of the House in relation to Select Committees and contempts be referred to the Committee of Privileges for a detailed, considered inquiry, as it may be necessary to take legal or other advice.

It is normal practice to agree with the Privileges Committee report. Therefore, the Opposition agree with the motion in the name of the Leader of the House.

11.52 am

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I wish to say a few words as a member of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee during the inquiry in the last Parliament into phone hacking at the *News of the World.*

First, the case against Tom Crone and Colin Myler is compelling. It is based not on one evidence session where there may have been a slip of the tongue or a piece of misleading information given; this was a systematic attempt to mislead Members of the House and members of the Committee over many years—over two parliamentary inquiries—and, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said, for which Tom Crone and Colin Myler have shown absolutely no remorse or regret; actually, in many ways, they believe they have done nothing wrong.

Without going through all the incredibly complex work that was done by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee ahead of the Leveson inquiry in looking at the knowledge and extent of phone hacking at the *News of the World*, one simple thing is really clear, and it shines out in the Privileges Committee's report as well: the evidence that condemned Colin Myler and Tom Crone—that condemned News International—always existed within the company itself and was always within reach of the executives of that company. In fact, the killer piece of evidence, which the Select Committee requested that News International's lawyers, Farrer, produce and release, was a memo written by Tom Crone himself and attached to a legal opinion by Michael Silverleaf, QC, which lays out in black and white, extremely clearly, that phone hacking at the *News of the World* was not restricted to one journalist, but widespread throughout the organisation. There was a cultural problem, they all knew about it and they systematically lied about it over a number of inquiries, with repeated opportunities to give oral and written evidence.

The Leader of the House is right to say that incidents of contempt of Parliament and of people being requested to be brought to the House happen rarely, so we should reflect on this report and on the evidence the House has received. It is clear that this is a serious matter—it went on for a long time—and there should be some sanction. On serious inquiries such as this—the inquiry on phone hacking, which was an issue that affected many people's lives—it should be a presumption that witnesses, when they appear before the Committee, are telling the truth, and are compelled to tell the truth, and that if they seek to lie, and repeatedly lie, there is some very clear sanction against them.

I am pleased to hear what the Leader of the House has said. It really is time that there was a clear process that the House should follow whereby people face some sanction if they are found to be in contempt of Parliament and to have lied to Parliament. That might, as he suggested, follow the example of the United States Congress, where the matter is referred to the courts for them to decide what further action should be taken. There should be some clear sanction in law. Witnesses should have regard to the fact that when they give evidence to Parliament they are compelled to tell the truth.

11.55 am

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I rise briefly to support the Privileges Committee in the report that it has published for the House. The Leader of the House put forward a very compelling case for how we need to look at this to make sure that when issues of contempt of the House emerge, as they have in the course of this inquiry, they are taken seriously and we have a range of sanctions that could be deployed against those who treat this House with contempt and action is then required. I was disappointed that Mr Speaker did not select the amendments, because they would have given us a useful opportunity further to exercise this House's views on controls and constraints of some sort, and on what has emerged in the course of this inquiry.

The Leader of the House outlined a sensible suggestion to compel the Privileges Committee to come forward with a report so that this House can consider all these issues properly. I support that intention. I hope that when such serious issues of contempt of Parliament arise in future, a range of options is available to this House that can be demonstrated and exercised by Members of Parliament who are doing their duties and carrying out their responsibilities on behalf of their constituents.

11.56 am

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): I am very conscious of the recommendation in the report that

"it would be wise for those Members of the House who sat on the CMS Committee in 2012 to take no part in the debate on our Report."

I therefore do not want to talk about the specific cases of Mr Crone and Mr Myler, other than to thank the Committee of Privileges and its Chairman, because they have already had to spend a great deal of time on this matter as a result of the decision of the Committee that I chaired at the time to refer this matter to his Committee.

The Leader of the House talked about the fit and proper person test. He will recall that there was great speculation when the Culture, Media and Sport Committee decided to dispatch the Serjeant at Arms to serve a

[Mr John Whittingdale]

warrant on Mr Rupert Murdoch requiring him to appear before the Committee, with much excitement in the press about the consequences had he failed to respond. In actual fact, he did come. I do not know what processes he went through in deciding to do so, or his advisers in telling him that he should, but the fact that there is a fit and proper person test for those holding broadcast TV licences may have had some small part to play. The fit and proper person test is a relevant factor. It would be interesting to know whether it might apply beyond the broadcasting licensing requirements, perhaps extending into the general assessment of whether somebody is suitable to hold a position of company director, for instance. Perhaps being admonished by the House is not just the slap on the wrist that some fear it could be.

The other point, which the Leader of the House also mentioned, is the debate about whether this should become a criminal offence. I have reservations about that. If the two individuals who are accused had been prosecuted in a court of law, they would have been entitled to defence counsel, and I can envisage myself being cross-examined about whether it was right that I questioned as I did the people who appeared. That would clearly have profound implications for the powers of Select Committees.

These are very deep and difficult waters. I conclude by expressing my sympathy for the Chairman of the Privileges Committee, who, having already spent years on this matter, is now being compelled to go back to it and consider even more difficult questions. I look forward to hearing his conclusions.

11.59 am

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I, too, am grateful to the Privileges Committee for the diligent work it has done, and I hope that we will hear from its Chair very soon. I am grateful not only to the Committee Chair and its Members, but to the acting Chair, who had to take much of this through over the last few months.

I will not make any comment about the individuals, Mr Myler and Mr Crone, but I think that the Committee did its absolute best to make sure that there was due and fair process, and that the two men were able to put their own case. The very fact that of the three names originally put forward by the Select Committee, two names are before us today—the Committee found that Mr Les Hinton had not misled the House, or certainly that there was not enough evidence to say that—shows that there has been due process.

The right hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), whose most important role in the matter was as the former Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, is right to say that we should not underestimate admonishment. The Privileges Committee was right to say that that should be the only punishment. We should not be considering a fine or imprisonment, because I do not think that a political institution such as Parliament should be able to do that. That is one of our fundamental principles of habeas corpus. We should not underestimate admonishment, because it would be the House saying that these two men are liars; that they are not honourable; that they have deliberately misled Parliament; and that they are not reliable witnesses. Anybody who wanted to employ them would obviously want to bear that in mind.

If the same thing had happened in the United States of America, the Leader of the House is absolutely right to say that it would have gone to court rather than being dealt with by Congress. The penalties would have been considerably higher than some words in the *Journal* of the House of Commons. The last such instance in the United States of America led to somebody being fined $10,000 and imprisoned for six months.

I accept the points that have been made about not wanting to infringe the Bill of Rights, and not wanting the courts to be able to question or impeach proceedings in Parliament. At the same time, there is a real problem if people can, effectively, proceed with impunity. This is a much more serious case than any that we have had before the House for some considerable time, including the cases that have been referred to from 1947 and 1957. I do not think that either of those cases would come anywhere near the House today. Simply telling a journalist off for having published somebody's telephone number and trying to get people to vote in a particular way—that was, to be honest, the House behaving a bit like a prima donna.

In the case that we are discussing, however, two men lied to Parliament. They chose to lie to Parliament. They made it impossible for the Select Committee to do its work properly, and other forms of justice were not available to those who were involved. I think it is much more serious than any other case since 1879, when two men said that they had bribed Members of Parliament to secure contracts for the building of bridges across the River Thames. Then, we did imprison; it was the last time that we imprisoned. The truth of the matter is that if the same thing happened today, the only thing that would be available to us, according to what we are deciding today, is admonishment. Frankly, I think that that is the kind of situation in which people should be going to prison.

The whole thing is made worse by the fact that the individuals concerned do not accept that they have done anything wrong. On the very day the report was published, they went on the record to say that they did not accept the Committee's findings, they did not accept the way it had done its work and they did not accept Parliament's remit. I tabled two amendments simply to say that we should not increase the penalty above that which was agreed by the Privileges Committee—it should still just be admonishment—but that it should be done at the Bar of the House.

I understand the argument that we should not do that. Lord Lisvane has his arguments, although he is too excitable on this matter for my liking, but I think the real problem was adumbrated by the Leader of the House. The reason we are not doing it is that we are frightened that we cannot summon someone to the Bar of the House because the Speaker's warrant has no effect and the Serjeant at Arms has no power. The problem is that we cannot force somebody to appear as a witness before a Select Committee, which really means that we have become a paper tiger. We have become a lion with no teeth.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): We should insist that we have certain powers, but my concern with bringing someone to the Bar of the House

is that it is unduly theatrical and would make the House of Commons look foolish in the public arena, rather than making us look wise and providential.

Chris Bryant: If somebody were brought to the Bar of the House, I would hope that they showed contrition. John Junor certainly did so in 1957, which meant that the House decided immediately thereafter that it would not pursue the line of admonishment but let the matter lie. Perhaps if the two men in question had been brought to the Bar of the House, they would have shown contrition and that is exactly what we would have decided as well.

It is the counsel of despair to say that we cannot use the powers of the House. We need to address the situation urgently, because the number of witnesses who have tried to avoid appearing before Select Committees has grown exponentially in recent years. That was true of the Maxwell brothers, and then there was nobody for about 10 or 15 years. James and Rupert Murdoch tried to refuse to attend, and Rebekah Brooks refused to attend for some time. All sorts of excuses were provided, but they did eventually attend. It is extraordinary that the Murdochs, having been in control of such a large part of this country's media empire, did not appear for 20 years. Mike Ashley and Philip Green tried not to appear, and we had to stamp our feet to secure their attendance. That eventually happened, but there may come a time when, if we keep saying that we do not have the power to force people to come, they will decide not to, and then we really will have lost. If we cannot summon witnesses and require them to attend, what price our ability to hold the powerful to account?

This is not about those of us who are in this Chamber today. We as individuals come and we will be gone. We pass through here but very briefly and the waters will very soon cover us over, but the role of Parliament endures, because Ministers do not have the sole prerogative rights on the abuse of power. We have to be able to summon witnesses, to force them to attend, to pursue the truth, to hold the lies and half-truths of the great and the good up to the light. I think that people in this country are sick and tired of the extremely powerful and the extremely wealthy being able to lie, scam and brag that they have been able to do so with impunity.

Finally, Rupert Murdoch has tweeted:

"Maybe most Muslims peaceful, but until they recognize and destroy their growing jihadist cancer they must be held responsible."

That tweet in itself is an act of incitement and it is despicable, but if we were to apply his logic that all Muslims, including peaceful Muslims, are responsible for jihadism, we would conclude that it must surely be true that Rupert Murdoch is personally responsible for the lies that were told to this House by Mr Myler and Mr Crone.

12.7 pm

Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): The report represents the fulfilment by the Committee of Privileges of the task that it was asked to undertake by the House on 22 May 2012. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) for chairing a number of the hearings in my absence in recent months.

There is not much time for this debate, so I will concentrate on the process rather than the details of the evidence. It is important to be clear about the role of the Committee. It did not set out to find evidence of phone hacking or to make a judgment about the inquiry conducted by the former Culture, Media and Sport Committee or its findings. Our report is not about phone hacking or the alleged cover-up of such activities. It is this country's legal process that has taken that into account in recent years.

As set out clearly in our Standing Order, the Committee of Privileges is concerned with specific matters relating to privileges. In this case, that meant investigating whether named witnesses and a company gave misleading evidence to the CMS Committee, as set out in chapter 8 of that Committee's report.

We started our work by determining the process by which we intended to reach our conclusions. We believed that the process should be fair and should offer sufficient opportunities to the inquiry subjects to put their side of the story and to comment on our draft conclusions.

Although we do not accept that article 6 of the European convention on human rights applies to our inquiry, we set out nevertheless to shape a process that would meet its stipulations. We consulted the inquiry subjects in advance and published the process as a resolution so that all could see what would happen at each stage. That was before the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege started its own work in this area, but we were pleased to see that the Joint Committee subsequently described our process as "fair" and used our resolution as the pattern for its own draft standing orders on dealing with contempt.

Our resolution was published in 2012 and it is included as an appendix in our report, but there are two points from it that I would like to stress. The first point is the standard of proof. We adopted the standard used to assess more serious cases involving MPs—that the allegations had to be significantly more likely than not to be true. The second is the provision that we would suspend the inquiry if there were any danger that it might prejudice a criminal proceeding.

It was that provision which led to the inquiry being suspended at least twice and which meant work to complete the inquiry was delayed until December 2015, when the Crown Prosecution Service announced that it would not bring corporate charges against News International. That cleared the way for us to look at all the allegations made by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

To reach our conclusions, my Committee examined the evidence before the CMS Committee up to 2012 and documentary evidence that had emerged since which was relevant to the allegations. We took into account publicly available material such as that given to the Leveson inquiry, and requested further evidence from the inquiry subjects, the CPS, the police and others. Most of those we approached co-operated with us and we are grateful for that. The exception to that was where lawyers for the inquiry subjects seemed determined to raise procedural issues, rather than engage with matters of substance. We have published all the correspondence relating to the inquiry so that anyone with the time or interest can see for themselves how co-operative different parties have been.

At the end of that careful consideration and analysis, we concluded that there was sufficient evidence to support findings that Colin Myler and Tom Crone—the latter

[Kevin Barron]

on two counts—had misled the CMS Committee and were therefore in contempt of the House. We did not find sufficient evidence to uphold a third allegation against Mr Crone, or any of the allegations made by the CMS Committee against Mr Hinton. Nor did we find sufficient evidence of a breach of parliamentary privilege by News International, and there was some confusion in the CMS Committee report over pinpointing the corporate body that could be accused of misleading the Committee.

I would invite anyone who disagrees with our findings to re-examine the evidence before us and to bear in mind the standard of proof. I repeat that our concern was specific: did these named inquiry subjects give misleading evidence as set out in the allegations of chapter 8 of the CMS Committee report?

We have recommended that Mr Myler and Mr Crone be formally admonished by the House. We believe that that is a significant step. Although individuals may be criticised in motions in the House, as we saw only recently, that is very different from the House directly resolving to admonish witnesses for obstructing the work of a Committee. It shows how seriously the Committee regards these offences that it seeks to involve the House in that way.

I know that some people feel that we have not gone far enough; the amendments that have not been selected today suggest that. Those people are disappointed to be deprived of the theatre of the inquiry subjects being dragged to the Bar of the House, hence the amendments. However, as has rightly been said, that has not happened in modern times—it did not even happen with the two Members of the House in 1992 who were admonished by resolution; they were not brought to the Bar of the House. We should be conscious of how we treat one another, as opposed to how we treat people outside. In fact, 1957 was the last time the process was used against an individual, when it was described in the House as a "medieval pantomime." That was objected to. The Speaker of the day, Speaker Morrison, accepted that it was wrong to describe the proceedings as a medieval pantomime, but he accepted "medieval drama".

The former Clerk of the House, Sir Malcolm Jack, in written evidence to the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege in 2013, considered that

"the possibility of hauling people to the bar of the House and admonishing them would provide a theatre of the absurd".

I think that he was right. The more recent precedent, set in 1992, is, as I have said, for Members to be reprimanded by resolution only. My Committee considered which form of admonishment was appropriate and decided firmly against summoning Mr Myler and Mr Crone to the Bar. That would risk moving the focus from the facts of the case, which are published with our report in great detail, to the punishment and making the process effectively a show trial, for want of a better expression. It seemed to me and the Committee that that would not be good for the House or for anyone else, even if those powers were available. We should remember that in 1957 the proceedings of the House were not broadcast and there was no such thing as social media. We recognise now that everything we do is much more public. I am sure that Mr Crone and Mr Myler will not regard today's events as a light matter, and nor should they, given the findings of the Committee and the evidence that is in its report for all to see.

I could say much more on the subject of the House's powers and how they are enforced, but I will be able to return to that matter if the House agrees to the proposal from the Leader of the House that the Committee of Privileges should examine the

"exercise and enforcement of the powers of the House in relation to select committees and contempts".

As my Committee points out in our report, that matter has been left unresolved for too long and it is right that we should go away, look at it and come back with some workable recommendations. I believe that it is better that that be done away from any current privileges report or any current inquiry.

I hope that the Leader of the House can reassure us that, unlike in the past, time will be found for the House to debate and to come to an agreement on whatever recommendations we make in our report. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) that we have to get the power that this place has into the context of the 21st century, not the centuries before. That is important. If the proposal is agreed today, and agreed by the Privileges Committee, all Members, and I am sure others, will have the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee about the powers we have and how we should exercise them.

The inquiry took a long time and my Committee has done its best to reach a fair verdict following a fair process. I think that we have done that and I ask the House to support the motion before it today.

12.17 pm

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): My initial reaction on the day of the report's publication was that I was pleased that the Privileges Committee had agreed with our 2012 report saying that Colin Myler and Tom Crone had misled us and were in contempt. I made those comments, which are on my website, following a statement by Les Hinton, the former executive chairman of News International that led to claims that he had been exonerated. Clearly, this Privileges Committee report provides no substance for that statement, and nor does it provide any substance for Mr Hinton's claims that the CMS Committee reached false findings in 2012. In my comments, I also said that I found the second half of the report more disappointing and I want to explain why. I also have questions about an aspect of the Privileges Committee's methodology.

I join the right hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) in expressing my sympathy for the Committee. During its long, interrupted inquiry, it clearly received only grudging, and certainly not full, co-operation from three of the subjects: Colin Myler, Les Hinton and News International, and their solicitors. That was an all-too-familiar experience through all our reports into phone hacking.

I turn to chapter 6 of the report and Les Hinton. Mr Hinton, often described as Rupert Murdoch's right-hand man, was the executive chairman of News International until December 2007. He resigned as chief executive of Dow Jones, another News Corp subsidiary in New York, in July 2011, within a week of the closure of the *News of the World*—that fact should speak for

itself. We found that he was not full and frank in his evidence to our Committee about the payments made to the convicted royal reporter Clive Goodman; about their purpose, which was to buy silence; or about suspicions that were communicated to him about the extent of phone hacking beyond one rogue reporter and one hacker. One only has to look at the detailed memo from Harbottle & Lewis, the lawyers to the group, to see that he also misled us over claims that a full and rigorous investigation into phone hacking at the *News of the World* happened on his watch—it certainly did not.

On Mr Hinton, the Privileges Committee made three findings, each of no contempt. First, on payments to Clive Goodman, the report concludes that he failed to tell us, but would certainly have remembered, his role in authorising a £90,000 pay-off to a convicted criminal. The Committee says that it found its conclusion of no contempt "particularly difficult". I, for one, find that a little confusing and surprising, because we certainly, and unanimously, did not find it difficult to reach our conclusion.

Secondly, on knowledge of the allegations about the extent of phone hacking at the *News of the World*, the report documents that Mr Hinton received a letter in 2007 from Clive Goodman appealing his dismissal, in which he implicated other senior members of staff. Mr Hinton subsequently told our Committee that he had never been provided with any suspicions of wider involvement, and he never sought to correct that comment. Paragraph 269 of the Privileges Committee report says:

> "On that basis we agree that Les Hinton's evidence was misleading because it did not reveal that Clive Goodman was the source of one of those allegations."

Yet in paragraph 270—the following paragraph—the report goes on to conclude that the allegations that Mr Hinton misled us were not

> "significantly more likely than not to be true",

so it made no finding of contempt. I am not the only person to find that conclusion rather contradictory and confusing.

I will not delay the House in relation to the third finding in this chapter of the report, about the payment of Mr Goodman's legal fees—the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) may want to ask questions about it—as I have said enough about Mr Hinton. I will say, however, that throughout our investigations we found a pattern of payments, settlements and confidentiality clauses that clearly had one aim in mind: to suppress the truth about phone hacking.

Chapter 7 of the report deals with News International, which has since been renamed News UK. It was the parent company of News Group Newspapers, which ran and published the *News of the World* and *The Sun*. I must say that, at the outset of the chapter, the Privileges Committee took a narrow approach to the question of whether News International itself was in contempt. It

> "looked to identify the individual who could be said to be a controlling mind such that their written or oral evidence could fairly be said to be on behalf of and bind the company."

That is tantamount to saying that statements by the company, individual senior employees or its lawyers, with plenty of chance to correct the record, are not binding. The report concludes that, by that test, only the executive chairman or the chief executive giving direct evidence at the relevant time—Les Hinton, James Murdoch or Rebekah Brooks—fits the bill. That is rather contestable.

On corporate liability, the report says that it was unclear why our Committee chose to focus on the parent company, News International, rather than News Group Newspapers. That, too, is a rather narrow point. The Privileges Committee did not ask us about that before it issued its report, but I hope to shed some light on why we chose that route. The issue was not raised before we reached our findings, when the Clerk of Committees was acting as our Committee Clerk and the recently retired Speaker's Counsel was giving us advice. The title of our 2012 report was, indeed, "News International and Phone-hacking".

I should mention some of my uncertainties about the Privileges Committee's methodology. It reviewed, inter alia, oral and written evidence formally given to us, but that was clearly not the sum of our knowledge. It says that it reviewed "other publicly available documents", but it is unclear from the report whether those included, in particular, court evidence in the myriad civil phone hacking claims and press releases from News International. We certainly considered those documents, as well as the whole behaviour of the organisation over a long period, when reaching our findings. They were not allegations; they were findings.

Throughout, we sought the truth beyond the initial "one rogue reporter" defence. We were clearly not alone in doing so. Along with media investigations, notably by *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, a raft of hacking victims sued in the civil courts. In each case, the pattern of behaviour in the whole organisation was always the same—denials, misleading statements and evasion, until being forced, grudgingly, to make admissions. That extended to out-of-court settlements with strict confidentiality clauses to avoid cross-examination in the witness box and, in the case of the investigator Glen Mulcaire, to indemnities and costs being paid as long as he played ball. We know that, as we knew it then, from all the court documents.

In July 2011, but only after closing the *News of the World*, News Corporation and News International changed tack, setting up the so-called management and standards committee to handle the scandal. Any notion that afterwards a so-called "zero tolerance", as the report describes it, equated to openness and full co-operation in reality is completely wrong. We had to probe, dig and cajole, as did lawyers in the civil cases. During our inquiries, News International issued misleading and false corporate statements, including press releases on 10 July 2009 denying a key story in *The Guardian* and, on 24 February 2010, savagely attacking our earlier report. At the time of that report, News International's chief executive was Rebekah Brooks, to whom I will turn in a moment. As far as Les Hinton is concerned, I have said enough.

I will not dwell too much on James Murdoch, save to note his "lack of curiosity", as we termed it, about the key items and events about which he was made aware during his tenure, including the damning opinion from Michael Silverleaf, QC, in June 2008, and the settlement with Gordon Taylor of the Professional Footballers Association to which that related. In evidence, the Murdochs rested on a letter from their lawyers, Harbottle & Lewis, claiming that there had been a proper investigation. In a

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key memo to us, the lawyers told us that the Murdochs were not entitled to do so. They said that the Murdochs were either mistaken or confused.

Those senior people were far from being the only News International executives from whom we took evidence. Tom Crone, for instance, who is found in the Privileges Committee's report to be in contempt, was the legal manager for both News Group Newspapers and News International. In key ways, our 2012 report was unfinished business. Owing to the imminent criminal charges, we, on advice, made no findings about the former editor of the *News of the World*, Andy Coulson, or Rebekah Brooks. Whether the Committee will wish to do so now, raking back over old ground, is clearly a matter for the Chair and its members.

In June 2014, Andy Coulson was convicted of conspiracy over phone hacking, while Rebekah Brooks was acquitted. However, those charges were not related to the evidence given to us about whether she had misled our Committee. On page 112 of its report, the Privileges Committee mentions that her evidence in criminal cases and to the Leveson inquiry was "constrained", as was her oral evidence to us on 19 July 2011. That was four days after she had resigned as chief executive, and the report says that

"as such her answers cannot be said to be on behalf of News International."

She was sitting alongside the Murdochs at the time. The report concludes:

"There are therefore no particular matters arising from her oral evidence in 2011."

I am afraid to say that I am not the only one who would beg to differ with that narrow, premature conclusion. Ms Brooks is now, of course, the chief executive of News UK—so much for Rupert Murdoch's penitence when he said:

"This is the most humble day of my life."

Chris Bryant: Is it not a curious irony that, because of the Bill of Rights, neither Lord Justice Leveson nor the courts could, when interrogating Rebekah Brooks, ask her why, in an answer to a question from me on 11 March 2003 about whether she had ever paid a police officer for information, she said yes?

Paul Farrelly: I agree with my hon. Friend. That highlights the long record of Ms Brooks coming—or declining to come—to give evidence in this House. We have taken issue with such evidence.

In evidence to our Committee in July 2011, Ms Brooks repeated one central assertion:

"the fact is that since the Sienna Miller…documents came into our possession at the end of December 2010, that was the first time that we, the senior management of the company at the time, had actually seen some documentary evidence actually relating to a current employee."

The Sienna Miller civil case was seminal in terms of disclosure. Ms Brooks went on to say:

"It was only when we saw the Sienna Miller documentation that we realised the severity of the situation."

Yet we know that, by then, News International had plenty in its possession to suggest that hacking was widespread, including the Silverleaf opinion. We know that Rebekah Brooks personally negotiated the big out-of-court settlement with Max Clifford, which was all wrapped up in confidentiality, just days after our 2010 report. As the Privileges Committee report records, we know that she was present with other people from News International at the meeting of its lawyers Farrer and Co. on 20 January 2010 that was held to discuss Mr Clifford's civil claim.

Damian Collins: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that Tom Crone's role as legal manager would surely be to act on behalf of the company to gather whatever advice he needed to advise whoever within the company—senior executives at all levels—of impending issues and problems, and that it is therefore right to assume that he would have made his opinion and that of Michael Silverleaf available to anyone he felt he had to make them available to?

Paul Farrelly: I thank the new Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. There are disputes within the company about who told what to whom at what time. If he will bear with me, in a moment I will come on to something about which there has been no dispute.

We know, too, that back in 2006, when Rebekah Brooks was editor of *The Sun*, the police informed her that her own phone had been hacked. Courtesy of evidence submitted to the Leveson inquiry in February 2012, we know that she had a long conversation with a police source that was relayed to Tom Crone and then by him in an email to Andy Coulson on 15 September 2006. That email referred to more than 100 victims across all walks of life, not just the royal family, who would have been of interest to royal reporter Clive Goodman.

On reviewing all the lengthy correspondence the Culture, Media and Sport Committee received at the time, it is clear that Rebekah Brooks led us a merry dance for nine months before our 2010 report, saying that she would give evidence in person and then declining. In her final written reply to the right hon. Member for Maldon, on 8 February 2010, she had this to say about what had been known at News International from the police about the extent of hacking:

"I understand that, at some stage between the arrests of Mr Mulcaire and Mr Goodman on 8 August 2006, and their first appearance in court on 29 November 2006, it became known, from information provided by the police, that Mr Mulcaire had accessed the voicemails of people other than Royal Household employees. It was not known how many."

Compare that to the email from 15 September 2006 that was cited at Leveson. She does not say that it was she herself who received the information from a police source, and the final sentence appears to be a complete untruth. The email cites 100 to 110 victims—a very precise number. Did Mr Crone simply make that number up for Mr Coulson after talking to Ms Brooks? It all certainly contradicts the central assertion that the Sienna Miller case was Ms Brooks's moment of epiphany about the severity of the situation, four years later. Along with the other replies that Ms Brooks gave us—not least over the cost indemnity arrangements with Mr Mulcaire after he was sacked—this also merits closer analysis than was evident, I am afraid to say, in the Privileges Committee's report. On all those grounds, I believe that the Privileges Committee is wrong in

being "unable to draw" the conclusion that News International misled us, and is rather premature in not considering it

"to have committed a contempt."

As far as parliamentary privilege is concerned, what is important now is what happens in the future. In chapter 8 of its report, the Privileges Committee is quite right to note that the work of the 2013 Joint Committee has not been taken forward. When we on the Culture, Media and Sport Committee were finalising our 2012 report, as the right hon. Member for Maldon mentioned, we summoned the Murdochs to appear in front of us, as we knew they were in the country to apologise to the family of the murdered teenager Milly Dowler over phone hacking. The uncertainty over our step was what to do if they declined to come. While we were finalising our report, we asked time and again for advice on what sanctions might apply in this day and age for misleading a Select Committee. Too often, I am afraid we found that in the reality behind the rhetoric, the parliamentary emperor apparently had no clothes. That situation needs to be readdressed urgently.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House—

(i) approves the First Report from the Committee of Privileges (HC 662);

(ii) having regard to the conclusions of the Committee in respect of Mr Colin Myler, considers that Mr Myler misled the Culture, Media and Sport Committee by answering questions falsely about his knowledge of evidence that other News of the World employees had been involved in phone-hacking and other wrongdoing, and therefore formally admonishes him for his conduct; and

(iii) having regard to the conclusions of the Committee in respect of Mr Tom Crone, considers that Mr Crone misled the Culture, Media and Sport Committee by giving a counter-impression of the significance of confidentiality in the Gordon Taylor settlement and by answering questions falsely about his knowledge of evidence that other News of the World employees had been involved in phone-hacking and other wrongdoing, and therefore formally admonishes him for his conduct.

That the matter of the exercise and enforcement of the powers of the House in relation to select committees and contempts be referred to the Committee of Privileges.

Backbench Business

Young People's Mental Health

[Relevant document: Fourth Report from the Education Committee, Mental health and well-being of looked-after children, Session 2015-16, HC 481, and the Government response, Cm 9284.]

12.34 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes the recommendations of the Youth Select Committee report of November 2015 on Young People's Mental Health; endorses the findings of that report on the need for more support from the Government for mental health services for young people; acknowledges steps taken by the Government, since its response of January 2016 to that report, with regard to some of its recommendations; and calls on the Government to set out what further progress has been made since its response and what its plans are further to improve mental health services for young people.

The motion concerns the report of the Youth Select Committee on young people's mental health and the Government's response to that report. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for the debate, the application for which was supported by more than 50 members from across the House, and to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) for co-sponsoring the debate.

I start by paying tribute to the many health professionals and voluntary sector organisations working in mental health services for young people, the teachers and teaching assistants who support young people with mental health difficulties in classrooms every day of the week and the youth workers seeking to support our young people in many different ways. This debate is not about the commitment of those who work tirelessly to support our young people but about the resources and the framework within which they are working, which affect our collective ability to deliver the outcomes we need.

The Youth Select Committee report on young people's mental health was published in 2015, as a consequence of more than 90,000 young people voting for the subject of mental health in the 2014 Make Your Mark ballot. It is an exceptionally important piece of work because it is a report on mental health by young people, about young people. Since I was elected last year, I have been struck by how often young people's mental health issues have been raised with me; whether by individual constituents struggling to access the support that they or their children need, doctors in my local accident and emergency department or teachers in our local schools. The issue is raised very frequently, and no one thinks the current situation is even close to being acceptable.

I pay tribute to the Youth Select Committee for its excellent, rigorous report and clear recommendations, which fall into three areas: funding and the state of services; a role for education; and awareness, stigma and digital culture. The report concludes that mental health services are significantly underfunded, and young people's mental health services even more so, and that the challenge posed today by young people's mental health is unprecedented. It highlights significant problems in accessing services, particularly in relation to first contact through GPs, and raises the urgent need for

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every young person in the UK to leave school with a good understanding and awareness of mental health, empowered and equipped to look after their own mental health.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the issues on access that are raised by this very good report could apply equally to adult services, so there is clearly a read-across between the two?

Helen Hayes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that, although today we are debating young people's mental health, many of the same issues apply to mental health services across the board for all members of our communities.

The Government published a response to the Youth Select Committee report in January 2016. That response was, on the whole, disappointing. It referred mainly to work that the Government were already doing rather than the additional work that they and other agencies clearly need to do. Most disappointing of all, the response rejected the key recommendation that statutory levels of attainment in mental health education should be introduced for all young people. I welcome the fact that the Government have subsequently announced some additional funding for young people's mental health, but I remain very concerned about the current state of mental health services for our young people and the resourcing of those services.

I will focus, therefore, on the current state of services, and what I believe to be evidence of a crisis that is growing, not diminishing, and demands a response far bolder and more comprehensive than that which the Government are currently offering. I will also return to the conclusions of the Youth Select Committee report.

One in four of us will experience mental ill health in any given year. That means that mental health is something that affects every one of us. All of us have a friend or family member who has mental ill health, and many of us will experience mental ill health ourselves. I have known close friends and family members who have suffered from severe anxiety that impacted on their daily lives, clinical depression and eating disorders. There are few worse feelings than the worry for a loved one who seems unreachable in the pit of depression, except perhaps the worry when that loved one is a child. All any of us wants for our own children and the young people we represent is that they grow up happy, healthy and resilient to the stresses and strains of our world. Watching a precious child struggle with clinical depression, severe anxiety or an eating disorder is absolutely devastating.

According to NHS statistics, around one in 10 children and young people has a diagnosable mental health condition; that is around three students in a typical classroom. Many more young people do not have a diagnosable condition but experience a period of mental ill health or emotional distress during their childhood or adolescence. The Government's own measures of children's wellbeing found that almost one in four children showed some evidence of mental ill health. Half of mental health problems are established by the age of 14 and three quarters by the age of 24.

Shockingly, suicide is the most common cause of death for boys aged between five and 19, and the second-most common for girls of that age, after traffic accidents. A recent survey by Girlguiding found that 69% of girls aged seven to 21 feel that they are not good enough. It is thought that around one in eight young people self-harm between the ages of 11 and 16.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): I know that my hon. Friend also has concerns, which a number of us share, about serious youth violence. Does she agree with me that mental ill health is now understood to be a key trigger in gang and serious youth violence, and that this deserves a serious and concentrated focus from within the health service and the Government? There is some very good practice out there. It is, sadly, nothing like widely available enough to help us deal with this problem.

Helen Hayes: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful and important point. This is an issue that affects both our constituencies to a significant degree.

Only 0.7% of NHS funding is spent on young people's mental health and only 16% of that funding is spent on early intervention. The Royal College of Psychiatrists also reports that additional funding the Government have committed to young people's mental health is not getting to the frontline. Responses to a recent freedom of information request from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) revealed that although the Secretary of State made a commitment that the proportion of funding for mental health services should be increasing everywhere this year, and this is desperately needed, 57 of the country's clinical commissioning groups are actually reducing the proportion of funding for mental health services.

The charity YoungMinds reports that three quarters of young people with mental health problems may not get access to the treatment they need. Child and adolescent mental health services, on average, turn away nearly a quarter of children referred to them for treatment by concerned parents, GPs, teachers and others. That finding is supported by evidence from the Association of Colleges, which reports that, of 127 colleges responding to a survey, many reported real difficulties referring students on to health services in times of crisis, with 61% of respondents reporting that their relationship as a college with local mental health services is only "fair" or "not very good/non-existent". The thresholds for support are going up at precisely a time at which demand for services is increasing. This has the potential to create a ticking time bomb of mental ill health for the future.

The average waiting times for all CAMHS providers was six months for a first appointment and almost 10 months for the start of treatment; and an investigation by Pulse recently found that three in five referrals from GPs to CAMHS are being batted back to primary care without any access to specialist support. When early intervention is not available, it is very often schools and colleges that end up dealing with the consequences, and they are woefully under-resourced to do so. A recent survey by the National Association of Head Teachers found that only a third of primary schools have access to a school-based counsellor, and that of those who do have access, 59% have a counsellor on the school site for one day a week or less.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I commend the hon. Lady for securing this debate on this very important subject, which often comes up in my constituency work. She makes a point about schools struggling to find support. That is certainly something I have experienced in my constituency, so I want to reiterate the point that primary and secondary schools know they have children who could really benefit from more specialist support and it is very hard for them to access it.

Helen Hayes: I agree with the hon. Lady completely. As we focus on prevention and early intervention, we need to think about early intervention in terms of age, as well as the stage of mental ill health.

As a consequence of the lack of early intervention support, the number of young people attending A&E because of a psychiatric condition has more than doubled since 2010. I have spoken to many doctors who tell me that when this happens and a seriously unwell young person presents at A&E needing a CAMHS in-patient bed, they frequently wait a very long time—sometimes days—for a bed to be identified. Often that bed is hundreds of miles away from home. One south London hospital has provided me with data that show a 37% year-on-year increase in the number of under-16s being seen in A&E with a mental health condition, and a 193% year-on-year increase in the number of those children being admitted to an in-patient bed.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that while there is a shortage of beds, another issue, particularly in cities such as London, is poor quality housing? In cases where individuals could perhaps have been treated at home and in the community, that treatment cannot be delivered because of the lack of proper housing.

Helen Hayes: My hon. Friend is right. There are multiple causes and contributory factors to mental ill health, and multiple contributory factors that present obstacles to addressing that and providing the treatment people need, where they need it. Housing is certainly one of them.

In London, 69 young people from Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark and Croydon were unable to receive in-patient care in the South London and Maudsley Trust. Of those, 45 were sent out of London for their care. This issue, of seriously unwell young people being sent a long distance away from home to access in-patient care, needs to stop. It is distressing for families, it stops young people receiving the maximum possible support from family and friends to help them recover, and it makes them more vulnerable. When young people are admitted to a CAMHS in-patient unit, very often the service is not what it should be. The Care Quality Commission found that 62% of CAMHS in-patient wards and units were inadequate or required improvement.

The goal of parity of esteem for mental and physical health was introduced into the Health and Social Care Act 2012 via an amendment by Labour peers, and was a landmark in the way that mental health services are considered. However, we only need to think for a moment about what our response would be if some of the statistics on young people's mental health related to a physical condition to realise just how far away we are from the stated objective of parity of esteem being realised. Just imagine if 75% of people with a bacterial infection struggled to get access to treatment; if almost a quarter of referrals for cataracts were turned away; if people with a chest infection were routinely forced to wait until they had pneumonia before any help was provided; or those with a broken leg were forced to wait for days in A&E only to be sent to a hospital hundreds of miles away to be treated. It would be a national scandal. The state of our mental health services, particularly those for young people, is a national scandal: it just is not being recognised as such. Words alone cannot achieve parity of esteem; the Government must start to act differently.

What action, then, is necessary to transform mental health services for our young people? I want to return now to the conclusions of the Youth Select Committee report. The Royal College of Psychiatrists highlights three recommendations in the report, which it believes are key. First, the Government must increase funding for young people's mental health services and ensure that this funding is ring-fenced to guarantee that the money "reaches the ground" to CAMHS. There is particular concern at the moment about the introduction of sustainability and transformation plans across the NHS, and the resourcing implications of those plans. The Royal College of Psychiatrists recommends that the Government introduce ring-fenced funding for CAMHS and rejects any sustainability and transformation plans that do not clearly set out a plan to improve children's mental health services in their area. I hope the Minister will commit to that today.

Secondly, health services must pursue co-production, in which young people themselves are involved in the process of formulating policy to improve CAMHS. Research shows that where young people have a clear voice in service design, the end result much better reflects the real needs of the patients.

Thirdly, the Government must focus on improving mental health education in schools, with the aim of ensuring that young people leave school with not only an understanding of mental health, but an understanding of how to help their own mental wellbeing. This recommendation was made by the Youth Select Committee and it is supported by the Education Committee, the National Association of Head Teachers and other teaching unions, the United Nations and many others. The Government have introduced new lesson plans for the personal, social, health and economic curriculum, but there is a broad consensus across the health and education sectors that the role of mental health education in developing resilience, preventing mental ill health and safeguarding young people is so important that it should not be left to chance, and that along with sex and relationships education it should be a compulsory part of the curriculum. I hope the Government will reflect on the urgency of the situation and the consensus around the need for compulsory education, and will make a commitment to introduce it.

The Youth Select Committee report made many other practical recommendations, including the introduction of regional commissioning, the development of an app to provide mental health advice and support, and the introduction of plans to support students through periods of exam stress. I would welcome an update from the Minister on the progress that is being made to deliver these excellent ideas.

[Helen Hayes]

Finally, we know that one of the greatest barriers to delivering the mental health support and services that our young people need has always been the stigma that surrounds mental health. I want to pay tribute to a brilliant piece of work that was recently published by the YMCA in partnership with the NHS. Called "I Am Whole", the research sought to identify the extent and impact of mental health stigma and included the finding that three quarters of the young people spoken to believe that people experiencing difficulties with their mental health are treated negatively as a result of stigma. The project also sought to address stigma directly by publishing a series of stories from young people about their experiences of mental health difficulties. These make for very challenging and moving reading.

Before I close, I want to read a quotation from the foreword to "I Am Whole", from Connie, aged 22:

> "Having mental health difficulties is like being trapped inside a thousand invisible prisons. There are a thousand reasons that as a young person you are driven deeper into that colossal void. Not only isolated by the struggles you're facing mentally, but further enveloped in a thick, suffocating darkness. The darkness descends, comprised of a tangled web of myths, harmful language, misconceptions and misunderstandings. This is stigma. It is time for these myths to be dispelled, the web broken and the isolation to end. It is time for us to be free to talk about our mental health difficulties openly, so that we can access the services we need. Once the conversation begins, you promote understanding for others and break down misconceptions people hold…It is like being stood in the dark, untangling parts of that web until the sun's warmth breaks through…the light reaches your eyes, and you look around to see you are not alone."

When we talk about young people's mental health, we are talking about the wellbeing of our precious children, about their health and happiness, about the resilience of the next generation and about the ability of young people to fulfil their potential and be everything they can be. We are talking about the ways to stop more families living with the heartbreak of a young person with mental ill health and about ways to stop more families suffering the devastation of a loss to suicide. There are few things more important than this and it is time the Government got it right.

12.52 pm

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak in this important debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. The report was brought to my attention by Lucy Broadman, my local member of the Youth Parliament, who has been in the Chamber for Youth Parliament debates. Lucy is in the Public Gallery to listen to the debate today and has even assisted me in formulating my remarks today—I will return to that later. As a result of the contact from Lucy, I made my own application for a Westminster Hall debate, but owing to an administrative error somewhere behind the Chair it was unable to be heard. I therefore congratulate and thank the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) for bringing this debate to the Chamber today.

Before I address the subject directly, I would like to applaud not only the hon. Lady but the Backbench Business Committee for granting this debate, not just for the seriousness of the issue but for the legitimacy it confers on the Youth Parliament. As we all try to engage with young people more and more, it is imperative that the efforts of the Youth Parliament get acknowledged and debated in here. As Lucy, now a former member, tells me, when the Youth Parliament casts out for subjects, mental health is very often in the top five or six that concern young people, so it is important that it is considered. The report is excellent, but it is also important that we debate it today.

The report is thorough and makes several conclusions and recommendations, as highlighted by the hon. Lady, but I wanted to get a better understanding of the issues facing young people in the modern age that can lead to the mental health issues laid out in the report. It is a long time since I was a young person—[Hon. Members: "No!"]—thank you—so I thought the best way for me to understand the issue was to make use of the expertise of young people, as highlighted in recommendation 17 of the report. I decided to do that off my own bat, so I had a conversation not only with Lucy but with another 17-year-old young lady I know very well, Martha Banks Thompson. I asked them to tell me what their thoughts and experiences of life as a teenager were and about the pressures that they and their friends have to face in the modern-day world. Both girls are A-level politics students, but from different ends of the country. Lucy is from my constituency of High Peak and Martha lives in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). My remarks today are very much—although not completely—based on the conversations we have had.

Mental health issues in any person, of any age, are very often difficult to diagnose. As has been highlighted, they are not like a broken leg, which can be seen; they are not as tangible as that. Mental health issues can often be mistaken for a temporary emotional upheaval or distress, but in the young they can often be put down to other things: pure teenage angst, raging hormones or just plain old teenage moodiness—or, as some people say, the Kevin and Perry syndrome. Consequently, these issues go unspotted and unnoticed and therefore untreated. By the time it is realised that there is a problem, it has manifested itself to such a degree that it becomes even harder to treat.

Who would, should or could identify the problem? In all likelihood it would be an adult—a parent, a guardian or even a teacher. Because of that, there is a generational gap. I am sure anyone in the Chamber or listening today will have heard from a teenage the line, "You don't understand", and in this case I think that, as adults, we do not understand. So what should we look for and how does the problem manifest itself? There are various symptoms and they are all too easy to miss. As we have heard, there could be anxiety, depression, eating disorders, contemplation of suicide or maybe even self-harm. Self-harm can sometimes be seen as a cry for help or attention, but more often it is a symptom of a much deeper problem. When can it occur? In days gone by, the pinch points for stress among teenagers were usually exam times: January for their mock GCSEs—they were O-levels when I took them—or May for their final exams. However, in the modern world there are so many more pressures that can impact on young people and bring about problems.

How are things different from when we were young? What are the extra factors and circumstances that we did not have to contend with that the modern-day

young person or teenager does? There are many, but it would be a derogation of our duty to consider this question without looking at the impact of social media, whether it is Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp or Snapchat, or the many more that those of us in the Chamber have probably not heard of. Only a few years ago, they were a figment of the imagination—in my day they were science fiction—but now not only are they part of everyday life, but for the modern teenager they are often the preferred method of communicating with each other.

These technologies have much to commend them and have many advantages, not just for the teenager but for all of us in the Chamber. I am sure many of us tweet and have Facebook pages, and I am sure we all have websites. Indeed, I would venture to say that most of our communication as Members of Parliament with our constituents comes via email, making us more accessible than we have ever been. It is good that we are, and so is communication between young people. Again, I am going to betray my age now, but the days of sending notes to the object of our affections across the classroom with "SWALK" written on the back of the envelope—

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): SWALK?

Andrew Bingham: Exactly. I mentioned this to Martha and Lucy and they did not know what SWALK was. I can tell my hon. Friend that it stands for "Sealed with a loving kiss". Those days are long gone. Now everything is done via social media. It is out in the open for everyone to see and it is also there forever. The SWALK letter is read. If it is not reciprocated, it is thrown away; if it is reciprocated, it is replied to. On social media, it remains there forever.

That brings with it perils and pressures. Relationships, appearance, fashion, style—all are analysed in the public glare. Relationships, attitudes and opinions once shared privately between friends are now put out for the world to see, with every comment seemingly soliciting a further comment or response and the rhetoric growing from that. With, for example, chat groups on applications such as WhatsApp, it is very easy for what could be seen as a little verbal leg-pulling or teasing to take on a sinister complexion. We increasingly hear stories of cyber-bullying and the posting of revenge pictures. I am sure all of us in this House have at one time or another been on the receiving end of comments online that we would see as offensive or upsetting. However, for a teenager, maybe uncertain, vulnerable or lacking in confidence, such remarks can have a shattering effect on their self-confidence and in turn their mental state.

Let us look at the media in general. The modern media seem to present all young people in reality programmes such as "Made in Chelsea" as perfectly formed human beings, which puts pressure on so many young people to be absolutely perfect. The slightest imperfection, perceived or otherwise, can become a major issue. We hear a lot about body image, too, and young people's attitude towards it. Again, the desire to be perfect crops up, so when a perceived imperfection is not only remarked on but ridiculed via social media, it can be amplified and re-tweeted, when "likes", "unlikes" and "comments" can become very cruel, particularly to uncertain and vulnerable teenagers. This can severely damage the self-esteem and mental health of a young person.

Our consumer society is another issue. As we see with mobile phones, clothing and computers, everywhere we look there is a thirst for the latest, the best, the biggest, the fastest and the shiniest, while anything less than the optimum is seen as a problem. This is another issue that ratchets up the mental pressure on young people. I am not saying that a young person's not having the latest iPhone will lead to mental health problems, but I am saying is that if someone is vulnerable and has low self-esteem, this sort of thing can work to enhance those insecurities and push someone into the territory that we are discussing today.

We need to remember, too, that all these pressures—I have mentioned only a few—are impacting on young people at a time when their minds, brains and characters are still growing and forming. As we get older, we form our minds and personalities, and we develop our own resilience to many of these outside pressures.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): My hon. Friend is putting forward a pertinent case and providing an accurate analysis of the pressures on our teenagers. Does he agree that it is important to recognise that we need an integrated solution, which requires education and NHS response, so that schools can get in very early and start tackling some of the behaviours that lead to poor mental health outcomes?

Andrew Bingham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and his point about the need for a whole school approach is acknowledged in the conclusion of the report. It states that when children leave school, they should be conversant with all the issues around mental health, which the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood also mentioned in her speech. As I was saying, as we get older, we develop our own resilience, but in young people that development is not complete. That is the issue that we need to be aware of, and it is where schools need to play a part in helping to develop that resilience.

As we know, a stigma is attached to mental health—and nowhere more so than with young people. No young person wishes to admit to it for fear of being labelled, and people often are labelled in this society. Parents are similarly affected, so this leads to a situation of potential denial—I am not sure that "denial" is exactly the right word—which further exacerbates the problem. There seems to be a lack of willingness to say, or a fear of saying, "Look, I have a problem, and I need some help." There should be no stigma attached to any young person admitting that they are struggling with certain issues, and neither should there be any barrier to parents making a similar plea.

Young people should have somewhere to go to ask for help—the report mentions a counsellor—without fear of ridicule. They should not be judged or labelled either by their peers or by society. Parents can be the strongest help and support for any young person, and we should look to families and family support units as well. We need to enable parents to play as full a part as they can. A young person who is getting some help at 15 can find on turning 16 that they are suddenly deemed to be an adult and their parents can be almost excluded from playing a full part. An attentive parent who is

[Andrew Bingham]

trying to help can face being told, "We can't discuss this with you, because your girl or boy is now 16." We should look to see whether there is a way around that problem.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Lucy Boardman and Martha Banks Thompson for their help. They have given me an insight into the world of the modern teenager and into how 21st-century pressures impact on their lives in a way that did not impact on my life as a teenager or that of many other Members here today. It was a very illuminating and educational experience for me, and I pay tribute to both of them for their candour and their honesty. As I have said, talking about these issues freely takes a lot. Many of my remarks today have come as a result of their contribution.

I say gently to the Minister that we must not in any way fall into the trap of dismissing mental health issues in the young as mere growing pains. This is a serious matter. I know she understands, but let us recognise that to provide the help needed, it needs to be not only readily and easily available, but available for as long as it is needed for each person according to their individual needs.

1.5 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) on securing this debate. I warmly congratulate, too, the clearly very talented Youth Select Committee on producing such an excellent report, which cogently highlights the need for additional and better mental health services for young people. It is a job very well done indeed.

For too long, those suffering from mental ill health have received far less care and attention than those suffering from physical ailments. Even though mental ill health accounts for 28% of the total burden of disease, it gets just 13% of the NHS budget. One in four adults is diagnosed with a mental illness at some point in their lives, but only about a quarter of those who need mental health services have access to them. Serious medical conditions are going untreated because of the disparity of esteem between physical and mental health that everybody—the Government, health professionals, patients, the voluntary sector—speaks of wishing to end. There is such a long way to go.

The consequences of our neglect of mental health services are devastating. Over a third of people with mild mental health problems and almost two thirds of those with more severe mental health problems are, in fact, unemployed—yet research shows that the vast majority of them wish to work.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and congratulate the Select Committee on this report. She makes an important point about the number of people with mental health issues who are unemployed. I have been struck by the message from schools; one in my constituency told me that it was referring 40% of its pupils for mental health support. Does she agree that early intervention, as highlighted in the report, is vital? Does she recognise the work of Members of the Youth Parliament, including Tafumi Omisore in Hounslow, who raised these important issues with us?

Lyn Brown: Absolutely. I totally agree with my hon. Friend, and as I go through my speech I am hoping to provide an example to show how intervention is particularly important for a very young child because of the impact on the rest of the family. Early intervention can do a lot to mitigate other events and difficulties occurring in the family that might include other family members, too.

Unfortunately, tragically and outrageously, young people's mental health services often receive less attention than adult mental health services, so that young people's mental health services have been called the "Cinderella of Cinderella services". In November 2014, the Health Committee found that there were

"serious and deeply ingrained problems with the commissioning and provision of services for young people's mental health."

Many providers reported increased waiting times and increased referral thresholds for specialist services, where patients would have to show severer symptoms to receive treatment than they would have done in the past. GPs reported feeling ill-equipped and lacking in confidence when dealing with young people's mental health issues. The Select Committee found that early intervention programmes were

"suffering from insecure or short term funding, or being cut altogether."

There really is no excuse for this failing. Around half of people with lifetime mental health problems experience symptoms by the age of 14, and about 75% of them before the age of 18. Catching these problems early could well lessen the severity of adult problems, possibly saving the NHS money in the long term. More importantly, I would suggest, it would reduce unnecessary suffering and enable people to live better lives.

I want to be fair to the Government, who have recognised that there is a problem. In 2014 they set up a children and young people's mental health and wellbeing taskforce, which made a number of recommendations in its 2015 "Future in mind" report. The taskforce identified a number of problems with young people's mental health services. The right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who was then the responsible Minister, said that there needed to be a fundamental shift in culture, with a much greater focus on prevention and early intervention.

The taskforce rightly recognised that one of the challenges facing young people's mental health services was—unsurprisingly—funding. I was pleased when the Government responded by announcing the provision of an additional £1.4 billion of transitional funding for youth mental health services, but that additional money needs to be considered in the context of the less encouraging overall picture of mental health services funding. NHS England's planning guidance states that all clinical commissioning groups must increase their spending on mental health services by at least as much as their overall budget increases. However, there have been warnings from organisations including mental health trusts that mental health funding is not properly ring-fenced, and that NHS England's target is being missed.

Let me again follow in the footsteps of my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood. We know from the responses to a series of freedom of

information requests from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) that more than 50% of CCGs intend to spend a smaller proportion of their budgets on mental health in 2016-17. That clearly demonstrates that what the Government tried to do has failed, and that that target is being missed as well.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): The hon. Lady is making some important points. She referred to the taskforce's "Future in mind" report. According to one of its startling statistics, only between 25% and 35% of young people with diagnosable mental health conditions access support. Does that not underline the need for much better training and much more awareness among both teachers and GPs, in respect of early identification as well as early intervention?

Lyn Brown: We need early identification and we need early intervention, but we also need the funds to ensure that there are services to which people can be referred. That is the rub of this whole debate. There does not seem to be the necessary funding at any point in the journey of young people who need help, whether in the form of awareness, intervention or services.

I have been looking into the good work done in my borough, the London borough of Newham. Even in these difficult times, it is increasing its mental health spending in both absolute and relative terms, and its children's mental health services received an "outstanding" rating from the Care Quality Commission. I wanted to find out how we could improve young people's mental health provision, and to learn about the challenges that an "outstanding" local provider continued to face in its fight for better services. Professionals in Newham recognise that a good young people's mental health service does not just help those who have already developed severe and serious conditions, but provides early intervention and preventive programmes so that problems can be dealt with at source.

Seema Malhotra: Is it not important for young people's mental health services to consider the needs of parents as well? I was struck by a recent case in which the parents did not understand where the issues had come from and could not identify what they were, and felt unable to understand how best to help their child.

Lyn Brown: My hon. Friend is right. The family is often key to the provision of the support that a young person needs, but a family may itself need intervention to gain the support that it needs to lead a mentally healthy life.

The national lottery funded a programme in Newham called HeadStart, which helps 10 to 16-year-olds, particularly in schools. It trains teachers in secondary schools to develop programmes that help to build resilience among their pupils. It also provides children directly with mentoring schemes so that they can learn from each other about how to manage mental health issues—it is peer-to-peer learning—and works directly with parents to show them how they can work through mental health issues with their children. Unfortunately, the scheme relies on lottery money rather than core funding, which means that its future as a core service cannot be guaranteed. It is often difficult to obtain the necessary proof that would persuade funders—including the Government—that core funding should continue, because the timescale is often not big enough to be persuasive.

Newham would love to run more services directly in the community, and more integrated services, because it knows that they make a real difference to people's lives. M, aged two, and her baby brother T, just seven weeks old, were referred by a perinatal psychiatrist, who was helping their mother to deal with chronic mental ill health. M was still frequently breastfed, and showed a very insecure attachment to her mum. Her anxious, and therefore sometimes controlling, behaviour was making it difficult for her mum to wean her and to attend to the needs of the new baby, who was being bottle-fed. M's speech was also delayed.

Following assessment, the family were offered parent-infant psychotherapy, which enabled them to reflect on the needs of both children, and gradually to help M to become more independent of her mum. At the same time, T was able to have more appropriate attention from his mum as the baby of the family. I am pleased to say that, following that intervention, M is more confident and her speech is developing. She sleeps in her own room, and has settled well into nursery. That is an example of our physical and mental health services working in tandem to improve real lives.

J was a 17-year-old who had been arrested and charged with possession of a weapon and affray. He had a history of violence and non-engagement with services. During the course of his referral to a youth offending team, the team became concerned about his mental health, and referred him directly to a child and adolescent mental health services specialist for an urgent examination. During that assessment, J was having suicidal thoughts, was highly anxious, and showed quite severe symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder as well as softer symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

The youth offending team nurse arranged for J to have urgent psychiatric treatment. He was put on medication for his anxiety, with an accompanying course of cognitive behavioural therapy for his obsessive-compulsive disorder. He will also be assessed for ADHD in the longer term once his more acute symptoms abate. I am pleased to report that J has not offended since he has engaged with the mental health services offered through the youth offenders team. That shows that integrated services are better for individuals, and better for the whole community.

Those are just a few of the stories that I have been told, but I believe that there are enormous challenges to the provision of community-based and fully integrated services. I am told that Newham would love to run services directly from general practices, but they cannot currently do so because they do not have the necessary resources. With the current staffing levels it would not be efficient, because staff would spend as much time travelling to and from general practices as they would spend helping patients.

Health professionals acknowledge that early intervention work often increases rather than reduces workload in the short term. Professionals in Newham worry that they simply will not be able to deliver the clinical hours that are necessary to help more patients. Over 50% of patients in Newham already have to wait for more than five weeks to see a specialist, and that figure can only increase when further cases are uncovered without corresponding additional resources.

[Lyn Brown]

Some well integrated and community-based mental health services are delivered in Newham and, I am sure, throughout the country, but if we want to preserve and expand those programmes, we must be aware that they need stable and long-term funding. A good place to start would be ensuring that money designed for mental health services actually finds its way to the front line.

1.19 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I declare my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I apologise for missing the opening couple of minutes of the speech made by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes).

I am delighted that we are having this debate, and to be participating in it, for two main reasons, which I am sure you will share, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I know your interest in this matter. First, this is an important subject. It is something that we are failing on, so it is right, proper and beneficial that hon. Members talk about it openly, especially because, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham), young people are much more prepared than ever to come forward with their own stories of their problems and issues, hopefully so that solutions can be found through them.

Secondly, I am delighted to participate in this debate because it is part of the UK Youth Parliament's work. It is significant that we are giving up mainstream parliamentary time in the main Chamber of the House of Commons to discuss a report by the Youth Select Committee, an offshoot of the UK Youth Parliament. It is a shame that we have to do it in Backbench Business Committee time rather than Government time, but I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood for securing the debate and giving it such an excellent start—this will clearly be a high-quality debate. I take the view—I think that you share this view, Madam Deputy Speaker—that the Youth Select Committee has now taken on such status and stature, with its production of reports of such high quality involving such good research, that not only should the Government produce a formal response to the reports, as they have, but they should give up Government time in this Chamber on an annual basis—just once a year—so that we can formally debate the work of the Youth Select Committee. I have put that idea forward for some time, so I hope that the Whips and Government business managers are listening.

I am a big supporter of the UK Youth Parliament. It was founded during my time in Parliament, and I always try to attend its annual parliamentary sittings, which are a great spectacle. It is always exceedingly frustrating for Members when we return on the Monday and the Speaker inevitably says, "Why don't you lot behave as well as the UK Youth Parliament members who were here on Friday; they are very smart, very concise, very well behaved, don't heckle and set an example?" It is a shame that the media coverage of the Youth Parliament sitting is not more extensive because it is a great event for a great organisation, and it is great that we are discussing its work today.

When I was the Minister for children and young people, we produced the "Positive for Youth" document, which was all about promoting that sort of youth engagement. One of the things I most treasure having done is helping the transition of the UK Youth Parliament across to the British Youth Council to secure its future. I pay tribute to all its work over the past few years. It is a mainstream part of the youth voice in this country and in this Chamber.

I was the first witness ever to be called before the Youth Select Committee. It was an awesome and intimidating experience. I was called for its first inquiry back in 2012 along with the then Transport Minister, Norman Baker. We rather too nonchalantly rocked up before this group of young people in the Boothroyd Room. They were exceedingly well-rehearsed and well-researched, and were certainly not taking any BS from anybody. I have appeared in front of Select Committees—mostly the Education Committee—on many occasions, but I have to say that this was the most intimidating experience I ever had as a Minister in front of a Select Committee, and it was fantastic. That shows why the work of this Committee, and this, its fourth report, need to be taken seriously.

This Youth Select Committee report is difficult to distinguish, other than by its cover, from a House of Commons Select Committee report, and I congratulate Rhys Hart and his team on their work on it. They did all the things they should have done: they visited experts and sufferers of mental illness, and took no fewer than 148 submissions from expert witnesses and others—if only all the other Select Committees had as many well-informed and well-researched submissions as it did.

The Youth Parliament also has a substantial democratic endorsement. In 2014, when its priorities and the subject of the Youth Select Committee report were decided upon in the "Make Your Mark" ballot—which includes a debate in this House in the Youth Parliament's annual sitting—no fewer than 875,000 young people from up and down the country bothered to turn out and vote. Of them, more than 90,000 voted specifically for the subject of mental health services, which is why we are debating this report in the Chamber today. That is a huge democratic mandate.

Every year I hold an event in the House of Commons to present democracy awards to schools in West Sussex, including my constituency, that have achieved a high turnout in the elections that are held every February. Each year the turnout gets higher, so more and more trophies have to be given out, and an ever bigger room has to be booked to accommodate everybody. Last year, one school had a 100% turnout—all its pupils turned out to vote for its UKYP members, which is absolutely fantastic.

This report is a chunky piece of evidence that needs to be appreciated, looked at and, importantly, acted upon. I am delighted that we are giving time to it today, and I am also pleased that the Government produced a formal response to it, whatever we may think about the shortcomings of what they said. That was produced jointly by the then Health Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), and the then Education Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah). Neither of them are still in those ministerial posts, but I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), to her new position. I am sure she has

learned the ropes quickly and that she will continue to do so. We need consistency in our approach to mental health, however, and a much more joined-up approach—and not just between education and health, because there are many other aspects as well.

This subject is clearly important to young people, as is this report, so it should be important to the House and the Government. There are many useful lessons that we can learn.

I am also very frustrated, however. I have been in the House for almost 20 years. I have been shadow Minister for mental health, and I was shadow Minister for children and young people for some nine years, as well as Minister for children and young people. I currently chair the all-party group on children and the 1001 group, which is all about perinatal mental health. I have seen mental health Bills come and go, too, and have been involved in them. I saw the 2011 mental health strategy "No health without mental health", which was a very important statement about the parity of esteem we need to achieve, although we still have not. In 2014, I saw "Closing the gap: priorities for essential change in mental health", with specific commitments to improve mental healthcare for children and young people. I saw the rolling out of talking therapies and the improving access to psychological therapies programme. In March 2015, as has been mentioned, we had the mental health taskforce, which produced "Future in mind". I have seen lots of good work in the Department of Health, in particular, such as that done by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire, and in February this year the mental health taskforce produced the "Five Year Forward View for Mental Health". There has been a lot of talk about the importance of mental health and the necessity of achieving parity of esteem but, as the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) rightly said, there is still a very big disparity. And here we are again: we are still here talking about this, and record numbers of children and young people still have mental health problems.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we can have reports, taskforces and recommendations, but the real problem is that mental health is seen as a Department of Health issue, whereas what we actually need is a completely cross-Government approach so that mental health and wellbeing can be part of every single piece of policy development?

Tim Loughton: The hon. Gentleman is right; he pre-empts a couple of my comments. From my experience as a former Minister—and, I am sure, from his—the term "joined-up government" is a complete illusion. Joined-up government does not happen in practice. On becoming a Minister, one is cocooned in a Department, and instead of having a dialogue with colleagues in the Division Lobby or wherever, a huge wall suddenly comes between you. Trying to get interdepartmental action becomes really frustrating.

I remember setting up something called the youth action group, which consisted of Ministers from nine or 10 Departments and representatives of six major children's charities. It was co-chaired by the Prince's Trust and Barnardo's. The charities came to us with problems—often complex ones—affecting young people. One example related to housing benefit and accommodation for children in care. I cannot remember what the specific problem was, but it involved housing, which was the remit of the Department for Communities and Local Government, and benefits, which were the remit of the Department for Work and Pensions, as well as children in care, who came under the remit of the Department for Education. Normally there was a vicious circle that involved people being pushed from pillar to post. Alas, that committee has not met for the past 15 months or so, but our meetings used to consist of at least six actual Ministers—not just civil servants—from the relevant Departments as well as their officials. We would get Ministers together and ask them to go away and solve the problem.

Mental illness falls into that category, in that it is not simply the remit of the Department of Health or the Department for Education. There are many other implications and knock-on effects that can relate to the underlying cause of somebody's mental illness problems. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the structure of government needs to be much better. We need taskforces that genuinely cut across Government Departments, but in my experience they will flourish only if they have the buy-in and direct engagement of Ministers at the top. One welcome initiative from the hon. Gentleman's party was the appointment of a Cabinet-level Minister for mental health. I think that that appointment has slightly gone by the wayside now, but the principle behind it was absolutely right, in that it tried to join up all the relevant Departments at the top table.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): May I remind the hon. Gentleman that I am the shadow Cabinet Minister for mental health? That post has not gone away on this side of the House.

Tim Loughton: I am delighted to hear that; I did not in any way mean to underestimate the hon. Lady's contribution. However, when the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) held the position, she sat at the Cabinet table. I hope that that is still the case, and I would very much like to see my own party replicate that position in government, because this is such an important cross-cutting issue.

Mental health remains the Cinderella service of the NHS. Indeed, the report describes child and adolescent mental health services—CAMHS—as the Cinderella service of a Cinderella service. The whole question of parity of esteem and funding is important. We can have arguments about how much the NHS budget has increased and kept up with inflation, but in every year in which the funding for mental health remains static or, worse still, declines as a portion of the overall NHS budget, we are sending out a clear message that it is a secondary priority within the NHS, and therein lies part of the problem.

I do not want to be too negative, however. We are making progress, as are other countries. For example, when you go in through the main entrance of a hospital in Copenhagen, in Denmark, you turn left if you have diabetes and you turn right if you have a mental illness. And nobody cares whether you turn left or right; there is no stigma attached to mental illness. People are treated on exactly the same basis, and that is how we need to treat mental illness here. Despite the best intentions of many Ministers, that is just not happening in practice at the sharp end where our young constituents are

[Tim Loughton]

trying to access the mental health support that they desperately need. It is certainly not happening in a uniform way across the whole country. As a result, at least one in four people in this country is still suffering from a mental health problem.

I have a particular interest in perinatal mental health, and I declare an interest in that I chair the all-party parliamentary group for conception to age two—the first 1,001 days. I am also chairman of the trustees of the Parent and Infant Partnership Projects charity. We now have seven parent infant partnerships—PIPs—across the country providing direct support and specialist perinatal psychological help to mums and dads with newborn babies. About half of all cases of perinatal depression and anxiety go undetected, and many of those that are detected fail to receive evidence-based forms of treatment. Alarmingly, at the time of the publication of the all-party group's report, "Building Great Britons", in February last year, just 3% of clinical commissioning groups in England had a strategy for commissioning perinatal mental health services. The upshot of all that, as the Maternal Mental Health Alliance has calculated, is a cost to the NHS of £8.1 billion for each one-year cohort of births in the United Kingdom. That is the equivalent of almost £10,000 for every single birth in this country, and it is a cost that the NHS can ill afford.

Why is this relevant to young people? Nearly three quarters of that cost relates to the adverse impacts on the child rather than the mother. Followers of attachment theory, which the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) mentioned, will appreciate the strong link between achieving a strong attachment between the child and the primary carer and good nurturing from the earliest age—that is, from conception to the age of two, as our report puts it—when the synapses in the brain are developing at a rate of some 40,000 a second and the child's brain, character and development are being formed. The earliest experiences shape a baby's brain development and have a lifelong impact on that person's mental and emotional health.

Research shows a direct link between what happens to a mum during the perinatal period and her child in later life. If a teenager aged 15 or 16 is suffering from some form of depression, there is something like a 90% chance that his or her mum suffered from perinatal depression. The link is that clear, so it is absolutely a false economy not to help mum out at that early stage. And let us not forget dad, who also plays a crucial role. Getting it right with parents and children early on is crucial to the good mental health of children and young people. This is not rocket science—technically it is neuroscience—and we should be doing it better, sooner.

Certain other factors have been flagged up in the report. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) spoke about many of them, including the peer group pressure that our children and young people experience. In fact, I have no children any more. My youngest is now over the age of 18, but we went through the teenage years together and I have seen these things at first hand. No one can go out in the morning without the latest iPhone, without checking Facebook and without tweeting what they are having for breakfast and Instagramming a photograph of it. And that all happens just after they have got up. The pressure to succeed in school and the hothouse of exams and testing are not conducive to the best mental health, and young people need support to help them through the challenges. We never had those challenges in my day, which I guess was even earlier than that of my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak. Social media is a huge influence on young people, and it was just not around in my day. I would hazard a guess that it was not around in your day either, Madam Deputy Speaker.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Tim Loughton: I will of course give way before I say something indiscreet.

David Rutley: I am sure that my hon. Friend would never saying anything indiscreet. He always makes important observations in such debates. He and I were at school together, and if bullying or similar was going on, children left their problems behind when they left school for the day. Does he agree that the challenge today is that such problems go home with the child beyond the school gates and during the holidays? Does he agree that digital service providers should take further steps to provide apps and protections that will help children in those difficult circumstances?

Tim Loughton: I do agree. Believe it or not, my hon. Friend is older than me and was in the year above me at school. He has aged rather better than me, but then he has not been in the House quite as long as I have. He is right about the dynamics of the stresses and strains in those days. How children communicate has also changed. For example, one of my daughters once put in her request for supper by text message from her bedroom to my wife and me in the kitchen—supper's off! In an age when communicating has never been easier with email, social media, mobile device, tablet or whatever, the irony is that face-to-face communication between human beings has never been more rare or remote. Therein lies part of the problem. Communication between children and parents does not happen as regularly, and the fault lies with the parents as much as the children. Some people cannot talk frankly about the real pressures, strains and stresses on our children and about grooming, sex matters or drugs. In my hon. Friend's day and my day, we perhaps talked more to our parents or other family members.

I will now pick out a few points from the report—I know that other hon. Members want to speak. We have reached a point at which one in 10 school-age children will have some form of mental disorder, and the age at which that happens is getting younger. Some 340,000 five to 10-year-olds have a form of mental disorder. If it is not detected early and acted on, it just festers and gets worse. Too often, the only immediate response if someone gets access to a clinician is the chemical cosh of drugs, which is in many cases inappropriate for younger children. Talking therapy, for example, might be more appropriate, but we increasingly find that when people have to wait weeks or months for them a call has to be made between waiting longer or giving some form of antidepressant.

The report flags up the big issue of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Nothing changes physically or mentally when someone receives an 18th birthday

card from their Member of Parliament. The last thing that an 18-year-old needs if they are going through the stresses of mental health is to have a completely new process and system to deal with because they have suddenly become an adult even though their condition has not changed. There is a particular issue around children in care, who too often used to leave at the age of 16. Fortunately, we now have a new scheme, which I was proud to have piloted at the Department for Education, based on staying put, allowing for a longer lead-in time. Every child is different and different children will be ready to go into the big wide world at different ages. The report contains some good examples of best transition practice. Southampton general hospital has a 0 to 25 age range for its "Ready Steady Go" scheme, under which every person is treated differently—people have different "go" ages.

Turning to the report's recommendation about GP training, it is right, certainly for younger children, that GPs will be the first port of call for clinical services. Training for GPs to deal with younger people's mental health problems is not good. Young people may need a lot of confidence to go along to see a GP with a parent or whomever, and there must be a clear understanding of how to tease the best out of children, so we need better guidance. As the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood mentioned earlier, young people should absolutely be in on the genesis of that guidance.

Another recommendation that we have heard a lot about relates to what happens in schools. The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood quoted the National Association of Head Teachers briefing, which states:

> "When children do not meet CAMHS thresholds, schools often become responsible for children's mental health."

In too many cases, they are ill-equipped to do so. We are dealing with potentially one in 10—three in a class of 30—children suffering from some diagnosable mental health disorder, and the chief medical officer says that three quarters of them will receive no treatment at all. That will obviously have an impact on the child, but there will be an impact on the class as well and it is very much in the school's interest to do something about that.

We need better teacher training so that they are able to identify the signs that point towards a mental illness. They also need better awareness of where to signpost children to get the treatment that they require. They should also be able to talk about things more generally in class. We can argue whether PSHE should be compulsory—I have some sympathy with that—and whether mental health should be a formal part of it, but it must be done in an environment in which young people will feel engaged. It should not be just another lesson, but a place where they feel free to talk openly, to absorb and to learn.

Helen Hayes: The point about the proposal that mental health education should become compulsory is simply that its presence on the curriculum is too important to be left to chance. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that it should be undertaken in a way that is engaging and effective at educating young people, but does he agree that whether it happens at all should not be left to chance?

Tim Loughton: The hon. Lady and I have the same objective, but I am always sceptical about a solution that means making something another compulsory part of the curriculum. Sex and relationship education is an interesting case in point. Some of the best SRE that I have seen has been from outside youth workers and others who can empathise with young people and talk to them in a way that they will appreciate, respect and learn from. Making it another subject taught by Mrs Miggins the geography teacher, who happens to have a free period on a Thursday afternoon and so can be in charge that term, can cause problems. More schools should automatically want to have well-informed mental health education in whatever form is appropriate to engage their children. It is in their children's best interests. I do not think that my objective differs from the hon. Lady's, but we can have a debate about how we can most effectively achieve it.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about the importance of having appropriate, properly trained, empathetic people—specialists—delivering mental health education to young people. He suggests that youth services could provide such education. The problem is that local authorities are cutting those services because they are non-statutory. Many schools that have been providing support and bringing in specialist experts to help young people and teachers in this curriculum area are also facing cuts. Headteachers are having to pare back services as they deal with reduced budgets.

Tim Loughton: I hear what the hon. Lady is saying and that is a subject for another debate. It is an issue on which I have campaigned for many years, and indeed I chaired a commission looking into the role of youth workers in schools. Some really good examples of best practice are available, often in academies, which have appreciated the value of youth workers, because they can empathise with young people better, and brought them into schools. That is missing in so many other places. I have been advocating giving other roles to youth workers, who, sadly, are no longer being employed, particularly in local authorities, because this is not a statutory requirement and therefore has fallen by the wayside. So I have a deal of sympathy with that view, but it is for another day and debate.

I wish briefly to deal with a couple more points, the first of which relates to the last one: the importance of resilience and character education in the well being agenda in schools. Recent Education Secretaries have begun to take that on board, and a lot of this subject lies within that area. Another issue to consider is how this is monitored, and another good recommendation in the report is that Ofsted should have a role in that. Ofsted now has a role in assessing behaviour in schools, but that should extend to how it copes with mental health problems among pupils—that should be on the checklist. We are really bad in this country at disseminating good practice, but I have seen many examples of it. I recall visiting a school in Stafford and sitting in on some of the sessions held by their full-time counsellor. The teachers had confidence in her, would refer to her children about whom they had some doubts, and the children would speak frankly to her. Such people can prevent a lot of problems from occurring later on in the schools that have them, but not enough schools do—again, there is a debate to be had about why that is.

[Tim Loughton]

We also have to address the issue of cyber-bullying and the role of social media. The report gives examples about websites that promote self-harm, which are a huge scourge. We need to be much more aggressive in tackling these sites, particularly where they relate to anorexia and self-harm. People are going to them to seek advice and find a solution because they have feelings about self-harm or problems with anorexia, but these bizarre websites are promoting those things. As the report suggests, we need some form of verification scheme and, as has been mentioned, a much more responsible and bigger role for our social media companies. They are huge companies employing many thousands of people, yet the numbers in their scrutiny and enforcement departments are woefully low. As Members of Parliament with Twitter accounts, most of us have blue ticks to show we are who we say we are. Can there not be some form of verification scheme, described in the report as a "kitemarking scheme", so that young people, particularly those who are vulnerable and impressionable, have confidence that the sites they are accessing are there to give them support, not to encourage them to do harmful things to themselves? This applies to so many different areas, including in respect of radicalisation sites.

Body image has been mentioned, and Girlguiding, which regularly revisits the issue of body image and young girls' perceptions, has recently produced a report on the subject. It is always so alarming and petrifying to see the number of young girls as young as 13 whose aspiration is to have plastic surgery. Despite the fact that their bodies are not even fully formed and that they are still growing up mentally, they are being conditioned to think that this is the ideal to which they must aspire. That is wrong, and these influences on our young people are at the root of so many of the weaknesses and vulnerabilities leading to mental illness and, in the most tragic cases, to suicide. In the old days, a note passed across a classroom with the words "Sealed with a loving kiss" might, at worst, end up on a playground floor. At the worst extremes, in the case of a form of sexting, the equivalent these days goes viral and ends up on social media in perpetuity, where it is open for millions of people to see. That is the difference between the note in our playground days and the casual, ill-advised text on social media these days.

Finally, the report makes recommendations about young people wanting to relate to people their own age, rather than old men in suits, which I guess takes in quite a few of the hon. Members here today. *[Interruption.]* Okay, I was talking about myself and my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak. They say that taking such an approach makes it easier to receive the right message, hence the recommendation that

"a consultation group of young people, both with and without a mental health history, be set up to work on and contribute to the anti-stigma campaign, and that someone is identified to ensure this happens."

I completely agree with that.

My final point is that when I was a children's Minister, I had four reference groups within the Department for Education, each of which came to me on a three-monthly basis: one comprised children who had been adopted; one comprised children in foster care; one comprised children in residential care homes; and one comprised children who had recently left care. They came to me in the Department without adults, we sat around the table and they told me exactly what was going on. They challenged some received wisdoms, and I got some of the best information that I ever got from any experts by speaking to those young people. This report has been produced by young people and by reference to many thousands of young people, many of whom have suffered and are suffering the sorts of problems that I and many other hon. Members have mentioned today. We need to listen to the voice of these young people, to act on their recommendations, and to include and involve them in the solutions. That is why this report is so important to them, but it needs to be equally as important to us, to this House and to this Government.

1.56 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) on securing this debate and thank her for it. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing time for the House to discuss this issue. May I also put on record my thanks to the British Youth Council, the UK Youth Parliament and the Youth Select Committee for this excellent report? May I also give them another big thank you for allowing us again to talk about mental health on the Floor of the House? People perhaps get a bit sick of me saying this, but I say it again: the way to address some of the stigma is by talking about this more. Talking about this report as we have done today will mean that young people know we are taking this subject seriously.

As I said in an intervention, the report raises issues that cross over into those relating to adult mental health services. As the hon. Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) said, the unique thing about the report is that it gives those of us more advanced in years an insight into pressures on young people today that were not there when we were younger and into the challenges for parents and schools in dealing with them. The core of the report is very important, because it deals with a lot of issues that also affect adult mental health services.

I wish to concentrate on two aspects of the report: how young people get access to mental health services; and the vital issue of prevention and being able to address not just mental health, but mental health well-being. As has been said, how people access these services is important. The report talks about mental health services to young people being:

"The Cinderella of Cinderella services".

Is this about money? Yes, it is, in some cases. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) eloquently mentioned that we can have all the aspirations in the world, but if the funding is not there locally to provide services, the services will not be there and people will not access them. I agree with the report that this is therefore about more cash, but it is also about how we structure our mental health services in this country.

Page 5 of the report sums it up well. It contains a diagram of a pyramid showing a list of organisations that commission mental health services—schools, local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England—and calls for a lead commissioner. I totally agree with that, but I would go one step further. When we talk about commissioning services, we need to talk

about the treatment pathways and how people get into those systems. Adults trying to navigate the mental health system find that it is like a maze. Not only do they have to find their way through it, but when they get into it they on many occasions find that, as my hon. Friend said, they can wait weeks, months or years to get help—this help is available in some areas but it should be provided more quickly. Early intervention, especially for young people, can prevent problems further down the line.

I sympathise with parents today, because how do they know who to go to if their child has mental health problems? What do they need to ask for? We assume that, somehow, people are well versed not only in issues around mental health, but in how to access help—that is also true for families of adult sufferers. We do need that pathway.

The report quite rightly highlights the issue around GPs and GP training, but, as I have said many times, therein lies the problem. I am not criticising GPs, because there are some very good ones who do help, who are sympathetic and who can access services. I support the recommendation in the report for more training for GPs, but we need a more open system—a system of self-referral—which does not necessarily mean going through a GP.

That brings us to the issue around commissioning and how we provide mental health services in this country. Mental health services very much follow the medical model, but I am not sure whether that needs to be the case. What we need in this country is an open system, which involves the community and voluntary sector. I am suggesting this not because it is a cheap option, but because it is perhaps a better way of providing mental health services. However, those voluntary groups need to be funded, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham said. It is no good saying that we are going to pass this work over to some very good voluntary sector organisations and expect them to do it without the funding. Therein lies the problem. I give credit to the former Minister, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who was a great champion of parity of esteem and of concentrating on how to make the system better. As I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), it is no good just looking at mental health in terms of the Department of Health, because the cuts that have taken place in local government are having a direct impact on the provision of mental health services—I am talking about the closure of youth services and voluntary sector organisations that provide mental health services locally. This is a false economy. If we are putting more money into health and taking it out from elsewhere in the system, we will create an ongoing problem.

We also need a fundamental review of CAMHS, as it is a complete failure. I am not for one minute criticising the dedicated individuals who work in that service, because I have met them and know that they work very hard. Given their workload and the way that they get their referrals, they are doing a fantastic job, but the system is broken. We cannot have this situation in which young people are waiting possibly six months for an assessment, and in which families and the individual young person are somehow expected to cope.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in some cases, children have to become badly ill before the problem is addressed? The problem should be addressed in the first place so that they do not get into that state.

Mr Jones: That is the case, yes. I can say from personal experience that the longer a person leaves the problem undiagnosed or untreated, the worse it gets.

I wish to touch on this idea that parents are, somehow, geniuses and know how to deal with children with mental illness. They do not. I work with Kinship Carers in Durham, which is run by Lyn Boyd, a friend of mine. It deals with grandparents, uncles, aunts and others who often find themselves, later on in life, looking after young people and children. Many of them have quite horrifying stories to tell. They often end up with the children, because of abuse, because the parents cannot cope, or because they want to save them from the care system.

I had a case earlier this year in which a six-year-old was self-harming. When I looked at his background and talked to his grandparents who were looking after him, I could understand why, but the issue is how does he access CAMHS. They were told that he had to wait six months. There we have a couple, who are not the biological parents, looking after a six-year-old. All they can say is, "What do we do?" The child is also disruptive at school. That leads to pressure on the school, which then seeks to exclude him. What happens to the child then? We are talking about not just the trauma, torment and heartache of a six-year-old self-harming, but the knock-on effect on the family and the school.

We do need a new system. It may be a community-based provision. I would certainly like to see open access services—they could be run by well-funded voluntary sector organisations or by the local authorities and councils—where people can go for help or even on occasion just information. Those grandparents, for example, did not have a clue what to do. What does a person do in that situation? The system is certainly failing those individuals. It should not be up to me as a Member of Parliament to contact a mental health trust to enable those people to gain access to services. That is where we are failing.

The problem is not just about ensuring that we have joined-up local services—I have already said that local authority budget cuts are having a direct impact on the working of such services—but the changes in the national health service and GP commissioning, which has made things worse for many voluntary organisations. Contracts are being let for a whole host of services, many of which are too large and too complex. The idea that local community groups can bid for such services does not work because those services are just too big, which means that those groups are being excluded from the money that is available. I am not for one minute saying that anyone who works in the voluntary community sector providing mental health services wants a free ride. Those groups are quite happy to be evaluated. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham mentioned a project in her constituency that secured lottery funding. That project will certainly have had to ensure that the outcomes were there and that it was accountable. There is no way that many of those small organisations, which in many cases would provide a cheaper and better option for delivering the service, can manage those contracts that are currently being let by the NHS.

[Mr Kevan Jones]

The way in which the Government should look at this matter—it is perhaps very difficult in this age of austerity—is that if they deal with it properly, they could save taxpayers' money. It would save not just the heartache of the individuals who are going through the system, but, if done properly, money as well. On page 9 of the report, the chief medical officer said:

> "Early intervention services that provide intensive support for young people experiencing a first psychotic episode can help avoid substantial health and social care costs over 10 years perhaps £15 in costs can be avoided for every £1 invested."

If the Government really want value for money, this is a way to do it. However, there is a problem, which is that, in this country it is said that we know the cost of everything, but the value of nothing. The investment now in young people will possibly not pay for itself for another 10 or 20 years, but when it does, the payback to society will be quite large, and not just in terms of our having a healthier and happier society.

Another area I would like to touch on, which is covered in the report, is prevention—through the work done in schools and by making sure that we mainstream wellbeing. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham mentioned the difficulties of Whitehall Government and the silos people are in. We have enough reports on some of these areas now, and we do not need any more; what we need to do now is to hardwire mental wellbeing into all public policy across Whitehall. Can it be done? Yes, it can. I was involved when the last Labour Government mainstreamed veterans policy. Bob Ainsworth, who was the Minister at the time, commissioned a report on veterans. He made sure that the issue was taken forward and that each Department, when it was coming up with public policy, took veterans into account. We need a similar approach to mental health and mental wellbeing. The only way to do that is to have a Cabinet Sub-Committee so that this is dealt with at Cabinet level and the main Departments make sure, when they are coming up with a policy, that they take into account mental health and mental wellbeing.

As I said, early investment saves money, but it also makes for a better society. Another issue where I totally agree with the report is supporting school counsellors. Counsellors could be something of a pressure valve in the system. If they are properly trained, and there is a proper network of them across schools, they could intervene early on and prevent some of these issues. The hon. Gentleman said he was reluctant to make it mandatory for schools to carry out this work, but, as the report says, we have national standards and curricula for physical education, so we should have them for mental health as well.

Again, it is a patchy picture. There is some good work going on in schools across the country, with teachers taking the initiative. In my constituency, Simon Westrip, a lecturer at Northumbria University, has done some work around mindfulness with local community groups, and he is now taking that into secondary schools. If we look at some of the feedback on and evaluation of mindfulness in schools, it is clear that this is not just about the effect on individuals; it actually raises standards in many cases. However, the approach to these issues is patchy, and unless they have dedicated time in the curriculum, or they are something governing bodies need to take into account, people will not do that. Done properly, such work will not only address the pressures that a lot of our young people face now, so that they are happier going through school, but it will save lives and, in some cases, save money in the long term. Is this rocket science? I am not sure it is. We in this country have to change our attitude to mental wellbeing. If we get it right in children, as the report highlights, the payback for this country and its economy in the long term will be tremendous.

Let me finish where I started, by thanking the British Youth Council for its work. I also thank it for giving us another opportunity today to talk about mental health on the Floor of the House.

2.13 pm

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I would like to start by commending the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) for securing such an important debate and raising so many important issues. The quality of the debate has been incredibly high so far, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to make a short contribution.

I will start, as others have, by paying tribute to the Youth Parliament. I want to give a shout-out to our young Members of the Youth Parliament in East Sussex: Joshua Moreton, Orla Phipps and Reuben Hayward-Brown. These MYPs do a fantastic job, and I hope that, one day, at least a couple of them will be sitting on these Benches as grown-up MPs—Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure that you, for one, will agree that we could do with far more grown-up MPs in the House of Commons. The mentor of those three MYPs—and my mentor—Councillor Sylvia Tidy, has done a great job in supporting them, and she is a huge credit to East Sussex County Council.

I also pay tribute to the work of the Youth Select Committee, which has produced this important report. It is still shocking how mental health is treated as a second-class health issue, compared with physical illnesses.

This October, we recognise Breast Cancer Awareness Month by wearing pink ribbons. This month is also when some celebrate Halloween parties up and down the country. It remains a common occurrence for people to dress up as someone with a mental health illness because it is seen as scary to portray mental hospital patients next to flesh-eating zombies. In our culture, sufferers of mental illnesses are often supposed to be feared or ridiculed, and that must change. We have to challenge the stigma and attitude that are so present today; we must challenge those prejudices.

We are all often guilty of making assumptions that are just wrong—I am also guilty of that. As a new MP I received an early piece of casework. I heard about a young teenager who was struggling with an eating disorder, who was self-harming and who had run away from home. I just assumed it was a girl. When I met the parents, "she" was a boy.

We have already heard about the impact of mental health issues on young men. Suicide rates among young men are shockingly high. In the UK today, a young man between 20 and 49 is more likely to die as a result of suicide than he is to die from a cancer, in a road accident or from heart disease. The stats are shockingly high. We do better than Japan, where suicide is the

leading cause of death for men aged 20 to 44, but we have a lot of work to do on prevention, early diagnosis and early treatment.

Mental illness also has consequences. It has particular consequences for young people who are already vulnerable to grooming and exploitation, who become more vulnerable when they suffer from a mental health issue. I recently chaired an inquiry for Barnardo's into harmful sexual behaviour between children, where the victims and survivors are children, and where the perpetrators are children as well. A lack of self-esteem, an eating disorder or depression can sometimes be a factor in children committing, or being victims of, sexual abuse. That makes effective early diagnosis and therapy even more important.

There is an issue about these children sometimes being seen as troublesome, but not recognised as vulnerable or struggling with mental illness. Here, the Government can do more, by sharing best practice across schools, councils and police services. The integration of education and health is key—something my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) has already touched on.

The role of the digital world is also important in terms of its impact on young people's mental health—something my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) has spoken about. The internet can be a dangerous vehicle for grooming vulnerable young people, so I especially welcome the Youth Select Committee's recommendation that the Department of Health should develop a trusted app, with NHS branding, that young people can use to access mental health services—a positive use of the digital world that stands in stark contrast to the negative use of it. The Government have done great work on the youth mental health hub website, but the hub has not quite made it into app form, so I would be grateful for an update from the Minister.

Though we less youthful MPs have many disagreements across the Floor of the House, there is one thing on which we can all agree: we would be nowhere without the energy, enthusiasm and youthful brains of our hard-working teams. I was touched to hear the story of one young parliamentary assistant, who lost his brother to suicide. This is Jed's story. Jed woke up on his day off to find his mum in despair at a Facebook message posted by his brother. The message read, "I'm sorry", with the location, "At the Needles"—a beautiful but treacherous location on the Isle of Wight. Jed's brother was hard-working, reliable, genuine and caring. He had suffered a marriage breakdown, but he was back to his former self, with a fantastic new girlfriend by his side. But Daniel Dwight took his own life. Writing afterwards, Jed said:

> "It seems such a shame to think that he felt that he had nothing to live for...I for one can promise that I shall do everything I can to ensure that the world I grow old in will learn to be fairer, more caring, with a greater willingness to understand others whilst providing all important support."

Jed's experience, like that of others, shows what is at stake. We need to tackle stigma. We also need early diagnosis, early support and good-quality therapy that is offered within a sensible timeframe. Waiting months for therapy, whether for depression, anxiety, a personality disorder or an eating disorder, often just because someone has not quite reached a trigger level of concern, does not help them. It hinders their recovery because time allows their suffering to get worse, and they come to believe that their case cannot possibly be important, because if it was then surely the therapy would be provided sooner. This means that when the therapy finally is available, it is even less likely that it will be successful.

One of the key lines in the Youth Select Committee's report is this:

> "Until young people's mental health services receive funding proportionate to that of physical health, we do not believe parity of esteem can be achieved."

For me, that squares the circle. The amount of funding we put into mental health support and therapy is linked to our attitude towards it, and our attitude towards it is linked to the amount of funding we put into it. One must lead to the other. We in this place can lead on the funding, ensuring timely and good-quality therapy and support for mental health.

I welcome all the steps the Government have taken so far to improve support for mental health, and youth mental health in particular. The investment of an extra £1.4 billon in children and young people's mental health services over the course of this Parliament is especially welcome, although there is always more that we could invest, and I urge the Minister to do exactly that. When funding parity is achieved, and timely and appropriate support is available to everyone who needs it, the taboo that surrounds mental health can be crushed.

Finally, I pay tribute to Jed for allowing me to share his touching account of the painful and still vivid memories of the day his brother committed suicide. We both hope that sharing his story might help to prevent others from taking that most desperate route, and remind any young person struggling with their mental health who is listening today that they are valuable and valued.

2.22 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the Youth Select Committee for an excellent and comprehensive report, compiled by our young parliamentarians with the backing of experienced evidence. It is extremely thorough, and a credit to them. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for scheduling this debate and the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) for leading it.

I must begin by declaring a professional interest, having worked for 20 years as a clinical psychologist in mental health. I continue to maintain my skills and engagement in line with the professional requirements of my registration. Just after the election, I had the great privilege of contributing to the evidence taken by the Youth Select Committee during its inquiry into child and adolescent mental health services.

Mental health is an extremely wide field, ranging from major mental illnesses such as psychosis to depression and anxiety, trauma, and eating and adjustment disorders. Childhood developmental disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autistic spectrum disorder are often also included in the sphere of mental health. I would welcome future debates on those important conditions too, because I feel that we shall not have time to do them justice today.

As a member of the all-party parliamentary group on autism, I have a particular interest in this field. I commend the recent report by Ambitious about Autism, which, worryingly for us all, highlights the fact that 80% of

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

children with autism experience anxiety on every single day they attend school. For this crucial group, we must target our resources and make sure that early diagnosis and support are provided for the young child and for the whole family. More than half of mental ill health starts before the age of 14, and 75% before the age of 18. Early and effective intervention in and prevention of mental ill health during childhood are absolutely key in reducing morbidity. The quicker we intervene, the more effectively we intervene, and it is also more cost-effective for the NHS.

In 2014, the health improvement efficiency targets were adopted in Scotland and across the UK, meaning that patients should be seen, from referral to assessment, in 18 weeks, including in CAMHS services. The figure that I have researched suggests that in Scotland 84% of children and adolescents are now treated within this time, and we have set a benchmark of 90%. We have therefore come a long way in this regard, but we still have further to travel. There are now significantly increased referral rates. Although that may mean increased numbers of sufferers, it may also mean that stigma is reducing and people feel more able to present, so it is a mixed picture. However, mental health services in Scotland, and across the UK, are not the finished article. We should continually strive towards improvement, and that should always be guided by patient need and by research underpinning the most effective clinical practice.

As we have heard, mental health problems in childhood are extremely serious. At worst, they can destroy educational potential, or at least impede it, and impede relations with peers and within the family. They can also lead to suicide and self-harm. Difficulties must be assessed and recognised at an early stage. In Scotland, widespread staff training has been undertaken to try to ensure that we can pick up on mental health issues within this age group. We have rolled out cognitive behaviourial therapy, family therapy, interpersonal therapy and specialist interventions such as those for eating disorders, with a focus on seeing patients as close to home as possible. We must make continual progress on this.

There needs to be additional resourcing for tier 4 services for in-patients. For children and adolescents, in-patient treatment should be a last resort, because it takes children away from the family home and pathologises their difficulties. Best practice highlights intensive outreach approaches that enable children to be seen at home and treated in their natural environment, so maximising key family and peer supports. Children who need in-patient services may suffer psychosis, intractable eating disorders, severe obsessive compulsive disorders, and a variety of neurological conditions. There are currently 48 beds available in Scotland, and £8 million has been pledged to build a new unit in Dundee for children and adolescents with mental health problems. We must ensure that service provision meets needs. My clinical experience suggests a lack of available tier 4 beds in forensic and learning disability CAMHS, and that should also be addressed.

We need better communication channels between departments when children's care is transferred between professionals, and importantly, as has been described, at key stages of development such as moving from adolescence to adult services. There requires to be a component of the training programme for general practitioners in primary care that identifies children's mental health issues. I would include symptoms of autistic spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder within that training. We need to shorten the time from presentation to referral, and picking up symptoms timeously assists greatly with this. As with diet and exercise, good mental health and well-being has to be normalised. These are all fundamental coping skills that impact on everyday aspects of our functioning and deserve to be slanted more towards health and well-being than diagnosis.

Access to mental health specialists in schools is merited, as well as mental health awareness and training, particularly training for staff in schools so that if someone is experiencing a mental health problem the staff can pick it up at a very early stage and help them to access services. Specialist training for teachers would be a positive step forward. Education for children is also crucial so that they can identify when they are struggling, identify what makes for good mental wellbeing and seek help when needed, and so that they can identify whether a peer is struggling. Young people like to be, and should be, fully involved in their care.

We need to modernise our approach to mental health services for children and adolescents. We must embrace IT and social media methods of communicating with young people, because in the modern world, it is often how they communicate. In previous debates I have mentioned a project in Scotland called SafeSpot, which is an application, website and school intervention to promote positive coping skills, safety planning and access to information about mental health services for young people. That is a good step forward. I am aware that recommendations for online standardised and approved resources would be a key step.

As has been mentioned, we must address bullying, particularly online bullying, which appears to be on the increase and which badly affects children's lives. In fact, we must address bullying everywhere. Only this summer, when I was discussing mental health, I was informed by an MP who was a fellow member of a delegation that MPs have a high suicide rate—something that I was unaware of. We must lead by example. We must ensure that mental health and wellbeing are addressed in all aspects of life, and we must provide our own model.

There remains a lack of empirical data regarding effective interventions for young people with co-morbidity issues, by which I mean mental health difficulties coupled with learning difficulties or substance use. That has to be built on through research and treatment programmes. I would also like to touch on services for looked-after and accommodated children—particularly those who have violence risk needs or self-harm needs—who are some of the most severely disadvantaged in terms of services and the magnitude of difficulties that they present with. Further service provision for specialist groups and underpinning research are crucial, and I am extremely pleased that the First Minister will be pledging to support those groups.

Given that the weight of evidence for child and adolescent mental health services is in favour of psychological rather than pharmacological interventions for the majority of presentations, clear structures must be in place to support the delivery of effective evidence-based psychological therapies for children and adolescents.

The number of child and adolescent mental health services psychology posts have doubled in Scotland, and I welcome that, but we need to continue and strengthen that progress. Uptake of such services has always tended to be poorer among people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and in such cases an assertive outreach approach may be required to ensure that some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families do not slip through the net.

To summarise, mental health services require parity of esteem and therefore considerable funding. I believe that this goes beyond party politics. It is crucial that we tackle it meaningfully in a cross-party manner, sharing best practice across the whole United Kingdom. We need real progress to reach children and adolescents and to help all our children achieve their full potential.

2.33 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron)—I hope I have got that correct.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. It is pronounced "Stray-ven and Lez-ma-hay-go".

Huw Merriman: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am suitably corrected and admonished at the same time. I am glad that you did not ask me to repeat that after you.

I particularly applaud the point that has been made about making this a cross-party matter on which we can all work together. As the young people have shown us in their fantastic report, working together will help to ensure that all voices are heard and recognised.

I thank the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes)—her constituency is much easier for me to pronounce—for sponsoring the debate. I apologise for going back and forth from the Chamber, and perhaps I may explain to those who are watching why there are so few MPs on the Benches. My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said that it would be good to hold such debates during Government time, when Members may not be in their constituencies. Of course, Thursday afternoon is also a time when Bill Committees sit, so Government and Opposition Members are required to attend those Committees. I hasten to add that I should also be in a Bill Committee, but I was so determined to speak on this matter that I have come to the Chamber. It is probably for that reason that I will always be asking Ministers for more from the Back Benches, rather than being on the Front Bench and able to deliver those things myself.

I commend the 2015 Youth Select Committee report, and I particularly applaud the 90,000 young people—many more took part in the vote—who voted that mental health services for young people should be the priority concern. They are absolutely right to focus on this subject, and I submit that they are in the best position to give their opinion on it.

I similarly decided that the subject would be a chief priority for me when I was elected as an MP in East Sussex 18 months ago. The severity of this issue, particularly among young people, became all too apparent to me. I found—I still do—the stories of carefree, confident and happy lives being shut down as young people enter a dark world of fear, anxiety and isolation to be incredibly upsetting.

As a result of my concern, I chose this issue as the topic of my question when my name was first pulled out of the hat for Prime Minister's questions. I told the then Prime Minister that I had spent an afternoon in the small town of Battle in my constituency visiting three families, each of whom had a child who had not been given the early-stage intervention that they expected from the child and adolescent mental health services. I asked the Prime Minister for more focus on early-stage treatment so that young people's conditions do not become more acute.

Providing such services is not only our civic duty, but an economic and social imperative. When my constituents ask me why the roads in East Sussex are in a state, I explain that I recently secured £250,000 from our county team to fund just one year of acute mental health treatment for one constituent. Fixing people has to come before fixing holes in the tarmac. The phenomenon may not have existed so openly when many of my constituents were younger, but it is now a huge financial concern to my county council colleagues.

I firmly believe that too much pressure is being loaded on to people too young. Social media and the internet, as pioneering as they are, are a curse on wellbeing, and internet service providers must be forced to do more. Every young person should have the right to have their web history expunged. Cyber-bullying is at last being recognised as a crime, but every school must ensure that its pupils are aware of good internet practice and the sanctions for abuse. We also need to be aware that young people and children are accessing graphic images and media on the internet that they cannot understand, process or cope with.

In the report's consideration of education, I absolutely commend the recommendation

> "that the Government develop and introduce statutory levels of attainment for mental health education…Schools should have autonomy to deliver mental health education flexibly but must be able to demonstrate how pupils reach the attainment levels."

May I suggest that in so doing the Government should ensure that the curriculum combines a consideration of social media and the internet with wellbeing training?

We also need training for our GPs. The situation is summed up perfectly by the experience of a young person that is detailed in paragraph 32 of the excellent report. It is essential that the GP does not diagnose a mental health condition, but merely refers the young person to a specialist. I know that mental health specialists find it frustrating if GPs diagnose a mental health condition when the specialist does not regard it as such. Once that badge is given to someone, it is difficult to remove it. Equally, brilliant local GPs, such as those in Battle who have helped my constituents in their surgeries, have championed young people and become their advocate. They are incredibly frustrated by the delay in early intervention in mental health services. I work closely with my local CAMHS team, and I have the highest regard for the many excellent specialists who do their best. However, I am worried that constituents face lengthy waiting times and that some have been passed from pillar to post when receiving treatment.

[Huw Merriman]

Building up trust is a key ingredient of successful diagnosis and treatment. I hear stories about young people finding the courage and trust to open up about their condition, only to find a new practitioner at the subsequent session. It disappoints me that the young person can then regress because of that change of personnel. I would like a commitment to giving treatment on a fixed one-to-one basis. If we can do that for maternity provision, surely we can do it for mental health treatment.

When I attended the launch of the mental health taskforce, I was buoyed by the commitment of the then Minister and the chief executive of NHS England to implement the excellent "Five Year Forward View". I was cheered by the commitment to funds to ensure that our acute hospitals have adequate mental health expertise on A&E wards to deal with those who are hospitalised as a result of mental health issues, or who have such a condition in addition to a physical illness.

My concern was driven by the experience of a family in my constituency following a suicide attempt. The NHS staff did not have the ability to deal with the mental health condition, and my constituent, a young man in his teens, was forced to wait until CAMHS staff could make their way over from another town miles away. I understand the need for specialist treatment, but it strikes me that there is a need for a culture change across the entire NHS, and that all staff should be trained to understand mental health and provide a basic level of treatment. Specialisation in health is important, but if the NHS becomes over-specialised, it can lead to a lack of general involvement in such care for patients.

I welcome the news that the Government will fund 24/7 mental health provision in our hospitals, but I was alarmed at the suggestion by the chief executive of my local trust that the funding may not stretch far enough. I also want to ensure that that specific coverage will not mean that other NHS staff with the necessary technical understanding and empathy will feel that they are not empowered to assist those many hospital patients who need help with their mental healthcare, in addition to their physical wellbeing.

Ultimately, getting early-stage intervention right is a key part of achieving a proper diagnosis for people with a mental health condition. We should not misdiagnose young people who are suffering growing pains and need the coaching and guidance of family and friends to overcome the problems of adolescence. However, I have met too many young children who face a difficult future because their mental health condition was not treated at an early stage. Funding mental health treatment is a most important investment, not only for people's welfare and wellbeing, but to enable these amazing young people to fulfil their hopes and dreams in their careers, and to make something of themselves and their country.

I applaud the amazing work of all of those in the British Youth Council, many of whom live in my county of East Sussex, who have done so much to produce this excellent report. Those young people are leading the charge to ensure that the nation supports all those who are affected by this terrible condition. We owe it to them, and to all young people, to deliver a better mental health service, and many of the report's recommendations will do just that.

2.42 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) on securing this debate. My hon. Friend is having quite a week: she has pressed the Prime Minister about the serious issue of historical child sexual exploitation in her constituency; she is here today; and tomorrow she will help lead the charge on the Homelessness Reduction Bill. I am delighted that she has found time to lead this afternoon's debate.

As one of the elected honorary presidents of the British Youth Council, I am particularly delighted that this debate arises from the Youth Select Committee's report, "Young People's Mental Health". I hope that the fact that Members of Parliament have taken the initiative to make sure that we are debating it in the House of Commons reassures the UK Youth Parliament, youth councils and young people generally that their voice is being heard. Our challenge now is to make sure that their voice is listened to by Government.

It is also worth saying that much of the profile that the UK Youth Parliament enjoys in the Houses of Parliament, particularly the annual sitting, which will next take place in this Chamber on 11 November, arises from the personal support of Mr Speaker. I know that I speak on behalf of so many people involved in BYC and the UK Youth Parliament in thanking him for his consistent championing of young people's voice in democracy.

My interest in young people's mental health and the reason I am here partly stems from my time as deputy leader and cabinet member for health and wellbeing in the London Borough of Redbridge. However, the main reason I have chosen to be here instead of in my constituency on a Thursday afternoon is my experience, both as a councillor and as a Member of Parliament, of listening directly to young people talk about their concerns and issues, and those of their friends and peers, with mental ill health. Redbridge has a fantastic youth council, which, like the national UK Youth Parliament, has prioritised work on mental health. I will come on to talk about that.

While sitting in Redbridge Council chamber listening to young people from across our borough, I was struck by the way in which they talked in such an open, candid and courageous way about their own struggles with mental ill health and what they have seen in their classrooms and communities. Although much of what they described was harrowing and of concern from a public policy point of view, it is hugely encouraging that this generation of young people seem to be far more at ease with discussing mental health and have normalised discussing it in such a way that it is similar to how they discuss physical ailments. That gives us hope for the future when it comes to changing the culture surrounding mental health, which my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) has mentioned.

Recently I chaired a meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on youth affairs about mental health, and it was hugely encouraging to see young people from across the country pack one of the largest Committee Rooms of the House of Commons. The key

message that came across was the failure of public services and health services to address concerns that many of those young people had experienced personally.

We know from so much of the research, particularly the excellent briefings we have had from charities such as YoungMinds ahead of this debate, that there are significant and well-known problems nationally with regard to mental ill health affecting children and young people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood said at the start of the debate, one in 10 children and young people has a diagnosable mental health condition. That is the equivalent of three children in every classroom. We also know that a great many more suffer periods of anxiety, emotional distress and ill health because of the growing pressures of childhood. That should give us all pause for thought and cause for concern.

Three quarters of young people with mental ill health may not get access to the treatment that they need. I am particularly concerned about the statistic that my hon. Friend shared showing that CAMHS is turning away nearly a quarter of children referred for treatment by parents, teachers and GPs. Those children have been referred by people who, to be frank, have expertise, and to turn such a high proportion of them away is wholly unacceptable.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful contribution, as have many others. This summer, Healthwatch Nottingham published the results of its survey of young people about their experience of seeking help and treatment. It found that 26% of young people had not sought any help or treatment at all, despite feeling that they suffered from a mental health problem. That was twice as likely among black and minority ethnic young people. Does he agree that we need to do more to raise awareness of the help that is available, which needs to take account of the needs of all young people?

Wes Streeting: I agree strongly. That leads me neatly on to a point I wanted to raise about the provision for young people. It is not just young people generally who are having trouble accessing mental health services. The Government and the health services need to look carefully at the profile of the young people affected. During my time as head of education at Stonewall, we published "The School Report", a piece of research undertaken with young people by the University of Cambridge. It found exceptionally high and extremely worrying levels of mental ill health among lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people. The alarming rates of self-harm and suicide, to which many hon. Members have referred, are even higher for that particular group. More than half of LGBT young people are self-harming. Around a quarter have attempted suicide or considered taking their own life. Those levels are of epidemic proportions. That points to a crisis among LGBT young people, which is a symptom of wider poor provision.

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend will be interested to know that the same report says that young people who identified as homosexual or bisexual were most likely to have experienced a mental health issue in the past or currently, and that their experiences when seeking treatment and support were more likely to be negative. Does that not give more credence to what he is saying about the need to deal with their specific needs?

Wes Streeting: It really does. One of the things that concerns me most about young people's poor experience of mental health services—this was reflected at the discussion by the all-party group—is that it is not just GPs and headteachers who recognise that young people are being failed and turned away; young people themselves recognise that. I cannot imagine what it must be like to be a young person who is suffering from anxiety, depression or another form of mental ill health, who knows they have a problem, seeks help and is left to feel ignored, dismissed and unsupported. I have mentioned the proportion of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people who are affected, and it is even higher for trans young people.

I represent a constituency that is highly diverse ethnically and religiously. It worries me that Asian communities seem to be far less likely to seek access to mental health services. There is a job to do there to tackle stigma and to make the services more accessible. People from African-Caribbean communities face inequality. The failures of public policy on African-Caribbean people should shame our country. It is a further indictment that the majority of African-Caribbean people who come into contact with the mental health system seem to do so through the criminal justice system. That is a terrible state of affairs. Therefore, the issue of access and support is crucial if we are to deal with the problem.

This is partly about funding. We have had a good-natured debate this afternoon, so I do not say this to be objectionable or churlish, but on Wednesday, three or four Members on both sides of the House raised the issue of mental health with the Prime Minister, and her response was, to put it politely, inadequate. Beyond general statements about parity of esteem, she seemed unable to point to any meaningful actions her Government were taking on the issue of mental health.

I am sure that the Minister has come better briefed this afternoon, but the Prime Minister also needs to make this a priority. Much of this is about joined-up government—this will be a theme of mine this afternoon—and that requires leadership from the centre. It is not good enough for the Prime Minister to be sure-footed, although wrong-headed, when it comes to home affairs issues, but completely blind-sided on issues outside her comfort zone. We need stronger leadership on mental health from her and I was genuinely disappointed with what we saw during Prime Minister's questions this week.

Parity of esteem is not about sentiment—it is about resources. About 11% of the NHS budget is spent on mental health and just 6.36% of that 11% is spent on children's mental health. I recognise that the Government have made a commitment to invest £1.4 billion in child mental health in the next five years, and I welcome that, but I urge the Government to ensure that that funding is delivered sooner rather than later. Locally—other Members have referred to this—budgets are being cut or frozen in three in four mental health trusts. Seven in 10 CCGs and local authorities are freezing their budgets because of pressures from central Government reductions. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) has, through written parliamentary questions, highlighted that decisions coming down the track will make that picture even worse.

In the London Borough of Redbridge, the council is doing fantastic work with limited resources. However, I can say from first-hand experience—I declare an interest

[Wes Streeting]

as an elected member of the council—that local government cuts are biting. The picture is compounded by the state of our local health economy. Both our NHS trusts are in special measures, although I hope one of them will be leaving special measures sooner rather than later. I hope that they will both leave, but I suspect one is nearer to the end of that journey than the other. Primary care is creaking, it is fair to say that our clinical commissioning group is struggling, and our community health trust has a rating that requires improvement. The challenge for Redbridge is not simply the funding reductions that affect my borough, but the fact that the funding formula does not lead to a settlement for Redbridge—for the local authority and for the wider health economy—that genuinely reflects the needs of our population. I urge the Minister to look carefully at how Redbridge has been disadvantaged through the funding formula, particularly in public health funding, and at what can be done.

Huw Merriman: I do not wish to get into a skirmish on funding, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as in my area of East Sussex, the way to find the efficiency savings that the NHS is required to make, in addition to the £10 billion that this Government have put in, is to have a "better together" organisation so that hospitals and all the other healthcare providers—at county level and so on—can talk together? That would not only save money, but mean that everyone is joined up, which is the way forward on such issues, as he has rightly said.

Wes Streeting: I very much welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention. He has anticipated some of my closing remarks about looking to the future. I will have some positive words to say about the direction of Government policy in that respect.

This issue is not simply about funding, but about leadership and accountability. I must say that the damning CQC report on the Brookside unit in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) has more than raised eyebrows. Some of its judgments about this facility for children's mental health provision were:

> "The ward environments were not safe, clean or suited to the care of children and young people… The wards were not adequately staffed… There was a high usage of restraint and rapid tranquilisation at the unit… The ethos of the unit was containment rather than therapy… Care plans reviewed were not recovery orientated and more behaviour orientated… During the inspection we saw staff refuse to facilitate the requests of young people… Young people stated the food was of poor quality and cultural and religious foods were not available"—

and those who know the London Borough of Redbridge will know how totally inappropriate that is. My question for the North East London NHS Foundation Trust is very simple: why did it take a damning inspection by the Care Quality Commission for sufficient action to be taken? From what I can see and from my conversations with colleagues in the local authority, there is clearly a road to improvement. It should not take inspectors coming in to highlight the fact that we have failed some of our most vulnerable young people in such a gross and unforgivable way.

Among my worst experiences as a constituency MP—these are universally my worst experiences—are in my surgeries on Friday afternoons when I see absolutely awful cases of people who have been very badly failed by public services. One case I will never forget was that of Simon Harris, a young man—he was 30 years old—who was failed by Goodmayes hospital because he was insufficiently cared for. While under the care of the NHS, he was allowed to take his own life, although he was in the very place that his family thought would keep him safe. I never again want to have a conversation with a constituent like the one I had with his incredibly stoic and courageous grandmother, Brenda. That is the consequence of mental health failure: it is simply the difference between life and death. I do not think that young people like Simon should ever be failed in such a way by the services that are there to keep them safe and well.

This subject is not just about public service provision, but about celebrating the work done by the voluntary sector. In the past year, I have visited a number of programmes in my constituency. I have visited Audacious Veg, a social enterprise that involves helping people suffering from mental ill health to set up their own social enterprise, growing and selling vegetables. This wonderful project runs in conjunction with the Forest Farm Peace Garden, another environmental and sustainability project, which gets people with mental ill health outside, interacting with others and active.

I cannot commend strongly enough to the Minister the importance of social prescribing. Here, public policy has a role to play. When Redbridge Youth Council, for example, commissioned the Redbridge Drama Centre to design and deliver a play on mental health to reach young people, 5,000 young people and counting across the London Borough of Redbridge were reached by that fantastic way of engaging young people in conversations about mental health.

Music can play a powerful role in therapy, as can sport. One of the most impressive projects I have visited in the past 12 months was Coping With Football, sponsored by the London Playing Fields Foundation and run in conjunction with the North East London Foundation Trust. Again, that project got young people outside, interacting and developing their skills and, most importantly, their self-esteem.

That brings me on to looking to the future, and I will press the Minister to take policy in a few directions. I have asked her to look at Redbridge's funding formula, on public health in particular, and I hope she will undertake to do so. I also ask her to work with her colleagues in Government to think about funding nationally. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle talked about the value of joining up services locally, in particular local government and the NHS. I commend the approach being taken by the Government through the introduction of the accountable care organisations. In the pilot with Redbridge, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and the London Borough of Havering, that approach is bringing the local authority together with stakeholders from across the local health economy to join up public service provision. That will bear fruit.

We also need joined-up Government nationally, however. Other Members have made a compelling case for the Minister to fight her corner in public health, because investment in public health and early intervention is a money saver—and not just across Government; within her

own Department we can reduce A&E admissions and the pressure on urgent and primary care if we get public health funding right.

The Minister also needs to make the case, along with the Secretary of State, across Government. For example, it is no good the Treasury making cuts to local government if that leads to cuts in public health funding and undermines the work of the Department of Health. It is no use cutting mental health provision if that leads to a spike in crime, an increase in the prison population and greater demand on the criminal justice system.

In education, it is no good asking Ofsted to inspect schools on mental health provision if school referrals to CAMHS are going unheard. We need to make sure the services are there to support schools. We also cannot continue with the postcode lottery on sex and relationships education and personal, social and health education. I hope we can revisit the issue of compulsory SRE and PSHE.

Finally, and most importantly—it is the reason we are here this afternoon—I urge the Minister and her colleagues in Government to listen to young people. That she is here this afternoon shows the importance the Government place on this report and the views of young people. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood talked about the importance of co-production and involving young people in the design of public services, and that is absolutely critical. But the Youth Select Committee has made a whole series of other recommendations that deserve not just the serious attention of this House but the response of Government. If that happens, we will get better public policy, and, I hope, we will have a generation of young people whose voices have not just been heard but, most importantly, listened to.

3.3 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) on securing this debate and the Backbench Business Committee on allowing it.

I have a new member of staff in Westminster, who started with me only last week, Matthew van Rooyen. He is 18 going on 28. He is cool, calm and collected; I have only seen him panic once so far, which was when he lost his hair gel. By an amazing coincidence he is from the village in south Wales where I was born, Kenfig Hill; more amazing still, I used to do judo with his mother when I was a child. As I have said before, Wales is one big family, and that has its advantages and its disadvantages, so in many ways this is Matthew's maiden speech.

Matthew is a Member of the Youth Parliament and has been elected by fellow Welsh youth parliamentarians to represent Wales at the sitting of the Youth Parliament in this Chamber on 11 November. The calibre of the debate is always exceptionally high; at times, higher than some of our debates—Matthew is obviously driving the point home here—and I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to attend to show their support for the UK Youth Parliament.

By way of background, each year the UK Youth Parliament holds a UK-wide ballot called "Make Your Mark" that allows for young people to vote to campaign on an issue that is most important to them. The five campaigns with the most votes are then debated by members of the Youth Parliament at their annual sitting in this Chamber. Matthew has asked that I thank the House for allowing this opportunity year after year. In 2014, more than 90,000 votes were cast specifically to campaign for the improvement of mental health services. Following the debate, the Youth Parliament voted to campaign on mental health services as its priority campaign. The Youth Select Committee subsequently launched an inquiry into mental health provision, publishing its report in November 2015. Today, this report comes before the House for debate.

What the report indicates, quite simply, is that there is a lack of full and proper support for young people with mental health issues. Nearly 850,000 people aged between five and 16 suffer from a mental health issue. There is clearly a real need for good quality, mental health provision. The fact that over 90,000 young people voted for this as their priority campaign is indicative that the standard of service provided falls far short of the standard of service that can be expected.

It is not even the case that the service provided is good, but young people expect excellent and they deserve excellent. It is the case that the service is simply substandard. In written evidence to members of the Youth Select Committee, one young person explained their frustration:

> "After a lot of deliberation, I decided to take myself to my GP in search of support…What you must remember is the amount of courage it takes to open up about your mental health issues. It is extremely difficult for someone...who's totally confused about what's going on in their life, to openly talk about having suicidal feelings in a five-minute appointment to someone who feels like a complete stranger. This landed me in a vicious cycle. I ended up returning to different GPs, in a desperate cry for help, but time and time again I was refused any help. It took seven visits before I eventually got the support I needed. Seven times I had to retell that same story. Seven times I was faced with not being 'sick enough' and seven times I had to walk out of that same GP surgery feeling absolutely crushed and demoralised."

That young person is only 14 years of age.

The stories from young people, up and down the country, of substandard interactions with their GPs and medical practitioners are many. With countless witness testimonies, the report highlights the many areas where improvements need to be made with regard to the medical profession and health services. I would welcome an update from the Minister.

There is not one single area that needs improvement. We need to improve the overall state of services for those suffering from mental health issues. We must also look at the education system and what role this has to play in improving young people's mental health. The report, very thoroughly, covers the education curriculum. It suggests improvements to personal, social, health and economic education, which would provide the most effective environment for mental health education. I broadly endorse those.

A key issue that has been raised time and again by the Youth Parliament is the need for a curriculum for life—to meet the needs of young people by having a national curriculum that sets them up to succeed and not fail. This issue is so fundamental to young people that it received the most votes in the "Make Your Mark" ballot this year. In the local authority area of Neath Port Talbot, in which my constituency of Neath lies, around 2,300 young people took part in this year's

[Christina Rees]

ballot. I look forward to working with the Neath Port Talbot Member of the Youth Parliament further over the coming year.

To return to the report, the findings of the Youth Select Committee make clear the need for an all-encompassing approach to improving mental health and wellbeing. Although the Department for Education has introduced character-building and resilience programmes, the report notes that this is not the best method of improving the wellbeing of young people and instead proposes further training for teachers and academic staff. The report specifically mentions that teachers said in evidence that they feel they

"need more regular training on how we promote positive mental health."

The Youth Select Committee recommends that, as part of the core content of initial teacher training, there should be mandatory training for teachers on young people's mental health, with the training focused on how to respond to a young person who asks about mental health, how to spot problems and where to refer young people. The committee goes on to recommend the inclusion of a trained counsellor in all schools and agrees that schools should make counselling services available to all secondary school pupils. These are recommendations that I am sure every Member of the House will agree with.

Today's debate has highlighted the vital work done by the UK Youth Parliament, the British Youth Council and the Youth Select Committee, all of whom I commend in assisting young people to have their voices heard. In recent times, there have been multiple reports and initiatives to improve mental health services for young people, aiming to reach parity of esteem, but until equal funding is achieved for physical health and mental health provision for young people, with funding for young people's care at least equal to funding for adult's care, the campaign will go on. Young people are our future. It is our duty to ensure their success and wellbeing. My thanks to Matthew—great speech, Matthew, and it is a pleasure to work with you.

3.12 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I apologise to the House for missing the start of the debate—it started a little earlier than I anticipated and I was sitting on a bus in Millbank—and thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), and I congratulate her on leading this debate and the Backbench Business Committee on delivering it.

I am speaking towards the end of the debate, so I will try not to repeat the many excellent contributions that hon. Members have already made. Like so many other Members, I have had parents contacting me in great distress at the lack of adequate acute services when their children are in crisis. I had one parent who was worried about her daughter having to spend yet another weekend—this was not the first period of crisis she had had—in the children's ward of the local hospital, as no specialist beds were available. The children's ward is not a safe place for a young person in a mental health crisis, nor is it fair on the staff or children in the ward to have to support her either. She needed to be in a specialist bed, but in London there are too few tier 4 beds for young people.

I had another distressing experience, where a young man needed to go to hospital urgently, but because of a disconnect between the police, the ambulance services and the other services, it took two attempts on the same day to draw him from his house and get him to the safe place he needed to be in, leading to added trauma and distress and worsening his already critical health situation. To be fair, we are seeing some improvements locally, and we are promised additional tier 4 beds and better joined-up thinking between services, but I have to say that this is a small increase from a very low bar.

An additional problem is the break in consistent service when a child in crisis suffers further as they hit their 18th birthday. They lose one set of services and the adult services may or may not pick up at the same place, which does not make it easy for the child, the family and those trying to support her.

I pay credit to those working in the public and voluntary sector who support and heal these young people, but whose job is being made difficult because of the funding situation and lack of adequate joined-up thinking. In common with all Members here today, I want to thank the Youth Select Committee, the British Youth Council and the many Members of the Youth Parliament across the country for their work.

Earlier this year, I met Hounslow's MYP, Tafumi Omisore, who told me about the history of this debate and how young people across the country had voted mental health as the top agenda issue for discussion among MYPs and the top issue that they wanted to bring to our attention. Tafumi told me:

"The future of tomorrow cannot possibly get to a stage where young people can rise to their full potential when they are being failed by this current generation",

by which I think she means us. She continued by saying that they

"lack the support they need for Mental Health. Every time we say we need more support, Mental Health services simply get cut."

National campaigns for the Youth Parliament come along only once a year, so we have to treat young people's demands seriously. Tafumi will be holding sessions in her school to promote more education on this subject—and all credit to her.

Earlier in July this year, I met a group of primary and secondary school heads, and I expected them to raise with me the issues of funding, recruitment and retention and testing, which they did. What I had not expected was that they raised their concerns about children's mental health and the state of the services available to them as being equally important. They were concerned about the increasing incidence of mental health problems, self-harming, disruptive behaviour and so forth. These headteachers had feelings of inadequacy when it came to supporting those children. They felt that they could not get them through a good-quality education and make them ready for the world of work or higher education unless they could give those young people better mental health support.

These headteachers said that the capacity of CAMHS was overstretched and that there were long waiting lists. They had real concerns about inadequate early intervention.

They pointed out that more children were vulnerable for many and varied reasons, including mistreatment and abuse at home, and that more families were living in chaotic circumstances. They noted that more families were living in uncertain, insecure and poor-quality housing, which was exacerbated by austerity, particularly in respect of benefits and tax credits. Most parents and families were working, but they had suffered as a result of the changes to the benefit and tax credit system. Increasing numbers of families could not find enough money to pay the rent and put food on the table. This stress impacts on children—it could not fail to impact on them. The head of Kingsley Academy, who has been at the school only a year, told me that during her tenure, three of her children have been sectioned. Some of her children were self-harming and not enough support was available. The social work team could not cope either.

Some solutions were identified. Most of our schools either commission the Hounslow youth counselling service to deliver counselling or employ in-house counsellors. Strand on the Green runs a programme called "theraplay", which combines therapy and art for children. It is very successful, but there is no funding left to allow it to continue indefinitely. The school heads concluded that not enough support was being provided.

An excellent youth counselling service serves the borough of Hounslow, and has done so for many years. Its counsellors strongly believe that Government cuts have led to the increased need for counselling. Less money means higher criteria for early entry to tier 1 services, and—as other Members have pointed out today—when tier 1 services pull out, young people enter the system when they are in crisis and need tier 3 and 4 services, which are extremely expensive. The Hounslow youth counselling service, like many others, is a tier 1 service, and is there to provide initial counselling and support. It is not a therapeutic service; it cannot be, and it is not funded to be. It does not have the necessary professional advisers. However, it is often the only option for young people, because higher-level services such as CAMHS will not see them for many weeks, and often for many months.

The Hounslow counselling service says that skilled and experienced staff are being replaced by others who are less skilled and experienced, which has made it difficult to maintain important standards in certain departments. It also says that there is no sign that the increase in the number of young people requiring counselling is slowing down, and that further cuts could worsen the situation. It is a voluntary service organisation, funded mainly by local government and the NHS, which are cutting support for the voluntary sector as their own funding is cut. It says that it is likely to see at least 3,000 young people per year and that the number is growing, but it is highly unlikely that it will be able to grow as well in order to meet that pressure. Its waiting lists will lengthen, and young people who are referred by schools or parents, or who refer themselves, will have to wait even longer for counselling.

Our experience in our borough reflects the experiences that other Members have described today. Children and young people are under ever greater pressures from social media, family poverty, housing crises and identity questions. Services are already stretched, and some face an uncertain future: as school and voluntary sector cuts are made, many are closing or have already closed. There is a lack of early intervention. Different services have different priorities, and there are reports of the decommissioning of early intervention services as a result of reductions in spending on social services.

We could do things differently. It is not just a question of funding, although we cannot fail to discuss that issue. My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) made an excellent suggestion, based on experience of the armed forces covenant. The establishment of the covenant under the Labour Government was led at Cabinet level, but it filtered through a range of services into local government. I was a councillor in Hounslow at the time, and we adopted the covenant, which filtered into several of our services and priorities. Could we not do the same for children's mental health?

As many Members have said, we need to do more as a country, and the Government must lead. We must do better. We must listen to young people. We must deliver joined-up services, and we must deliver them early. By doing that, we will save money, but, more important, we will save our young people's future.

3.23 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a privilege to take part in the debate. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for selecting it, and extend my praise to the Youth Select Committee for its excellent report on young people's mental health. It is a genuinely superb summary of the current situation, backed up by sensible recommendations, and it makes a welcome contribution to the wider debate.

The details of the debate have already been clearly outlined by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). I agree wholeheartedly that it is a debate about resources and the framework for their use. I also agree that the current situation is not acceptable, and that the demand for services is indeed increasing. I thank the hon. Lady for her clear explanation of the position, and for giving some powerful statistics.

The importance of this issue to the young people of the UK nations is illustrated by the fact that it has been repeatedly chosen as a priority campaign by the UK Youth Parliament, and voted for in the British Youth Council poll. The issue has also been the subject of research by the Scottish Youth Parliament, with the report "Our generation's epidemic". So we need not wonder what issues are of concern to young people; they have clearly, intelligently and repeatedly told us and it is incumbent upon us as elected politicians to address the concerns highlighted. The fact mentioned already today by several Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), that more than half of all mental ill-health starts before the age of 14 serves to illustrate the seriousness of this issue.

I am also grateful to the hon. Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) for illustrating the risk of the issue going unnoticed and undiagnosed and for highlighting the generation gap technology has developed and the issue of cyber-bullying. I am sure I am not alone in this Chamber in being glad that my youthful teenage years are not preserved for posterity on the internet and in social media.

As well as highlighting an important issue, the Youth Select Committee report shows the importance of young people being engaged in our democratic debate. In Scotland

[Martyn Day]

we are already making good progress with this engagement, and our 16 and 17-year-olds had the right to vote in the 2014 Scottish referendum and 2016 Scottish Parliament election. That, however, is an issue that needs revisiting in another debate. I endorse the call of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for an annual debate in Government time on the good work of the YSC.

The issue of mental health is widespread. It affects every part of the country and people from all parts of our society. All ages, races, classes and backgrounds are susceptible to this illness.

The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) highlighted the disparity between mental and physical health problems and emphasised the scale of the issue. We have heard many examples from across the House showing how young people have been affected and that more needs to be done.

All of us will be aware of local examples, and of groups working to address these issues. One such group which covers my area is the Falkirk and District Association for Mental Health, the subject of early-day motion 125 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally). Among the wide range of support the group offers is a befriending service to help combat the isolation experienced by young people suffering from mental health issues. The group also offers a health and wellbeing drop-in, counselling, support groups and other services.

But it is not just specialist mental health groups that help to tackle this illness. For example, the Open Door project, which provides supported accommodation for young people in the West Lothian area, carries out a risk assessment of every young person who approaches it for help. If following the assessment it feels there is an issue it refers them to "moving into health", psychiatric nurses from the health and homeless team. Some 89 people were assessed in 2012-13, of whom 33 presented with mental health issues. Indeed, the project believes that the number of people presenting with mental health issues is increasing, a theme highlighted by several Members today.

Another example is the Chill Out Zone, or COZ, in Bathgate, a healthy living centre for young people aged between 12 and 20. It is a partnership between Children 1st, West Lothian Council and NHS Lothian. COZ provides a drop-in service that young people can use in their own time to get information, counselling and advice, or if a young person prefers they can make an appointment with a nurse or a counsellor to talk about sensitive physical, emotional, mental and sexual health matters.

I could go on highlighting many other examples, but I think everyone gets the picture. It is not just our young people who are telling us this is an "epidemic"; the evidence of support groups and the impact on other organisations locally demonstrates this for all to see, and highlights the need for action.

Of course in Scotland health and education are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, and many of the devolved issues were covered succinctly by my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow. I am grateful for her professionally informed opinions in today's debate.

Mental health is a priority for the Scottish Government, as demonstrated by the fact that Scotland has the first dedicated Minister for Mental Health in the UK, and while across England funding for young people's mental health services has been reduced since 2011 the SNP-led Scottish Government have doubled the number of child and adolescent mental health service psychologists, as part of an additional £150 million to improve mental health services.

The Scottish Government have welcomed the Scottish Youth Parliament's recent research "Our generation's epidemic", which I mentioned earlier. That research was undertaken as part of the Scottish Youth Parliament's Speak Your Mind campaign on mental health. Maureen Watt, the Minister for Mental Health, met representatives of the Scottish Youth Parliament in September and took note of their recommendations that relate specifically to the Scottish Government. They will be considered as part of the public engagement on the new 10-year mental health strategy for Scotland. The SNP will continue to review the legislation in Scotland to ensure that the interests of children and their need to form and maintain relationships with key adults in their lives are at the heart of any new statutory measures.

The Youth Select Committee report highlights the importance of ending stigma around mental health, and the SNP is committed to playing its part in ending that stigma. Education Scotland is developing a national resource to support the development and practice of nurturing approaches for primary schools. A whole-school nurturing approach can promote school connectedness, resilience and the development of social and emotional competences, all of which are key aspects of promoting mental wellbeing.

It is completely wrong that people with mental health issues should suffer discrimination and stigma, but sadly too many still do. The Scottish Government, in collaboration with Comic Relief, fund the See Me initiative to help address this, and they do invaluable work, but the truth is that each and every one of us has it within our power to do our bit to end this stigma and to be more understanding of people who have mental health problems.

It has been a pleasure to take part in this well-informed and largely consensual and good-natured debate.

3.31 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate on the Youth Select Committee's report, "Young People's Mental Health". I too want to thank the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for the debate, but I agree with the Conservative Members who suggested that this matter should have been debated in Government time. We must underline the importance of this report.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) on securing the debate. My hon. Friend talked about the focus on the need for early intervention, as did many other Members. She also talked about the need for beds, saying that sending seriously ill young people away from home had to stop. I think we all support that view. She made it clear that, in her view, the state of the service was a national scandal, and she raised a number of points

that we hope the Minister will respond to. They included the recommendations for ring-fenced funding for CAMHS and for co-production involving young people in the design of CAMHS, and the need to improve mental health education in schools. I will talk about those issues as well. My hon. Friend also referred to the notion in the YMCA report on stigma, "I am Whole", of young people feeling as though they are

"trapped inside a thousand invisible prisons".

We should keep that in mind.

The hon. Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) acknowledged the legitimacy of the Youth Parliament. He also talked about the pressures on young people and related that back to his own experience when he was young. That has been a bit of theme in this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) stressed the need for early intervention. That subject that has come up many times today, and quite rightly, because early intervention can decrease the severity of mental ill health. She made a powerful case for the Government's funding pledges to be fulfilled.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) talked about the importance of the status of the report and rightly said that it should have been debated in Government time. I am glad to have his support for the fact that Labour has a shadow Cabinet Minister for mental health, which is me. It is interesting that the Scottish National party Government also have a dedicated Minister for mental health. I think we are moving towards a position in which that is seen as something to be supported. The hon. Gentleman also talked about the effect of the pressures of social media on the mental health of young people. It is interesting to note that we shall debate the impact of social media on the mental health of young people in Westminster Hall next Wednesday.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) talked about the real problems that parents and grandparents face in navigating mental health services. He talked about commissioning and made some important points about the difficulty of working through GPs in our medical model. He also talked about local government cuts and said that they were a false economy. I shall talk about that as well. He also talked about the need for open-access services, given the difficulty in navigating the system.

The hon. Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) talked about a teenager with an eating disorder, the suicide rate and the problems faced by young men. Although there is a focus on the impact on women of mental health issues, young men are also badly affected.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) talked about access to mental health specialists in schools and training for staff, which has been a theme this afternoon. She also mentioned the need to modernise approaches. We keep hearing about the importance of IT and social media, and she referred to the SafeSpot app. Like several hon. Members, she also talked about online bullying.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) is back in the Chamber. He came out of a Bill Committee to speak today and regards this topic as very important. His clear commitment to mental health was shown by it being the subject of his first question at PMQs. He also talked about social media and the need for early intervention.

I did not know that my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) was elected an honorary president of the British Youth Council. He quite rightly thanked the Speaker for his support for the British Youth Council and the Youth Parliament. It is important, as he has done, to listen to young people's concerns about mental ill health because that can lead to open, candid and courageous discussions. It is good that groups of young people can become more at ease with discussing mental health—there is hope for the future. He also talked about the exceptionally high incidences of mental health issues among LGBT young people, including high rates of self-harm and suicide. He referred to the poor standards of care at Brookside adolescent unit. It took a damning report from the CQC to highlight its problems, the consequence of which was the death of the young man Simon.

My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) gave us the first speech of Matthew, a member of the Youth Parliament who works in her team, and talked about the lack of full and proper support for young people's mental health. She also mentioned the difficult experience of a young person who had to visit the GP seven times before getting help and felt crushed by the lack of support. Like other Members, she referred to training for teachers and having a trained counsellor in every school.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) talked about hospital wards not being safe for young people with mental health problems. A headteacher in her constituency reported having three children sectioned from school, which is a sobering thought indeed.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day), the SNP spokesperson, talked about many local groups. It is a sign of the difficulties facing support within the NHS that there is a need for all the groups he mentioned.

Before I move on, I want to pay tribute to the work of my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). She has campaigned tirelessly for improvements to the mental health system. Her work helped to raise the profile of many issues that had not previously been given the attention they deserve. I join other Members in congratulating the Youth Select Committee on its excellent report.

The Secretary of State for Health recently admitted to failings in mental health services for children and young people. He said:

"I think we are letting down too many families and not intervening early enough when there is a curable mental health condition, which we can do something about when a child is eight or nine, but if you leave it until they are 15 or 16, it's too late".

People working in mental health services know all too well the truth of what the Secretary of State says. We know that on average one in four people experience a mental health problem, that 50% of adult mental health problems start before the age of 15, and that 75% start before the age of 18. Yet just 8% of our mental health budget is spent on children, with CAMHS, which have been referred to extensively, representing just 1% of the NHS budget. Members have quite rightly referred to that as the Cinderella of the Cinderella service. Does the Minister agree that 8% is far too small a proportion of the budget to spend on youth mental health, and does she agree that more needs to be done to intervene

[Barbara Keeley]

earlier when mental health issues are involved? Demand is clearly outstripping supply. Demand for child and adolescent mental health services is growing, but Government action is not meeting that demand. Funding for overstretched mental health services is not reaching the frontline, where it is so badly needed.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham said, essential support services are being lost as a direct consequence of Government cuts to local authority budgets. Ofsted has reported that between 2010 and 2015 there was a 38% cut—£538 million—in funding for children's centres, and a 53% cut, which is £623 million, in funding for youth services. Very many children and young people are not receiving the help that they need until they reach crisis point, and those cuts in local authority services are part of the problem. By failing to address these critical issues, Ministers are letting down vulnerable children and young people.

Sarah Brennan, the chief executive of Young Minds, has said that children's mental health services have been "woefully" underfunded for years and that:

"While the government's extra investment is welcome, it's unclear whether it's making a difference to frontline services. Even if the new money is spent where it's intended, the Chief of NHS England has admitted that it will only be enough to reach a third of the children who need help."

She goes on to say:

"Because of long waiting lists the threshold for accessing specialist services has got higher. Without treatment, problems are very likely to escalate and children are more likely to self-harm or become suicidal, to be violent and aggressive, or to drop out of school, which can ruin their prospects for the future. Delays can also have a disastrous effect on families, with parents forced to leave their jobs to look after their children".

A report for the British Medical Association underlines that by telling us that the number of young people aged under 18 attending accident and emergency because of a psychiatric condition more than doubled between 2010 and 2015. The number of children and young people self-harming has also risen dramatically in the past 10 years, with the upward trend more pronounced among girls and young women. We have heard examples of that in the debate.

The number of referrals to child and adolescent mental health services increased by 64% between 2012-13 and 2014-15, but 28% of children and young people referred to CAMHS were not allocated a service. Members have referred to that fact in this debate. A report by the Children's Commissioner found that 79% of CAMHS imposed restrictions and thresholds for children and young people accessing their service—I could go on. We have a tale in this debate of an increasing number of referrals to CAMHS, high thresholds for care and long waiting times. What all those things mean is that many children and young people are not receiving help.

Let me come back to the Secretary of State, because in reference to the quality of care that CAMHS teams provide, he said:

"I think this is possibly the biggest single area of weakness in NHS provision at the moment."

Does the Minister recognise that the statistics we have heard in this debate show that demand for mental health services has clearly outstripped supply? Can she tell us what actions Ministers plan to take to address those issues?

I want to talk about regional variation, because it is an important aspect of the issues we are seeing. The Children's Commissioner's report also highlighted regional variations in treatment, suggesting that access to CAMHS is, in effect, a postcode lottery. The data gathered suggest that in England the average waiting time between referral and receipt of services from CAMHS ranged from 14 days in the north-west to 200 days in the west midlands. Does the Minister agree that that level of variation is totally unacceptable? Can she highlight what Ministers are doing to achieve swift access to care across the country at the same levels? A recent report on the state of mental health by the Public Accounts Committee warned:

"Good access to mental health services matters. Many people can make a full recovery if they receive appropriate, timely treatment. However, a high proportion of people with mental health conditions do not have access to the care they need."

I wish to dwell for a moment on the state of CAMHS services, because that has been an important aspect of this debate. There is a lack of crisis services, a lack of accountability for transformation plans, and a lack of co-production with parents, carers and service users. One person asked, "Who cares for the carers because it certainly isn't the mental health service?" That view of CAHMS is borne out by nurses who work in CAHMS. In a survey of 631 CAMHS nurses, 70% said that the services were "inadequate" or "highly inadequate"—I put it to the Minister that it is very worrying that the very people who work in CAMHS refer to the services in such a way—73% said that the main problem was too few nurses, 48% said that there were too few doctors, and 62% said that there were too few beds for patients.

Last December, the Secretary of State made this pledge:

"CCGs are committed to increasing the proportion of their funding that goes into mental health."

However, as we have heard in this debate, increased front-line funding is not being delivered, and that is clear in the provision of services.

Let me refer to a matter that was raised by a number of my hon. Friends. In the responses to the freedom of information requests made by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree, 73 out of 128 CCGs—more than half those that responded—admitted that they plan to cut the amount they will spend on mental health, which underlines the fact that the funding issue is just getting worse.

Does the Minister agree that the Secretary of State has clearly broken his promise and that many CCGs are not increasing funding for mental health? As we have heard in this debate, the pledge to achieve parity of esteem is repeatedly being broken. Despite Ministers' promises about achieving parity of esteem between mental and physical health, there is still a great difference in the treatment of families of children with physical rather than mental health needs—a number of Members referred to that disparity. Indeed, many physical health hospitals now have family rooms or flats in which parents can stay to support a child, and parents can, in some cases, get help with transport costs. By contrast, the families of children in mental health units feel isolated. There is no provision for families to stay, and no support with transport costs, which can become prohibitive. Often a child can be sent home with no transition plan. It is clear from this debate that the Government are failing to achieve parity of esteem.

We had four questions on mental health at Prime Minister's questions yesterday, which is an indication of the level of concern among hon. Members. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle made mental health the subject of his first such question. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North said, there was real disappointment about the responses from the Prime Minister, so I hope that we get better answers from the Minister today.

Much has been said about education and the role of schools. A report by the Education Committee on the mental health and wellbeing of looked-after children made the clear recommendation that schools should have a role in teaching about mental health and wellbeing. That report said:

> "The interface between schools and health services needs to be strengthened to ensure that teachers and schools are better equipped to identify, assess and support children and young people with mental health difficulties."

It has been quite clear in this debate that Members feel that schools and colleges should play a key role in promoting the good mental health of children and young people. More young people are experiencing serious psychological distress because they are under unprecedented social pressures. It is a credit to Members that those pressures are recognised.

Although we will not have time to cover this subject today, I have to say that easy access to the internet poses new challenges for young people. Cyber-bullying is increasing with more than one in 10 children now saying that they have experienced it. Young people cannot get away from bullying even when they have closed the door of their homes.

A number of Members have stressed the role of schools in ensuring that these problems are spotted as early as possible and addressed. Counselling services are vital. As a Salford MP, I am pleased that Salford has launched a register of approved providers of counselling in schools, and that one provider has already been appointed to deliver a two-year pilot to train and support a cluster of schools in counselling. My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham talked about the importance of counselling, but we recognise that there are funding problems. Many schools will not be able to afford to pay a trained counsellor.

Clear guidance is needed for schools on how to commission high-quality mental health support programmes and how to tackle mental health discrimination and stigmatisation. Will the Minister outline the Government's plans to ensure that education, health and social services work together to provide an extra layer of support to spot and treat mental health problems? The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham talked about how cross-departmental working can help.

Clearly, the best way to deal with a crisis is to prevent it from happening in the first place. It is critical that people can access the right information and that better support is provided in childhood and adolescence. That can help to reduce the incidence of young people developing mental health problems.

Overall, it is clear from the debate that actions speak louder than words. If Ministers are serious about tackling these issues, they must follow through with their funding pledges. Government cuts to local authority budgets, which I and others have referred to, have meant that many of the local services providing early intervention have had to scale back services or close their doors. I have talked about cuts to children's centres, social workers, educational psychologists and mental health services in schools. There has been a reduction in care and support for under-18s, so we need urgent action. The Minister has been urged by Government Members, as well as Opposition Members, to relieve that pressure on overstretched CAMHS, but we also need to develop prevention and early intervention strategies. Crucially, the right help and support must be available for vulnerable children and young people when they need it, not 200 days later. I look forward to the Minister answering my questions and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood, and telling us what action will be taken to improve provision in this vital area.

3.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Nicola Blackwood): I thank the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) for initiating this debate on the Youth Parliament Select Committee report on young people's mental health. I want to add my voice to those from both sides of the House in paying tribute to the Youth Select Committee for its powerful report—it is an important and timely intervention. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said, Rhys Hart was, by all accounts, a remarkably effective Chair, and the 10 members were dedicated and focused. They won the admiration of the House of Commons staff who were involved, and they made particular mention of that to me before this debate.

The hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) demonstrated quite clearly that he is an elected president of the BYC, with his particularly eloquent speech. He is right that we should thank those young people who have had the courage to speak up on their mental health experiences and opinions, and who have allowed us to refer to them today, because the value of those first-hand stories in this Chamber cannot be overestimated.

I would like to make a particular point of thanking the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham), Lucy Boardman and Martha Banks Thompson, and my own Youth Parliament representatives, Tara Paxton-Doggett and Rowan Ibbotson, who spoke to me about the mental health campaign. A number of colleagues have spoken about the impact of meeting the Youth Parliament representatives. As has been said today, what is important now is to prove that we have not just heard them; we have listened to them, and we are taking action on their words. That is why this has been such a moving and necessary debate.

Members have shared some very personal experiences of mental health and the services and support that they and their constituents have received. All of us will know the cases that haunt us. All of us know that we need to do better. As colleagues have said, over half of all mental ill health starts before the age of 14, and 75% has developed by 18. We know the distress that mental health problems cause to individuals and all those who care for them, and we know that the earlier we intervene, the better.

Children's and young people's mental health is a priority for this Government. Not only has the Health Secretary made it his personal priority, but so has the

[Nicola Blackwood]

Prime Minister. It is time for a step change in the way that we deliver mental health services in the UK, and we are determined to deliver that. But we must not underestimate or under-sell some of the progress that has already been made, because that is thanks largely to the efforts of dedicated NHS staff, stakeholders, voluntary services and others. We have heard some success stories today, and it is important that we praise those involved for the hard work that they do in the face of great challenges.

We agree with recommendation 3 that funding needs to increase, as many colleagues have said. That is why we have increased investment in children's mental health, with an additional £1.4 billion. While we do believe that it is right that local CCGs, led by clinicians, are best placed to prioritise their spending to meet the needs of local populations, we have been clear that this money is provided for mental health services, and we are requiring CCGs to increase their spending year on year.

Lyn Brown: Has the Minister considered the request from my local mental health providers that the Government consider ring-fencing the money for mental health so that it gets passed to the frontline?

Nicola Blackwood: I was attempting to deal with that point, but obviously not being very clear. As I said, we have been listening to these requests. We are looking very closely at how effectively the money is getting to the frontline, but at the moment we still believe that local clinicians are best placed to decide how to target these services. However, we have put in place a requirement for CCGs to increase spending on mental health year on year. We are also very clear that STPs must reflect the NHS mandate, which says:

> "We expect NHS England to strive to reduce the health gap between people with mental health problems, learning disabilities and autism and the population as a whole".

That will require great strides to be made in improving care.

Lyn Brown: This is happening in Newham, but not elsewhere. How long is the Minister going to wait for it to happen elsewhere before taking action?

Nicola Blackwood: One of the ways in which we are ensuring that money reaches the frontline is through driving accountability through transparency. Mental health services have lagged behind the rest of the NHS in terms of data and our being able to track performance. That is why the NHS will shortly publish the mental health dashboard, which will show not only performance but planned and actual spend on mental health. This is real progress.

Barbara Keeley: Let me make a couple of points in addition to the useful points made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown). First, it is clear that CCGs are ignoring the Government's requests, so we will need more action than the dashboards and transparency that the Minister has mentioned. The Secretary of State will need to go back to CCGs and make the position very clear to them. Secondly, as other hon. Members and I have said, there is the question of local authority funding. Over £1 billion has been taken out of various services for children and young people such as children's centres and youth services. That is a factor too. Those two things need to be addressed.

Nicola Blackwood: It is not fair to say that CCGs are ignoring the funding that is coming through. Moreover, it will not be possible for them to ignore what is going on when transparency and accountability is put in place with data sets that clearly show not only performance down to CCG level but the amount of funding that CCGs are given and the amount they are spending. These data will be much more detailed than before. In January, we introduced the first ever provider-level data set on children's mental health services, and that will provide data on outcomes, length of treatment, source of referral, and location of appointment.

Mr Kevan Jones: The Health and Social Care Act 2012 contained one provision that I welcomed—allowing CCGs and others to commission services in the third sector, for example. A lot of the good work in this area is done in the third sector, but the problem lies in how the contracts are drawn up, because they are either too big or too complex for smaller organisations to bid for. Will the Minister look at that?

Nicola Blackwood: I am happy to look at it. We are very clear that there is a vital role for the voluntary sector to play in delivering some of these services. We hope that local transformation plans will be part of the way in which this is clarified. The programme to deliver transparency and accountability will be essential if local areas are not only to design effective services that match the needs of their local populations, but to be held to account for delivering them. I will not beat about the bush. We recognise that a complex and severe set of challenges faces children and young people's mental health services. This area has been undervalued and underfunded for far too long.

While I am happy to investigate funding formulas such as those mentioned by the hon. Member for Ilford North in relation to Redbridge, I agree with him that leadership and accountability are also key to making the changes that we need. That is why we are committed to delivering real changes across the whole system, not just in funding, and to building on the ambitious vision set out in "Future in mind". I pay tribute to my predecessors for the work they have done to bring those forward. As the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood has said, we need to go further to drive through these changes, which young people have told us they want to see.

Children want to grow up to be confident and resilient, and they want to be supported to fulfil their goals and ambitions. We are placing an emphasis on building in that resilience, on promoting good mental health and wellbeing, on prevention—it is so important, as the shadow Minister has said—and on early intervention, as a number of the recommendations propose. We are looking, in particular, at how we can do more upstream to prevent mental health problems before they arise.

Barbara Keeley: The Minister is about to move on to intervention. Before she leaves funding, which has been pretty key, does she believe that the 8% of the budget

spent on young people's mental health—1% for CAMHS—has been anything like adequate? I did put that question to her. If she does not think that that is adequate, could Ministers tell us what they think it should be? If CCGs are ignoring Ministers' continual urges to them to make pledges, will there be sanctions against CCGs that do not put in that extra funding?

Nicola Blackwood: I think I have already answered those questions. The Government have been clear that we think that mental health funding for children and young people, as well as for other areas of mental health, needs to increase. That is why we have increased mental health funding to local areas and we are putting in place measures to improve accountability and transparency, and the STPs, to make sure that that can be tracked locally. We are going to see how it works in the first instance.

Wes Streeting *rose—*

Nicola Blackwood: I must continue.

Another issue that was raised is the fact that children and young people want to know where to find help easily if they need it. I want to make sure that I respond to all the issues that have been raised, otherwise it will not be fair to the young people who wrote the report. Children want to know that they can trust such help when they find it. Young people are clear that they want a choice about where they can get advice and support; they want to be able to get it from a welcoming place, based on the best evidence about what works; and they want the opportunity to shape the services they receive. Many colleagues have spoken about co-production.

"Future in Mind" committed to sustaining a culture of continuous evidence-based service improvement, as well as improving transparency and accountability across the whole system, as I have mentioned. A big part of that is producing the datasets that I have mentioned, which will give local areas the ability to hold their CCGs to account. Those datasets will include information on funding. As the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) told us so eloquently—Matthew's maiden speech has made its mark on all of us—young people want, as we all do, to tell their story only once rather than having to repeat it lots of times to lots of different people. We are committed to delivering a much clearer and more joined-up approach, with services coming together and communicating more effectively.

As numerous other colleagues have said, young people do not want to have to wait until they are really unwell—until they have reached a higher threshold—to get help. Asking for help should not be embarrassing or difficult. They should know what to do and where to go. If they do have to go to hospital, they should be on a ward with people around their age and close to home. So we are delivering a step change in how care is provided and ensuring that access is improved so that children and young people can easily access the right support from the right service at the right time, as close to home as possible. I recognise that this is a process.

"Future in Mind" is more than just a report. It is more than just words. It has already brought together key players, focused efforts and given us a clear trajectory for improving services. It is only the start of the journey, however, and we need to maintain the effort, focus and political momentum from this place and in our local areas.

In February 2016, the "Five Year Forward View for Mental Health" set out the start of a 10-year journey to transform NHS care across all ages. The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) was absolutely right to say that similar problems can be tracked across to adult services. The report was clear:

> "The NHS needs a far more proactive and preventative approach to reduce the long term impact for people experiencing mental health problems and for their families, and to reduce costs for the NHS and emergency services".

A lot of it is simply common sense. The five year forward view for mental health is underpinned by additional funding, which I have already spoken about, and the NHS England implementation plan sets out in detail where and when that money will become available. It builds on the foundation of local investment in mental health services and the ongoing requirement, which I have referred to, to increase that baseline by at least the overall growth in allocations.

"Implementing the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health" sets out clear objectives, which will support improvements to the services that young people will receive. I think it would be helpful if I say exactly what they will be, as they will make practical changes. The first is a significant expansion in access to high-quality mental healthcare for children and young people. At least 70,000 additional children and young people each year will receive evidence-based treatment. By 2020-21, evidence-based community eating disorder services for children and young people will be in place in all areas, ensuring that 95% of children receive treatment within one week for urgent cases and four weeks for routine cases. By 2020-21, in-patient stays for children and young people will take place only when clinically appropriate; will have a minimum possible length of stay; and will be as close to home as possible, to avoid inappropriate out-of-area placements. Inappropriate use of beds in paediatric and adult wards—this has already been referred to—will be eliminated.

All general in-patient units for children and young people will be commissioned on a place basis by localities, so that they are integrated into local pathways. That is designed to address some of the concerns that have been raised today. As a result, the use of in-patient beds should reduce overall, with more significant reductions possible in certain specialised beds.

Those objectives are supported by a refresh and republication of the local transformation plans, which have been mentioned. The plans set out how local areas will work together to improve services for children and young people with mental health problems across the whole care pathway. The plans are, in fact, the richest source of information available to date about the state of children and young people's mental health services across England.

NHS England has also commissioned a number of thematic reviews as part of an analysis of the LTPs. In July, it published the children and young people's mental health LTPs, which provide a summary of the key themes. It is fair to say that, essentially, they found that there was a lot of variation in local areas in terms of approaches, quality and priorities. We have heard about that in some of the stories that have been told today. The LTPs are a starting point. They are living documents and are not designed to just go in a drawer. They are reviewed and refreshed at least once a year, and we are

[Nicola Blackwood]

clear that children, young people, families and carers must be involved in the process, for the exact reason given by the shadow Minister, which is to increase accountability and effectiveness and to make sure that the plans actually work.

A number of key themes have emerged from the report recommendations and the LTPs. Recommendations 5 and 6 comment on the need to support the workforce. We acknowledge the need to address the capability and capacity needs of the workforce—from GPs and A&E, to the mental health specialist—to deliver on our ambition to transform mental health services. In line with the eight specific workforce recommendations of the taskforce report, we will work with Health Education England and others to develop a five-year mental health workforce strategy, which we will publish in 2017. That is a serious response to a serious problem, and it is designed to address a lot of the challenges that have been raised today.

As many Members have rightly said, access to services is a priority area and we need to address it. We know that young people do not want to wait until they are really unwell to access services, and we do not want that to be the case, either, so we are tackling the issue. In August 2015, NHS England published an access and wait standard for children and young people with eating disorders, as I have said. From January, compliance with that standard has been monitored via the data collected through the mental health services dataset. It is, therefore, being held accountable and the aim, as I have said, is that 95% of young people will be seen within a clinically appropriate timeframe by 2020. That is just the first of the waiting time standards.

NHS England has commissioned the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health to develop a new evidence-based treatment pathway for children's mental health. The project will report in March, recommending maximum waiting times for referral to treatment. An England-wide quality assessment will then be used to establish a baseline and trajectory to achieve those national waiting time standards in local areas. The matter was also raised by the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who is no longer in her place.

We are also taking action on particularly vulnerable groups of children and young people. In April, Alison O'Sullivan and Professor Peter Fonagy were appointed as the co-chairs of the expert working group for looked-after children, established to lead the development of models of care for looked-after children's mental health, which has historically been a blind spot. The expert working group is about practical outcomes—not just what is needed but how it should be delivered, without jargon, proposing concrete milestones and measures. We expect that work to conclude by October 2017.

However, ensuring access to services will not be enough if young people do not feel confident and safe seeking help. All children and young people should feel able to go for help when they need to, without fear of discrimination or stigmatisation. We have made a lot of progress in tackling stigma in recent years. The fact that young people have been willing to tell their stories demonstrates that.

Time to Change is a campaign that aims to tackle the stigma around mental health. In October, it was given £20 million in funding from the Department of Health, Comic Relief and the Big Lottery Fund. We are committed to ensuring that the Time to Change initiative, which is run by charities such as Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, will work with schools, employers and local communities to do more and go further to reduce discrimination and to raise awareness. It is developing a targeted campaign for young people, working with experts by experience.

As "Future in mind" and "The Five Year Forward View For Mental Health" both made clear, co-production is now a fundamental principle in the way we seek to develop and improve services, and anti-stigma campaigns are no exception. However, as many colleagues have said, to make that work, and to see the progress that is so desperately needed, we also have to work closely with colleagues across government, in particular the Department for Education, but not exclusively.

We are determined to continue that collaboration, as recommendation 2 proposes. We have been working closely together to ensure that the vision of "Future in mind" becomes a reality. We are also working together to consider what more can be done upstream to intervene early—an issue raised by the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) and many others—and to provide the right interventions as soon as they are needed. The report's recommendations will be a valuable resource for us as we do that, including the recommendations on attainment, Ofsted, teacher training and a whole-school approach, which was highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak. We know that this is the weakest link in our current process and we are prioritising activity in that area to ensure that young people get the support they need right from the start.

A number of colleagues have mentioned the issue of online pressures and cyber-bullying. That matter has been taken extremely seriously by the Government Equalities Office, which announced in September £4.4 million of funding to tackle bullying. That includes a number of measures to underpin the fact that all schools are required by law to have a behaviour policy with measures to tackle bullying among pupils, and they are held clearly to account for their effectiveness by Ofsted. However, we know that more needs to be done, including to support parents. That is why the GEO has also invested £500,000 in the UK Safer Internet Centre to provide advice to parents on how to keep children safe and provided support to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre to support a national roll-out of parent information through schools.

Today's debate has been important because it has provided an opportunity not just to reply to the details in the Youth Select Committee report, which is so important, but to test the Government's commitment to mental health reform. I am grateful to colleagues for the time they have taken today to raise concerns, to champion good practice and to propose innovative solutions. I hope that, in my response, our commitment to reform mental health services is beyond doubt. I also hope that it is clear that I believe that it is only through concerted political will, allied with the extraordinary and selfless determination of the mental health workers throughout this country, that we will have any hope of achieving our goal of mental health services that are accessible when and where they are needed.

I look around the Chamber and I hear speech after speech expressing determination to see a change. It gives me courage because great reform requires long-term vision, non-partisan partnership and fine minds. I have seen all three of those today, not just in the excellent Youth Select Committee report, but in all colleagues' speeches. That truly is a firm foundation for the tough task ahead.

4.14 pm

Helen Hayes: I very much thank the 10 Back Benchers, the Opposition Front Benchers and the Minister for taking the time to be in the House to contribute to this debate. It has been an excellent debate, with some very powerful speeches. Members have acknowledged the scale of the crisis in young people's mental health, very effectively represented those of their constituents who face mental health issues, brought to bear their direct experience in this field and called on the Government to take a different approach. We have discussed many statistics, and they paint a picture of a heartbreaking reality for young people and families across this country. Many Members have also highlighted the false economies involved in failing to invest properly in young people's mental health, with the additional costs to the health service, local authorities, the criminal justice system and, indeed, to human beings themselves.

Many Members have paid tribute to the work of the British Youth Parliament, and I want to add my voice to those saying that the work of the Youth Parliament should be debated in Government time. We must continue to build the institution of the Youth Parliament as the voice of young people in our democratic process. It is right and proper that it should be given such a status. The debate has, on the whole, been very consensual, and it has shown the House at its best. I hope that Members on both sides of the House have communicated to the British Youth Parliament, the Youth Select Committee and young people across this country the seriousness with which we take this issue.

I very much welcome the Minister's response, and her commitment to address this issue and to deliver a step change in young people's mental health. She is right to point out that this will require resources, leadership and work across Departments. She mentioned work with the Department for Education, but work with the Department for Communities and Local Government will also be very important. As the Minister also has responsibility for public health, she will know the extent to which public health expenditure is so challenged at the moment. We heard from several Members during the debate about the impact of such cuts on mental health and as a direct consequence of them. I welcome her response, but it must be backed up by action, following through and delivering on those commitments.

I hope all Members from both sides of the House who have contributed to this debate will join me in holding the Government to account on delivering the step change we need to protect our vulnerable young people and on delivering a framework of support that will help them to be resilient, confident and healthy as they grow into adulthood.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes the recommendations of the Youth Select Committee report of November 2015 on Young People's Mental Health; endorses the findings of that report on the need for more support from the Government for mental health services for young people; acknowledges steps taken by the Government, since its response of January 2016 to that report, with regard to some of its recommendations; and calls on the Government to set out what further progress has been made since its response and what its plans are further to improve mental health services for young people.

PETITIONS

Change of use of Abberley Hotel

4.17 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): The petition states:

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council should not approve the planning application to change the use of the Abberley Hotel to a 32-bed house in multiple occupation (HMOs); further that there are too many HMOs in Walsall; further that Walsall Council's Housing Standards objects to this application; and further that 194 individuals have signed a local petition on the same subject.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council to reject planning application 15/1266.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001968]

Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts

4.18 pm

Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the Women Against State Pension Inequality, who are now better known to us all as the WASPI women. I know that this is not the time to make a great long speech, and I do not propose to do so, but I will, if I may, pay tribute to the women who have contacted me during this campaign. They are the most decent, the most honourable and the most well-mannered campaigners I have ever had the pleasure, or not, to come into contact with. They have been fabulous. For completeness, I will read out the petition, which I am afraid is rather long.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Southampton Itchen,

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.

[P001969]

HS2 Ltd: Communication and Engagement

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

4.20 pm

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise, in what will be a slightly lengthened Adjournment debate, the subject of the effectiveness of communication and engagement by HS2 Ltd.

I welcome the Minister to the Front Bench. I think this is the first time he has had the joy of responding to a debate on HS2 that I have secured. I hope that he will be in his place for many years to come to respond to future such debates. I have great hopes that his response will be full and encouraging, both to my constituents and to many others up and down the line of phase 1 of HS2.

I thank Buckinghamshire County Council and my local parish councils in particular for their input into the debate, for their perseverance and for their work for greater mitigation in our area; I extend those thanks to local authorities up and down the line, which have worked tirelessly to try to mitigate the damage to their areas.

I am one of the few MPs along the route of phase 1 with the privilege of the freedom of the Back Benches to speak on these matters. It would be remiss of me not to thank my colleagues up and down the line who have had an input into the debate. I pay particular tribute to their researchers, who do so much work on HS2. The burden has fallen disproportionately on our offices as MPs. Although she has absolutely no idea that I am going to do so, I pay tribute to Kate Fairhurst in my office, who has done tremendous work in co-ordinating and working on this subject for a long time.

I am particularly disappointed still to be facing the prospect of having to raise the quality and standard of HS2's communications and engagement, which have made this project a very difficult one for my constituents in Chesham and Amersham in particular. They have found it difficult to deal with in the past, and I am afraid it still fills them with dread for the years to come.

It would be unfair if I did not recognise some of the efforts that HS2 Ltd has made recently to try to improve its communications. Indeed, it has done so in some instances—for example, the introduction of local engagement managers. But that is too little, too late, and must be set against the background of the scars of communications in previous years, which have left a deep-rooted history of poor engagement along phase 1.

It is fair to say that that has resulted in an atmosphere of mistrust among many of our constituents, up and down the line, along with a great feeling that there is a complete lack of empathy from HS2 Ltd and the people who work for it. In the words of one of my constituents, its

> "record is poor and they have been talking about more engagement for months, but for the local affected resident at the coalface, it's hard to spot any change".

I understand that that view is replicated in the constituencies of many of my affected colleagues. For an organisation with such an enormous operation and rapidly expanding workforce, I think the Minister would agree that this is unacceptable and requires addressing with senior personnel and at ministerial level.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) recently wrote to the chairman of HS2 Ltd to convey her concern that her constituents were not being adequately communicated with, ahead of their petitions to the House of Lords Select Committee. That caused undue frustration. She asked me to introduce that into my speech this evening, because she is at an HS2 meeting herself and is unable to be here.

In the course of preparing for this debate, I have been contacted by Chalfont St Giles parish council, which reports that HS2's original attempts at engagement, in the form of focus groups, did little to allay the fears of the local population. It was felt that they were entirely controlled by HS2. The council felt that the community events were designed to promote the project, rather than to engage effectively with those who were most affected. It reported to me that HS2 personnel seemed uninterested in tapping into the wealth of local knowledge, which could have helped HS2's work hugely, in places such as Chalfont St Giles. This point is echoed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden, who feels that more positive solutions could have been generated if HS2 had just listened and utilised local expertise.

I do not know whether the Minister has had the chance to study the design panel for HS2. It is full of the great and the good, with some marvellous members, including leading stars in the worlds of architecture and design. However, what is not as obvious is the local input that we were promised. We were promised that the design of this project would rely on local input to help to get the best possible solutions in areas as the line goes through them.

I think it is fair to say that the earlier community forums are considered to have been disastrous. Great Missenden parish council felt the engagement was part of a tick-box exercise by HS2, which was unable to provide the detail that residents and constituents want. Residents tell me that they think HS2 is going through the motions during community engagement. That is not good enough. For them to come out of the community engagements thinking that it was a one-way-only, top-down discussion, reflects very badly on the quality, content, thought and input that goes into them. The situation was summed up in a recent comment by a parish councillor in Great Missenden:

> "The parishioners have no real knowledge of what is happening; in fact, most still believe that HS2 will not happen. This is not democratic. In fact, it is bordering on a dictatorship."

It is sad that after six or seven years that is how residents feel following an attempt at engagement with the community.

This poor engagement will continue to cause problems with the progress of HS2's work. As I understand it, there was a fracas at Fairford Leys recently, when HS2 omitted fully to communicate to residents that it would be accessing a site for groundworks. I am told that households were leafleted only after the work had commenced.

I am very pleased to see the Leader of the House of Commons, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), in his place. I know he shares my concern that this kind of incident is a very worrying

precedent for the future. I ask the Minister to familiarise himself with these interactions and to seek improvement. This sort of work is going to multiply and increase dramatically in the coming months. I do not want to see any repeat of this type of incident, which actually comes from poor communication.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) became so exasperated with HS2 Ltd's poor communication that she personally delivered more than 1,000 leaflets explaining to residents in Brent how the construction of a vent shaft would affect their homes. It really is a sad indictment when a hard-pressed, stretched Member of Parliament has to do the job of an organisation in receipt of such vast sums of taxpayers' money and do the communications on behalf of the project.

Construction is due to begin next year, as the Minister will know. Not only are construction timetables not yet available to residents, but the newly appointed construction commissioner will apparently be unable to intervene in individual cases. The newly appointed, interim construction commissioner came to see me in my office. I have to say that I still question his independence, particularly when I am told that any correspondence should be sent to HS2's office. That hardly gives the impression that that commissioner is totally independent from HS2. I said to him—and I think this is fair—that my constituents and others deserve to be informed of what is happening well in advance of construction works. At the moment, if they want to find out anything, they have to ring an HS2 helpdesk, and they have no information about who exactly they are dealing with and no named person to deal with. HS2 can honestly be said to have not taken a proactive approach to engagement with the community, but is relying on a reactive strategy, putting the onus on the very people who are adversely affected by the plans.

To pursue this issue, I have invited the construction commissioner to attend the HS2 compensation and mitigation forum, a group in the House that was founded by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) back in 2012. I hope the construction commissioner will come to our next meeting in a few weeks' time and reassure us that communication on construction matters, not least with MPs and their offices but also with our constituents, will be a priority. I would like to ask the Minister now whether he will talk with the newly appointed, interim independent construction commissioner and try to ensure that when he arrives at that meeting he has more to tell us that we can pass on to our constituents than when he first came for his courtesy call on me last week.

When there is one commissioner, another commissioner always comes along, and in this case it is the residents commissioner. We all welcomed the appointment of the residents commissioner last year, who we thought was there to assist specifically with communication. I have met her several times. I have to say that she is a thoroughly nice woman and I am always encouraged by her intentions. However, the reality is that the impact is very low. First, the Minister should be aware that she, too, does not appear to be independent. She reports to the HS2 chairman, she is paid by HS2 Ltd and she sits in its offices. Again, that does not strike me as an independent operation. The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority certainly does not sit in the House of Commons, but instead sits down the road and is truly seen to be independent. It is nothing to do with MPs, as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker; in fact, it seeks to regulate what MPs do in their expenses.

Secondly, the residents commissioner only makes recommendations to the chairman. They are in no way enforceable. That seems to me to be pretty weak and to lack teeth. Thirdly, she cannot intervene in individual cases either, which prompts the ongoing question of who my constituents can go to when problems arise. Of course, they go to their MP, and, as we have heard, when MPs have to distribute leaflets with information about a Government project, their offices become only too hard pressed and the burden that disproportionately falls upon them becomes quite tremendous.

The result is a lack of confidence. Residents along the line do not have the confidence that the residents commissioner is a credible independent figure, and thus her role to scrutinise HS2's communications has, I believe, so far been pretty ineffective. I stress that it is no reflection on her individually. The problem comes from the job and the description that has been given to her and from the approach that HS2 has to this project, which has always been, "We're doing it whatever; we have the mandate to do it, and you are just getting in the way." That is the message that has come across to our constituents. When it comes to those two commissioners, it is fair to say that constituents feel that all roads lead to HS2, which is effectively both judge and jury in all circumstances.

I do not know whether the Minister has had a chance to read it, but in March this year the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, on which I happen to sit, produced a report on HS2's communications, following the damning report on its communications by the parliamentary and health services ombudsman. The ombudsman determined that HS2's actions towards a community in Staffordshire had constituted maladministration. The Committee concluded that "the necessary fundamental changes" had not taken place, and that

> "the continuing existence of a culture of defensive communication and misinformation within a public body, responsible for the delivery of such a large and highly controversial project, is not acceptable".

I think you would agree with me, Mr Deputy Speaker, that that is not acceptable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher) has been working alongside Jonathan and Elaine Loescher and the wider community at the heart of the ombudsman's report for some time now, and in spite of them receiving an apology by HS2 Ltd, the Loeschers have contacted me—and I have been in contact with my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth—to say that very little has changed in practice. HS2 Ltd's treatment of residents remains poor; it simply does not prioritise community engagement. In fact, there is no one to hold its feet to the fire or to ensure that HS2 Ltd fulfils its responsibilities to residents. Sometimes it feels as if I am the only person holding its feet to the fire on many issues.

I do not know whether the Minister is aware of it, but only a couple of weeks ago, HS2 advertised for four newly qualified graduates to work for six months, at salaries up to approximately £30,000—I am quoting from the advert—to "write the story" of HS2. I have been a Minister, and it sounds to me that the record-keeping

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in the Department and in HS2 Ltd is so poor that they do not know how they have got to where they have got to, so they are bringing people in to do some forensic analysis to try to dig out the policy. Frankly, that is not good enough, and it reflects some of the chaos that I see from the outside as being evidence of what is happening in the organisation.

Ultimately, the two commissioners—the construction commissioner and the residents commissioner—have been put in place to hold HS2 to account, and I do not think that the drafting of those jobs and the way in which their remit will operate in each case is going to fit into the Bill. I know that I bang on a bit about HS2 from time to time, but I and others have put considerable thought into the amendments tabled to the Bill, which is currently in the House of Lords.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): My right hon. Friend may well bang on and on, but she has many admirers in this place for doing so on such an important issue. My constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) are going to be affected by phase 2a, so I encourage her to go on banging on.

Mrs Gillan: I am grateful for the break in proceedings and for that kind intervention by my hon. Friend. As I have said before, it is never possible to over-flatter a politician! I feel passionately about this issue, as do many others, and if I have the freedom to speak, I am very happy to reflect the views of others. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) has himself worked very hard on trying to mitigate this scheme. In fact, I am now alongside two Staffordshire Members. I am second to none in my admiration for the support that I have had from my colleagues who, I think, feel as strongly as I do.

At the time of Third Reading, I tabled amendments proposing the introduction of an adjudicator—an independent regulatory body that could deal with complaints swiftly and fairly. People who are affected by the scheme would have confidence and faith in such a body, and I think that it is still badly needed. I urge the Minister to think about the amendments again before Royal Assent, to accept them and to try to create a body that would give confidence and faith to the people who are being so badly affected.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): As my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) is aware, we have a serious problem in our part of Staffordshire. What my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) is suggesting would help enormously to deal with the frequent complaints about the manner in which HS2 Ltd is operating, which is causing local people enormous anxiety. I shall be seeing some of them over the weekend to discuss these very questions. I am deeply grateful to my right hon. Friend, and totally endorse her proposal.

Mrs Gillan: I thank my hon. Friend for what he says. We spent some time drafting the amendments, and some serious and senior legal brains were brought to bear. The Minister is new to his post, so he might not be as familiar with this project as the rest of us, and this would be a good opportunity for him to review my proposal. Then at least I would feel that it had been examined and considered before being rejected, whereas at the moment I feel that the proposal was rejected out of hand because it came from someone whose constituency was affected so badly by the scheme.

I am astounded by the lack of information that HS2 Ltd has about communications. I do not know whether the Minister has had a chance to look at the answers that have been supplied to my written questions over the past fortnight. In preparation for the debate, I asked for the annual budgets for communication and engagement by HS2 Ltd since 2010. The response stated that the figures could not be provided, as

"the amount of time spent on communication and engagement activity is not centrally tracked."

I am astounded that, in spite of all the external criticism and scrutiny of its poor communications, HS2 Ltd is not even keeping track of what it is spending, how it is spending, and who is doing what.

Sir William Cash: The cost of HS2 started at £30 billion, then rose to £50 billion, and is now increasing further. According to the latest estimates from all the experts, it is rising exponentially. One can imagine that it might end up being £80 billion or even more, in which case it would cost more than Hinkley Point, the Heathrow development and a development at Gatwick, if that were also to take place. We are talking about a payment of massive sums for what many people regard as a badly thought out project that will cause a great deal of anxiety and trouble.

Mrs Gillan: It is a case of the three Hs: Hinkley, Heathrow, and HS2; and the greatest of them all is HS2. The Minister has probably heard me say this before, but I still think that the project is so gargantuan that it deserves to be overseen by a dedicated Minister who would keep an eye on it. A sum of £80 billion is larger than the budgets of many Departments of State. It is absurd to think that five Secretaries of State and as many Ministers have overseen this project over a comparatively short period. The lack of continuity is ridiculous. Now we have lost the chief executive, of course, who is going to Rolls-Royce. We have an interim chief executive—Mr Hill, I believe—who comes from CH2M, which has just received a bonus from HS2 for some of its works, and I believe is still in the running to bid for contracts. The arm's length relationship with contractors does not seem to have been maintained in the current circumstances.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire asked me to raise particular communications flaws in the need-to-sell scheme. Apparently, constituents still find it difficult to speak to a named lead on their case and cannot retrieve information from HS2 Ltd until they have made an application. On Tuesday, in reply to a written question inquiring about the effectiveness of the scheme, the responding Minister told me that it was operating fairly and as intended. That is certainly not reflected in my right hon. Friend's remarks to me, so that is worth looking into. I hope that the Minister will respond positively to that.

I will not go into the inadequacy of the legislative process through which the HS2 Bill is being put through this House and the House of Lords. That is a matter for

another time but, needless to say, the process itself causes a great deal of confusion and consternation. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright) raised with me the excellent point that better communication and provision of information would have negated the need for the House of Commons Select Committee to hear so many petitions. Constructive engagement beforehand could have promoted a dialogue away from the Committee Room, and thus speeded up the passage of the Bill. I think that people felt the only way they could communicate with HS2 Ltd was by depositing a petition and coming along in person to make their case.

I also wish to highlight the poor practice of corridor deals during the Select Committee process. The relocation of the construction haul road in Great Missenden in my constituency was agreed in principle between Buckinghamshire County Council and HS2 Ltd in such a deal. The promise by the promoter altered the evidence given thereafter in Committee and, as it stands, the pledge has not been fulfilled.

The nature of these corridor deals means that vital discussions are not transparent and assurances cannot be enforced. In this case, my constituents feel they are left in a very uncertain and unclear position as to HS2's intentions towards a traffic management plan that will have an enormous local impact at Great Missenden.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam also asked me to raise the unsatisfactory fact that constituents need to resort to submitting freedom of information requests to obtain meaningful and detailed information. Once again, such information should have been available from HS2 Ltd at the outset, and it is a great shame that it does not display greater transparency. It must understand that I, as an MP—I think I am speaking for my hon. Friends in the Chamber with an interest in the matter—have always approached this on a twin-track basis. If I could not persuade the Government that this was not the scheme in the right place at the right time, and going to the right places, I would be working hard to mitigate its effect on my constituency, and especially on the area of outstanding natural beauty. However, it always seems to me that HS2 thinks that MPs are working against it, yet if this scheme is going to go through, we will have to accept that, but we need to work with HS2 to improve the outcomes for the people we represent.

Jeremy Lefroy: Phase 2a has not reached Parliament yet, but the effects of blight are felt by my constituents, as they are by those of my hon. Friends the Members for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher), for Stone (Sir William Cash), for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and for Crewe and Nantwich (Edward Timpson). These constituents feel that they are not being given the necessary support for planning if they will have to move house. Some of my constituents' homes will be demolished in phase 2a, but they are being told that because parliamentary consent for that phase has not been given—the matter is not even before Parliament—nothing can be done, even though they have to make plans over the next four or five years to build a new house. Has my right hon. Friend come across such instances?

Mrs Gillan: What is so depressing is the fact that the lessons from phase 1 that we have tried to point out do not seem to have been learned, and the mistakes are being repeated in phase 2. The burden of supplementing HS2's poor performance has certainly fallen disproportionately on local authorities. I am fearful about the next part of the process and the planning that will follow, because there will be more and more burdens on our local authorities, whose budgets—let's face it—are stretched as it is.

Sir William Cash: As my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford implied, the fact is that whatever is decided regarding the current Bill as it goes through the House of Lords will inevitably be applied as a precedent for the next Bill. That is why we need to follow closely what my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham says. I congratulate her on doing everything possible to get this right now.

Mrs Gillan: Separately from giving evidence and making recommendations on how we should change the procedures of the House, I think that everyone would agree that it is inequitable that our Standing Orders prevent Members of Parliament from appearing as petitioners in the other place. The Chairman of the Committee had no choice but to interpret the Standing Orders in that way, but to remove the right of advocacy from Members of Parliament seems self-defeating and inadequate, and I am sure that Members of both Houses will want that to change.

The burden on local authorities, especially in relation to communications, has been astronomical. The leader of Buckinghamshire County Council told the House of Lords HS2 Select Committee on Monday that the council had spent £110,264 in 2015-16 on community liaison relating to HS2. That was entirely to cover for HS2's poor communications. The council has asked for retrospective compensation to recover those costs, which I think is entirely reasonable. I hope that the Minister will agree to that request. If he cannot do so at the Dispatch Box today, perhaps he will do me the courtesy of looking into the matter to see how we can compensate our local authorities.

I would like the Minister to note that I find it incredible that a county council can provide actual figures for communication and community engagement, down to the last pound, whereas HS2 Ltd cannot do so. Indeed, the county council has since incurred further costs in assisting HS2 Ltd's groundwork investigations, as its staff are consistently used to help to mediate between HS2 Ltd and residents when intentions to access land have not been adequately communicated. HS2 Ltd could and should be doing that job satisfactorily on its own, if only it had the will. Prior to the introduction of the local engagement managers, local authorities were expected to plug the gap in communication and to provide residents with information that was not readily available from HS2 Ltd. The Minister should bear in mind the fact that that was all done at the councils' own expense.

It is not just local authorities, parish councils and residents that are affected in this way; HS2 Ltd's poor engagement reaches into a wider constituency. I have been contacted by the Woodland Trust, which reports that it has not been engaged on the independent review of biodiversity, as recommended in the House of Commons Select Committee, and that it might now have to petition the House of Lords without the information it needs. It also tells me that information regarding third-party

[Mrs Gillan]

planning applications has not been forthcoming from HS2 Ltd, and that that has caused unacceptable delays in compensation payments. A project of this size that brings with it such a heavy burden on our environment, in particular the violation of the AONB in the Chilterns, really should ensure that it deals with the detail and follows up with the environmental organisations that are trying to help to mitigate the project's impact on the environment.

I ask the Minister to take note of the ongoing communication failures and to ensure that he will make sorting them out his priority. This catalogue of errors has considerably hindered HS2 Ltd's operation—it is the company's fault—and is costing the taxpayer even more money. The Minister needs to consider creating a scrutiny body with teeth to hold the organisation to account, especially with construction fast approaching.

HS2 Ltd needs a better attitude towards the affected people. When I was preparing for this debate, I thought of two main themes that I wanted to leave with the Minister. First, I want to ensure that there is an overhaul of the communication and engagement strategy and the attitudes of HS2 Ltd. That should be considered at the highest level of the Department for Transport. Secondly, echoing the interventions from my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I want to ensure that this communication calamity never happens again. Residents who received substandard treatment during phase 1 should be the exception, not the rule. If residents are going to be treated the same way under phase 2, the taxpayer will be paying even more for the project than is anticipated.

We have to reconsider how we do major infrastructure projects. We had an announcement this week on Heathrow, which I welcomed because it will be of economic benefit to Buckinghamshire, my constituency and my residents. We finally got a decision after the Davies commission and years of investigation—the project has been examined from every angle. HS2, however, was written on the back of an envelope by a Labour Transport Minister and immediately adopted by the coalition Government. All those processes were not followed. One system is far too long and the other is far too short. We need to find a way of ensuring that our infrastructure projects are the right projects in the right places, and that communications and engagement are of the highest standard, otherwise greater problems will emerge as such projects progress.

I do not usually talk at such great length and did not realise that I was going to have the luxury of taking so many interventions. I thank my colleagues in the Chamber for their support today, particularly those who must remain silent. I hope that the Minister will assure me that he will use his influence radically to re-evaluate how HS2 Ltd deals with our constituents, and that he will embed a culture of respect, transparency, openness and improved communications.

4.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) on securing this debate on the effectiveness of the communication and engagement undertaken by HS2 Ltd. I must begin by acknowledging her tireless work, which has had a measurable effect on the Government's approach. She also highlighted the communications problems that have been a part of the project to date, about which I have heard not only from my right hon. Friend today, and previously, but from other colleagues around the House. The main thing that she asked of me in her closing remarks was whether I would undertake to look at the communication thus far and improve it. I can assure her on that right now, and I will go into this in a bit more detail.

Let me start by putting the HS2 project into context. I know that we might disagree on this, but I believe that HS2 is a vital strategic issue for our whole country. Our rail industry is a huge success and—

5 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

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

Andrew Jones: Our rail industry is a huge success, and that growth is causing huge problems for the capacity of the network. We need to put capacity into the network, which is what HS2 is about. We need to recognise that it will bring connectivity and capacity on the vital routes between London and the west midlands, Crewe, Leeds, Manchester, south Yorkshire and the east midlands. It will also create space on our networks for other new routes, and give a boost to our regional and national economies. It is vital for the jobs it will create.

Sir William Cash: I know that the Minister is only using those things as a backdrop to the points he is going to deal with in a moment on the specifics that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) so ably put forward. Will he accept, however, that report after report has challenged the assumptions on which he has just made his remarks? Although the vote in the House of Commons demonstrated a huge majority for the project, the reports that have been coming out over the past few years have universally condemned the project, on cost and increasing cost grounds, and on many of the assumptions on which he has just put forward his case.

Andrew Jones: It would be a little extreme to say that all the reports that have been written on this project are universally condemning it—I do not believe that to be the case. I recognise that some voices have cast doubts upon the project, or have said that we should be doing a different project or that there could be an alternative use of public money, but there is now real momentum behind this project, which had overwhelming support in this House, with the votes on Second and Third Reading of the phase 1 hybrid Bill being passed by nine to one in favour.

When construction begins next year, attitudes will change on this again. We intend to start construction shortly after Royal Assent, which we anticipate will be towards Christmas or in January, depending on the progress that their lordships make; the commencement of work should be in the spring. At that point, the debate will change. It will not be about whether or not we should be doing this project, but about how we can maximise its benefits, because this project is going to

happen. When the construction does start, HS2 will rapidly become the largest infrastructure project in Europe. A project of the scale, complexity and duration of HS2's nature requires engagement across many communities, organisations and individuals.

Mrs Gillan: Having just confirmed the scale and complexity of the project, does the Minister agree that it would be sensible to have a dedicated Minister for it, as it is of such size that it needs supervising closely? It is clearly out of control at the moment.

Andrew Jones: I would not say this project is out of control. The apportionment of responsibilities is mercifully way above my pay grade, but I am thoroughly enjoying having responsibility for this project, because it is an exciting one that will transform our rail industry. It is our long overdue recognition that we need to start taking responsibility for our own transport futures. We are still trading off Victorian infrastructure, which shows not only how significant the ambitions of our Victorian forefathers were, but how we need to address the situation and take responsibility for ourselves.

Let me get back to my point about the scale of the project. We are dealing with a project of enormous scale, complexity and duration, and we are talking about one of the largest communications and engagements challenges ever undertaken on an infrastructure project in this country. On a project of this scale, we cannot leave the communications and engagement to chance. The Government and those who enact the policies of the Government, such as HS2 Ltd, have a duty to communicate clearly and openly with everyone, but above all with those on whom Government policies may impact and, in some cases, disadvantage. All of that takes time, resources and professionalism. Above all, the underlying attitude has to be to treat individuals and communities with respect. That point underpinned many of the remarks of my right hon. Friend. It is very disappointing to hear that there are huge concerns about this, and that people feel that that has not happened. I personally undertake to take all the points from today's debate to HS2 Ltd, and to have further conversation about them, because the attitude that has been described is unacceptable and will have to change.

Jeremy Lefroy: I very much respect the attitude of the Minister towards the project and this debate. Will he also mention to HS2 another concern of my constituents, which is that when they are suffering from great stress as a result of this project—we are talking about some fairly elderly folk—there is no particular provision for them at their local GP surgeries to receive some kind of additional counselling to help them overcome it?

Andrew Jones: I will most certainly look into that. My hon. Friend always speaks up as a great champion for his constituency, particularly in health matters, and I am happy to take his point forward.

Communication and professionalism are the principles that HS2 must apply, but not in a profligate way. We have taken a very positive and conservative approach to publicly funded communications under this Government and the coalition Government. Basically, I am talking about doing more without spending more. By 2015, we were actually spending 47% less on communications than six years previously. HS2 must be focused in its communication.

It might just help if I explain some of the things that have happened before talking about the future. Over the past few years, HS2 Ltd has delivered what has been estimated as the largest public consultation that we have ever had in this country. Through public events, exhibitions and information boards, the company has engaged with more than 30,000 people. The High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill Select Committee has heard more than 1,578 petitions, compared with 205 petitions for the Crossrail Bill. Overall, HS2 Ltd estimates that it has interacted with more than 140,000 people, received 80,000 consultation responses, dealt with 37,000 helpdesk inquiries, engaged with 20,000 people at meetings and events and, last year, sent out approximately 396,000 pieces of literature.

All of that says to me that there are things happening in scale, but all of the concerns that have been articulated by my right hon. Friend indicate that we have much further to go in this piece.

Sir William Cash: As my hon. Friend will know, the word consultation means "I hear what you say", but it does not mean that "I will do what you ask". In fact, the attitude that has been highlighted by my right hon. and hon. Friends, and that I have had personal experience of, is that people are listened to, but then nothing much happens after that. That is called communication, not consultation.

Andrew Jones: My hon. Friend makes a legitimate point. Consultation in the worst cases can simply be a tick-box exercise—a process that has to be undertaken for lots of different elements of public policy or for planning applications. That is not good enough, but during the progress of the Bill, we have seen many changes in the original proposals, the consultation and the route and the communication around it. We are not in that place where people are just going through the exercise and not listening, but I do not want people to think that their voices will not be heard. We must ensure that people recognise that their views are respected. That goes back to my earlier point about ensuring that, underpinning everything, there is an attitude of openness and respect for individuals.

Mrs Gillan: Will the Minister give way?

Andrew Jones: I am making no progress, but yes, I will give way.

Mrs Gillan: I am sure the Minister will—he has a good 20 minutes, and he thought he was going to have only 10, so he has plenty of time.

Yes, in my area, for example, we have had route changes, but the proposal that HS2 should come up in the middle of the football pitch in the middle of Old Amersham was geologically incompetent, and it had to be changed because it was impossible for it to come up in that particular area, so they moved it along to Mantles wood. However, the change was made by the Select Committee here in the House of Commons on additional provision 4, so it was not HS2 or the Department that were listening; it was actually the House of Commons

[Mrs Gillan]

Select Committee—our colleagues—that was listening and made changes. We in the Chilterns area would still like further tunnelling to protect the valuable and fragile landscape. However, that is rapidly diminishing into the great beyond and is impossible, but I am hoping that, maybe, the Minister will give me encouragement that he is listening and that he could achieve that for us.

Andrew Jones: I am, indeed, listening. I am not entirely sure that I can promise extra tunnelling in the Chilterns—that was a very big ask. We have, as a House, and through this project, been over that ground in some detail. However, the point remains that consultations are to genuinely listen to local input so that projects can be improved, whichever part of our public services it is. That cannot mean that everybody gets what they want—that is not possible—but it certainly means that people should be treated with respect and that it is not just a tick-box exercise.

The point about the numbers I was going through earlier is that there is already scale to what is happening. These are big numbers, but the big numbers have to be backed by practical help. In April 2014, an improved assistance package for property owners close to the route was announced. I would stress that the Government are committed to fairly compensating land and property owners directly affected by HS2. Most large infrastructure projects compensate property owners only when statutory compensation measures apply. Given the time it will take to develop HS2, which is a most unique project, the Government recognise that earlier discretionary schemes help those property owners who are most severely affected by the proposals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) raised the point about those most affected by blight in phase 2a. They can submit a blight notice, and that means, potentially, face value for property—10% homeowner's payment and costs. I will write to my hon. Friend with details of that so he can pass those on to his constituents and anybody else who may contact him.

Residents with properties on the full phase 1 and phase 2a routes currently have access to a package of compensation measures and assistance. Overall, these are available much more widely than for other infrastructure projects, and, indeed, offer more choice. We intend to bring forward proposals for long-term property compensation and assistance schemes when the HS2 phase 2b announcement is made later this year.

The need-to-sell scheme is, I believe, operating fairly. I will of course pick up the points my right hon. Friend mentioned. We already have updated guidance to reflect learning from the scheme since its inception in January last year. In particular, a change made earlier this year allows a successful applicant to choose one of the two initial valuers, either from HS2 Ltd's pool or any Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors-registered valuer. While that change is recent, initial results show fewer properties need further valuations to determine their fair price. That is an issue the right hon. Lady has raised, and I am grateful to her for her contribution. It was alluded to by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General, when he talked about how increased and improved communication may have mitigated the need for more petitions as the Bill progressed.

A residents' charter has been introduced setting out clear commitments by HS2 Ltd to local communities. Through the charter, HS2 Ltd pledges to communicate plainly; respond to inquiries quickly and efficiently; and promote awareness of all discretionary property schemes. Holding HS2 Ltd to the standards of the charter is the independent residents commissioner Deborah Fazan. I have met her already, and I intend to have a regular series of meetings with her and, indeed, others, to make sure they are taking up and following through any issues raised with me by colleagues.

HS2 Ltd has introduced a robust, verified complaints-handling process which includes an independent review stage that meets ISO 9001—the nationally accredited standard. The real prize, of course, is to avoid as far as possible giving cause for complaint. That means building HS2 carefully and correctly. An environmental statement accompanied the introduction of the hybrid Bill, and further environmental statements have accompanied the additional provisions considered by the Select Committee. Changes made in the Select Committee mean less land take, more noise barriers, and longer tunnels. On the latter point, I again acknowledge the successful campaigning by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham to lengthen the tunnel through her constituency.

Sir William Cash: It has been brought to my attention that there have been proposals for tunnelling through sand and gravel, and that in such circumstances an enormous of time will be wasted given that it is not possible to do that because it just falls in.

Andrew Jones: I am not a geologist, but I am aware of concerns about the ground conditions on the route for phase 1 and phase 2a. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) has highlighted the challenges regarding salt mines. These issues will be tackled in full and in detail by geologists. I recognise the challenges involved in a project with significant tunnelling, but, as a country, we have learned more about that through the progress made on Crossrail.

My right hon. Friend has made very clear the frustrations of not only her constituents but those of her colleagues' constituents. HS2 Ltd acknowledges that it has not always got communications right, as we know. It did not in the case of Flats Lane near Lichfield, as the parliamentary and health service ombudsman's report and the inquiry by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee laid bare. I am not here to make excuses for the company. We must deal with all those affected with fairness, and fairness requires the highest standards of engagement. I believe that HS2 is an organisation that is learning, and it needs to learn and improve over time. Communications on phase 2 reflect the lessons of past engagement. I cannot correct what has happened before, but I can seek to learn from it, to make sure that the company has learned from it, and to correct and improve things for the future. Much has taken place and much more is planned.

On phase 2a, HS2 Ltd has seen 2,184 people at 13 information events held this month and last month, as well as numerous meetings with parish councils and action groups. It has also met individuals directly and indirectly affected by the 2a line of route. In addition, 1,487 people have been seen at phase 2a property events

this year, and 1,442 were seen in 2015. On phase 2b, the company has already seen 6,458 people at nine information events held in South Yorkshire, plus a further 123 at appointment events. For me, that shows how much demand for information there is from the public. They know that this is a big deal, and they need to know what it means for them. High-level communication has to be at the core of a successful project. Following a decision on the phase 2b route, the company has plans for a series of further engagement events, details of which will be made known once confirmed.

Vital as good engagement on phase 2 is, the first phase of HS2 is poised at a significant threshold—the start of construction. HS2 Ltd will specify the behaviours it expects of its contractors in their engagement with residents and communities. For contractors working on HS2, key performance indicators on community engagement will form part of their contracts, and HS2 Ltd will measure their approach to this. The phase that we are entering will see many more people working not just on HS2 but all through the HS2 supply chain. The number of potential interactions between members of the public and the project will therefore increase. It is important to note that this is not just an HS2 Ltd issue; it is an HS2 Ltd and supply chain issue.

Mrs Gillan: One of the key things I have tried to put across during this debate is the fact that people do not have confidence in HS2 or in the independent commissioners who are supposed to represent their interests if things go wrong. Does the Minister agree that for HS2 to have an interim chief executive who comes from a contractor that has already received contracts from HS2, and that is now bidding for further contracts from HS2, makes it look as though there is a conflict of interest? Does the Minister agree that it hardly engenders confidence in the public that the project is being anything other than steamrollered through by people who are connected and who do not share the best interests of those who are affected by the scheme? Is that a relationship that the Minister is happy with? I think that there is a conflict of interest.

Andrew Jones: We sought to make sure that the project continued in its critical phase of delivery when Mr Kirby left to join Rolls-Royce. People leave companies all the time. He had a very good offer to go into Rolls-Royce, and he has taken it. "Man leaves company" is not necessarily news, but it would be news if the project faltered. We seek to secure continuity of delivery while we engage in a full and open recruitment process for a replacement for Mr Kirby.

I understand all the points that have been made about trust and communication. Trust is easy to lose and difficult to gain. As the project develops, the company will simply have to work much harder to rebuild trust. It takes ages to rebuild something that can be lost in a moment. As I have said, we cannot correct what has happened in the past. I know that there are frustrations from communities, councils and colleagues here. We have to learn from them and put in place measures in HS2 and the HS2 supply chain, with a means of appeal. We can come on to the commissioners in a moment. Those have to be the principles by which we can plan for the future. The company is developing its plans for working with contractors to deliver engagement plans for each area, and they will be captured in a public code of construction practice.

An announcement will be made shortly on HS2 Ltd's appointment of a director of community engagement, who will answer directly to the CEO. In addition, HS2 Ltd has recruited engagement managers for the phase 1 route, and their numbers have increased from six earlier this year to 26 today. They will be the main points of contact for local communities and will be responsible for acting on the concerns of those communities. Moreover, the engagement managers will be responsible for ensuring that the issues that are raised with them are addressed by HS2 Ltd in a timely and open manner.

As a statutory undertaker, HS2 Ltd has been required to appoint an independent construction commissioner. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham highlighted her meeting with Gareth Epps, who was appointed to the role on an interim basis in July. His is an interim role, but we envisage that it will increase after Royal Assent. It would be inappropriate to start adding to the cost base by allocating offices and taking on staff until we have clear Royal Assent. We intend to make sure that that role is independent and away from HS2 Ltd.

Sir William Cash: I want to use this opportunity to register my concern, about which I am writing to the persons responsible, regarding the temporary construction facility of a railhead near Stone, in my constituency, which will affect Swynnerton, Eccleshall and Stone itself—as well as Yarnfield, of course, which is where I am going on Saturday. I just thought I would get that on the record so that the Minister could pass on that message to the people he is talking about.

Andrew Jones: That message is now firmly on the record. It is inevitable that when projects of great scale arrive in any area, they will attract enormous public interest, public concern and, in many cases, public enthusiasm. We need to make sure that we get this right, and Members of Parliament have an important role as a natural place for a resident who is concerned about a national policy initiative to go.

The construction commissioner will mediate in unresolved disputes between HS2 Ltd and individuals or bodies, including under a planned small claims scheme. He will also monitor complaints and advise on how to reduce them where possible, and he will scrutinise HS2 Ltd and the community engagement work of its contractors, to provide a clear steer for the company. As I have said, following Royal Assent we expect it to become a permanent role, and I intend to have regular contact so that I am fully informed of any issues up and down the line.

I have alluded to the variety of communities and groups with an interest in HS2. The company understands the importance of a tailored approach. Its equality, diversity and inclusion team is at the forefront of engaging with harder-to-reach communities, including perhaps those with a language barrier. There have been concerns in the Camden area, for instance. That highlights the importance of local representatives, so local government has a significant role to play in HS2.

HS2 Ltd provides briefing sessions for local authority elected members and chief officers, and it meets, briefs and seeks input from them. I have met authority leaders

[Andrew Jones]

in Birmingham and Manchester in the past few days. They are looking at the project in a very encouraging and exciting way and are considering how they will be able to redevelop their areas when the project lands. However, it is not just about redevelopment; it is also about construction work. HS2 Ltd, local authorities and other bodies, such as Highways England, have to engage properly in order to plan the building process effectively.

Mrs Gillan: Will the Minister give an undertaking that he will look at my amendments relating to the adjudicator?

Andrew Jones: I am coming to that and the answer is yes.

HS2 Ltd also has to engage with business organisations, to ensure that they know how to take advantage of the opportunities provided by HS2. I want HS2 to be a project that is from the UK for the UK, with UK contractors bidding for and winning business.

This is a project that matters to everyone, and I believe that it is in the national interest. Of course, it matters particularly to those whom it directly affects, and doing what is right by them includes excellent communications and engagement. That is what I and, most importantly, those along the route are entitled to expect from HS2, and it has given me that commitment. It is seeking to learn and build on what has happened before.

I will visit the HS2 offices in Birmingham shortly to review the community engagement plans. I will sit down with the team to discuss them and I will go through all the points that have been made by colleagues today. I can certainly provide an undertaking to review the amendments, as requested by my right hon. Friend. I will also consider her point about compensation to local authorities and write to her.

The point that I really want to make is that we cannot correct the past. This is a project that is happening. I believe that it is exciting and necessary and that it will transform our rail industry and provide a huge opportunity to regenerate large swathes of big cities across our country. Ultimately, I believe that it is a project that we will be proud of as a nation, but we have to make sure that we deal with the issues that have been raised, including building trust and communicating better. I can certainly give colleagues the undertaking that they can raise issues with me and that I will then take them up with HS2 right away. I want to make sure that, from the moment we set about building the project and right along the length of its line, people are treated with openness and respect, and that through that we can build the trust that has been missing, as judged from the comments of colleagues today.

Question put and agreed to.

5.29 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 27 October 2016

[Mr Peter Bone *in the Chair*]

Defence Expenditure

[Relevant documents: Second Report from the Defence Committee of Session 2015-16, Shifting the goalposts? Defence expenditure and the 2% pledge, HC 494, and the Government response, HC 465.]

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): If Members wish to remove their jackets, that is totally in order. I apologise for the fact that one of the green clocks is not working, but the other two are.

1.30 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Second Report from the Defence Committee of Session 2015-16, Shifting the goalposts? Defence expenditure and the 2% pledge, HC 494, and the Government response, HC 465.

It is a privilege to present the findings of our report entitled "Shifting the goalposts? Defence expenditure and the 2% pledge" to the public once again—it was published some time ago. I doubt whether anybody two or three years ago would have registered the significance of the term "2% of GDP" in connection with defence, because it was only relatively recently that the prospect of Britain's falling below the NATO recommended minimum expenditure on defence for the first time came to the public's attention. For many years, we spent a great deal of money on defence. The purpose of the report is to track the history of that expenditure to check the extent to which we are continuing to meet the NATO minimum and to see whether there has been any financial jiggery-pokery to enable us to do so.

In a nutshell, we found that no rules have been broken. The Government's figures and methodology conform to the NATO guidelines. It is true that, on the basis of including such things as armed forces pensions, which were not previously included but are allowed to be included, the Government will reach the 2% minimum. I use the word "minimum" advisedly, because that is what it is. It is not a target, but the minimum expected of each NATO country to contribute as a proportion of their gross domestic product to their defence. One could argue that it remains a target for countries that have never managed to reach it, but for those of us who have always exceeded it, often by very large amounts, it remains a floor, not a target, let alone a ceiling.

I know it is frowned upon to use props in debates in any Chamber, but the sheet of paper I have is so vivid that, even at a considerable distance and through the lens of a television camera, it is easy to read. The bar graph shows a consistent and steady decline in the percentage of GDP spent on defence since the mid-1950s. In the mid-1950s, we spent more than 7% of GDP on defence. In about 1963-64, that downward-falling graph crossed the upward-rising graph of what we spent as a proportion of GDP on welfare. Far from spending more on defence than on welfare, as we did until about 1963, we spend six times on welfare what we spend on defence. In the mid-1980s, we were spending roughly the same amount on defence, education and health. Since then, the descending graphs for defence expenditure and the rising graph for education and health have similarly crossed over, and we have declined closer to the 2% minimum. We now spend almost four times on health and about two and a half times on education what we spend on defence.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I am interested in the chart that my right hon. Friend is describing, which appears as a corrigendum to our report. More interesting than the three Departments he mentions is the fact that, during that period, spending on overseas aid increased by a significant amount while spending on defence declined. Is that not a significant correlation?

Dr Lewis: It is significant, and it is indeed included on the chart. The only reason why I did not mention it is that, in comparison with the total spent on the other high-spending Departments, it is a relatively small proportion of our GDP. However, my hon. Friend is absolutely right because, such has been the decline in defence, our commitment to spend 0.7% on international development now amounts to one third of the total that we spend on defence, which comes in just above the 2% minimum.

When we called the report "Shifting the goalposts?", we put a question mark at the end because we did not wish to prejudge it. There are two ways in which the Government could be said to have shifted the goalposts: first, by including things they are not allowed to include—we absolved them of that—and, secondly, by including things that they are allowed to include but never included in the past, which would mean that we are not comparing like with like in terms of our previous methods of calculating UK defence expenditure. The Defence Committee inquiry found that the NATO minimum would not have been fulfilled if UK accounting practices had not been modified, albeit in ways that are permitted by the NATO guidelines.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that some of the money that is counted in the 0.7% official development assistance is also counted towards the 2%? I might take issue with some of his line of argument, but it sounds like he is arguing that that double counting should not be double counted.

Dr Lewis: We did not find a hard and fast case of double counting, but we noticed in the past that there are items of expenditure that are highly relevant to defence and security that could fairly and usefully be catered for by the international development funds. Given that the 0.7% is protected, and given that one sometimes hears stories of the Department for International Development struggling to find creative ways of spending the money it has to dispose of, there is an opportunity, particularly in relation to soft power, to use elements of the international development money for measures that add to our security.

Of course, this is a rather crude measure, because gross domestic product can vary. If this country's gross domestic product goes down but we spend the same

[Dr Julian Lewis]

amount on defence, it might appear that we are doing more when we are doing nothing of the sort. Similarly, when the value of the pound changes, as has happened in the short term following the Brexit decision, we see the effect on what we are able to buy for the money we have available for defence when we purchase big-ticket items such as the P-8 maritime patrol aircraft from the Americans, although a considerable amount of that purchase will find its way to the British defence industry. What I am driving at is that perhaps we ought to be talking not about shifting the goalposts, but trying to move the benchmark.

We should be reminding people that, in the 1980s—the last time we faced a significant threat from the east in Europe in the second and closing phase of the cold war—we regularly spent between 4.5% and 5.1% of GDP on defence. The similarity lies not only in the international situation. In the 1980s, we simultaneously faced a very significant terrorist threat in the form of Irish republican terrorism. We now face a similar threat in the form of fundamentalist Islamist terrorism.

It therefore seems appropriate to note that and, in the week that we were told that the first of the successor submarines for the nuclear deterrent will be named HMS Dreadnought, to remember a previous HMS Dreadnought, the battleship that changed the whole nature of sea power as far as capital ships were concerned in the years approaching the first world war. A famous naval arms race was going on between this country and Germany and, around 1909, there was a great deal of controversy that the German navy was drawing level with the grand fleet of the British Royal Navy in terms of dreadnought battleships. A public campaign was mounted, encapsulated by the phrase of the Unionist politician George Wyndham:

"We want eight and we won't wait!"

My view, which I believe is shared by at least some other members of the Defence Committee, is that a new benchmark is perhaps needed for the percentage of GPD to be spent on defence: "We want three to keep us free!" In reality, if we go on at the 2% level, we are in danger of finding ourselves incapable of meeting the threats that face us today and will continue to face us in future.

Mr James Gray: We want four, or we'll show the Government the door.

Dr Lewis: As always, I am delighted to be trumped by my hon. Friend in that direction. That is an absolutely splendid intervention and I thank him for it. I hope the Minister will go one better even and think of something to rhyme with five.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Yes, the threshold is important for a whole number of reasons, and we want to look at the overall level and get that focus of Government, but it is not the most important thing. The right hon. Gentleman might be about to come to this point, but we ought to be pressing the Government on what capability we are getting as a consequence in terms not only of materiel, but of manpower, and experienced manpower in particular.

Dr Lewis: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely spot on, and of course that is what underlies my remarks about the fact that the figures are only, at best, the crudest guides. Nevertheless, they give us some sort of measure of comparison. Spending a certain amount of money on defence—or, should we say, investing it in defence—is not a sufficient condition for the reason that the vice-chairman of the Committee has just explained. It is, however, a necessary condition: if we do not spend enough, we cannot possibly have the potential. If we have enough to spend, we can consider how to ensure that we spend it in the most efficient and productive ways.

At this point, I pay tribute to the staff who help the Defence Committee to prepare our reports and, in particular, to one member of staff, Dr Megan Edwards, who did all the background research for the appendices to the report. They show, on as near as it is humanly possible to express the same terms, how much we have spent every year since 1955-56 up to the present day. That sort of original research work is of lasting value, because it sets into context the minuscule efforts that we make these days in comparison with the efforts that we had to make in the past. The reason that I single out Dr Edwards is that today is her last day working as a specialist member of the staff of the Defence Committee—our loss will be the Cabinet Office's gain, and we wish her well in her new post and congratulate her on it.

Another aspect of the financial calculations that causes particular concern is the constant emphasis on efficiency savings. The most recent tranche of efficiency savings that the Government required from the Ministry of Defence was, I believe, some £0.5 billion, just before the 2015 strategic defence and security review. Some estimates put the aggregated total of efficiency saving requirements in recent years at something in excess of £1 billion, carried forward year on year. Theoretically, savings are ploughed back into the MOD. In practice, I understand from people who know about such things, it is hard to track that money, to apply those notional savings in concrete terms and to see where exactly the savings have gone in terms of new capacity.

A few days ago, on 18 October, that matter came up during a hearing on the Ministry of Defence's annual report and accounts for 2015-16. The Defence Committee was interviewing Mr Stephen Lovegrove, the new permanent secretary at the MOD; Lieutenant General Mark Poffley, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff for military capability; and Ms Louise Tulett, director general of finance at the MOD. They made an impressive trio of witnesses.

At one point, it was put to the witnesses that, of the almost £26 billion of equipment commitments that came out of the SDSR, almost a quarter really was new money, nearly £11 billion was so-called headroom or contingency, which is understood to be used up at appropriate points in the programmes, but the rest of it was in fact efficiency savings. It is therefore understandable if we feel a bit worried that what seems on paper to be a substantial commitment to spending large sums of money is, in a significant respect, notional, because it is dependent on the redistribution of money that the MOD already has but is supposed to spend more efficiently in some way or another.

Mr Spellar: May we forbear on the nomenclature of the civil service—the so-called efficiency savings? Efficiency, as I understand it, is when we are running a payroll

office and using 100 people, but we bring in new equipment and only employ 50 as a result, while keeping outputs the same. Efficiency is when people find new and improved ways of undertaking their work. Everything else is cuts. We should be clear that many of the things we are discussing are not efficiency savings but cuts, and we should describe them as such.

Dr Lewis: The right hon. Gentleman perfectly exhibits the cross-party basis on which we try to find agreement on such matters in Committee, and the extent to which we succeed in doing so. He is of course absolutely right.

I do not intend to speak much longer, because it is excellent to see so many would-be contributors to this short debate, but I will first refer to the question that was put to Mr Lovegrove. We asked, basically, when the point will arrive at which an organisation can truthfully say, "We are just about as efficient as can be and, indeed, any further 'savings' that we make must amount to cutting into the bone, having already cut through the flesh." The permanent secretary's response was as follows:

> "There may be a moment at which that happens. It is not on the horizon right now. There are certainly efficiency savings that we can get at in the Department, and our focus is on doing that and seeing whether or not we can go even further. It is only at that point that we would start engaging in the kinds of conversations that you suggest."

With the greatest respect to the permanent secretary, who as I say made a good impression and was a credible witness in our examination of the annual report and accounts, we hear time and again from within the armed forces the same underlying fear: that we are in danger of creating a hollow force, which may have exquisite equipment—perhaps not enough so-called platforms, but exquisite nevertheless—but not enough people to man it.

The trouble is that short-term cuts—I beg your pardon; efficiency savings—can lead to long-term problems. That applies in particular to training. With the carriers coming on stream, the big frigate programme having to get under way and the new F-35 joint strike fighters taking over the maritime air role from the sadly missed Harriers, which will have filled too long a gap in our naval capabilities, now is the time when we should inject maximum effort into training. Yet we find ourselves in a position—perhaps for reasons of morale or under-investment, or perhaps because insufficient emphasis is being placed on defence in our national priorities—of struggling to recruit and retain the people we need even as we cut the size of the armed forces.

The Government have not broken any rules, but they have scraped over the line by the narrowest of margins. There is no guarantee that we will not dip below the 2% figure. People usually come up with the response, "Just remember that we are the second highest spender on defence in NATO." I remember that sort of argument from back in the 1980s, when people who wanted us to spend less on defence—we were spending quite a lot in those days; between 4.5% and 5%—said, "Why should we spend this amount on defence when Germany and so many other European countries spend so much less than we do?" The answer, as the author of a short and pithy letter to *The Times* pointed out, was that the countries that we were being compared with were all on our side. We have to judge our defence expenditure by what our potential adversaries spend and what defence and attack capability they get for the money that they invest.

We do not want to engage in a race to the bottom. We do not want to preen ourselves on doing a good job because people on our own side are spending even less than we are. Our percentage expenditure on defence is lower than it has ever been—even on the new calculation, it is 0.1% lower than it was in the previous financial year. Something has gone wrong with our scale of national priorities, and the purpose of the Committee's report is to draw attention to that, in the hope that the Government will renew their emphasis on their first duty: to keep our nation safe.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Order. It may help Members to know that I hope to finish this debate at around 3 o'clock. It is not my intention to put a time limit on speeches, so perhaps Members will bear that in mind.

1.54 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I will not delay everyone for long. Although the Committee found that the Government's accounting criteria fell firmly within the NATO guidelines, we also found that those criteria had been amended to include several significant items that had not previously been included when the UK calculated its defence expenditure. That is the nub of the issue that we must address. The Committee is concerned that the inclusion of such items, which were critical in attaining the 2%, could undermine the promises in the SDSR of new money for defence.

During our inquiry, there was considerable discussion of the 2% as an indicator of Britain's political willingness. Witnesses said that

> "2% is good politically"

and not to meet the 2%

> "would have been damaging to our reputation politically."

The 2% was said to have

> "a…powerful symbolic meaning".

The UK has made great play of that 2% as demonstrating its commitment to collective defence in NATO, but the inclusion of items that had not previously been included, such as pensions, has not gone unnoticed—with considerable contempt—across the alliance. As well as being a member of the Defence Committee, I represent the UK on the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and I have found that other countries, when talking about their expenditure and accepting that it does not reach 2%, take great delight in pointing out that their figures do not include pensions, as they have no wish to use creative accounting to bolster their spending. That is divisive within NATO and damages our credibility and capability to defend our shores and those of our allies.

Our report highlighted that 2% should be a minimum, not a target, and certainly should not be seen as an indicator of capability or capacity, or give a false glow of competency and readiness. The report also urged the Government to provide a calculation of what defence expenditure would be if we left out the new items such as pensions and used the same items as we had under the 2010 accounting rules. We still await those figures.

[Mrs Madeleine Moon]

A perfect storm is building of cuts to personnel, cuts to training, problems in procurement and gaps in capability. With the 2%, there is a disparity between our procurement aspirations and their affordability—and our capacity to deal with major defence equipment deficiencies, such as the engines for the Type 45 destroyers and the delays in replacing the Type 23 frigates and logistics supply ships. I have a major concern in particular about the Royal Navy's capacity and capability. If we went back to realistic accounting, perhaps we would be able to deal with those issues.

I do not want to take too much time, because I know that colleagues want to speak, but I must emphasise that in our report, the Committee expressed concern that the UK must not become a hollow force. Sadly, despite the great commitment and bravery of our personnel and their amazing "make do and mend" ingenuity, I fear that we are hiding our vulnerability behind the cardboard shield of 2%.

1.58 pm

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): It was just outside the constituency of the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) that Her Majesty's Government first committed two or three years ago to the 2% target—or the 2% figure; I will come back to the target in a moment. I would be ungracious if I did not start by saying that I warmly welcomed that that was the case. Until then, through five years of coalition government, that had not been the case. It probably would not be the case—dare I say, without being too party political—if we had a Labour Government; people would seek to find savings from defence to spend on schools and hospitals. The first thing that we ought to say is that thank goodness we have that 2%. I am glad that the previous Prime Minister made that firm and rather surprising commitment at the Wales summit.

Mr Spellar: Will the hon. Gentleman tell me in which year under a Labour Government expenditure fell below 2%?

Mr Gray: The trouble is that under Labour Governments we always have wars and things so we have to keep spending up—that is the difficulty. However, the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. I am not suggesting that the Labour party made cuts in previous years, but, from listening to some of the speeches produced by the current leader of the Labour party, it would be perfectly reasonable to expect that significant defence cuts would be made were Labour to be in power today.

Mr Spellar: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Gray: If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me—*[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Mr Gray: Before the right hon. Gentleman leaps in to enter into a party political discussion of the matter, the purpose of the debate is not to have a party political pop across the Chamber—and of course I would not wish to tread unreasonably on the Opposition's personal grief on this subject.

Mr Spellar: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Gray: I would really rather not. We have not got very long—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Spellar: On a point of order, Mr Bone. As we are having a debate on defence, it is perfectly proper for the hon. Gentleman, who is normally much better behaved in the Defence Committee, to make partisan points. What I think is improper and verging on being out of order is then not giving way for a response, because I for one do not believe in unilateral disarmament either in the Chamber or in our defence policy.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): The right hon. Gentleman is very experienced and knows full well that that was in no way a point of order.

Mr Gray: I am most grateful.

Mr Spellar: Will the hon. Gentleman now give way?

Mr Gray: No, if the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me. We have a short debate and I have one or two things to say. I do not want to go on too long, but too many interventions of that kind will simply delay the proceedings. He knows perfectly well, because he and I are close friends—

Mr Spellar: Give way, then!

Mr Gray: I have the strongest respect—*[Laughter.]* Allow me to finish the sentence. I have the strongest respect for the strength of commitment by Labour members of the House of Commons Defence Committee to the defence of the realm. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman is right in saying that I have been a little ungracious in talking about some other parts of his party's approach to defence because I know the members of the Labour party on the Defence Committee are strongly committed to that.

Mr Spellar *rose*—

Mr Gray: I am happy to give way.

Mr Spellar: May I thank the hon. Gentleman, my friend from the Committee, for giving way? I point out that in fact he cannot point to any Labour party policy. The policy of the party is decided at our party conference, as indeed is our commitment to Trident. In the previous Parliament, when decisions were being put off on Trident, there was an overwhelming majority in the Labour party to support the Labour party policy of renewal of Trident. It is the same for the defence budget.

Mr Gray: I am most grateful and greatly reassured by the right hon. Gentleman's commitment both to Trident and to an increase in defence spending. I look forward to that vision being repeated by the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) when he replies to the debate from the Front Bench. It is good news to know that that is what Labour thinks.

In all events, the debate is not about which party will spend more on defence. I think perhaps we should move away from that parti pris squabble and move on to discuss the report in front of us, which is a very well worded, calculated and researched paper. The first thing I would say, however, is that the Ministry of Defence's accounts are second only to the Schleswig-Holstein question in being completely and utterly incomprehensible. I think there is nobody alive today who fully understands the MOD accounts, so the one or two accountants in the Department are well able to move figures around and fiddle with them in such a way that no normal human being can understand or follow.

Indeed, much of the language used is equally incomprehensible. For example, in paragraph 14 of the Government's reply they are talking about the £11.2 billion of efficiency savings—we asked where they would find that. It lays out a few efficiency savings first and then says:

"A further £2 billion will be delivered through the reprioritisation of existing funding."

They will save £2 billion through the reprioritisation of existing funding. They then go on to say that £2.1 billion that will come in from the joint security fund will in fact allow cuts in the ordinary defence spending. Therefore, that is not extra money coming in from the joint security fund at all; that is merely replacing moneys that otherwise were to be cut. There are many other examples of precisely the same thing.

Without a PhD in such matters it is simply impossible to understand exactly how the MOD accounts work and I am slightly concerned that the Government's response tends not to try to clarify matters but to make them even more complicated than before. That makes comparators extremely difficult. It is very difficult indeed to compare our spending today with what we spent in the past. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) touched on this: it is perfectly true that when I was born in 1954 we were spending something like 7.8%—if I remember rightly from the charts in the report—and today we spend about 2%. Therefore, the cut has been gigantic. However, comparing what we were spending then with what we spend today is extraordinarily difficult because of the accounting procedures.

It is unclear whether things like urgent operational requirements, or several other things that occurred in the past, are included, not least because, as the MOD said in its reply, it keeps its accounts only for seven years. Therefore, if we ask officials about any financial matter before seven years ago, they do not know. They are unable to give answers on what happened in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s because they do not keep the accounts. It seems to me simply bizarre that a Government Department should not keep accounts in perpetuity—it ought to be able to give an answer on what Government spending on defence was at the time of Waterloo if we asked the question sensibly. To say that it does not know for more than seven years ago is simply extraordinary. We therefore do not know how our spending today compares with previously because of that rule and we cannot compare our spending with other NATO countries for the same reason: it is all lost in the shrouds of mystery and antiquity.

My right hon. Friend made the extremely important point that 2% is all very well, but it is not a target and it is not even a floor—it is absolutely the minimum. In terms of the rhetoric, the Government appear as if they are claiming, "Haven't we done well? We have achieved 2%." No, never in the history of British defence before have we ever had to spend only 2% of GDP. Actually, that is the lowest figure we have ever been at. Moreover, if we were to listen to the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer and we were to face quite a significant recession post-Brexit—I personally do not believe that will occur, but he said so plainly—2% of GDP would presumably mean a significant cut in the pounds spent on defence. Therefore, the 2% figure is, to some degree at least, misleading. What we need to know is that this year we are spending £35 billion or thereabouts on defence and that that will increase every year irrespective of what happens to the economy.

The opposite applies as well. Supposing the economy were to grow at some fantastic rate thanks to Brexit—let us imagine that we see 2%, 3% or 4% growth—does that really mean that we will spend billions and billions of pounds more on defence than we have currently programmed to do? If so, how on earth will we find things to spend the money on? I am not certain that the 2% figure necessarily allows for sensible comparators with other Departments or that it is quite the right way to judge it.

We need to know how much the Government will spend and, as my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Bridgend said, not only how they will spend it but what they will spend it on. What we need to know is what we can do in defence terms—how many ships, tanks, soldiers and sailors and all the other things we need, such as cyber, will we have in the future? The 2% figure does not necessarily tell us that. It is a question of capabilities and not necessarily of money.

While I very much welcome the Government's commitment to the 2%, which is certainly a step in the right direction, that by no means reassures me that we as a nation are ready to face the appalling threats we now face. Russia is a bigger threat to us today than it has been since the cold war, the middle east is in complete turmoil and much of the rest of the world is a disaster area and we are struggling to maintain a level of spending that we have never before seen.

It seems to me that we are in danger of failing in our primary responsibility of defending the realm by allowing ourselves to be fooled by a piece of camouflage: "Aren't we being great? We are spending 2% of GDP". Are we able to defend the realm? I suggest that we may well not be.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): I know this is a very important debate and I have six Back-Bench Members who want to catch my eye as well as the Front Benchers, so could Members keep their remarks as brief as possible?

2.8 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Bone. I will try to be as brief as possible because I also hope to catch the Chair's eye in the next debate—I have half a speech to give because at first I thought there would be one debate.

Of all the Government's commitments, we can point at and quantify two—2% of gross national income on defence and 0.7% on aid—and the others go up and

[Patrick Grady]

down. The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) appeared to imply that somehow that was a bad thing and that spending more on welfare than defence, showing compassion to the most vulnerable and needy in our society and providing that social security safety net of which we all ought to be so proud, was somehow at odds with finding the money we need to spend on the defence of the realm.

The right hon. Gentleman also spoke of investment, which I think is also quite important when considering the international aid budget. I would argue that spending money on international aid is an investment in our security and in our enlightened self-interest—helping to build a more stable and secure world by lifting people out of poverty and helping them get the food and education that they need.

It is particularly interesting that the 0.7% target, which admittedly was agreed some time ago, was based on a calculation of what was needed to meet the globally agreed goals for poverty eradication, including ending hunger, access to education and so on. I am not entirely clear where the 2% target came from. Is it a needs-based assessment of what NATO countries ought to be spending in order to effectively defend themselves or, as the report seems to say, a political target—an arbitrary amount? I think that has serious implications.

Even if we are meeting the 2% target, the key point I make is that there is a serious risk of conflation between those two targets. This might be a point of agreement: by definition, the double counting of money that is spent on aid and money that is spent on defence means the total amount of money being spent on each of those is less than it ought to be. That might be permitted under OECD rules, and sometimes there might be a good reason, but both the people who support the aid budget, like I do, and people who support the minimum defence spending target are effectively being short-changed by the Government's practices in this regard.

There is also the question of what the 2% is actually spent on. I was in Westminster Hall not that long ago and was told that money could not be found for the Type 26 frigates, yet there seems to be a blank cheque for weapons of mass destruction on the Clyde. I have spent a lot of time in Westminster Hall this week discussing the Chagos islands and Libya, as has the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton). We heard a worrying amount of language that sounded an awful lot like old-style projection of power and a frankly old-style colonialist mind-set that belongs in the past. If the Government insist on setting these targets for defence spending and want to spend that, fine, but please spend it on what we need, such as modern counter-terrorism or conventional forces in places such as Fort George near Inverness, which is where I grew up. Do not conflate that spending with aid and do not waste it on weapons of mass destruction.

2.12 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I commend the Chair of the Defence Committee on the leadership he has shown in bringing the Committee together, as is obvious from our work. While there may have been a wee bit of spat today, the fact is we all work together because we all share the same goals. It is good to be able to tell people outside of the Chamber that we were able to work together on behalf of our service personnel. It is always wonderful to be able to do that.

As a member of the Defence Committee, this is an issue I feel strongly about, and other hon. Members have strongly expressed themselves as well. The evidence that came before the Committee was incredibly persuasive, and I believe the Government have issued their conclusive response since April 2016. The crux of the matter is clear. I have a direct quote from the press release for the report, which I agree with. It says that

"the Government has achieved its 2% commitment to defence spending in the last year only through what appears to be creative (albeit permissible) accounting."

That is the fact of the case. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray), who spoke very clearly, outlined that. We are all saying together that there has been creative accounting and that, while the figures may show that the percentage has been met, it is not where we wanted it to be. That is the clear issue and what we are about.

I am a straight man. If I can do something for someone, I will tell them and then do it. If I cannot do something, I will tell them that it cannot be done, and together we can work to find an alternative plan. We do that in the House, in the advice centre back home, in the constituency office and in life in general. I understand that Government bodies cannot always achieve miracles and that people cannot do everything I would like them to do, but this is life. By the same token, if someone says they can and will do something, I expect it to be done. That is the fact of it, and that is what the debate is about.

When the Government made the pledge, I was among the first to stand up and congratulate them on taking this step to ensure that our armed forces were at full strength in all aspects. Why, because of creative accounting, has the pledge not been met in real terms? Why have I seen so much evidence that the 2% pledge has not been fulfilled? Today, along with other members of the Committee, I am holding the Minister and the Government to account on the reasoning behind the failure simply to do what they committed themselves to do with the statements they made a long time ago.

The Government's commitment to not fall below the NATO-recommended minimum defence spending of 2% of GDP for the rest of the current Parliament was not simply a message to our armed forces that they will not be sent out without adequate equipment, training and intelligence. It also sent an important message to our partners and potential adversaries that we are a force to be reckoned with and that we will continue to improve and enhance our defence with an appropriate budget. As other hon. Members have said, we have to respond adequately and strongly to threats, and send a message that defence and our ability to take up arms if necessary is a Government priority. That message has been diluted and clouded by rhetoric, and has not amounted to much in reality.

It is unclear what accounts have been included in the definitive defence budget, both now and in the past. The Ministry of Defence has been unable to provide a robust dataset that identifies which years the costs of

operations or the purchase of urgent operational requirements were included in the calculations it submits to NATO. Such inclusions are allowed by NATO, but the lack of clarity confuses anyone's ability to make year-on-year comparisons of the defence budgets. The MOD must be secretive—that is the very nature of it—but there is no need for shading in that respect, unless it is because the Government hope to get away with not doing what they said they would do. If that is not the case, it could easily be cleared up and rectified with a clear, simple and transparent spreadsheet. That has not been done. I am sure the Minister will respond to that when the time comes.

In accounts provided by the MOD for 2010 and 2015, the new inclusions of the 2015 accounting strategy are difficult to identify. The new inclusions should be outlined and shown from which Department each was previously funded, such as war pensions, intelligence gathering and all of the other things that may be found in the budget for the first time that have suddenly been introduced as part of the 2%. Hon. Members will understand why the Defence Committee is concerned; others who are not on the Committee have expressed concerns as well. My mother often talked of "robbing Peter to pay Paul". That is what appears to have happened. We have enlarged one defence budget by doing away with others. In the end, Peter and Paul have the same combined amount as they did before. It really is hard to understand how it all works.

As I said in March 2015, my concern is not and never has been about the pennies. My concern is about provision and whether we have in place what we need to actually do the job we want. That was mentioned by the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), who spoke before me. Is there enough? I do not believe there is enough spending, and the report backs up the fact that that has not changed. My first concern is not having the adequate manpower or provision to step in and offer adequate aid to buttress against further pressures in the areas in which we are involved, which is in the wider context of heightened security tensions across Europe and the middle east and across the Atlantic.

I and other members of the Defence Committee have expressed concerns before about the numbers of reservists and how we get those numbers up. How do we deliver that? How do we retain our regulars? How do we ensure that our service personnel are adequately trained and equipped, and that we have the frigates and ships to fulfil the Royal Navy's roles? Sometimes Members who are not here or not on the Defence Committee may not know what those roles are. Do we have an RAF that can carry out its responsibilities, from as far away as the Falklands to the piracy in the horn of Africa? Can we be effective in the middle east? We need to be, and we need to have the money in place to do that.

We face threats of both an internal and existential nature, which we need to be prepared to meet. Those threats stretch the capacity of our defence capabilities, first, to maintain the standard of assistance in areas in which we are involved and, secondly, to meet the prospect of further demands. That is what we have to do: meet those further demands.

Those concerns have been shown to be truth over the past 18 months, as we have become involved in more and not fewer situations that require, if not a presence, then intelligence and preparation. We cannot stretch ourselves to such a limit that we are no longer able to protect our citizens, or commit to and deliver our responsibilities, wherever in the world they may be.

As I stood then for at least a 2% of GDP spend, I stand today. We will not be pacified with pie charts and graphs, as the Chair of the Defence Committee presented it to us at an earlier stage, or columns of this or that. We need an honest and open account, and that is not what we have received.

I am conscious that other Members wish to speak, so I will conclude. I say to the Government: do the right thing. Be a Government who stand by their word. Do not seek to pull the wool over the eyes of the Defence Committee or anybody else outside it, when our national security and the lives of men and women are at stake. Our men and women whom we are very proud to see serving and honouring the pledge they have made to defend all these shores and all our interests deserve no less, and their service demands that we cease the disservice that has been done. The Government should simply do what they said they would do by delivering on the 2% and ensuring it is a real 2%. At this time, I do not believe it is.

2.20 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. It is always a challenge to follow my informed colleagues in these debates, so I apologise for any repetition.

The first duty of any Government is the defence of the realm and security of their citizens, so I welcome this opportunity to discuss the Government's ongoing defence commitments. We are living through a period of global turmoil and national uncertainty. Though Britain is preparing to exit the European Union, we must remain an outward-looking nation, committed to fulfilling our role in the world and supporting the efforts for peace and international stability across the globe.

The threats to that peace are many and varied: an emboldened Russian Federation, continuing instability in the middle east, a Europe struggling to come to terms with the historic migrant crisis, ever-adapting terror networks, and modern technology that expands the potential threats to our country and that has revolutionised the theatre of war. In these uncertain times, it is more important than ever that the UK is committed to maintaining a military that is capable of dealing with whatever threats the future may hold and that meets the capacity and capability needs identified by the strategic defence and security review. That can be achieved only by ensuring sufficient year-on-year funding to maintain and expand our armed forces capability. That is why I and my colleagues on the Defence Committee welcome the Government's continued commitment to the 2% pledge on defence spending, to ensure our NATO compliance. That commitment sends an important message to our allies in NATO and beyond that the UK remains committed to fulfilling our role in the world, and to defending and supporting our friends, wherever and whenever that need arises.

As we have heard, the UK has the largest defence budget in the EU, the second largest in NATO and the fifth largest in the world, but money alone will not solve these issues. I hope that the 2% pledge is a commitment to maintaining our military strength in the long term.

[Ruth Smeeth]

It is important that we do not simply take the figure of 2% as an arbitrary one or as the final word on Britain's spending and procurement in the years ahead. In charting the future of the UK's military capacity, we must always endeavour to work from first principles. What is required to keep our country safe?

In our Committee's report, we raised a number of initial points in response to the Government's spending plans. We noted that while the Government met their 2% commitment to defence spending last year, they did so with the aid of what appeared to be a measure of creative accounting, albeit creative accounting that was accepted by NATO, as was outlined by the Chair of the Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis). By revising the criteria by which defence expenditure is calculated, the predicted Government spend for 2015-16 rises from £36.8 billion, or 1.97% of GDP, to £39 billion, equivalent to 2.08%. That was achieved by including expenditure from other funds, such as the conflict, stability and security fund, which is controlled jointly by the MOD and the Department for International Development.

I have no doubt that the Government's commitment to defence spending and recognition of the challenges our country faces is sincere. However, our troops deserve more than financial wizardry. I hope that, in future years, the Government work to ensure that the necessary resources are put into defence, and ensure that we are spending a minimum of 2% annually in real terms, so that we have sufficient resources to fund our capabilities as well as to invest in our future.

I also welcome the Government's commitment to maintaining the size of our armed forces, with plans to grow the size of the Royal Navy to 30,600 in 2025—an increase of 400 personnel and an uplift of 1,600 over the position initially laid out by the previous Government in 2010. However, as we have discussed today, with the planned retirement of HMS Ocean, even those numbers are insufficient to fully man our current capabilities. I have significant concerns about proposed cuts to our Royal Marines in terms of absolute numbers, which I hope our Committee will continue to investigate.

Considering the ongoing active deployments of our RAF forces, plans to expand the strength of RAF regular personnel to a baseline of 31,750 are welcome. However, with the imminent arrival of not enough F-35s, we will have to review that number. I remain sceptical of the Government's suggestion that an integrated Army of 112,000 personnel is sufficient to deliver the Army's contribution to joint force 2025, but time will tell, and I am sure we will revisit that.

There is much in the Government's response to our report that is welcome, but I wish to stress the importance of ensuring that capacity is met and that our defence spending is sufficient to meet our needs, even when that may necessitate a spending increase over and above the 2%, which, despite what the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) said, many Members on the Labour Benches would support. We must understand that the 2% pledge represents a minimum annual spend, and we should never seek to curtail or compromise our military capacity in order to stay within that amount. Our report stated that

"the Government must be clear that 2% is a minimum—not a target—and be prepared to increase defence expenditure further, in order to reflect the increasing threats faced by both the UK and our Allies."

We must also take into account the UK's situation in the wake of the EU referendum and the role that the current uncertainty may play in our economic outlook. With the additional financial and geopolitical challenges that Brexit may pose in the short to medium term, it is vital that the Government recognise those concerns and act to ensure that our military remains on solid financial and operational ground in the years ahead. A report from the Resolution Foundation suggested that the economic upheaval thrown up by uncertainty around Brexit could cost the UK economy up to £84 billion over the next five years, which would have a significant impact on the 2%. The real value of the Government's 2% pledge ebbs and flows with the country's economic fortunes. As outlined by the hon. Member for North Wiltshire, the commensurate drop in GDP resulting from that would be reflected in a drop in the value of the 2% set aside for annual defence expenditure, which could have a devastating effect on our capability, especially if the 2% comes to be seen as a spending cap rather than a minimum.

A further concern is the declining value of sterling and the impact that it may have on overseas procurement. One particular issue is the purchase of military equipment bought in US dollars, at prices that could greatly exceed initial estimates. For instance, the MOD recently announced the purchase of nine P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft from Boeing via a foreign military sale. The predicted cost, including training, infrastructure and the necessary support at RAF Lossiemouth, was recently estimated to be £3 billion over the next decade. However, with the pound slumping to its lowest value against the dollar in some time, the initial costs of purchase could greatly exceed initial predictions unless appropriate—

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mike Penning): I apologise for interrupting, but as former Ministers in the room and the Chair of the Defence Committee will know, these sorts of contract are offset, and predictions are put in—the Treasury has that capability. If we build a road project, we put in the project cost and the inflation cost. That risk is built into the project, which former Ministers in the Chamber know.

Ruth Smeeth: I thank the Minister for that. The end of my sentence was, "unless appropriate hedging is put in the contract."

Mike Penning: It always is.

Ruth Smeeth: While I appreciate that it probably is, I do not think anyone could have anticipated the likely devaluation of the pound in recent days. I hope very much that that is the case, but we will see what happens in the long term when we get the full figures.

Mr Spellar: Is it not even more significant that, in giving this order directly to Boeing, the MOD did not seek to get any offset in other programmes in order to create work back in the UK?

Ruth Smeeth: I totally agree with my right hon. Friend. With the P-8A and even the F-35, we get only 20% of the build in the UK.

Mr Spellar: And the Apache.

Ruth Smeeth: And the Apache. There are significant concerns about British manufacturing capabilities within the current procurement programme.

As the UK comes to terms with our future outside the European Union, it is more important than ever that we maintain a strong independent military presence. I believe the Government recognise that. I again welcome their response to the Defence Committee's report and their ongoing commitment to supporting a robust UK military. I for one believe these issues to be above party politics.

2.29 pm

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone.

I was going to talk about the 2% pledge, but many of the points I was going to make have been covered today and were extensively covered in the report, so I will confine my remarks to chapter 4 of the report: "UK defence: what can we afford". It considers that question in the context of the 2% pledge.

In paragraph 75, the Ministry of Defence is quoted as saying that the SDSR would

"determine priorities for investment to ensure that the UK has a full suite of capabilities with which to respond to defence and security threats".

Indeed, page 67 of the "National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review" document of last year identifies the three tiers of domestic and overseas risks we face, grading them as tier 1, 2 or 3

"based on a judgement of the combination of both likelihood and impact."

Taking that at face value, the National Security Council has identified terrorism, international military conflict, cyber, public health, major natural hazards and instability overseas as the tier 1 threats facing the UK.

With that exercise having been undertaken, one would have thought the resources would follow the perceived threats and their perceived likelihood, but that does not seem to be the approach followed by the Ministry of Defence. For example, it is extremely concerning that the Government seem to be hellbent on pursuing their ideological obsession with a new generation of nuclear weapons, which its proponents argue are to deter an attack using chemical, biological or nuclear weapons—a tier 2 threat according to the National Security Council risk assessment.

Meanwhile, the Government have delayed commissioning and building the promised Type 26 frigates on the Clyde, which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) mentioned. Those are essential to address tier 1 threats—international military conflict and instability overseas.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): May I ask whether the hon. Gentleman is in favour of continuing to produce Type 26 global combat ships on the Clyde when their primary role is the protection of our independent nuclear deterrent, which he detests?

Steven Paterson: I am in favour of fulfilling the promise made in 2013 to have 13 ships built on the Clyde. If the hon. Gentleman goes to the Ministry of Defence website he will see that its description of those ships' role includes a whole range of things in addition to protecting the nuclear deterrent.

We wait to see whether the national shipbuilding strategy, which is due by 23 November, sees an end to the disgraceful delay in commissioning those ships on the Clyde. We wait to see whether there is a guarantee that the five multi-purpose frigates will be built on the Clyde, or whether they will be commissioned to be built overseas. Based on the answers to those questions, we will evaluate the long-term prospects for the Clyde yards, which provide vital capability infrastructure, enabling the UK to address tier 1 threats set out in its own national security strategy and SDSR.

Originally, of course, the Government promised that 13 Type 26 frigates would be built on the Clyde, but they revised that substantially to eight, with five general purpose frigates to make up the shortfall. In paragraph 90 of the report, the Committee correctly identifies the risk:

"Should…the 'concept study' to investigate the potential for a new class of lighter, flexible general purpose frigate be unsuccessful, we wish to be informed at the earliest opportunity of the MoD's contingency plans to deliver the extra ships to satisfy the total originally promised."

The Government's response to these concerns merely indicates a willingness to keep the Committee informed, and we must hope that there will be no further backtracking on the general purpose frigates. Further, we await confirmation that they will be built on the Clyde. Should that not occur, as well as being a betrayal of the skilled workers employed at those shipyards, it will threaten the yards' capacity to deliver complex warships in the future and undermine the UK's ability to meet the challenges identified in the national security strategy and SDSR.

The report also identifies clear concerns among the witnesses the Committee questioned about the MOD's ability to maintain the size of the armed forces at the levels envisaged in the SDSR, which several speakers touched on today. Those concerns were voiced more than six months before the EU referendum and the economic impact of that vote. Should the decision of the UK as a whole to leave the EU result in an adverse economic impact on the UK, as seems likely given its impact in the months since the vote, there will be further pressure on the UK's ability to deliver expensive military capability and manpower in future.

In particular, the collapse in the value of the pound may have a serious impact on the affordability of imported military systems, of which we have many and plan many. Spending 2% of a significantly smaller pot will have serious implications for the delivery of ships and planes and the maintenance of manpower, particularly if, as seems inevitable, the costs of vastly expensive programmes such as the successor nuclear weapon submarines spiral.

I thank the Defence Committee for its work in this area—it does an excellent job looking at this policy. I am very happy to have had the opportunity to speak today.

2.34 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Bone.

[Phil Wilson]

This debate is about what sort of country we see ourselves as being. I have always seen the UK as a force for good, and I mean that not just in military terms but in our humanitarian role in the world and how we have defended liberal democracy over the decades. The issue is not just the 2% pledge, but whether we have the capability to achieve what we set out to do as a military nation. In 2013, the UK's GDP was £1.6 trillion, with a defence budget of £37 billion, or 2.3% of GDP. In 2014, our GDP was £1.7 trillion and the defence budget was 2.17% of GDP. At the same time as the budget has fallen significantly over that period, Russia's defence budget went up by 21% last year alone. That is what we must consider.

I do not think the Russians want to enter into a war with the west, but times are uncertain. Russia might be a declining power, but insecure powers, like insecure people, may lash out, and that country also has nuclear weapons. I read in *The Times* at the beginning of this week that Russia has just unveiled a new sort of intercontinental ballistic missile. We know that it has put nuclear weapons into Kaliningrad, and we know what it does in Syria. We definitely know what it did in Ukraine. Russia is flexing its muscles, and we must be prepared for that.

General Sir Richard Shirreff said in his evidence to the Committee that even if all NATO's member states put 2% of their GDP into the defence of the west, he was sceptical about whether that would be enough to see off the threat from countries such as Russia. We must realise that many of the military conflicts and issues around the world are asymmetrical, and there are all sorts of issues such as cyber and terrorism. Russia is one nation that we could find ourselves in conflict with.

China's defence budget is well over $200 billion. The rest of that region's defence budget put together is only $45 billion. A figure I came across at the beginning of the week is that there are more than 100,000 UN peacekeepers around the world in 16 locations, many of them in Africa. The world situation is very turbulent. Are we in a position to defend ourselves?

Sir Richard Barrons said in *The Daily Telegraph* on 17 September that the UK's armed forces are withered. I do not want to talk down our armed forces and the brave men and women who serve in them, but this man knows what he is talking about, so he should be listened to. He referred in the *Financial Times* to Britain's ability to defend itself from aerial attacks and said:

> "UK air defence now consists of the"

working Type 45 destroyers,

> "enough ground-based air defence to protect roughly Whitehall only, and RAF fast jets. Neither the UK homeland nor a deployed force—let alone both concurrently— could be protected from a concerted Russian air effort."

These issues are worrying for me and, I believe, for the other people in this Chamber and the Defence Committee.

Is 2% enough? When other things, such as pensions and so on, are included, and there is creative accounting, do the Government really mean 2%? We must sit down and think whether it is enough. Efficiencies are brilliant and fantastic. We all agree with that, but the one thing we must do is to protect this country. We must have a serious look at whether 2% is what we should be paying.

We have two brilliant aircraft carriers that will come into service in a little while, but have we got enough ships to defend them? Have we got the submarines to defend them? Have we got the skills to man them? We need to look at that. If we are to punch above our weight, let us ensure that we can actually do that. We just have to be honest with ourselves. Is 2% enough? Is the 2% actually 2%? Should the figure be higher? We need to hear from the Minister on that.

2.40 pm

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I thank the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) for his input this afternoon and for his chairmanship of the Defence Committee. I associate the Scottish National party with his comments about the excellence of the Committee staff.

In preparing for today's debate, I not only read the report and the Government response, but looked back over my notes from last year of the evidence that the Committee took. It speaks well of the quality of the witnesses to the inquiry that much of what they said is now coming to pass. I will touch on some of that evidence today.

This is obviously a vast subject that really deserves a day's debate in the House. However, time pressures will restrict me to only dipping into some of the issues raised in the report. Those are the decidedly squidgy nature of what 2% means; the pressure that that will inevitably put on future procurement projects; and the overwhelming feeling that the Government are confusing "preserving the shop window", which is typified by the pledge, with actual hard-headed strategic thinking that links in to capability. The focus on inputs has simply provided a useful smokescreen for a distinct lack of usable outputs in our defence capability.

The report is unequivocal that although 2% may act as a useful benchmark and a statement of intent, we should not kid ourselves that it means anything more than the MOD wants it to mean, because, quite simply, using previous measures of defence spending will bring us below the desired figure. Shifting the goalposts means bringing into that figure a whole range of spending priorities, from pensions right through to Trident, that would not have been included before. That has conspired with a whole range of other restraints and ring fences in a way that will see the MOD increasingly tie itself in knots.

Let us take pay restraint, for example. Central to future budgets of the Department is a commitment to ensuring that any rise in the pay of personnel does not exceed 1%. Any upwards movement on salaries would, given the nature of such a target, mean less money for other projects. As inflation rises in post-Brexit Britain, so our dedicated and selfless armed forces personnel will face a pay "crunch", as Dr Robin Niblett of Chatham House foresaw in his evidence to the Committee last October.

In that regard, although giving hard-pressed personnel a pay rise will be out of the question, the one part of the 2% that there will be no problem with is funding the weapons of mass destruction. I and my colleagues have been relentless in asking the Government to address that anomaly. In fact, if the SNP Defence team could be

renamed, I am sure that we would be called HMS Relentless, because we know that every penny spent on Trident is a penny less spent on conventional defence, and that also mean fewer pennies for the salaries of serving personnel.

The right hon. Member for New Forest East suggested that we should move to "three to be free". I think that a great campaign would be to go for "nil to save on the bill". Perhaps the Minister can comment on that.

As the Member for Dunfermline and West Fife, I am sad to say that every penny spent on Trident also means less money to support the stunning Queen Elizabeth-class carriers being built in my constituency. Those amazing vessels deserve and require a host of capabilities around them, but in the Government response to the report, we do not get much idea of how they will be paid for. Other hon. Members have alluded to the Type 26s, for example. Whether we are talking about the F-35B joint strike fighters that will fly from the carriers or the Type 26s that will protect them, it seems that in putting forward their pledge, the Government may have caught themselves in a trap of their own making. Of course, as the Great British pound continues to fall in value against the dollar, each of the planned 138 F-35s becomes that bit more expensive, even allowing for what the Minister alluded to earlier. Every day that passes without a timetable being given for the Type 26 programme means that the hard work of my constituents in ensuring that the carriers are delivered on time and on budget is being undermined. I hope that, along with addressing the other substantial points from the report today, the Minister will take the time to let us see what his Department plans to do to ensure that those projects are not adversely affected by the plummeting pound.

Ultimately, the problem is that the 2% pledge should not be confused with a strategy—a charge made by many witnesses in their evidence to the Committee and most forcefully by Professor Julian Lindley-French. The problem is well illuminated in the recent document leaked to the *Financial Times*, in which General Sir Richard Barrons critiqued the Ministry of Defence for its focus on "preserving the shop window" over its most basic national security duties. The 2% pledge obviously sits very nicely in that shop window.

Also in the shop window sit projects such as Trident, which the Government hope will boost our international prestige and look good in a press release, but which bear no relation to the threats that this country faces and are taking a terrible toll on real, usable procurement projects and, indeed, our armed forces personnel. As we float off into the uncertain waters of Brexit Britain, I would hope that at the very least we could have some form of real stability in our national defence, but as the report shows, as it is with Brexit, so it is with defence—there are more questions than answers.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): I thank hon. Members for their participation. Because we have run over a little bit—I thought it was right to do so—we will try to wind this debate up at 3.15 pm.

2.46 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I add my voice to those congratulating the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) on securing this important debate. As we have heard from other hon. Members, he has been an excellent chair of the Defence Committee. I congratulate him and his Committee on their report "Shifting the goalposts? Defence expenditure and the 2% pledge".

I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate, but particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Stirling (Steven Paterson), for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). *[Interruption.]* And the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) of course, although I will have to caveat that by saying that I agreed with much of what my hon. Friends said and, as the hon. Gentleman will not be too upset to discover, I did not agree with a great deal of what he had to say.

What has been confirmed to us today is that the 2% target was created to redress the balance between the defence budgets of the United Kingdom, the other European NATO members and the United States. It has been correctly pointed out that it does not necessarily follow that achieving the 2% target will deliver the defence capabilities required by the UK. The Defence Committee was very aware of the limitations of the arbitrary 2% figure in delivering capability. It may well, as has often been stated in this debate, have a powerful symbolic meaning in the context of the perceived commitment of the UK to our NATO allies. As the report says, it

"sends an important message to all the UK's partners and potential adversaries."

However, as I am sure the right hon. Member for New Forest East would agree, that is a far cry from saying that we are getting this right. Committing a minimum percentage of GDP to defence may well send the desired message, but—as my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling said—it does not adequately protect us from the threats that we ourselves have identified. I need not remind hon. Members of the words of General Sir Richard Barrons just last month. He said that the UK armed forces had lost much of their ability to fight a conventional war and accused the MOD of sidestepping "profoundly difficult" strategic challenges. He also said that there is

"no military plan to defend the UK in a conventional conflict."

Let us be clear: that is because we have made in this country the political choice to go down a nuclear route at the expense of a conventional route. That will have massive consequences for what we can do now and in future. Do not just take my word for it. Just last year, when General Sir Richard Shirreff spoke at the Defence Committee, he said one either goes

"down the line of a nuclear capability at the expense of conventional capability, or conventional capability at the expense of nuclear."

As a result of our decisions, our vital conventional defence capability has been sacrificed on the altar of this Government's obsession with nuclear weapons. As my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow North and for Stirling said, the most notable casualty of that is the Type 26 programme, which has been cut, delayed, cut again and further delayed while the Ministry of Defence struggles to find the money to cut the first steel on the Type 26 frigates. Lord West, a former First Sea Lord, said:

"Because of pressures…our numbers have declined. Not only is that a problem for our defence capability and the security of our nation and our people; it is a problem for our shipbuilding and our defence industries."

[Brendan O'Hara]

The lesson we have learned from this Government is that there will always be money for nuclear weapons and that it will always come at the expense of our conventional defence. How much longer will the workers on the Clyde have to wait to start work on the Type 26 programme? How much longer does the Ministry of Defence believe it can eke out the ageing Type 23 fleet? Those frigates were supposed to have been taken out of commission by 2023, but that is now virtually impossible to see happening. The Type 26 frigates are badly needed by the Navy and are a vital part of our conventional capability; however, they are being sacrificed because of this Government's obsession with nuclear weapons.

Bob Stewart: I thank the hon. Gentleman—he might even be a friend—for giving way. I repeat: a primary role of the Type 26 global combat ship is to preserve our independent nuclear deterrent. Frankly, if we really go down that road, perhaps we do not need the Type 26. If the Scottish National party were in power, it would get rid of our independent nuclear deterrent, make us really vulnerable and get rid of the Type 26 frigates while it was at it.

Brendan O'Hara: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's repetition and think that my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling adequately answered him previously. There is much more to the Type 26 frigates than simply protecting the deterrent. The workers on the Clyde were initially promised 13, which has subsequently been cut to eight. All we are asking the Government to do is honour their commitment and fulfil their promise to the workers on the Clyde.

Whatever the Government's method of calculating defence expenditure, we have grave concerns about their strategic choices and the effects those are having on the UK's defensive posture. As the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) and the hon. Member for North Wiltshire said, the MOD's creative accountancy and ability to hide a multitude of sins in a fog of statistics is the stuff of legend. Let us be absolutely clear, as Professor Phillips O'Brien at St Andrews University said recently, defence

"cuts have fallen disproportionately on the guts of British defence: the army and logistics."

The Army is smaller than it has been for centuries while the Government throw obscene amounts of money at Trident.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and West Fife said, although 2% may act as a useful benchmark and a statement of intent, let us not kid ourselves that it means anything more than what the MOD wants it to mean. As we have heard on numerous occasions this afternoon, if we take previous measures of defence spending, it brings us well below the desired figure. Only by adding a whole range of spending priorities, from pensions to Trident, can we achieve that 2%. In many ways, that renders "2%" meaningless—it becomes a totem rather than any meaningful gauge of how we defend this country. The Government have thrown everything into the pot, including the kitchen sink—indeed, we probably could claim against the kitchen sink—in order to play what has become a rather crude numbers game.

On this side of the House, we have said many times that the Select Committee's report noted that meeting the minimum NATO spending targets does not mean that defence is adequately resourced. That is very clearly the case under this Government and previous ones. Their sums do not add up, and we believe that their decisions have been highly detrimental to the armed forces and to this country's conventional capabilities.

In his opening statement, the right hon. Member for New Forest East said that there had been no jiggery-pokery by the MOD, but I am sure he would agree that there is, indeed, a strong whiff of jiggery-pokery in reaching the 2% target. The Government have had to rely on childish tricks, including conflating international development and defence spending, to reach this target. They have ignored numerous requests from the Committee to come clean and to explain where that money has been re-accounted for.

In conclusion, this debate has shown that the 2% figure is pretty meaningless; it is a totem and is merely symbolic. The debate is now about what we should be doing with the real money we have, rather than posturing with percentages. It is about the amount of money we have and what we do with it, not whether it is 1%, 2%, 3% or—in the opinion of the hon. Member for North Wiltshire—4%. We can do better if we allocate it properly, which means allocating it to our conventional defences and not pouring it down the black hole that is Trident.

2.56 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. We have had an extraordinary debate this afternoon here in Westminster Hall. I want to add my congratulations from the Opposition Front Bench position to the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), who chairs the Defence Committee, and to all the members and staff of his Committee, on producing an excellent report. So far, nine right hon. and hon. Members have spoken about it, plus two Front-Bench spokespersons, and the Minister will speak in a few minutes.

The Chairman of the Committee made it clear at the beginning that what we spend as a percentage of our gross domestic product on defence has radically altered since I was born in 1955, a year after the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray). *[Interruption.]* Yes, I appreciate he looks considerably younger than I do. When we were born in the '50s, it was just 10 years after the most momentous world war and the destruction of so many lives and properties throughout this country and the world. Our entire country was effectively one armed force to defend ourselves from the aggression we faced at the time. It was logical, therefore, that we should have scaled down the percentage that we spent. However, one of the themes that has come through clearly during the debate this afternoon, is that it is not about the crude percentage, but about how we spend it and the value for money we get. Speaker after speaker has made that point and I am sure the Minister will underline it when he sums up at the end.

We have heard some very good contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) is well known for her hard work on the Defence Committee and for her knowledge of defence. She questioned, yet again, the criteria of the calculation that was amended so that the Government were assisted in reaching that 2%. As many other right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned, including pensions is perhaps a slightly

dodgy calculation when trying to make up that 2%. I would welcome the Minister's view on the inclusion of pensions in the overall percentage. My hon. Friend made the point that the UK's credibility is being damaged by the way in which we make up the 2% that NATO demands.

We heard a very good contribution, as always, from that expert on the Government side, the hon. Member for North Wiltshire. I have known him for many years and have worked on many campaigns with him—we share that in common. He made the point that we cannot compare the percentage spent in 1954 with the percentage spent today because the world is a totally different place. He also made a very important point about accounts: why are they not kept for more than seven years? I find that surprising. Surely the different accounts must be in the records of this place in *Hansard* from when estimates have been debated and discussed in the decades since 1954.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), as always, made his contribution to a debate—it seems that every debate I take part in he is there, making important points. He said that the MOD was unable to provide a robust dataset and that, as his mother used to say, it was robbing Peter to pay Paul.

[Andrew Rosindell *in the Chair*]

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), who made a thoughtful and well written contribution to the debate. We are the fifth largest defence spender in the world, but it is really important that 2% does not remain a maximum of what we spend to keep the realm safe. She said that we need to spend what is required. We on the Labour Front Bench agree.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) spoke well, as always, being very knowledgeable in these things and being an active member of the Committee. He pointed to the threat from Russia. In my previous role in the foreign affairs team, I was responsible for our connections with NATO, where I went in June. We heard over and over again, from officials in Brussels and in the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Mons, about the increasing threat from Russia as it flexes its muscles in the world, shows us what it is made of, making up for the deficiencies of the President of that country in internal and domestic policy with aggressive foreign policy. It is very clear that that is what dictators look to divert attention.

In bringing my remarks to a conclusion, Mr Bone—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, Mr Rosindell. Thank you for pointing that out, Minister. In trying to bring together the points that have been made this afternoon, I make it absolutely clear that Labour's position is to remain an active, important and strategic member of NATO and to keep our defence spending as we need it to be to defend the realm.

Everyone in the armed forces knows the damage that was done during the last Parliament when our defence spending dipped well below that 2%. Many are questioning, as we have this afternoon, what is now included in the calculation that puts us artificially over that 2% to 2.08%. It has not necessarily been achieved as a result of increases in actual defence spending on our armed forces and on the equipment that they need; it has been done by showing and including other expenditures, such as some of the money spent within the Department for International Development. I would welcome the Minister's comments on that.

As my colleagues have pointed out, the Labour Government comfortably met that 2% target each year. In fact, the lowest percentage of GDP spent in the 13 years that Labour was in power was 2.4%, so the next Labour Government are certainly committed to spending that NATO minimum. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, did the Minister want me to give way?

Mike Penning: Where did that come from?

Fabian Hamilton: Well, that is the calculation that I have been given by my researchers.

As I said, we have the fifth largest defence budget in the world. I am glad to say that defence spending will increase by £5 billion up to 2020-21. That is welcome, but like any competent business purchasing supplies or the resources necessary to make it work, we have to ensure that we get the best possible value for what we buy, and that, as the Chair of the Committee pointed out, we put money into our personnel with adequate, proper and decent training. We all know that without that training, our forces cannot work as a collective whole and cannot work as effectively as possible.

I believe that only Estonia, Turkey, Greece and France spend 2% of GDP or more on defence. There has been anxiety in Washington about the fall in the UK's defence budget. In the *Financial Times* recently, the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), the former head of policy at No. 10 Downing Street, was reported as saying:

> "If we need to get to 2 per cent of GDP, there is a question of whether you can increase overall spending by counting funding of the intelligence agencies as defence spending".

I would welcome the Minister's response to that.

The Opposition Front-Bench team believes, like the Government and I think every Member of this Parliament, that the defence of the realm is the No. 1 priority of the Government of the day. We need to spend what is necessary to keep the population of this country safe, but we need to spend it wisely and well.

I will conclude by returning to the remarks that were made by my friend and colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield. He said that even if all the NATO countries put 2% of their GDP into defence, it would not be enough to protect us from our enemies. There are 100,000 UN peacekeepers in 16 countries because the world is in such turbulence at the moment, so the question I leave the Minister with is this: is 2% of GDP sufficient?

3.5 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mike Penning): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell—I hope I get your name right; I got told off last time, so I will try hard.

This has been a very interesting debate on such an important day—the day that the national poppy appeal is launched, when we remember those who gave so much for us. What a perfect time for this debate to take place. It is my first debate as Minister for the Armed Forces in the Ministry of Defence.

[Mike Penning]

I completely agree with the Committee in asking whether 2% is enough. Could we spend more? I am sure we could, but 2% is a NATO guideline. Would it not be great, as the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) indicated, if the other NATO countries also stepped up to the plate and spent 2% of their GDP on defence?

What great news it was today that our GDP has increased, even though scaremongers, including the BBC and others, said that the economy was in a dive after Brexit. It has gone in the opposite direction, which will mean there is more money to be spent. No Defence Minister would stand up and say, "No, we wouldn't like to have more money," and anybody who did would not be telling the truth. However, we have to live within our means and make sure that what we get is spent correctly, which is the crux of today's debate.

Let us get Trident over and done with first. If we want to be a member of NATO, we have to be under a nuclear umbrella. If we do not want that, we do not stay in NATO. If we took the Scottish National party's position, not only would we lose thousands of jobs on the Clyde, but we could not really be part of NATO. That debate has been had before. We debated the nuclear deterrent in the House, when the House—not the Conservative party or this Government—made the decision on the future nuclear deterrent by a huge majority. That was the message to the rest of the world and to NATO.

Brendan O'Hara: Does the Minister accept, though, that the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government, the SNP, the Labour party, the Greens, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Scottish churches and great swathes of Scottish civic society have all said no to Trident? Should that voice not be respected?

Mike Penning: Perhaps the referendum in Scotland, when the Scottish people decided to stay part of the United Kingdom and under the rule and sovereignty of this Parliament, is another important decision that needs to be taken into account. The percentage of GDP in the Scottish economy from defence spending is huge, and the SNP really have to take that on board in what they say about the future of defence.

Brendan O'Hara: Will the Minister give way?

Mike Penning: No, I have given the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to intervene and he has had plenty of time.

We have to spend the money correctly. Comparisons are really difficult. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East, the Chair of the Committee, touched on that point in saying that trying to compare like with like is very difficult. National service was still in place when the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) were born, which has been alluded to. When I joined the Army in 1974, I was in the British Army of the Rhine in Germany with the 3rd Armoured Division. We had almost no fuel and almost no ammunition and we hardly ever left the military transport park. We just did not have the money. We sat there knowing full well that we were a deterrent. The boys and girls who were serving at that time were very brave—all the armed forces were brave—but we knew that the money was not being spent correctly. As a young soldier, I could see it then and we have seen it through various Governments that have been in power.

How do we spend the money as well as possible? We get the right kit to deal with the threats, but the threat changes. Most of us thought the cold war was over. We thought we could look at the threats from other parts of the world and apply our defence accordingly. In the past couple of months we have had to look back to the old foe. We saw their fleet sailing through the English channel, probably as a sign of what they could do. We saw black smoke coming out of the top of the aircraft carrier—she could not have gone a knot faster if she had tried because she is so old and decrepit—but she represents a threat. Could they have gone round the north, as they have done before? In fact, the weather was very bad off the west coast at the time, but probably they were sending a message. Our boys and girls in our armed forces shadowed her man for man as she came through. I know that because I was on a frigate in the channel while the aircraft carrier was coming through.

We have to be careful with these defence reports. We are genuinely trying to do the best for our armed forces and make sure they have the right equipment. We must show we are behind them and not undermining them. It is a very thin line.

I have responsibilities as the Ops Minister. Everybody thinks we are home from Afghanistan and Iraq, but we have ops in nearly 39 countries where our armed forces are serving us today. I do not think we have paid enough tribute to those boys and girls—our servicemen and women who are out there on our behalf—during this debate. I know it was touched on in some Members' speeches, but mostly it was not, and that is a real disappointment because the forces pick up on what we say in this House and see where their support is.

Are we hollowed out? I do not think so; I would not be able to do this job if I thought that was the case. We will continue to fight the Treasury to make sure we have as much as we possibly can. It is enormously difficult to compare what happened in 1956 with what happened in 1974 when I joined the Army. The package we offer our armed forces is absolutely important. The issue is not just about recruitment, but about retention, which I will come to in a moment.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): There is genuine support for the armed forces, but when working out what we have to spend, it is difficult to have confidence in the figures we have been given. For the seventh year in a row the Ministry of Defence accounts have been qualified because they cannot meet international accounting requirements. A resolution of that would go a long way to supporting the appropriate spend in the areas that need it. It would also give confidence to our service personnel.

Mike Penning: I completely agree. It is way beyond me to understand the accounts of the MOD. I freely admit that.

Kirsten Oswald: It's way beyond anybody to clearly understand them.

Mike Penning: I am in my seventh Department in six years and I have struggled to understand the accounts in most of them. That does not make it right—I fully accept that. From my point of view and that of my fellow Ministers, when we are looking at what we can

and cannot do around the world and at home in defence of the realm, it is difficult, but at the end of the day, NATO set the 2% so that the rest of the NATO countries would come on board.

The question has been asked whether the international aid budget, which is 0.7% of GDP, should be linked to the MOD budget. Some of us have been in this place a long time. Although I was not elected such a long time ago, I remember a huge argument going on between DFID and Defence when Clare Short was the excellent DFID Secretary of State over helicopters during the flooding in Bangladesh—I may be wrong, but I think it was in Bangladesh. A massive delay took place while they argued about money. Is that the sort of situation that we want to be in today? If our Navy or our armed forces are operating in a humanitarian area, it is right that we help, but should that come from my budget or from DFID's? We need to work much more closely together.

I will not be able to answer all the questions in the time I have been given, but the crux of the matter is that we are all, no matter what party we are from, pushing for the same thing. We want to respect our armed forces and give them the kit and equipment they need. We will disagree on certain aspects. We disagreed on Trident, which was debated in the House. We will continue the debate, but the House has made a decision and we are pressing ahead. I am really pleased that Her Majesty's Opposition has committed to 2% of GDP on defence. That is the first time we have heard that. We have had a commitment for this Parliament going forward and I am really pleased that the Labour party has bitten the bullet, for want of a better description, and committed to doing that. I hope the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) has not got into trouble over it, but I will write to him to confirm the commitment when this debate is over. It is a very important message from this House as we go forward.

I felt the report was helpful. As it says, we have not broken any rules. Along with my fellow Ministers, I will spend the money in the best way we possibly can to make sure we continue to have the best armed forces in the world and that they have the kit and equipment they require.

3.15 pm

Dr Julian Lewis: I thank everybody who has contributed to the debate. We have had an excellent turnout for a quiet Thursday afternoon. The fact that so many people have given up their afternoon to take part in this debate and made such strong contributions, both from the Back and from the Front Benches of the respective parties, is a matter for congratulations. I think we all agree that adequate funds are a necessary condition, but not a sufficient condition for wise defence expenditure. The question that came up again and again was whether 2% is enough. We heard it from the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) and from the Front-Bench spokesman for the Labour party, the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton).

I started off by referring to the "we want eight" crisis of 1909, of which Winston Churchill wryly noted:

> "The Admiralty had demanded six ships; the economists offered four; and we finally compromised on eight."

Perhaps in the context of this debate we might end up by saying that I want three to keep us free in terms of percentages. My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) wants four or the Government should be shown the door. Maybe we can compromise and, like the Bee Gees, say, "We want five for stayin' alive."

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Second Report from the Defence Committee of Session 2015-16, Shifting the goalposts? Defence expenditure and the 2% pledge, HC 494, and the Government response, HC 465.

Lariam

[Relevant documents: Fourth Report from the Defence Committee of Session 2015-16, An acceptable risk? The use of Lariam for military personnel, HC 567, and the Government response, HC 648.]

3.18 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Fourth Report from the Defence Committee of Session 2015-16, An acceptable risk? The use of Lariam for military personnel, HC 567, and the Government response, HC 648.

Before I turn to the overview of the report and the conclusions of the Select Committee on Defence, I want to put on record our thanks to those who gave us the impetus to investigate the issue and contributed their knowledge and their time. I apologise if I leave anyone out. Our thanks go to Trixie Foster and the retired Colonel Andrew Marriott for their persistence in raising the issue and co-ordinating a detailed submission; to defence correspondents who took the matter up; and to Forces TV whose work brought in more evidence. I thank the Library for its research and our Clerks, who do a magnificent job, as well as the witnesses who appeared at our three evidence sessions, including from the drug's manufacturer, Roche.

I would also like to put on record my personal thanks to the Committee for agreeing to pursue the issue for the sake of the approximately 25% to 35% of personnel who have taken Lariam who have been directly affected. The Committee was determined to ensure that the Ministry of Defence would examine the damage to lives and the failure of the duty of care, and to make the necessary recommendations to protect our armed forces personnel in the future.

Lariam is one of several antimalarial drugs that the MOD uses to protect military personnel against malaria. None of the alternatives is without its problems, but Lariam has been the subject of concern for a long time. The inquiry set out to establish a clear picture of the impact of its use in the UK armed forces. I think it is fair to say that the Committee was shocked and surprised by what we found. I will leave others to go into details, as it is my role to give an overview of our principal conclusions and recommendations.

From the evidence we received from individuals and the statistics that the MOD provided, we were shocked that Lariam is still being used so often despite the well-known problems. We were told by the drug's manufacturer that the MOD accounts for one fifth of all its UK sales. At a minimum, 17,368 personnel were prescribed the drug between 2007 and 2015. There may well be more, but one of our findings was the haphazard nature of MOD medical record keeping. Note to the Minister: it was particularly unhelpful when the MOD published its first 10-page statistical bulletin on Lariam on the day we took evidence from the Minister.

The MOD receives advice from the Advisory Committee on Malarial Prevention alongside the advice from the manufacturer. Roche is clear in its guidance that every individual who is prescribed Lariam should undergo an assessment with a medical professional to identify any contra-indications that might make them more susceptible to side effects. We questioned whether the ACMP's advice was appropriate. It was clear to us that the general advice that it offered was not tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the military. It fell short and put military personnel at risk. We concluded that the MOD should work with the ACMP to develop specific guidelines, similar to the US so-called "Yellow Book".

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): Is the hon. Lady now confident that the MOD will be able to deliver on the duty of care and the commitment to proper prescribing of Lariam, especially when a large number of troops are leaving at the same time?

Mrs Moon: If I am perfectly honest, no. I think that the medical care that is offered continues to fall short, but I hope that the Committee will be able to address the issue again in future and ask for further updates. Of course, we have the opportunity to hear from the Minister today what further progress has been made.

Alongside our findings about the ACMP, we looked at whether Lariam was appropriate to where personnel were sent and the work that they do. The Minister and the Surgeon General told us that geographical location was a consideration in prescribing Lariam. By contrast, other witnesses made it clear that there is nowhere where Lariam should be the preferred drug, particularly given that there is increasing resistance to it and there are alternatives available. Geography aside, and linked to our earlier concerns about the ACMP advice, we sought to clarify whether Lariam, given the known side effects, was appropriate at all in a military setting. A military deployment is a world away from a tourist sightseeing or sitting by a pool. The physical and mental strain of being deployed in stressful situations does not need to be exacerbated by the severe side effects that Lariam can induce.

Dr Nevin gave evidence of an alarming potential negative impact on military performance and operations. There were cases of service personnel experiencing

"episodes of panic resulting in abnormal behaviour"

and incidents of servicemen becoming confused and being found "wandering aimlessly". There were incidents of tension and anger, episodes of severe mental and physical exhaustion and nausea, lapses of concentration and episodes of short-term memory loss, ill temper, dangerous driving, confusion and suicide ideation. That is a grim picture of medically induced problems for military personnel on deployment.

We explored whether other nations gave Lariam to their armed forces. Our research uncovered a mixed picture, but a tendency towards either no longer using Lariam at all or using it only as a drug of last resort. That all added weight to our recommendation that greater clarity is needed in determining when to use Lariam, and that attention should be paid to whether it is appropriate for military personnel.

At the heart of our inquiry was the question whether the MOD was fulfilling its duty of care by following the clear guidance on prescribing Lariam. Did every individual undergo the Roche-required individual medical assessment prior to deployment? Was it realistic to think that the MOD could ensure that that happened, particularly for a large-scale, short-notice deployment? Alarmingly, there was evidence that individual assessments were not happening. Lariam was included in pre-deployment kit;

it was handed out on parade; or the MOD relied on an assessment of medical records only for prescription. We felt that that was a fundamental failure in duty of care. We concluded that, aside from the need to consider the practicalities of arranging assessments, prescribing Lariam should only ever be a last resort bounded by strict conditions. Linked to that, we uncovered concerns about non-reporting of contra-indications; military personnel appeared unwilling to admit to conditions such as a previous history of depression, because of fear of a negative impact on their career. That underlines even further the need for individual assessments.

Several witnesses reported that personnel were so concerned by the reputation of Lariam that they discarded their medication and were potentially left with no antimalarial protection at all. That came even from the very top. I believe Lord Dannatt has announced that he refused to take Lariam and would throw it away. We were deeply disturbed by that and recommended that the MOD should monitor compliance rates.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I recall that evidence that came to us, as hearsay, from Lord Dannatt. It really shocks me that he was Chief of the General Staff and felt that way and did not take action. I think that the Committee felt that too.

Mrs Moon: We most certainly did; but that also shows the inertia in the Ministry of Defence. We heard from many personnel—either individually or as a Committee—at different ranks within the MOD. The matter was not something that was not known about, but it was not being tackled or recognised as a major problem for serving personnel.

Finally, and most tragically, we heard from many individuals who suffered severe long-term effects from taking Lariam. Long after leaving the military, they are still suffering such things as mental trauma, vivid dreams and suicide ideation. That is totally unacceptable. We sought to establish what support was on offer for them from the MOD as it became clear that arrangements were somewhat fragmented. We recommended the establishment of a single point of contact, which we felt was particularly important for veterans, some of whom have experienced mental health problems for years.

Having seen what happened in the previous debate, when the vice-chair of the Committee could not be called to speak owing to time restrictions, I shall now leave it to my colleagues to expand further on the report and evidence. We look forward to hearing from the Minister that further progress has been made.

3.28 pm

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): I, too, want to thank the Defence Committee Clerks, who did a terrific job. We were presented with a wide range of evidence, some of which was reasonably scientific, and we certainly needed their help. I also pay tribute to our many witnesses, one of whom flew in from America to give us evidence.

The report has been an important one for the Committee. In the first 18 months following the 2015 general election we have produced three reports on the duty of care and how we look after people. It is an interesting time in politics, and there are diverse views on defence on either side of the party divide and in the SNP; that is great, but we have a duty to hold the Government to account. That is where Select Committees can come into their own, and we have had some success. The report speaks to the soft side of looking after people and why it is important.

Having served and so on, I know that the interesting side of the military is going on operations and all the things that come with that—shiny stuff, bombs and all the rest of it—but what we fail to get in this country is the importance to combat power of looking after people. I certainly would not hold the United States up as a bastion of getting everything right, but we have seen its forces go through a process so that they understand the whole force concept. They do not just talk about it doctrinally or write about it at staff college. They actually impose a whole force concept whereby looking after families, housing, accommodation, health, wellbeing and so on contributes to fighting power. The US has seen those rewards. We are slow to that game, but we are beginning to get there and we are making real strides, particularly under the current Minister.

In the challenging time we are going through with Brexit, which absolutely presents opportunities as well, it is important that we do not drop the ball on defence issues. As everyone will recognise, we have come out of a particularly tense time on operations. We must maintain our focus, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces alluded to in the previous debate. People read and watch what happens in this place, and it means something to them, so I am pleased that we are having this debate.

Lariam can be quite a complex issue, but it comes down to one clear thing. There is a drug that is clearly very effective at fighting malaria, which is a killer—we should not lose sight of the fact that malaria still kills a lot of people worldwide—but any manufacturer will say that the drug should be used within the guidelines. Unfortunately, for one reason or another, we did not use it within those guidelines, and people were affected.

The matter can be viewed as being a bit niche. When I first brought it to the attention of the Ministry of Defence in August last year, I was treated as though it were a personal campaign of mine. I have never taken the stuff, so I have never experienced any of the effects at all, but the issue is not niche to those who have been affected. We are now doing so much better in this place when it comes to the problems caused by Lariam, as we are on other mental health matters. However, it is simply not good enough to understand it just because it happens to us, our family or someone close to us. We have to take these things seriously, and we must take responsibility.

Douglas Chapman: The hon. and gallant Gentleman has been identified as being closer to the issue than most. Do his former colleagues in the services believe that things have improved or changed? Is there any evidence of more support being given to our armed forces who have been subjected to the drug over many years, and are there signs of improvement in the support they get?

Johnny Mercer: It would be hard for me to say, at the moment, whether there has been a shift. From the information I have been receiving, I understand that

[Johnny Mercer]

work has been done and it will take a little while to get the granular picture of that support. We have been given assurances that the report has changed things for people who are suffering.

We have to be mature and accept that, as an employer and a Government, we have asked young men and women to take medication to protect them from a disease in areas where we are asking them to operate, and we have not done so correctly. I welcome the fact that the report realises that. It is not in keeping with how we normally look after people. I know that, having served, I have come to this place on a bit of a mission, and that I get slightly carried away, as I did the other night, about how we look after people. However, one of the strengths of the military, including the Army, is that we do look after people. That pastoral care very much contributes to what we do, but the way in which we have looked after those who have taken this drug has been out of keeping with that.

Bob Stewart: I thank my very good friend for giving way. I am slightly concerned by the third condition for prescribing Lariam, whereby the danger of the drug is explained to the soldier, sailor, airman or airwoman, and then the decision is down to them. In my experience, a lot of soldiers will say, "For goodness' sake, tell me whether I should take it or not. Why do you give me that decision?" That condition worries me, because I think that most soldiers will say, "You tell me what I should take. I am not the judge of that."

Johnny Mercer: I thank my hon. Friend, loosely speaking, for raising that point. He gets to the crux of the problem. Essentially in the military, we go on medical advice. None of us are scientists or doctors. If we get into the real detail of the issue, it is on that point that we get to the nub of what has gone wrong.

Mrs Moon: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the problem was that there was no medical advice? Often, a sergeant major would just walk down the ranks, saying, "Take these." There was no assessment—nothing. It was just, "This is what we have in the stores. You take it." There were no warnings about the side effects or about reporting them. That was, and remains, the failure.

Johnny Mercer: I absolutely agree that the single point of failure was that we had a drug that, like any drug—even paracetamol or Anadin—should be used within the guidelines set down by the manufacturer, but instead of people being given it carefully, in a medical fashion, with individual risk assessments as stipulated by Roche, Lariam was just handed out on parade. Clearly, that is not the way to do business. The hon. Lady is right. I am glad that we have identified that practice, and I believe that we have put a stop to it. That is a good thing to have come out of the report.

We now need to ensure that we look after those who come forward. There are conversations about compensation and things like that—I understand that that is the way of the world—but that is never the intent behind inquiries such as this. I am interested in looking after those who are going through the process. We must get those who come forward some sort of treatment. We must provide some point of contact that is not just known by me, other MPs and those within Main Building. Everybody should know where they can go to get help if they feel they have been affected, and we need to show them a clear pathway.

Ultimately, we need to pay people an interest and accept that something has gone wrong. There is a slight issue within the Department—I know that everybody, including the Minister, knows this—with accepting evidence of a problem. If I have seen that in my experience as a lowly Member of Parliament, I can only imagine what it is like for families who have an issue with the Ministry of Defence to come forward. I bring that point to people's attention and ask that we never ignore evidence of problems. We all know what soldiers are like. They are fantastic people, although if they are not moaning, something is not right, but we need to be slightly smarter and understand what they are saying so that we can identify problems before they become as big a problem as Lariam.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I am loth to interrupt the hon. Gentleman when he is in such impressive flow, but I would suggest that the chain of command is a problem. Although soldiers may moan to one another—the hon. Gentleman will have more experience of that than I do—they are unlikely, at any point, to want to challenge. When soldiers are brave enough to say that there is a problem, that should be our priority and we should listen to them.

Johnny Mercer: The hon. Lady is right. That is a generic function of leadership, not one that is particular to this cause. Having that intimate relationship with our soldiers, or with those under our command, is something we work hard on at a junior level. At a senior level, it is desired. Whether the time is taken to do that is another matter. Across the military, we need to foster an environment where it is okay for a conversation to go both ways so that we can get on top of such problems.

I know that more Members want to speak, so I will finish soon. We need to change our view on having a softer side in the Ministry of Defence and understand how important it is to look after people. Whether we reconfigure what we do, or look into having a Minister for defence people or whatever as a No. 2 in the MOD, we need to bump that change up the priority list. I thank the Defence Committee and its Chair for letting us look into the issue. People talk about Parliament being so remote—that essentially, we just turn oxygen into carbon dioxide and no one really cares—but I hope that the people who have been affected by the issue see that Parliament does work for them and can take some comfort from that.

3.40 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): It is a great privilege to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate the Defence Committee, under the excellent chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), and all previous speakers in this debate.

I declare an interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on malaria and neglected tropical diseases and as a trustee of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. I have a large MOD base in my constituency, MOD

Stafford, which has three signals regiments and the RAF's tactical supply wing. Many members of those units spend quite a lot of time on deployment in countries where malaria is a problem.

Malaria, as my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) said, is a killer. It used to kill well over 1 million people a year, but thankfully that figure is now down to 438,000 a year, according to the World Health Organisation in 2015. I hope the figure is still falling, but it is an awful lot of people. I have had friends die from malaria, which is a serious disease.

It is absolutely right that the Ministry of Defence should take every precaution to protect its personnel from the depredations of malaria, but the question, of course, is how to do it. I had experience of Lariam when I lived in a tropical country. I took it when I was diagnosed with malaria—I took it not as a prophylactic but as a curative—and they were four of the worst days of my life, and not because of the malaria. Lariam produces extraordinary dreams that leave those who take it completely debilitated. The next time I had malaria—I have had malaria four times—I took a different drug, artemether, and the experience was quite different. Within 12 hours I was back on my feet, back at work and able to continue. The side effects were almost zero.

We are talking about Lariam as prophylaxis, but several alternatives are mentioned in the report. There is Malarone, which for many years was quite expensive, but it is a lot cheaper now that it is off patent—that is the one I use whenever I go to tropical countries. There is doxycycline, which is effective and cheap, and of course chloroquine and proguanil, which have been used for decades. Those two drugs have some side effects, particularly proguanil, which can cause mouth ulcers if taken over an extended period—proguanil is also an ingredient of Malarone.

On the curative side there is Lariam, but artemisinin-based combination therapies are also incredibly effective and are the recommended curative drugs for malaria across the world—I will talk about those in my conclusion.

The Committee's recommendations for using Lariam are spot on. First, the MOD should find out whether service personnel are unable to tolerate alternatives. Secondly, individual risk assessments should be conducted and, thirdly, the patient should be aware of alternatives. I am delighted that the Committee has come up with those recommendations, which are all absolutely right, but they need to be put into effect. I am delighted to hear that the Ministry of Defence has taken the report seriously.

I finish by issuing a warning. We think that we have come a long way with both prophylactic and curative drugs against malaria, and that is indeed the case. All the research funding over the past decade and a half has partially resulted in halving the number of deaths, although a substantial part of that is also due to the use of mosquito nets. Has the Committee looked at how many service personnel are provided with insecticide-treated mosquito nets? A recent study by Oxford University found that almost two thirds of the reduction in deaths from malaria since 2000 is the result of insecticide-treated bed nets, not the improved drugs.

Be that as it may, it is vital that research into improved drugs continues because, unfortunately, we are beginning to see resistance to the artemisinin-based combination therapies—ACTs are the best drugs available at the moment—in south-east Asia, particularly on the Myanmar-Thai border. The worry is that resistance to all the previous effective antimalarials, first chloroquine and then sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine, started in that same area. The fact that resistance to ACTs is starting there gives us great cause for concern. The Department for International Development is putting a lot of effort into research on that subject, which I welcome, but it is important that we continue to focus research on antimalarials both as prophylaxis and as curative.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I thank my hon. and right hon. Friends on the Defence Committee for their excellent work, which I hope results in better treatment for our servicemen and women across the world.

3.46 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): It is right that the first three speakers in this debate should be the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who has campaigned on this subject for probably the longest time; my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), who is an outstanding campaigner on behalf of anything to do with the welfare of veterans and current service personnel; and my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), whose unparalleled experience of malaria—experience of an unfortunately all too personal nature as well as professional experience—we have just listened to with great attention.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford asked whether the Committee had considered the question of mosquito nets impregnated with insecticide, and the answer is no. We were focused entirely on Lariam and our concern that it was being prescribed inappropriately. We said that the prescription of a drug known to have what were described as "neuro-psychiatric side effects" and to cause "vestibular disorders" without face-to-face interviews showed a lamentable weakness in the MOD's duty of care towards service personnel. We are grateful that the Minister, who has an outstanding record of military service, made an apology to present and former service personnel when he appeared before the Committee on behalf of the MOD in relation to those who believe that they were prescribed this drug without the necessary individual risk assessments.

This is a slightly unusual case because, for once, nobody is pointing a finger of accusation at the drug manufacturer. Roche appears to have behaved responsibly in this matter from the outset. It always gave the clearest possible instructions that this particular drug, though it could be effective in some cases, could have dangerous side effects and therefore absolutely should not be prescribed without a face-to-face assessment of each individual first. It was good to receive a letter from the manufacturer, despite the Committee's report being so critical of the drug itself and despite the adverse publicity that the drug inevitably received, stating:

> "Your report has made a major contribution to highlighting the correct use of Lariam in the armed forces."

That shows the strength of the arguments in the report and reinforces the importance of the MOD following Roche's guidelines for use.

[Dr Julian Lewis]

The hon. Member for Bridgend mentioned several of the people who gave evidence to the Committee. I would like to mention Mrs Ellen Duncan, who gave evidence on behalf of her husband, Major-General Alastair Duncan. Alastair Duncan was awarded the Distinguished Service Order while in command of the First Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire, or 1 PWO. In May 1993, he took the battalion to Bosnia-Herzegovina under the UN mandate during the Balkans conflict. *The Daily Telegraph* described what he did in the following terms:

"The hostilities had escalated into a three-cornered fight between the Bosnian-Serbs, the Bosnian-Croats and the Muslims. In this dangerous environment, at great risk to himself, Duncan sought out the commanders of the belligerents in an attempt to broker a truce. In June, he was instrumental in the rescue of 200 Croats who had sought sanctuary from a violent attack in a monastery at Guca Gora. The citation for the award to Duncan of the DSO paid tribute to his courage, resolution and inspired leadership which, it stated, had saved many lives and had helped 1 PWO to win an outstanding reputation."

He was subsequently awarded the CBE for his work in Sierra Leone.

Major-General Duncan suffered from post-traumatic stress as a result of all that he had seen and done, but his wife was absolutely convinced that taking Lariam destroyed his mental stability. He was sectioned many times. Our report was published on 24 May 2016, and I was truly saddened to read in *The Daily Telegraph* that he had died on 24 July 2016. He was a year younger than I am. It is a case of someone at the highest end of the Army whose life was wrecked by the inappropriate prescription of the drug.

I will touch briefly on a number of the Committee's recommendations and the Government's response. As we have heard, the Committee recommended

"a single point of contact for all current and former Service personnel who have concerns about their experience of Lariam",

and the Government announced that that would be done. I would like an update on that, as I have heard suggestions that the advice people get when they ring the relevant number is very basic indeed, even on a par with "Go and visit your GP." If that is all they are getting, we still have some way to go on that recommendation. We also said that people should be offered an alternative to Lariam if they are concerned about the risks, that this should be explained to them and that a box should be ticked to show that it has. I believe that that is now happening.

One part of the Government's response was strange. They have alleged that they need to keep Lariam on the books because there are certain geographical areas where no other drug will work. The report disputed the Government's assertion that geography was a valid factor. We therefore asked the Ministry of Defence to set out which geographical areas, if any, it believed to be resistant to each antimalarial drug it uses, and give us any accompanying evidence to support that view.

The Government's response was:

"The MOD relies on authoritative external advice on the global distribution of antimalarial resistance."

They provided us with a link to guidance from Public Health England. That guidance, which is 109 pages long, includes a table where areas of malaria risk are listed alongside the recommended antimalarial drug for that area. The table shows a dozen countries or areas for which only chloroquine is recommended, but by contrast, we could see no instances where Lariam was the only recommended antimalarial drug in any single area. *[Interruption.]* I am interested to see my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford assent.

The report questioned the feasibility of providing face-to-face individual risk assessments before prescribing Lariam in the event of a significant deployment, so we asked the MOD to set out how it would be able to do so, alongside an estimation of how much time it would take to conduct face-to-face individual risk assessments at both company and battalion level. I will not go into all the details of the MOD's response, but I found one aspect worrying. The MOD acknowledged that if the operational imperative meant that the timing of a deployment did not allow for specific face-to-face interviews,

"an appropriately trained and regulated healthcare professional will review individual electronic health records and confirm that there are no contraindications to the recommended anti-malaria drug. It is estimated that this will take up to five minutes per individual, or approximately eight hours for a company, or approximately 50 hours for a battalion."

Can the Minister explain—or, if not, write to us—exactly what that means? Is it predicated on the fact that people will have had a face-to-face individual assessment at an earlier stage in their career? In that case, there might be some argument for it, but if it is meant to be a substitute for individual face-to-face assessments, I am sure the Chamber will agree that that would be wholly unacceptable.

Ruth Smeeth: Is not one of the problems with Lariam that if someone has had a mental illness before, they may be more vulnerable? A lot of servicemen and women would feel uncomfortable admitting that, would be unlikely to have told anyone within their chain of command and may well not have sought guidance, so the idea that the medication could be used even with those measures is almost impossible.

Dr Lewis: That is probably the single strongest point that one could make in the course of this entire debate. Particularly in the macho military environment—I use that term in a non-sexist way—people are unlikely to disclose mental troubles in their past, meaning that either they may take a drug that is inappropriate for them or they may throw it away, rendering themselves vulnerable to contracting malaria.

Jeremy Lefroy: Did the Committee have any idea why there is such a particular emphasis on Lariam when other drugs are available, such as doxycycline or Malarone, that many of us take whenever we go to countries affected? The emphasis on Lariam seems to me extraordinary. I absolutely applaud my right hon. Friend's point about the importance of encouraging Roche to continue its research in this area; we do not want it put off. Roche has been excellent in its clarity about what Lariam is about and what precautions need to be taken.

Dr Lewis: Other Committee members may correct me, but I have a feeling that we never quite got to the bottom of why the MOD is so fixated on that particular drug. What I am about to say is sheer speculation, but it could have something to do with the relative cost of different types of drug, or with concern about compensation

claims. If the drug were given up completely, it might be easier to bring claims on that basis: "You don't prescribe this drug at all now, so therefore you were wrong ever to have prescribed it."

We sought to give the MOD a bit of wriggle room, for want of a better term, by saying that all we wanted it to do was designate Lariam as a drug of last resort. I do not see why it should not do that. It is obviously a drug of last resort, because the MOD accepts the fact that it should now be issued only under the most strictly defined conditions. What is that if not making it a drug of last resort? So why does the MOD not say so?

Similarly, there has been reluctance to acknowledge the experience of other countries. The MOD asserted that Lariam was

"considered by US CDC"—

the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is the US equivalent of Public Health England—

"to be equally suitable (with an individual clinical assessment) as each of the other drugs".

However, Dr Remington Nevin—one of the two doctors to whom we owe a great deal of gratitude for their consistent campaigning on this issue and for the evidence they brought to the Committee—described that as a "misinterpretation of CDC's position". The section entitled "Special Considerations for US Military Deployments" in chapter 8 of the CDC's publication "Yellow Book" states:

"The military should be considered a special population with demographics, destinations, and needs that may differ from those of civilian travelers."

In respect of the use of Lariam in other states' armed forces, Dr Nevin argued that

"many of our Western allies have all but abandoned the use of the drug",

and that the US and Australian military use it only for

"those rare service members who cannot tolerate…two safer and equally effective alternatives".

That is why we made the point that Lariam should really be used only for such people, because we are not convinced that there is any geographical area where some other drug could not be used.

Dr Nevin also referred to the US Army Special Operations Command having taken the

"very wise step of banning it altogether".

He said that the decision by the US military was made

"primarily on clinical grounds"

and was intended to

"decrease the risk of negative drug-related side-effects".

The MOD's response commits merely to updating the information held on the use by our allies of Lariam and other antimalarial drugs, including the extent to which Lariam is used and the circumstances in which it is supplied. It still does not appear to accept that its policy on Lariam is increasingly out of step with that of our allies.

We have made considerable progress by focusing on the terrible situation in which a drug designed for very specific issuing to very specific people after a very specific interview was doled out en masse as a routine prophylactic to our service personnel who were about to go to malaria-infested areas. That really was a scandal, and it would be another scandal if it ever happened again.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): Order. May I ask for brevity in the remaining speeches? I shall call the shadow Minister to speak next, because he has to leave a little early; I know that that is not regular, but we do not want Fabian to miss his train.

4.3 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I thank Members for bearing with me; I know they will all get the chance to say their piece. I apologise to the Minister for having to leave. I have had to stand in at the last minute for my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David), who has been taken ill, and I need to catch a particular train to get back to my party meeting this evening.

Like my friend—I hope he does not mind my calling him that—the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), with whom I served on the International Development Committee for three years, I feel a personal connection to the subject of Lariam. Unlike him I have never had malaria, but had I contracted it I would no longer be standing here, because it is fatal to patients who have no spleen—mine was removed some 20 years ago. I really feel very concerned about malarial areas. The hon. Gentleman knows how difficult it is for people who do not have a spleen to go to them because of the risks involved. Even the prophylaxes that he mentioned are not 100% effective, so even places where there is a tiny risk of contracting malaria are too dangerous. The Foreign Office advises all its asplenic personnel not to visit those areas at all. His personal experience has informed us greatly about the effects of Lariam, and the fact that he has taken it himself and knows exactly what its side effects can be has brought the issue to life for many of us.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), because she has pursued and pursued this. I am so glad that the Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), and the rest of the Committee agreed that the issue of Lariam was so important and wrote this splendid and well written report with all the evidence that they accumulated. I congratulate them and their staff on it.

I feel huge sympathy with the 25% to 35% of Army personnel who have been affected by taking Lariam. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend mentioned that geographical location was a consideration when prescribing Lariam, and the hon. Member for Stafford underlined that with his point about the resistance that is now growing in south-east Asia. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend also said something very important that is contained in the report: military deployment is very different from tourism. While it is unpleasant to suffer the side effects as a tourist, it is dangerous if not worse for military personnel who suffer them on military duties.

The biggest scandal of all that has been revealed in the contributions to this debate, many from former serving personnel such as the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), is that there seems to have been no duty of care from the Army. The right hon.

[Fabian Hamilton]

Member for New Forest East said that just five minutes' assessment may be sufficient to ensure that individual Army personnel have the right prescription and are not forced to take Lariam when it is wholly inappropriate for their needs.

Dr Julian Lewis: May I correct that? I did not say that five minutes was sufficient. I said that the MOD was saying that.

Fabian Hamilton: My apologies for that. I obviously did not write my notes correctly. I am sorry if I misquoted the right hon. Gentleman.

As we discussed in the previous debate, we have a duty to ensure that people who put their lives on the line for the defence of this country, like hon. Members in this Chamber who have done so, do so in the knowledge that those who ask them to do it and who send them to dangerous places are looking after their interests.

We know that Lariam is the brand name of mefloquine and that it is used to treat malaria. It is most commonly administered as a prophylaxis, but the history of side effects, the evidence we have received and the evidence in the Defence Committee's report make it clear that it is not necessarily the most appropriate prophylactic medication. I am glad we have made it clear that we do not blame the manufacturer, Roche, for the misuse of its drug. It is clearly an issue for the Army itself and we want the Army to get it right. That is why the Committee's report was written in the first place. I myself have taken chloroquine and proguanil; I suffered some side effects, but nothing like those that have been recorded for Lariam.

We know that many countries' military forces have used Lariam in the past, but that it is becoming increasingly uncommon because of its side effects. Some 17,000 British military personnel were prescribed Lariam between April 2007 and March 2015, and the reports of those side effects meant that many of them have discarded their Lariam tablets instead of using them. That makes them far more susceptible to malaria, which is extremely dangerous—as the hon. Member for Stafford said, it has killed 438,000 people in the last 12 months.

The summary of the Defence Committee report says:

> "The evidence we received highlighted some severe examples of the possible side-effects of Lariam in a military setting. While they may be in the minority, we do not believe that the risk and severity of these side-effects are acceptable for our military personnel on operations overseas."

When the Minister responds to the debate—I apologise that I will not be present to hear him—will he care to tell us about the handing out of Lariam to military personnel in future in the light of the report and the evidence contained within it?

In preparing for this debate, I sought the advice of a specialist—he has asked not to be named—who works at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. His view was quite interesting. He made the point that Lariam is a cheaper medication than some antimalarials, and that it is very effective. That could be one reason why the MOD is maintaining its support for Lariam in the face of media controversy, the Defence Committee report and, of course, resistance from many military personnel. The specialist said that it is a good drug. He even gave it to his spouse when they went to west Africa a few years ago. He reported that she had had the most vivid and crazy dreams. Like most drugs, it is not good for some people, but it is good for others.

One thing in favour of Lariam is that it is administered once a week. Many other antimalarials are administered once a day. For someone in a military setting who is in a conflict situation, or who has been deployed in a remote area, it being a once-a-week drug will have a huge benefit for those administering it and those having to take it. A once-a-week dosage also increases the chances of compliance and of people actually taking the medication when they need to take it.

The specialist I mentioned noted that the number of tests on the effects of Lariam on Army personnel were small and were not done in an adequately controlled situation. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend would agree with that, given the evidence taken by the Select Committee, but there needs to be far more testing. There needs to be a much greater database of evidence to prove conclusively that so many people will not tolerate Lariam and that it should perhaps be replaced by other drugs, depending on geolocation and the individual assessment of military personnel.

Mrs Moon: Is my hon. Friend aware that there have been episodes in which serving personnel have murdered individuals, and in which they have deliberately carried out inappropriate acts, all because they were under the influence of Lariam? That is part of the record that the Committee looked at.

Fabian Hamilton: Yes, I was aware of that, but I am not aware of the details. I have heard anecdotal evidence, but it is important to hear about the actual cases and evidence.

I know that other Members wish to speak, and of course the Minister must respond, so I shall conclude. Paragraph 97 in the conclusion of the Defence Committee report states:

> "The Ministry of Defence has a duty of care to protect military personnel on operations overseas. It includes ensuring that they are adequately inoculated against disease. This will never be without the risk of detrimental side-effects, and we understand that the MoD must balance those risks against the health of our Armed Forces. However, in the case of malaria, we conclude that the MoD's current policy has got that balance wrong."

I hope the Minister addresses that point in his response.

4.13 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I shall be as brief as I can.

I have a couple of brief reflections of my own and from a constituent. I took Lariam prophylactically when I worked as a teacher in Malawi, and I certainly experienced what I later realised were its various side effects, including vivid dreams and a certain amount of paranoia. It was difficult to tell, though, because I had moved to a new context and was working in a stressful environment. It was not until some time afterwards that I started to realise that those side effects were the result of the Lariam kicking in. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) was absolutely right to ask at the outset

how much more difficult it must be for troops and service personnel, who are put into extremely pressurised situations, to try to deal with the consequences and side effects of these medicines.

I have heard from several individuals who have taken Lariam as part of their service. My colleague Feargal Dalton, a councillor for part of my area who also happens to be the husband of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), was a serviceman who served on Trident submarines and elsewhere. He described similar side effects which, fortunately for him, did not last after he stopped taking it. The point he made was that the drugs were prescribed and had to be taken under orders. If someone was to stop taking them, even if they were having side effects and making the person ill, they could be subject to military discipline. Many service personnel were put in a very difficult situation.

I was contacted by a constituent who was given Lariam while he was in Kenya for six weeks in the mid-'90s. Twenty years later, he continues to suffer from severe headaches and migraines, which are attributed to side effects of the drug. He has been given no compensation. He has also been told that the side effects are actually the result of post-traumatic stress disorder, but he has not been given any compensation for that either. The problems he faces are making it difficult for him to access work and, when he does, to maintain steady work. He has been told that his condition is not severe enough for him to be admitted to a treatment centre, despite his having approached various different charities. I wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence on 21 September but have not yet had a reply. I hope this debate will help to speed up the process.

There is clearly consensus in this debate. Lord Dannatt, who was quoted earlier, said:

> "It is extraordinary that the MoD continues with this policy given the mounting evidence as to the harmful effects of Lariam."

The Government have a duty of care to those who, like my constituent, have served in the armed forces. I call on the Government to implement the recommendations in the report and to provide the support needed by my constituent and many like him.

4.16 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Rosindell. I am aware that we are now very short of time, so I shall look for your guidance on when you want me to stop speaking so that the Minister can respond.

I thank the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) for opening the debate so thoughtfully, and the Defence Committee for its work. I endorse its recommendation that Lariam be retained for use by the Defence Medical Services, but it should be a drug of last resort, subject to the clear recommendations set out by the Committee. I would go further and suggest that those who are prescribed Lariam should be counselled about the potential side effects and the need to report them up the chain of command.

Once I had reviewed the Select Committee's report, I was left wondering whether the level of debate and conflict on this issue was actually necessary—I shall try to return to that point at the end. I noticed from the departmental memorandum submitted to the Committee that the Ministry of Defence policy on preventing malaria is contained in a joint services leaflet called "Preventing Malaria in Military Populations". I understand that the leaflet was made available to the Committee, but when I looked on the Government website, it was not there—it was released under a freedom of information request in 2013, so I was able to see it that way. The covering letter attached states that, in the interests of transparency, it should be published online. Had that happened and we had been able to see it, it would have been useful to a number of people. The sole reference in the leaflet to the use of Lariam and other antimalarial drugs is the statement:

> "In the UK Armed Forces…policy is based on the guidelines at Footnote 1",

which helpfully read:

> "British National Formulary (BNF). BMJ Group and Pharmaceutical Press Extant Version".

As we have heard from several Members in the debate, information on the use of Lariam is sorely lacking. The only direct reference to it in the guidance was regarding its use by divers and aircrew, who are not to use it. There is considerably less information than I would have expected from a document that is described to Members of this House as the Government's policy on the use of antimalarial drugs. It is exactly as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) said.

Had the information been freely available, we would have seen a description of the briefing that is given to personnel receiving antimalarial drugs without an individual consultation. The only definitive items that have to be included in that consultation are dosage and frequency, and when to start and finish taking the drug. If that is the situation, advice levels clearly fall far short of what we would expect, as the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) said. There was simply no indication that Lariam should be regarded as any different from other antimalarial drugs.

Will the Minister address whether the document was published online? Will he tell us more about the advice the Government are seeking from Public Health England's Advisory Committee on Malaria Prevention? Will he commit to a wider consultation on the version of the guidance that is currently being prepared? I also wonder whether he will commit to review the procedures for sharing and consulting on policy documents, which are so vital to the welfare of our armed services personnel, as the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) told us.

The Government response looks too much like business as usual. The Committee's report outlined the three stages when a risk assessment should be carried out: on completion of initial training; on being posted to a deployable role; and on receiving warning of possible deployment. Will the Minister clarify how the assessments will be made? Are they additional assessments, in which case how do we know what resources are needed to deliver them and are those resources in place?

As we heard from the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), the evidence provided by the Department in its response to the Committee reveals a significant difference in the nature of the side effects caused by Lariam and those caused by alternative drugs. We have heard significant detail about that difference today.

[Kirsten Oswald]

As the right hon. Member for New Forest East said, the evidence that Lariam has such a clear link with adverse psychoactive effects suggests that the Committee's recommendations about the use of the drug should be clearly heard by the Government, and it should simply be a drug of last resort.

4.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell.

We seem to have had something of a flurry of detailed questions towards the end of the debate, giving me little opportunity to address many of them in the nine minutes I have to respond to the debate. I will do my best, but at the start I simply commit to writing to any hon. Member whose question I do not manage to answer during that time.

Of course, I begin by taking this opportunity to thank the Defence Committee for its very thorough report on the use of mefloquine by service personnel, and I also thank the hon. Members who have spoken today, from the opening contribution by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) onwards. I will address many of the points that were made as I go through, but on a specific point that she made, I absolutely regret the publication of the statistics on the day of the Committee hearing. However, she may not be aware that it is absolutely right that Ministers have no control over the collection or publication of statistics; it would be wrong if we did. So it was genuinely an unfortunate coincidence, and it would have been even worse if the statistics had been published the day afterwards.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) for his passionate contribution, not least because every time he speaks in this House he seems to suggest that I should be promoted—so I thank him very much indeed. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who gave an incredibly incisive personal account; it really was very powerful. Of course, I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), who asked a number of questions, which I will endeavour to answer during my response to the debate.

We had other good contributions from the hon. Members for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton), who has had to leave us, for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), and for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald). I will endeavour to address all the points that they made in due course.

The Government have considered our conclusions carefully, and I will outline the positive steps that the Ministry of Defence is taking to address the Committee's recommendations. Before I do so, I want to nail one issue that floated around towards the end of the debate—that Lariam is somehow the MOD's drug of first choice, and that cost is a factor in its use. According to the "British National Formulary" of March 2015, Lariam, at £14.53 for an eight-week supply, is more expensive than Paludrine/Avloclor, less expensive than Malarone but more expensive than doxycycline. So cost is not a factor, and we would never prescribe on the basis of cost alone.

Equally, mefloquine currently constitutes only 1.2% of all the antimalarial tablets held by the MOD, and in terms of doses for a six-month deployment—of course, doses for different drugs are given at different rates—it accounts for just 14% of the stock. So 86% of our stock is not Lariam. That hardly represents a reliance on Lariam or evidence that it is being used as a drug of first choice.

Mrs Moon: I am delighted to hear about the low take-up of Lariam by the Ministry of Defence now. Does the Minister have the figures for what the take-up was in the past?

Mark Lancaster: Those figures give the current status, but I believe that the figures for the last eight years, which is as far as we go back, are similar. However, I am happy to write to the hon. Lady to give the exact figures. Of course, much of this debate is about how we move forward, as opposed to what we have done in the past, and I hope to demonstrate in my response over the next five and a half minutes that the steps we are taking are very positive.

It is important for me to state that we take the health and wellbeing of our personnel extremely seriously and acknowledge the duty of care to provide the best possible support to them. Malaria is a deadly disease, and we must protect our deployed personnel from it. The most effective way to do so is through the use of antimalarial drugs. However, as we have established, no antimalarial drug is 100% effective and risk-free. Indeed, all medications have the potential to cause side effects and adverse reactions in a small number of people. That is why the MOD needs to use a range of prevention drugs to protect our personnel and ensure that the treatment provided is the most effective for each individual. I should emphasise that despite tens of thousands of service personnel deploying to malaria-risk areas, no serviceman or woman has died from malaria resulting from an operational deployment since 1992, and cases of severe malaria are rare in the armed forces.

I turn to the two main recommendations of the Committee's report. The first was that the MOD works with the Advisory Committee on Malaria Prevention to develop guidelines on mefloquine and other antimalarials, specifically regarding their use by military personnel. The MOD has always kept its malaria prevention policy under constant review, and I can confirm that a recently revised malaria prevention policy has been passed to the ACMP for its consideration.

The revised policy is based on three elements. In the first instance, at around the time when individuals complete initial training they will undergo a face-to-face consultation with a medical professional, to identify any adverse reactions to the five most commonly used antimalarial drugs. Secondly, after posting into a deployable role, armed forces personnel will undertake a generic face-to-face travel health risk assessment, again with a medical professional. Finally, once individuals are advised that they are likely to deploy, they will undertake a deployment-specific face-to-face travel health risk assessment.

The results of those assessments will be recorded in the patient's electronic health record. Although the need for a risk assessment is not new—defence policy since 2004 has been clear on the requirement for such

assessments—monitoring will now be better aided by an electronic records system. In answer to a question put by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East, perhaps I can say that if the actions that he described need to be taken, in extremis, before an emergency deployment, they will be based on those three thorough, face-to-face, comprehensive interviews, as recorded in the electronic record.

On that point, I reiterate what I said when I gave evidence to the Committee. I recognise that anecdotal evidence submitted to the Committee suggests that, in a small number of cases, some people believe that their individual risk assessments did not take place in the past. I hope that the new system will prevent that situation from recurring. I encourage anyone who has concerns about the issue to come forward, in confidence, as there are established processes by which current and former members of the armed forces can be referred to medical staff to have such concerns investigated.

That leads me to the second main recommendation of the Committee's report, namely that the MOD should establish a single point of contact for those who are worried about their experience of mefloquine. I am pleased to report that the mefloquine single point of contact has been set up and publicised widely through the chain of command, veterans' organisations, military publications and GPs. As I sat here listening to the debate, I googled the advice about that single point of contact, and there it was on the gov.uk website. It was launched last month and is easily accessible. It is a confidential service for people to make contact by phone and email, and it is supported by other information on the Government website, as I have just said. Depending on their circumstances, individuals are directed to a range of information and services available to help them. That includes how service personnel and veterans can find out whether they have been prescribed mefloquine in the past. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East has raised concerns about the quality of information being given on the helpline. I am more than happy to go and examine that, and I will write to the Committee with details as to exactly what advice is being given.

Again, I encourage anyone who is concerned about their experience of mefloquine and who has not yet gone to the single point of contact, including those who believe that their risk assessment did not take place, to contact the single point of contact or speak to their GP.

In addition to those two main recommendations, the MOD will conduct a prospective audit of returning travellers, to assess the impact of the new policy. That will be for any antimalarial drug that has been taken. The MOD will also continue to undertake post-deployment surveys, to enhance its understanding of compliance with the revised policy.

The Government informed the Committee that the MOD would undertake further research into the impact of the adverse effects of antimalarial drugs on the performance of military personnel. A research proposal is currently being considered by the MOD's research ethics committee. The research will be in the form of a retrospective survey of soldiers deployed on exercise in Kenya who have been prescribed one of three antimalarial drugs. A questionnaire will seek information about risk assessments, individuals' compliance with prescriptions, the incidence and prevalence of side effects of the drugs, and the impact of those side effects on functional effectiveness.

If there are any other questions, I will endeavour to write to hon. Members about them.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Fourth Report from the Defence Committee of Session 2015-16, An acceptable risk? The use of Lariam for military personnel, HC 567, and the Government response, HC 648.

4.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 27 October 2016

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) was held in Luxembourg on 11 October 2016. The Government are committed to leaving the European Union; in the interim, they continue to participate fully in ECOFIN meetings. EU Finance Ministers discussed the following items:

Opening session

Ministers were briefed on the outcomes of the 10 October meeting of the Eurogroup and the Commission presented an update on the current economic situation. Ministers also discussed issues relating to the improvement and implementation of the stability and growth pact and Commission proposals for a European fund for sustainable development.

Current financial services legislative proposals

The Council presidency provided an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

Fight against fraud

The Council presidency and Commission delivered information on VAT-related aspects of the draft directive on the fight against fraud affecting the Union's financial interests by means of criminal law (PIF directive).

Banking union

Ministers discussed the current state of play regarding implementation of banking union within the eurozone.

G20 and IMF meetings

Council followed up on the G20 and IMF meetings which took place in Washington on 6 to 9 October 2016. The presidency and Commission provided information on the outcomes including; continuing the work on resilience and sustainability, continuing the work on tax avoidance and tax evasion and considering issues around the digitalisation of financial services.

Climate finance

Ministers discussed preparations for the 22nd conference of parties to the United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC) (Marrakesh, 7 to 18 November 2016), and agreed draft European Council conclusions.

European semester 2016—lessons learnt

Ministers exchanged views on key challenges, lessons learnt and the way forward for the European semester.

Joint report on health systems and fiscal sustainability

A presentation was given by the Commission on the joint Commission-EPC report of the health systems and fiscal sustainability. This was followed by an exchange of views.

Other business—the Basel Committee's banking reform agenda

The Commission provided an update on the state of play in ongoing Basel negotiations.

[HCWS222]

EDUCATION

Technical and Further Education

The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening): We have today introduced the Technical and Further Education Bill.

My ambition is to drive long needed improvements in the quality of technical education in this country—mirroring the impact of this Government's reforms to the quality of academic education. The reforms in this Bill are fundamental to the Government's vision of ensuring that all people, irrespective of their background, have a level playing field to fulfil their potential and have high quality routes to secure not only their own futures but also the skills that British business needs.

Following implementation of the current Government programme of area reviews for the FE sector—which are designed to give institutions the opportunity to put themselves on a secure and sustainable financial footing—the Bill will also reflect the important principle of student protection, already set out in the Higher Education and Research Bill currently before Parliament, through the introduction of an effective insolvency regime for further education and sixth form colleges. The Bill we are introducing today ensures that, for the first time, suitable protections are available for students in further education, and this follows a public consultation, during July and August 2016, on introducing such a regime which saw broad support.

Beyond the measures in the Bill, this Government have a fundamental mission of social reform to deliver our vision of an education system that works for everyone. Education is at the heart of our ambition to make Britain a true meritocracy. That is why we have put responsibility for early years, schools, Further and Higher Education, adult skills and apprenticeships in one single Department. In light of these changes and the Department for Education's existing two Bills in Parliament—the Children and Social Work Bill and the Higher Education and Research Bill—we have rightly reflected on our strategic priorities and the proposals for education legislation put forward at the time of the Queen's Speech. I am clear that the Technical and Further Education Bill will enable us to get on with transforming technical education in this country while we continue to develop proposals for a school system that works for everyone.

The "Schools that work for everyone" consultation, which I announced in an oral statement to the House on 12 September, remains ongoing. This consultation asks how we can create more great school places in more parts of the country—including selective places for local areas that want them—and asks our independent schools, universities and faith schools to play their part in improving the quality of our state-funded schools. In addition, my Department has renewed its focus on ensuring everything we do drives towards improving social mobility with an emphasis on not just the most disadvantaged families but also on those that are just about managing. Our ambition remains that all schools should benefit from the freedom and autonomy that academy status brings. Our focus, however, is on building capacity in the system and encouraging schools to convert voluntarily. No changes to legislation are required

for these purposes and therefore we do not require wider education legislation in this Session to make progress on our ambitious education agenda.

The Technical and Further Education Bill takes forward the Government's ambition to streamline technical education to ensure clear routes into skilled employment. These reforms will put employers at the heart of the skills system, enabling them to drive the skills they need and value the most. Supporting individuals to a lifetime of sustained skilled employment will not only help to boost productivity and the growth of our economy in line with our industrial strategy but it will also deliver on the Government's vision for an economy that works for all, not just the privileged few. The measures in the Bill build on the progress the Government have already made by investing in high quality apprenticeships and they deliver against the commitments the Government made in the Post-16 Skills Plan published earlier this year.

[HCWS223]

HOME DEPARTMENT

G6 Rome

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): The informal G6 group of Interior Ministers held its most recent meeting in Rome on 20 and 21 October 2016. Representatives of the United States of America and the European Commission also attended the meeting.

The summit was chaired by the Italian Minister of the Interior, Angelino Alfano, and I represented the United Kingdom. The other participating states were represented by Jorge Fernandez Diaz (Spain), Tomasz Orlowski (Polish ambassador to Italy), Bernard Cazeneuve (France), and Thomas de Maizière (Germany). The USA was represented by Jeh Johnson (US Secretary of Homeland Security) and Loretta Lynch (US Attorney General). The European Commission was represented by Dimitris Avramopoulos (Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship) and Sir Julian King (Commissioner for the Security Union). Representatives from other organisations including UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration, Interpol and Europol also attended.

The first session took place on 20 October. This consisted of a discussion on migration in the 21st century, focusing on effective upstream action in source and transit countries, particularly in Africa. The discussion also covered procedures to identify those in need of protection, how to deter economic migrants who do not need our protection and approaches to enhance co-operation with transit countries. There was a general consensus that upstream intervention was essential to addressing the issue of illegal migration to the EU but that this will take time and will involve concerted and continued efforts by the EU and all G6 States.

The meeting continued on Friday 21 October, with the next session on security and terrorism, focusing on efforts to counter radicalisation. The attendees agreed the need to learn from each other and the importance of working closely with communities to deter extremism. Participants noted that counter-radicalisation policies worked best when delivered in a "bottom up" way with full engagement from local communities in designing and developing the right strategies. The group reaffirmed the G6's commitment to ensure that steps to improve security and counter terrorism are at the forefront of the EU's political agenda.

The final session focused on cyber-security, which had been chosen as a discussion topic on the basis that, as technology progresses and cloud computing grows, cybercrime is perhaps the fastest growing criminal threat that we face. The attendees discussed how best to co-operate to address the problem and considered the implementation of the Budapest convention on cybercrime.

In my interventions, I outlined the large amount of work the UK is doing to address the current migratory pressures, including our upstream work, and reaffirmed our continuing commitment to help front-line member states manage the EU's external borders. I also sought agreement from other member states that the EU's approach to partnership frameworks with third countries must be comprehensive, and reiterated the three principles as set out in the Prime Minister's speech at the UN General Assembly: to ensure that refugees claim asylum in the first safe country they reach in the region; to improve the ways we and our partners distinguish between refugees fleeing persecution and economic migrants; and to agree a better overall approach to managing economic migration which recognises that all countries have the right to control their borders. During the session on security I shared UK's experience of countering extremism and radicalisation and highlighted the work of the Prevent programme. At the final session on cybercrime I reiterated the UK's support for increased international co-operation to address cybercrime, and highlighted the work of the UK's new National Cyber Security Centre in tackling this threat.

The next G6 will take place in Poland and is likely to be held early in 2017.

[HCWS224]

JUSTICE

Brussels IIa Regulation on Family Law

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): The Government have today decided to opt in to the European Commission's proposal which repeals and replaces regulation 2201/2003, also known as the Brussels IIa regulation, on cross-border family matters.

Brussels IIa has applied since 1 March 2005 and is the main instrument for families involved in cross-border divorce or children proceedings. It establishes rules to decide which EU member state's courts can determine divorce and other matrimonial matters, and parental responsibility matters (including residence and contact), and how orders arising from these cases can be recognised and enforced in another member state. It also provides rules on the return of children abducted to, or wrongfully retained in, other member states (usually by one parent), which supplement the international 1980 Hague Child Abduction Convention.

Following an evaluation of the current regulation the Commission's proposal aims to improve its use by providing clearer deadlines for certain procedures; making it easier for judgments to be recognised and enforced in another member state; clarifying and streamlining certain parts of cross-border child abduction proceedings; removing the possibility that a court will refuse to enforce a judgment on the basis that it would have applied different national rules to whether a child should have been heard in the proceedings; and clarifying and improving the procedures for co-operation between authorities.

Notwithstanding the result of the referendum on EU membership the Government consider it is in the UK's interests to opt in to this proposal. First the UK already applies the current regulation to the benefit of UK citizens, including children, in cross-border families, and it wants to avoid the risk that, if the new regulation comes into force before the UK's exit, and the UK has not opted in to the regulation, the existing regulation will no longer apply to the UK because it might be deemed inoperable. This might mean for a period of time no EU instrument regulates these matters for UK families even though the UK is still a member state. Secondly, even after a UK exit the regulation will affect UK citizens, principally in other member states, and it is in the UK's interests to influence the negotiations. As a family justice measure, this proposal must be agreed by unanimity in the Council.

During the negotiations the Government will aim to make sure that what is agreed respects national competence, limits any impacts on domestic law and procedures and minimises any additional burdens on the courts and the authorities that will use the new regulation.

[HCWS225]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Social Fund Annual Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes): In the annual report of the social fund by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the social fund 2014-15, published in June 2015, in annex 9 on page 52 of the report the number of social fund appeals decided in the appellant's favour was incorrectly reported by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) as follows:

Social fund (funeral payments): 380
Social fund (sure start maternity grants): 190
Total: 560

The percentage decided in the appellant's favour was incorrectly reported as follows:

Social fund (funeral payments): 77%
Social fund (sure start maternity grant): 90%
Total: 81%

This was due to an error, which led to the figures for appeals decided in the Department's favour being mistakenly given under this heading. The correct figures—rounded as in the report to the nearest 10—are:

Social fund (funeral payments): 110
Social fund (sure start maternity grants): 20
Total: 130

The correct percentage decided in the appellant's favour are:

Social fund (funeral payments): 22%
Social fund (sure start maternity grant): 11%
Total 19%

I apologise for this inadvertent error.

Later today I will lay a correction slip to formally correct the record.

[HCWS221]

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