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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 15 November 2016

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Excess Winter Deaths

1. **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): What plans he has to prevent excess deaths in the winter of 2016-17.

[907196]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): Last week, NHS England and Public Health England launched the Stay Well This Winter campaign, which last year reached 98% of the over 65s. This year, for the first time, children in year 3 will be offered free flu vaccine, which means that an additional 600,000 children will be protected this winter, making this the largest children's flu vaccination programme to date. The Government also provide practical support for those most at risk, including winter fuel payments and the warm home discount scheme. We are also working with the NHS and local authorities to implement our cold weather plan, which is poised to respond to pressures on vital health and social care services this winter.

Dan Jarvis: It is a national disgrace that so many people die needlessly in this country as a result of the cold each year—43,900 people died over the winter of 2014-15. When will somebody in Government accept some responsibility, show some leadership and act decisively to reduce the appalling number of people who die each winter as a result of the cold?

Mr Dunne: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the interest that he takes in this subject. I know that he has a petition currently running in his local area. We do take very seriously the additional pressures placed on the NHS primarily by the winter weather but also by disease prevalence, particularly flu. We started winter planning for this coming winter early in the summer. We have regular updates, which I run, and I report to the Secretary of State on how those plans are going. I can assure him that we are taking as many steps as we can to ensure that we are on top of this issue this winter.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): As part of the plans to reduce and prevent deaths during the winter, what changes have been made with regard to the winter fuel payments for those eligible residents living in the Mediterranean?

Mr Dunne: My right hon. Friend refers to the changes that we introduced under this Government with effect from last year, 2015-16, to reduce the eligibility for those

British citizens living in warmer climates around the Mediterranean, which I know caused him considerable concern. I am pleased to be able to tell him that the change in policy last year reduced the amount paid under the winter fuel payments by 70% compared with the previous year to those people living in the European economic area.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): One way of preventing excess winter deaths would be to ensure that people can go to their local pharmacy for advice, essential medicines and flu vaccines. Plans to cut pharmacy budgets will hit Dudley hard, with just 1%—one out of Dudley's 100 pharmacies—getting extra support, compared with 40% in places such as Chesham and Hampshire. Of the thousands of local residents who completed my survey, 97% said that they opposed these cuts. Why will the Minister not listen to the people of Dudley and sort this out?

Mr Dunne: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman included in his survey the fact that the reduction in the establishment payment to each pharmacy will be of the order of £200 a week from 1 December, and £400 a week from 1 April. How many of those pharmacies in Dudley will not be able to sustain that reduction in Government subsidy? We use community pharmacies to undertake flu vaccinations for which they will be paid.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): What can be done to reduce the effect of winter pressures on the bed state of our acute hospitals and thus reduce the awful phenomenon of bed blocking this winter?

Mr Dunne: As my hon. Friend knows, we are taking steps, in particular through the sustainable transformation plans, to increase the integration of social care and the health sector. For this winter, we are working hard on delayed transfers of care, to try to ensure that there is more rapid patient flow through our hospitals. That involves closer integration with social care professionals to encourage quicker discharges from the hospitals.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): One way of making sure that people do not die in the winter or at any other time is for this Government to concentrate on keeping hospitals open, thereby saving the beds. In that context, why does the Secretary of State refuse to answer the question why hospitals such as Bolsover and another half a dozen in Derbyshire are secretly being closed and Ministers are doing nothing about it?

Mr Dunne: The question is about flu vaccinations and I strongly encourage the hon. Gentleman to join me in having a flu vaccination, as I believe he is one of the eligible individuals. In relation to Derbyshire, the local health services there are working together to identify the best pattern of provision for a sustainable health service for the future.

Mr Speaker: The question was about the prevention of excess deaths, so the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) was entirely in order in his interpretation of the question. It was not about flu vaccinations, and nobody should mislead the House, however inadvertently.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Kettering general hospital would be better able to deal with winter pressures were it given permission to develop its urgent care hub. The hospital tells me that its application has been with NHS Improvement for nine months now. Will the Minister prod NHS Improvement to get a move on in approving this application?

Mr Dunne: My hon. Friend held an Adjournment debate recently which I was pleased to respond to. We discussed the status of Kettering general hospital and the foundation trust that runs it. He is correct that it is discussing with NHS Improvement the development of a business case for an urgent care hub, and this is being considered in the context of the wider sustainability and transformation plan. Mr Speaker, I accept your admonishment in respect of my answer to the previous question. Of course, one of the primary solutions to winter excess deaths is the flu vaccination programme.

Mr Speaker: Or even admonition.

Hospitals in Special Measures

2. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What progress has been made on turning around hospitals in special measures. [907197]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): In the past four years, 31 trusts have been put into special measures, more than one in 10 of all NHS trusts. Of those, 15 have now come out and I particularly congratulate the staff of Sherwood Forest, Wye Valley, and Norfolk and Suffolk trusts which have come out of special measures in the past month.

Sir Henry Bellingham: Does the Secretary of State agree that the sustainability and transformation plan for Norfolk and Waveney is a vital part of the Queen Elizabeth hospital's future as it successfully moves out of special measures? Although there is overwhelming support for integrating health and social care, will he confirm that there will be full consultation with different patient groups on the STP?

Mr Hunt: I can absolutely give that assurance. Through my hon. Friend I congratulate the staff of King's Lynn hospital who have turned things around there. It was a great privilege for me to visit it and see the work that they have done. My hon. Friend is right—the next step is to integrate the work done in acute hospitals with what happens in the community and the social care system. That is why the open and transparent STP process is so important.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): I do listen carefully to the Health Secretary and sometimes I end up wondering what planet he is living on. There are as many trusts in special measures now as there are trusts that have come out of special measures. Just because different people in different places are experiencing poor care does not make the overall picture any better. When will the right hon. Gentleman accept that the overall amount of resource going into the system is simply inadequate if he wishes to provide high quality, timely care for all?

Mr Hunt: Let me tell the hon. Lady that what is different now is that we have a special measures regime. When Labour was in power, the problems were swept under the carpet and not dealt with. Now they are being dealt with because we want every NHS patient to have confidence that we will not have another Mid Staffs. That is why we are making very good progress. With respect to funding, may I respectfully tell her that had we followed her party's spending plans, the NHS would have £1.3 billion less this year?

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that with depressing regularity the same hospitals come up on that list that he has just referred to. Sustainability and transformation plans provide the opportunity to address some of the unsustainable elements of local health economies, but only, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) says, if the money is there. With the health service facing its tightest financial settlement in its history, these plans are just not deliverable.

Mr Hunt: The right hon. Gentleman understands health extremely well, both from his ministerial position and from being on the Select Committee. If he looks at the hospitals going into special measures, he will see that we are beginning to succeed in moving hospitals out of special measures, but because we have an independent inspection regime, sometimes other ones go in. That is how it should be. That is what works very well in the education sector and is beginning to work well in driving up standards in health care as well.

To go back to my answer to the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander), £1.3 billion more in the NHS this year compared with what would have been put into the NHS if Labour had won the last election means 30,000 nurses, 13,000 doctors or 200,000 hip replacements that we are able to do because of this Government's funding of the NHS.

Healthcare Spending

3. **Peter Dowd** (Bootle) (Lab): How much his Department spent on healthcare as a proportion of GDP in (a) 2009-10 and (b) 2015-16; and what estimate he has made of the amount that will be spent on healthcare as a proportion of GDP in 2020-21. [907199]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Because of the 2008 financial crisis, all political parties committed to reducing the proportion of GDP spent on health in 2010, but because this Government chose to protect the NHS, the proportion fell from 6.4% to 6.2%, a drop of just 0.2% of GDP.

Peter Dowd: While welcome, that creative response does not answer the question. The fall in GDP spent on health is worrying. To mitigate that fall, when can my constituency expect its share of the Brexit NHS bonus to be injected into its health economy, which would bring in £30 million a year?

Mr Hunt: No one would be more delighted than the Health Secretary if we had a Brexit bonus for the NHS, which is why we are getting on with negotiating the best possible Brexit deal for this country, including by invoking article 50 as soon as possible.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for taking time last week to visit the Peterborough City hospital and to praise the magnificent staff there, who are labouring under a £35 million annual private finance initiative millstone. Is the wider context not that we would have a lot more money to spend on front-line care if we did not have to deal with a poisonous legacy from Labour of £64 billion of appalling PFI contracts in the NHS?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I was incredibly impressed with the staff I met at Peterborough hospital—there was incredible commitment to patients and some fantastic work going on in the oncology and renal departments, which I visited. He is right: PFI was a disastrous mistake, saddling hospitals up and down the country with huge amounts of debt, which cannot now be put into front-line patient care. We are doing everything we can to sort that out and not repeat those mistakes.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the NHS spends only about £400 million a year on homeopathic medicine and treatments through the 400 doctors who have trained in homeopathy and are members of the faculty. If he wants to reduce antibiotic prescribing, may I suggest that he increases that budget, because there are very good scientific trials now showing that upper respiratory tract infections can be treated using homeopathic medicine? May I write to him about that?

Mr Hunt: May I commend my hon. Friend for his great persistence in flying the flag for homeopathic medicine? While we must always follow the science in the way we spend our money on medicines, as I know he agrees, he is right to highlight the threat of antibiotic resistance and the need to be open to every possible way of reducing it.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Today I publish my first annual report as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, in which I conclude that there is a sustainability crisis in the funding of the NHS. Surely the Secretary of State will agree—he has made some comments in the media that suggest he is becoming aware of this—that he will need to lobby the Chancellor for a better settlement in the autumn statement. Will he update the House on his negotiations?

Mr Hunt: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Lady but I do not update the House on Government discussions which happen in the run-up to every Budget and autumn statement. What I would say to the hon. Lady is that I am not someone who believes that the financial pressures that undoubtedly exist in the NHS and social care system threaten the fundamental model of the NHS. What they remind us all of is that what we need in this country is a strong economy that will allow us to continue funding the NHS and social care systems as we cope with the pressures of an elderly population. That, for me, is the most important challenge—the economic challenge that will allow us to fund the NHS.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, under his tenure as the Minister, there has been a real-terms increase in spending on the

NHS in England, unlike in Wales, where, over the last few years, we have seen real-terms cuts under the Labour party?

Mr Hunt: As ever, my hon. Friend speaks wisely. Thanks to this Government, health spending in England is up by 10.1% in cash terms—4.6% in real terms—since 2010. That is double the cash increase in Scotland and three times the cash increase in Wales. Other parties talk about funding the NHS, but Conservatives say that actions speak louder than words.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): But we have seen public health budgets cut and social care budgets cut, and I can now tell the House that the maintenance budgets have been cut. In fact, the backlog of high-risk maintenance facing the NHS has soared by 69% in the past year. In London alone, the high-risk backlog has grown by £338 million; across the country the figure is nearly £5 billion. NHS finances are so stretched that even the most urgent repairs are being left undone. Is this what the Secretary of State meant when he said that he is giving the NHS the money it asked for?

Mr Hunt: I know that the hon. Gentleman has only been shadow Health Secretary for a while, but may I ask him to cast his mind back to 2010, when the party that wanted to cut the NHS budget was not the Conservative party but Labour? In 2015, his party turned its back on the five year forward view and said it would increase funding not by £8 billion but by just £2.5 billion. It is not enough to found the NHS—you have got to fund it.

Mr Speaker: Order. These exchanges, not untypically, are taking far too long, and part of the reason for that is that the Secretary of State keeps dilating on the policies of the Labour party. If he does so again, I will sit him down straight away. *[Interruption.]* Order. There are a lot of colleagues who want to ask questions. We want to hear about Government policy, not that of the Opposition. I have said it, it is clear—please heed it.

Jonathan Ashworth: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

If everything is so rosy with the NHS's finances, why did Simon Stevens say just a couple of weeks ago that “2018-19 will be the most pressurised year for us, where we will actually have negative per-person NHS funding growth in England”—in other words, that NHS spending per head will be falling? The number of patients waiting longer than four hours in A&Es has increased. The number of days lost to delayed discharge has increased. The number of people waiting more than 62 days to start cancer treatment following referral has increased. Should not the Secretary of State do his job and make sure that next week's autumn statement delivers the money that the NHS urgently needs?

Mr Hunt: Unlike other parties in this House, we have been increasing funding for the NHS. Thanks to that, we are now funding the NHS in England at a 10% higher proportion of GDP than the OECD average, and we are in line with the western European average because of our commitment. These are difficult financial times and there is financial pressure, but this Government have been saying that despite that financial pressure we must make sure that the NHS continues to offer safe, high-quality care—and that is our focus.

Cancer Referral Times

4. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): What the average time taken is between referral and treatment for patients with (a) ovarian and (b) bowel cancer; and if he will make a statement. [907200]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): The figures for times between referral and treatment are published against the standard whereby 85% of patients should begin treatment within 62 days of GP referral. The September 2016 figures were 69% for bowel cancer and 75% for ovarian cancer.

Fiona Mactaggart: Is it not the case that only skin cancer and breast cancer referrals are meeting that 62-day target? Is it not unsurprising that the survival rate over 10 years is 78% for breast cancer and 89% for skin cancer, whereas it is 35% for ovarian cancer and 57% for bowel cancer? How does the Minister feel about these excess deaths, and what is he going to do to ensure that people with these cancers are treated in time?

David Mowat: There are eight cancer standards for waiting times and we are consistently meeting seven of them, as we did in September. The right hon. Lady is right to say that the 62-day waiting time has been challenging, and that has an impact on bowel cancer and ovarian cancer. It is also true, though, that one-year, five-year and 10-year survival rates for bowel and ovarian cancer are improving significantly. However, we do need to go further. That is why all 96 recommendations of the Cancer Taskforce have been accepted—we are investing up to £300 million to make that happen—and there is going to be a new test whereby all patients will be either diagnosed or given the all-clear within 28 days.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I refer to my entry in the register. Does my hon. Friend agree that research will defeat bowel and gastrointestinal tract cancer, and may I invite him to congratulate Bowel and Cancer Research on its fundraising and support for the cancer research community?

David Mowat: My hon. Friend is quite right: research, in the end, is the way we will beat cancer. This country is ahead of all countries in the world in terms of the number of trials going on, including the US. The voluntary sector, including the charity to which he refers, makes a big impact and I congratulate it.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I lost my mum to ovarian cancer just a few years ago. She received outstanding treatment at the Rosemere centre in Preston. That is the centre that my constituents need to travel to for radiotherapy for all forms of cancer, but an average round trip to receive treatment takes about two hours. Does the Minister agree that that is not acceptable, and will he support the Rosemere centre in setting up a satellite unit at Kendal hospital, so that people in south Cumbria can get treatment quickly?

David Mowat: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that two hours is a long time. His is a large constituency and I am very happy to look at his specific point and to revert to the House.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Like the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), I lost my mother to ovarian cancer. One of the reasons is late diagnosis and it has been suggested that cervical smear results should state that it is not a test for ovarian cancer. Will the excellent Minister update the House on his research on that proposal?

David Mowat: My hon. Friend is right to say that one of the big issues with ovarian cancer—we talked about this earlier—is that early diagnosis does not happen as quickly as it should. It is true that the cervical cancer test could raise awareness of ovarian cancer. We are looking at the issue and will revert to the House.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Ovarian cancer accounts for some 12% of all new cases, and early diagnosis is critical. What discussions has the Minister had with the devolved Assemblies to co-ordinate and make available better treatment options, to provide a truly UK-wide NHS?

David Mowat: This is a reserved matter, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that early diagnosis is the single most important thing that we need to do better in order to improve our cancer out-turn rates, and that dialogue continues.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Is it not rather unfair to compare outcome rates for skin cancer, with which I was diagnosed, with those for other types of cancer, because it is easier to diagnose skin cancer at an early stage, which means that the outcomes are usually very good?

Fiona Mactaggart: If it is treated in time.

Michael Fabricant: Yes, because it is easier to diagnose at an early stage—that is the point I am making. Compared with 2010, are we not seeing more than 26,000 extra outpatients a day?

David Mowat: Compared with 2010, we are referring an average of 800,000 more people urgently for cancer treatment. My hon. Friend is also right to say that both skin and lung cancer have more straightforward pathways than ovarian and bowel cancer, but that is not to say that we should not focus on continually improving in relation to the points made by the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart).

Childhood Obesity Strategy

5. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What steps he is taking to implement his Department's childhood obesity strategy. [907201]

8. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What steps he is taking to implement his Department's childhood obesity strategy. [907204]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Nicola Blackwood): The Department is working closely with Public Health England, the national health service, local authorities, schools and other partners as we implement the childhood obesity strategy. We have already

taken firm action, including consulting on the soft drinks industry levy and launching a broad sugar reduction programme.

Stuart C. McDonald: Channel 4's "Dispatches" programme has comprehensively demonstrated how the former Prime Minister's obesity strategy was drastically watered down by the time of the final publication. Both Public Health England and the Health Committee agree that control of in-store promotions of unhealthy food is absolutely vital. Why was regulation of such promotions ditched from the Government strategy?

Nicola Blackwood: We have made no secret of the fact that we considered a range of policies before publishing the childhood obesity strategy, which is a world-leading strategy and one of the most ambitious in the world. It will cut childhood obesity by one fifth in the next 10 years, and I am determined that we do not get lost in a debate about what it could or should have been, but instead get on with implementing it. Our children deserve no less.

Gavin Newlands: A few weeks ago, I hosted a Westminster forum on the implementation of the strategy, at which there was much consternation about why another important recommendation—the creation of a 9 pm watershed to reduce children's exposure to junk food advertising—was cut. Does the Minister not realise the seriousness of the obesity crisis, and can she explain why that important measure was dumped?

Nicola Blackwood: Current restrictions on the advertising of less healthy food and drink in the UK are among the toughest in the world, so I am pleased to reassure the hon. Gentleman and his constituents on that fact.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): May I draw the Minister's attention to some excellent leadership from the private sector? Lucozade Ribena Suntory, which is based in my constituency, announced last week—rather buried in the news from the United States of America, I am afraid—that it was going to take 50% of sugar out of its soft drinks by reformulating all its new and existing products. That demonstrates really good leadership and is an example to other companies.

Nicola Blackwood: I welcome my right hon. Friend's question. He is absolutely right. We very much welcome the actions of not only Lucozade but Tesco in cutting the sugar in their drinks. It is proof that doing so is possible and meets the expectations of many consumers.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Recent data from the national childhood measurement programme shows that obesity rates have risen for the second consecutive year. With that in mind, will the Minister outline what further steps she has taken to make the childhood obesity plan for action into a true strategy?

Nicola Blackwood: As I have been saying during this question time, I am absolutely determined to focus on implementing the plan that we have. It is one of the most ambitious in the world, and it will deliver a reduction of a fifth in childhood obesity over the next decade. However, we have been clear that this is not the

final word; it is just the beginning of the conversation. I would welcome contributions from my hon. Friend, who is a dogged campaigner on this issue.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Yesterday, on World Diabetes Day, the Prime Minister opened the new headquarters of Diabetes UK and said that the number of cases of diabetes increased by 75% in the last decade. The Minister and I attended the launch of the Food Foundation's declaration on how to tackle obesity. Which of the 10 measures put forward by the foundation has she decided to accept?

Nicola Blackwood: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this issue, and we are considering the contributions from the Food Foundation, which are very important. He is right about the role that obesity plays in triggering diabetes. That is why we are focusing on preventing type 2 diabetes through the world's first national diabetes prevention programme, which aims to deliver at-scale, evidence-based behavioural change to support people to reduce their risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May I urge the Minister, in tackling childhood obesity, not to go down the line of nanny-state proposal after nanny-state proposal, but instead to look at Active Movement, which is in operation in a number of areas around the country? It builds exercise into the average day of children in schools, and it is already making a great difference to childhood obesity levels.

Nicola Blackwood: I very much welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for a key plank of the childhood obesity strategy, which is helping all children to enjoy an hour of physical activity every day and which will include physical movement as well as specific physical education.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Another target that "Dispatches" uncovered was to be scrapped was the target to halve childhood obesity by 2026. This was compounded by recent national childhood measurement data showing that obesity is on the rise and that obesity rates are more than double in deprived areas compared with more affluent ones. Instead of squandering this opportunity, the Government should be pushing ahead with a comprehensive and preventive strategy. Can the Minister explain, therefore, why this significant target was dropped from the Government's plans to tackle childhood obesity?

Nicola Blackwood: The hon. Lady is right to say that the childhood obesity strategy is one of our key priorities for tackling health inequalities in the UK. Obesity prevalence for children living in the most deprived areas is double that for those living in the least deprived areas, and the gap continues to widen. That is exactly why we will press ahead with the plan, but, as she has said, this is just the beginning of the conversation and we will continue to fight obesity as a government priority.

Sustainability and Transformation Plans

6. **Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): What discussions he has had with local government representatives on the sustainability and transformation plan process. [907202]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): The STPs are a collaborative local effort, involving providers and commissioners coming together with other stakeholders to produce place-based plans. The vast majority of plans have been developed jointly between the health sector and local authorities. Several plans have been led by local government.

Ms Eagle: Yesterday, the King's Fund rightly characterised what is euphemistically called the sustainability and transformation project as being planned in secret, behind the backs of patients and the public. In Merseyside and Wirral, we know from leaks that the Government are going to cut £1 billion from our local national health service, which, despite rising demand, will close hospitals, downgrade many accident and emergency departments and possibly leave the whole of Wirral without an acute hospital. Will the Minister now come clean and publish these plans in full, and will he undertake to visit Wirral so that my constituents in Wallasey can come and have a word with him about his plans for their NHS?

David Mowat: To be clear, every single STP will be published by Christmas. About 12 have been published so far, and the Cheshire and Merseyside STP will be published tomorrow. When the hon. Lady has access to it, she will see that some of the statements she is making are just scaremongering. She mentioned the King's Fund, so let me quote it:

"The King's Fund continues to believe that STPs offer the best hope of delivering long term improvements to health and care services."

That is what the King's Fund says.

20. [907218] **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): Will the Minister ensure that NHS managers undertaking the STP process affecting North Devon are fully aware of my constituents' concerns, especially in relation to our geographical isolation? In particular, will he ensure that they are aware of their concerns in Ilfracombe, which has suffered from decades of health inequality because of its location?

David Mowat: It is vital that every STP engages with all stakeholders, and that includes North Devon. The public and, indeed, MPs should engage in the process as critical friends to try to make these plans better.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): Despite reassurances, there are still concerns that mental health remains peripheral to STPs in many areas. Will the Minister provide some further reassurance, because unless the Government absolutely insist that mental health is central and that resources are focused on prevention in mental health, these plans will simply fail?

David Mowat: I give the right hon. Gentleman the categorical assurance that better mental health is a fundamental part of what the STPs are trying to achieve, as are better cancer outcomes and better integration of adult social care. If an STP does not include those things, it will have to continue to evolve until it does.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): The mayor of Bedford, Dave Hodgson, and I have a common approach to the STP in Bedford—it is ably led by Pauline Philip, the

chief executive officer of Luton and Dunstable hospital—but he is frustrated that he is not being involved and that his voice is not being heard in the process. Will my hon. Friend ensure, when he reviews all the STPs, that he gets a guarantee in every single case that the local authorities have bought into the plan, and, if not, that they will not proceed?

David Mowat: I give my hon. Friend the categorical assurance that if local authorities and the NHS managers doing the planning work have not engaged properly, the plan will not be considered to be complete. That does not mean that every local authority has a veto on its STP.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Following on from that point, the Minister has previously said that STPs will

"not go ahead if councils believe they have been marginalised."

Given that seven councils in London and west Yorkshire have already rejected their STPs and, as we have heard, that council leaders from both main parties have expressed concerns about the Cheshire and Merseyside proposals, does the Minister have a plan B when it comes to rejected STPs?

David Mowat: In a previous answer, I made the point that every local authority should be engaging with its STP, and the NHS must ensure that that happens. That is not the same as saying that every local authority has a veto on the STP, which was the implication of the hon. Gentleman's point.

Delayed Hospital Discharges

7. **Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of changes to local authority social care budgets on the level of delayed discharges from hospital.

[907203]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): The Government are giving councils access to a further £3.5 billion for social care by 2019, which will mean a real-terms increase over the lifetime of this Parliament. The causes of delayed transfers of care are complex and, frankly, vary considerably by local council.

Tom Blenkinsop: The Care Quality Commission has commented that social care is on the verge of collapse. The Government have had six years of warnings in relation to this matter, yet they have cut £4 billion from the social care budget. Will the Secretary of State for Health be talking to his colleague the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that the £4 billion is replaced in the autumn statement?

David Mowat: The system is under pressure but we also know that the best way to achieve the best results is faster integration, and not just money. I will give the hon. Gentleman an example. There is a massive disparity between councils. The best 10% of councils have 20 times fewer delayed transfers of care than the worst 10%. It is not just about money, as the budgets are not 20 times different. Indeed, many councils have been able to increase their budgets, including Middlesbrough.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): The Minister is aware of the Health Committee's concerns about the effect of underfunding of social care on the NHS. He may also be aware that there are particular concerns in my area and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) because of the recent Care Quality Commission rating of Mears Care as inadequate. Coming on the back of community hospital closures in Paignton, that gives grave concern to all our constituents. Will the Minister meet me and my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay to discuss this further?

David Mowat: My hon. Friend is right that there was an inadequate CQC rating for that care home. It is therefore right that the care home must either improve or go out of business. That is what the CQC regulatory environment will ensure. She makes a point about the issue with the hospital in Paignton; that is out for consultation at the moment, and I would expect the local care situation to be part of that consultation.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The National Audit Office report "Discharging older patients from hospital" said that "there are...far too many older people in hospitals who do not need to be there".

Delayed discharges reached a record level in September. The Minister says that this is complex, but I can tell him that the main drivers for that increase were patients waiting for home care or for a nursing home place; those issues are both related to the underfunding of social care. Does he agree with NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens that any extra funding from Government should go into social care?

David Mowat: As I said earlier, we accept that the system is under pressure, but we also make the point that there is a massive disparity between different councils. Some 13% of local authorities cause 50% of the delayed transfers of care—DETOCs. The real point is that those local authorities that go furthest and fastest in integration, with trusted assessors, early discharge planning and discharge to assess, have the most success.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Northern, Eastern and Western Devon clinical commissioning group is already consulting on the possible closure of community beds across Devon. The social care budget in East Devon, an area of elderly people, and the rest of the county is already under severe pressure. That pressure will inevitably increase if community beds are closed. Will the Secretary of State therefore commit to putting those points to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the run-up to the autumn statement?

David Mowat: The Secretary of State has already made the point that we do not give a running commentary on the status of discussions with the Treasury, but I accept my right hon. Friend's point about his local issue.

NHS England: A&E

9. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the performance of NHS England in meeting A&E waiting time targets in the last 12 months. [907205]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): Last year, the NHS in England handled 2.4 million more A&E attendances than when this Government took office. There has been a 4.6% increase in attendances, compared with only a 1.2% increase in Scotland. Despite that significant increase in demand the NHS has coped well, with nine out of 10 patients still seen within four hours.

Alan Brown: I thank the Minister for that answer, but the truth is it must do better and needs more support. In September, only 86% of patients were treated within the four hour target time in English A&E departments; by contrast, in Scotland it was 95%, for a record consecutive period. Given that winter is coming, what will the Minister do to ensure the service copes?

Mr Dunne: The hon. Gentleman should know that, according to figures for the most recent month available, 90.6% of A&E attendances were seen within the four hours. We are aware that the system remains under pressure, and are putting efforts into identifying steps through the A&E improvement plan, with five specific measures to improve front-door streaming, back-door discharge and patient pathways through hospitals to improve that performance.

19. [907217] **Anne Marie Morris** (Newton Abbot) (Con): Rural areas have high demand for primary and social care that increases the pressure on A&E if it is not met. Given the relationship between primary, secondary, A&E and social care, does the Minister also measure waiting times in primary and social care in the same way? That would give him a fuller picture of the demands on the system that need addressing.

Mr Dunne: The short answer is that at present we do not record waiting times in the same way. Tests are being undertaken in relation to waiting times for GPs, but at this point I do not have access to the data.

22. [907220] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): As we are unlikely to reach my question on the Order Paper, perhaps the Minister could now direct his attention to the east midlands where we have problems with A&E, particularly for people in rural areas. For those of us who rely completely on the NHS, this is obviously a matter of vital concern. I just wonder whether we should not have an honest debate about this and recognise that we have an ageing population. Our A&E times are stressed and we may have to either tax people more or even think the unthinkable and charge people for—[*Interruption.*] See, it is unthinkable, but we have to concentrate on the essentials. Let us have an honest debate about the finances of the NHS.

Mr Dunne: My hon. Friend will be aware that the sustainability and transformation plans discussed earlier today are designed to bring closer integration of health providers and commissioners within a health system area, such as the east midlands. The ambition is to integrate better health and social care provision to avoid some of the challenges he identifies.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The A&E target the Minister mentions is actually a measure of the entire acute system. Important in that is the flow

of patients from admission through treatment to discharge. In Scotland, delayed discharges have fallen 9% since health and social care were integrated. In England, they have gone up 30%. Does the Minister accept the need to fund social care properly to relieve the back pressure on A&E?

Mr Dunne: I listen with great interest to what the hon. Lady says, but I gently remind her of two things. First, as the result of the generosity of the Barnett formula, Scotland receives £1,500 per capita more to spend on health than England. Secondly, the Auditor General for Scotland recently reported that NHS Scotland was failing to meet seven out of eight key targets, including waiting times for A&E.

Dr Whitford: I wonder how many targets are being missed in England. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine report demonstrates that in the 176 emergency departments in England there are only enough consultants to provide the cover of one for 16 hours a day. On top of that, rota gaps among junior doctors are causing safety concerns. What exactly is the Minister going to do this winter and will he agree to lift his ban on locum agency staff to help to keep A&Es functioning?

Mr Dunne: We recognise that there have been pressures on emergency departments for some years, which is why we have put particular effort into recruiting more consultants. There are, I believe, 50% more consultants working in emergency departments in England than there were in 2010, and 25% more doctors.

Maternity Care

10. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve the safety of maternity care. [907206]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Last month, I launched the safer maternity care action plan, which is part of our ambition to halve the rates of stillbirths, neonatal deaths, maternal deaths and brain injuries by 2030.

Henry Smith: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. In 2001, the then Labour Government closed the maternity unit at Crawley hospital. Longer journeys to East Surrey hospital have been a safety concern. Will the Department look at reintroducing midwife services to Crawley hospital and GP surgeries in Crawley?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to talk further with my hon. Friend. He knows that this is a local matter. It was, I think, looked into in 2014, but if the pattern of demand changes it should be kept under review.

Local Authority Social Care Budgets

11. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of changes to local authority social care budgets on the demand for health services. [907208]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): Social care plays a vital role in keeping people healthy and independent, which is why the

Government are making a further £3.5 billion available by 2020—a real-terms increase over the lifetime of this Parliament. There is an overlap between care and health, which is why faster integration is our major priority.

Jeff Smith: The Secretary of State's Conservative predecessor, Stephen Dorrell, has said this month that we are increasingly using our acute hospitals as "unbelievably expensive care homes", and he described this as a "grotesque waste of resources". Is it not the case that the Government have simply outsourced the hardest decisions on social care cuts to the hardest-pressed local authorities to ensure that councils get the blame, not the Government, and that ultimately it is the NHS that suffers?

David Mowat: As I said earlier, we agree that the social care system is under pressure, but we also make the point that there is a massive disparity between the performance of different parts of that system. For example, Manchester, the hon. Gentleman's own patch, has a DTOC performance seven to eight times worse, per 10,000 patients, than Salford, in spite of the 15% increase in its budget this year.

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): A small-scale study by Professor Peter Fleming has recently made the press. It links cardiorespiratory compromise in new-borns with sleeping in car seats for prolonged periods—over 30 minutes. Given that for many Eastbourne babies, one of their first life experiences is the journey home from Hastings hospital, which is longer than 30 minutes, will the Department look at these findings, consider whether further study is required and offer reassurance to parents rightly concerned by the research?

David Mowat: This is a very difficult case. The Department will look at the evidence and revert to the House.

Mr Speaker: That was very dextrous handling of a very broad interpretation of the question on the Order Paper, but I hope that honour has been served.

14. [907211] **Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): The Cheshire and Merseyside sustainability and transformation plan relies heavily on more care in the community. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that this will not work while local authority social care is being cut to the bone, because it will merely send people back to their own homes, where their health will deteriorate?

David Mowat: The Cheshire and Merseyside STP will be published tomorrow, and we will all know better then what it says. The hon. Lady is right that there is an interaction between social care and health, but she and I, as Warrington MPs, must both be pleased that Warrington is one of the top performers in terms of delayed transfers of care, and on that we should congratulate our local authorities.

NHS England: A&E

12. **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): What discussions he has had with NHS England on the reconfiguration of A&E units. [907209]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): It was this Government who first introduced key tests for service change, giving local people a say. We need an NHS that is ready for the future, and sustainability and transformation plans will help to ensure the best standards of care, with local doctors, hospitals and councils working together in conjunction with local communities for the first time. No decisions about service reconfigurations, including A&E units, will be made without local consultation, as is currently the case.

Jason McCartney: How can it be right that the disastrous private finance initiative deal at Calderdale is dictating that Huddersfield royal infirmary be bulldozed, leaving Huddersfield as the largest town in England without an A&E unit?

Mr Dunne: I am familiar with my hon. Friend's concern for the hospital in Huddersfield. We have discussed it previously. Calderdale royal hospital was an early PFI and is halfway to paying off its liabilities. The present proposal, put forward by the local CCGs, for moving to a full outlined business case would involve an A&E trauma centre on a single site, but there would continue to be emergency care in Huddersfield 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and it would maintain the capability to assess and initiate treatment of all patients, if it were to proceed.

Mr Speaker: Hoping for an un-lawyerlike brevity, I call Mr Alistair Carmichael.

Leaving the EU: Nurse Recruitment

13. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What recent assessment his Department has made of the effect of the vote for the UK to leave the EU on future recruitment of nurses to the NHS. [907210]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): The NHS currently employs 21,030 nurses from the EU—6.6% of the total number of nurses in the workforce—while a further almost 90,000 EU citizens work in the social care sector across the UK. They all do a fantastic job, and we have been clear that we want them to be able to stay post-Brexit.

Mr Carmichael: What is the Minister going to do to achieve that then?

Mr Dunne: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has discussions with Cabinet colleagues handling the negotiations, and I am sure that his messages are being well heard across Government.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) is in line for an award.

Topical Questions

T1. [907148] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I am pleased to report to the House something I was not sure I would ever be able to say: last week, the

British Medical Association called off its industrial action and committed to working with the Government on the implementation of new contracts for junior doctors. This will make a significant contribution to our commitment to a safer, seven-day NHS, and the Government will work constructively with junior doctors to address their concerns, because they are a vital and valued part of our NHS.

Paul Blomfield: The South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw STP sets out some very positive ambitions, but it warns that there will be a financial shortfall for health and social care services in our area of £571 million by 2020-21. Those ambitions are unachievable unless the Government address the shortfall. What is the Secretary of State going to do about it?

Mr Hunt: We are working very carefully with all STP areas to make sure that their plans are balanced so that we can live within the extra funding we are putting into the NHS—an extra £10 billion—by 2020-21. We will look at that plan and do everything we can to help to make sure that it works out.

T3. [907150] **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in thanking Dr Ollie O'Toole of the Kirby Road surgery in Dunstable for representing all of the very best in a family doctor? Will he also explain what more we can do to encourage people to go into general practice rather than working for locum companies, which so many seem to want to do at the moment?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to do that, and I would like to pass on my congratulations to Dr O'Toole, who obviously does a fantastic job for my hon. Friend's constituents. We are investing significantly in general practice, with a 14% increase in real terms over this Parliament and our ambition to provide an extra 5,000 doctors working in general practice. This will mean that the need for locums will become much less and we can have much more continuity of care for patients.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): The Secretary of State and the Minister will be aware that Capita has wreaked havoc in GP surgeries across the land, placing extra pressures on already overstretched NHS staff, compromising patient safety and breaching confidentiality. Last week, I met a group of practice managers who told me that some patient records have been missing for months, while others have turned up apparently half-eaten by mice. Given that this contract was introduced to save the NHS money, will the Minister tell us how much it is costing to rectify the mess and what steps she is taking to compensate GPs for the expenses they have incurred as a result of ill-conceived and poorly implemented contracts?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Nicola Blackwood): The hon. Lady is right that the current delivery of this contract by Capita is unacceptable. I have met NHS England and Capita regularly to make sure that rectification plans are in place. We are assured that these steps are now in place and that the programme will improve.

T4. [907151] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): Across north Northamptonshire there is an enormous appetite for the new urgent care hub to be built at the site of

Kettering general hospital, relieving pressure on A&E and improving services for patients. Will the Minister update us on progress?

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): As I said to my hon. Friend's parliamentary neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), we are aware that Kettering hospital has put forward a proposal. The outline business case is due to be discussed with NHS England in the coming weeks. In the meantime, we are looking at an interim solution for relieving pressure on A&E services in the area.

T2. [907149] **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Diabetes is a big problem in my constituency, and the number of unnecessary lower limb amputations due to diabetes is on the rise. Will the Minister ask clinical commissioning groups to provide fully staffed community podiatry foot protection services to avoid amputations, keep people in work and make huge cost savings?

Nicola Blackwood: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that diabetes is a major health risk in the UK. That is why we have rolled out the first ever NHS diabetes prevention programme this year on 27 sites, covering nearly half of England and referring nearly 10,000 people. Next year, the second wave of the programme will reach a further 25% of the English population. The aim is for the NDPP to be rolled out across the whole of England by 2020 to support 100,000 people at risk of diabetes each year.

T6. [907154] **Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Proper integration of adult social care and health services requires co-operation on both sides. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is really not acceptable that in a borough such as Bromley, the CCG top-sliced only 3.5% of its funding to go into the better care fund—nowhere near enough to make a difference to hard-pressed local services?

Mr Jeremy Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing up that issue. Everyone recognises, on both sides of the House, that the health and social care sectors need to work together. That happens very well in some parts of the country, but not in others. I think all hon. Members have a job to make sure that people behave responsibly in their constituencies.

T5. [907153] **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): Both Public Health England and Food Standards Scotland support restricted advertising of junk food to children, yet this was entirely omitted from the Government's completely underwhelming obesity strategy. Given that we clearly cannot rely on the UK Government to take this forward, will the Secretary of State support the devolution of broadcasting powers to allow the Scottish Government to tackle the obesity crisis and its devastating impact on society?

Nicola Blackwood: The obesity plan is one of the most ambitious in the world. It will reduce obesity by a fifth by cutting the amount of sugar in our food, helping all children to engage in an hour of physical activity a day, and making it easier for families to make

healthy choices. We already have some of the toughest advertising rules in the world, and we have consulted Scotland closely on these arrangements.

T7. [907155] **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): The anti-coagulation service at the Furnace Green general practice was recently moved to Crawley hospital, which has caused concern to some local patients. Will a member of the health ministerial team agree to meet me to discuss that further?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): I understand that the clinical commissioning group has provided an alternative which is no more than two miles away, but I should be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the matter.

Stuart Blair Donaldson (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): Climbing obesity rates are expected to lead to increases in type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and the need for joint replacements, which will put even greater pressure on the NHS. Given such threats to health, does the Secretary of State really think that now is the time for timidity and sucking up to business?

Nicola Blackwood: As I have made absolutely clear today, I am determined not to allow the House to get lost in a debate about what the plan could or should have been. Our children deserve more from us. We should not politicise this debate; we should get on with delivering the plan that we have before becoming involved in a lengthier conversation about what a long-term obesity programme should be.

T8. [907156] **Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): General practices in Winsford are being underfunded by 3.6% in terms of the formula that should apply to them because of the slow rate of change, while nearby Merseyside practices are being overfunded by 5%. That is resulting in a £30 million loss to my local surgeries. Will the Minister commit himself to looking into it and introducing a quicker rate of change, so that local residents can benefit from the funds that they should be receiving?

David Mowat: In 2016, the Government implemented a new formula for allocation, which means a better deal for underfunded areas such as Winsford. As my hon. Friend has noted, however, the extra money is being phased in over a few years to prevent distortions. This year her local CCG received an increase of more than 3%, and the funding will continue to catch up as a result of the new mechanism.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): The Minister rightly said that greater integration between health and social care was a prize worth striving for. Why do local government leaders on Merseyside feel that they have been excluded from discussions about the STP process? If we are to make progress, they need to be part of the solution.

David Mowat: As I said earlier, local engagement with all stakeholders is necessary. The STP for Cheshire and Merseyside will be published tomorrow. It is essential

for local authorities to engage in it as it evolves, and it is essential for MPs to engage in it—as critical friends—to make the plans better.

T9. [907157] **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): According to a report published recently by the British Lung Foundation, 1.2 million people are suffering from and have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, while many more sufferers have not been diagnosed. Will the Minister support the establishment of an independent respiratory taskforce to help diagnosis and improve lung health for everyone?

Nicola Blackwood: I know that the British Lung Foundation has called for a taskforce on lung health. Given that a million people have been diagnosed with COPD and a further million remain undiagnosed, the Government and the NHS are keen to work with the NHS and the voluntary sector to find practical and innovative ways of improving outcomes for patients with respiratory disease, and I will consider my hon. Friend's proposal as part of that process.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The number of nurses working in mental health has fallen by 15% since 2010, from 45,384 to 38,774. Why is that, and does the Secretary of State believe that it will achieve real parity of esteem for mental health in our country?

Mr Jeremy Hunt: What I can tell the hon. Lady—who, I know, rightly campaigns hard on mental health—is that we are treating 1,400 more people in our mental health services every day than we did in 2010, and we will be treating a million more people every year when we have implemented the taskforce report. We are investing more, and we are making good progress.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Shared care allows GPs to provide complex prescriptions for drugs such as methotrexate, but in my constituency the Beacon surgery recently withdrew from those arrangements. Can the Secretary of State assure me that the Department will support not only patients who now face potentially longer round trips, but GPs themselves, so that they can continue to provide those vital services?

David Mowat: The arrangement my hon. Friend describes is a special relationship whereby a GP agrees with a hospital consultant to prescribe complex drugs which are normally only hospital-prescribed. This is not part of the standard GP contract and they cannot be required to provide this service. On the specific issue raised, we have asked NHS England to determine whether there are alternatives and I will revert to my hon. Friend on that.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Is the Minister satisfied that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence procedures for the approval of anti-cancer drugs are sufficiently speedy, because the

waiting times for approvals can be months or even years, and there is a widespread feeling that that is too slow?

Mr Jeremy Hunt: We have tried to speed this up with the cancer drugs fund, which helped 84,000 people in the last Parliament, but we always keep the NICE procedures under review and I take on board what the hon. Gentleman says.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): We recently had an excellent debate in Westminster Hall on the Government's tobacco control strategy. When will they publish the new strategy, which was promised for publication this summer?

Nicola Blackwood: The UK is a world leader in tobacco control and we have a proven record in reducing the harm caused by tobacco. We should be proud of the fact that smoking rates among adults and young people are at the lowest ever level, but my hon. Friend is right to push for the tobacco control plan because there is unacceptable variation. We are working on developing that plan, which we will be publishing shortly.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): In Northern Ireland in 2014-15, 870 deaths were due to the cold weather. Will the Minister engage with other Ministers to ensure that fuel poverty is looked at by all Departments, so that the pensioners who raised this in Parliament do not suffer from the health matters that are killing them off?

Mr Dunne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. We do of course have the cold weather payment system in force across the UK, and later this week I will attend a meeting with other Government Ministers to look at winter preparedness across the board.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The Minister will be aware of the concerns in Torbay about the impact on accident and emergency services from the potential loss of the minor injuries unit at Paignton hospital. Does he agree that it is vital that MIU services are kept within Paignton given that it is the second biggest town in Devon?

Mr Dunne: My hon. Friend is aware that a consultation is going on regarding services in south Devon. The point he makes has been well made and I am sure it will be taken into account by the clinical commissioning group and the local community hospital trust.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry but we must move on. Demand at Question Time tends to exceed supply. I recognise the intense interest in these matters, but it would help if questions and answers were shorter—or maybe the Government want to propose a larger allocation of time for Health questions? But there is much interest and only limited time in which to accommodate it.

Prison Officers Association: Protest Action

12.38 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if she will make a statement on today's protest action by the Prison Officers Association.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the chance to update the House on this important issue.

Prison officers do a tough and difficult job, and I have been clear that we need to make our prisons safer and more secure. I have announced that an extra 2,500 officers will be recruited to strengthen the frontline. We are already putting in place new measures to tackle the use of dangerous psychoactive drugs and improve security across the estate.

I met the Prison Officers Association on 2 November. Over the past two weeks, my team has been holding talks with the POA on a range of measures to improve safety. Those talks were due to continue this morning. Instead, the POA failed to respond to our proposals and called this unlawful action, without giving any notice. The chief executive of the National Offender Management Service, Michael Spurr, spoke to POA chairman Mike Rolfe this morning reiterating our desire to continue talks today. That offer was refused. The union's position is unnecessary and unlawful, and it will make the situation in our prisons more dangerous. We are taking the necessary legal steps to end this unlawful industrial action.

The Government are absolutely committed to giving prison officers and governors the support that they need to do their job and to keep them safe from harm. In addition to recruiting an extra 2,500 prison officers, we are rolling out body-worn cameras across the prison estate and we have launched a £3 million major crimes taskforce to crack down on gangs and organised crime. In September we rolled out new tests for dangerous psychoactive substances and we have trained 300 dogs to detect these new drugs. We have set up a daily rapid response unit, led by the prisons Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), to ensure that governors and staff have all the support that they need.

Taken together, these measures will have a real and swift impact on the security and stability of prisons while we recruit additional front-line staff. I urge those on the Opposition Front Bench to join me in condemning this unlawful action, and in calling on the POA to withdraw this action and get back to the negotiating table.

Richard Burgon: The Justice Secretary has been told repeatedly that the prisons she presides over are dangerous and volatile. Assaults on staff and prisoners are rising. In the 12 months to June 2016, there were nearly 6,000 assaults on staff, 24,000 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, and 105 self-inflicted deaths of prisoners. There are 6,000 fewer officers on the frontline than in 2010. Staff shortages are stark and morale is low, and officers and

prisoners alike feel unsafe. The Government's White Paper does not provide the rapid action that our prison system so urgently needs and has so long asked for.

The Secretary of State has consistently failed to acknowledge that this is a service in crisis. Today's protest action by prison officers is the clearest sign yet of the fact that this is a crisis over which she and her ministerial colleagues have lost control. Will she confirm when she last spoke personally to representatives of the POA and when she will talk to them next? What solution was put to the POA to address urgently its concerns about safety? Does she accept that the increase in violence on staff and between prisoners is a direct result of her Government's staff cuts? Does she regret her Government's decision to cut 6,000 prison staff, and how does she intend to increase the number of prison officers now, not in two years' time? This is a Secretary of State in denial. She has let down our judiciary, lost the confidence of our prison staff and failed to take effective action in the face of a crisis of violence in our prisons.

Elizabeth Truss: It is disgraceful that the hon. Gentleman refuses to condemn illegal industrial action that is putting our hard-working front-line prison staff at risk—it is completely irresponsible. I have made it absolutely clear ever since I was appointed to this role that safety is my No. 1 priority. That is why we are rolling out new tests for psychoactive substances and making sure that all staff have body-worn cameras. It is also why we are already recruiting new staff, for which we have announced a £100 million increase in the prison budget. The hon. Gentleman needs to act more responsibly. He needs to work with me, as does the Prison Officers Association, to make sure that our prisons are safer. Sanctioning illegal industrial action in our prison estate is actively putting people at risk of harm, and I ask him to reconsider his disgraceful stance.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): Following the recent disturbances at Bedford prison, I put on record my thanks to the prison officers and members of the Tornado force for restoring order so rapidly and carefully, and to the prisons Minister for keeping me in touch with affairs throughout the evening a week last Sunday. It is a great shame that prison officers have been led into unlawful action today, but does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State not recognise that in addition to adding staff, she needs to look urgently at the retention of existing staff and the reasons for their disquiet? Please will she do so as part of her ongoing review?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is absolutely right about the importance of retaining our valuable officers with experience in our prisons, which is why we have given governors extra freedoms to take the measures they need to take, and why we need to increase safety across our prison estate. I have made that a clear priority, and we have already put in place a number of measures to improve security and safety. Unlawful industrial action is not the way to improve the situation. We had been in discussions with the POA—I met its representatives on 2 November—but it has walked away from talks that were designed to deal with some of the issues. I urge the POA to come back to the negotiating table, to stop putting its members at risk and to work with us to make our prisons safer.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): Given my experience on the Justice Committee over the past year, it is abundantly clear to me that this is a toxic mix of policy and resource. The policy is that we are sending far too many people to jail on shorter sentences, and the resource problem is that we have an ever-increasing ratio of inmates to prison officers. Officers are utterly demoralised. On the ground, inmates are being kept in cells for 23 hours a day because there are not enough resources in the prison estate to ensure that they have meaningful and purposeful work. Everybody agrees that meaningful and purposeful work is the way to better rehabilitation. Does the Lord Chancellor recognise the huge resource issue? If so, how many prison officers do we need to recruit to get to a 2,500 net increase, bearing in mind the retention problems that have been adequately articulated in the Chamber today? Is she inclined to look at reducing the number of young people who are sent to prison for short sentences which, quite frankly, do not achieve anything?

Elizabeth Truss: We are recruiting 2,500 officers across the estate, but we are also taking immediate action to stabilise the position and ensure that security measures are in place. In response to the hon. Gentleman's question about young people, I want more early intervention to prevent those people from going into custody in the first place by dealing with issues such as mental health and substance abuse at an early stage. That is what we will be announcing shortly.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): There can never be any excuse for unlawful industrial action, which helps no one, so I join the Secretary of State in her condemnation. Perhaps she will update us about the form and timeframe of the legal action.

Does the Secretary of State concede that underlying issues of staff morale and a lack of retention, especially of experienced officers, have been highlighted repeatedly? Did the discussions that the POA unfortunately walked away from include suggestions from the management of NOMS about how to improve retention? When will we bring forward a comprehensive scheme to deal with retention and the loss of experienced officers?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend, the Chairman of the Justice Committee, for joining me in condemning today's illegal industrial action. I again urge the Labour Front-Bench team to join me in that condemnation. The Chairman is right about safety in our prisons. I can confirm that several issues were on the table in the discussions with the POA and that offers have been put forward. That is why I want the POA to come back to the negotiating table, instead of indulging in illegal industrial action, so that we can work together to make our prisons safer.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Prison officers in my constituency do an amazing job with the most dangerous and difficult offenders at Wakefield prison and New Hall women's prison. Action such as today's is, thankfully, incredibly rare, but does the Secretary of State have any regrets that her Government and the previous Government have presided over a slow-burning crisis that has culminated in today's action, riots in Bedford prison, an increase in violence and self-harm, and escapes from Pentonville?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is correct to say that prison officers do a fantastic job. I want us to recruit more of them so that we strengthen the frontline and enable them to spend their time reforming offenders. That is what we all want, and it is exactly what our plans in the White Paper are about. We are facing an issue at the moment, and that is why we have taken additional measures to deal with psychoactive substances, which have been a serious problem, and with serious and organised crime. We are offering direct support to governors in prisons to make sure that we stabilise the situation in the short term.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I am a frequent visitor to HMP Lewes in my constituency, so I know what a fantastic job the prison officers there do in difficult circumstances. One problem they are facing is a rise in the number of sexual offenders in prison, either on remand or serving a prison sentence, which makes life difficult for prison officers to manage. Will the Secretary of State update us on what work is being done to help prisons such as HMP Lewes?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. The prisons Minister will be visiting HMP Lewes on Friday, when he will follow up some of the issues she raises.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): We have nearly 7,000 fewer prison officers in our prisons than in 2010. The Secretary of State is now desperately trying to recruit 2,500 prison officers, yet she comes to that Dispatch Box and attacks prison officers for taking desperate measures because their safety is at risk every day. How does she think that will help with recruitment?

Elizabeth Truss: I support prison officers, who do a fantastic job. The people I am attacking are those in the Prison Officers Association who have called this illegal action, despite the fact that we were in talks with them and there was an offer on the table, which has not been responded to. I wholeheartedly support the good work of prison officers across the country, and I want them to benefit from the improvements we are making on the frontline and to safety. We are launching a new apprenticeship programme to recruit more people, and we have a new programme encouraging the brightest and best graduates to become prison officers. Of course these things will take time, but I have also talked today about the measures we are taking in the short term to stabilise the situation in our prisons.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Testing for psychoactive substances has the potential to be a game changer, so has there been an increase in the number of charges for possession? Has the message finally got through to people that if they take Spice, we will know they are doing it, they will be charged and they will take the consequences?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend clearly has much experience in this area and what he says is absolutely right. The prisons and probation ombudsman described psychoactive substances a game changer in our prison estate, and they are one of the reasons why we face the current situation. We rolled out testing in September,

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and we have trained 300 sniffer dogs to detect those substances. That will have an impact, and we are already beginning to see it in some of our prisons.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Lord Chancellor should perhaps bear in mind that questions of what is and is not legal are to be determined by the courts, not by Ministers and not by this House. I say to her gently that she cannot praise prison officers in one breath and then condemn them for being reckless in the next without trying to achieve some understanding of how things have reached this point. If she really wants the POA to come back to the negotiating table, might she think about the tone she adopts in dealing with this dispute, so that it might have some confidence that if it does return, it will be listened to?

Elizabeth Truss: I respectfully say to the right hon. Gentleman that I have had a number of meetings with the POA and discussed issues of safety, on which I share its concerns. I am absolutely not attacking the hard-working prison officers on our frontline, but it is a mistake for the POA to call for unlawful industrial action in the middle of talks. I urge it instead to come back to the negotiating table, because that is how we will get a safer environment for our prison officers to work in; we will not get that through unlawful industrial action.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): When I was a very junior civil servant under a Labour Government, one of my first tasks was to get an injunction to stop the POA going on strike—we did that many years ago. Will the Secretary of State tell us the effects of the current unlawful industrial action, both on those who work in our prisons and on those detained in them?

Elizabeth Truss: We have implemented our contingency plans across the prison estate, at local, regional and national levels, but clearly we will not be able to run full regimes and that puts people at more risk. We are managing as safely as we can, but I strongly urge the POA to come back to the table to start negotiations again, so that we can reach a solution that helps make our prisons safer.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): I have three prisons in my constituency, two closed and one open, and a fourth prison is nearby in Doncaster. Therefore, for the past 20 years I have known only too well the stresses and strains that those working in the service are under, particularly because the people who end up in prison today are pretty nasty characters who have committed some terrible crimes. The Secretary of State has said that she wants to hear from those on the front line about how we can make our prisons safer, so may I urge her to look at the charter of minimum safety standards produced by the Community union, which has worked with its front-line officers to identify practical ways forward to secure safer conditions in our prisons? Will she meet people from Community to discuss that document?

Elizabeth Truss: I visited HMP Bronzefield a couple of weeks ago, where I met members of Community and discussed these safety issues. We agreed on a great number of things, which, in the White Paper, the Government have announced are taking place, and I am keen to continue those discussions.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): May I welcome the measures that my right hon. Friend announced recently? I join her in condemning the action by the POA, which is not going to help it or the prisoners it is meant to be looking after. I, too, am concerned about retention, which affects the young offenders prison in my constituency. My local officers raise with me their fear that the courts do not have the sanctions available to impose tough enough sentences on those who assault prison officers—there is no deterrence. Will she examine that?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with my hon. Friend that crimes committed in prison against prison officers need to be treated extremely seriously, and I am working closely with the Attorney General and the Home Secretary to make sure that that is followed through.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): We all welcome the Secretary of State's willingness to tackle violence in prisons by funding additional officers, but she must be honest with the House about how this does not extend to those people working in our prisons in the private sector. Prisoners do not choose whether they end up in a public or private establishment, and those who work in the private sector, including those from my Community union, perform a public service in guarding those prisoners, whether the contract is directly with the Government or not. What is she going to do to help ensure the safety of all in our prisons and give them the respect they deserve?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments and I can confirm that those increases will also apply in the private sector as well as in the public sector.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): In response to concerns from prison officers, this Government criminalised psychoactive substances in prisons. My right hon. Friend has announced an increase in the number of prison officers, but will she inform the House what other steps have been taken to increase safety in prisons, including limiting the illegal use of mobile phones by prisoners?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; mobile phones and drones pose a serious security threat. We are working closely with the mobile phone companies to be able to block those mobile phones in prisons. We are also rolling out the use of body-worn cameras across the estate to give officers more protection, and we are offering prison governors specific support in dealing with the issues they face in their particular establishments.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Prison officers at Holme House prison in my constituency tell me that they, like others, have suffered cuts and seen increases in violence. The former Lord Chancellor and Education Secretary designated it an academy-type prison with new freedoms for the governor to do things differently. Assuming that these powers still exist, what difference are they making—or has that failed experiment also been abandoned?

Elizabeth Truss: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has read the White Paper in full, where we announced that further powers are being devolved to governors

right across the prison estate. This enables them to conduct their own recruitment campaigns and give special payments to retain officers, and it is working.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): The Secretary of State has talked about short-term issues, but if we are truly to see long-term reform of the Prison Service we need to empower governors to manage, lead and innovate. Does she agree with that and will she proceed on that basis?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. We are giving prison governors power over their education budgets, so that they can ensure that the offenders in their institutions are getting the skills they need to secure a job on release. We are enabling them to work with local employers and also to co-commission health services, so that there is closer work towards getting prisoners off drugs, which is a major cause of reoffending.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Parc prison in Bridgend has an enviable record of successful work in cutting intergenerational reoffending, reducing reoffending and of family intervention, which makes a difference. Does the Secretary of State understand the importance not just of staff numbers, but of appropriately skilled and trained officers, and, once we get them, of retaining them, because her record to date does not show that she does?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree that retaining staff is vital, which is why we have given these additional freedoms to governors. We are also recruiting more staff to the frontline so that staff feel safer, which is a very important part of the job. By having more staff on the frontline, we will enable more time to be spent turning offenders' lives around, which is why the prison officers to whom I speak wanted to go into the service in the first place. What is important is getting offenders into jobs and off drugs.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): When the former shadow Secretary of State for Justice, Lord Falconer, opened a debate on prison reform earlier this year, he rightly recognised that the problems in our prison system go back not one year or five years, but decades. Given that we have a situation in which more than half of adult males reoffend within a year of their release, should we not be focusing on rehabilitation rather than blame?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. Reoffending is a huge cost to society—£15 billion a year—but it is also a huge cost to the victims who suffer from those crimes. The prison system is not turning lives around in the way that it should, which is why our White Paper was a plan for prison safety and reform. We need to have safe prisons in order to be able to reform offenders, and by reforming offenders our prisons will become safer too.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): The tone of the statement from the Secretary of State today has been absolutely shameful. It is no wonder that relationships are at an all-time low. Will she take this opportunity to apologise to the House and to the officers for allowing things to get this far?

Elizabeth Truss: In my view, it is those on the Opposition Front Bench who need to condemn unlawful industrial action. I know that that will not solve the safety problems in our prison estate, but I want a constructive relationship—I want the POA to come back to the table.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Is not the real problem that we still lock people up in Victorian prisons, which is not good for the safety of the prisoner or of the prison officer? Is not the solution to build modern new prisons such as the one the Government are building in Wellingborough? Will the Secretary of State update the House on how that programme is being developed?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As well as recruiting new staff and retaining our highly valued existing staff, we also need officers to be able to operate in modern, fit-for-purpose buildings, such as the one that we are putting in place in Wellingborough. I would be delighted to update him shortly on the plans for that.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware of the level of demoralisation that exists right across the criminal justice system in members of staff such as prison officers? In my respectful view, her tone today has been entirely misplaced and ill-judged. Given the current crisis that pervades our criminal justice system, is it not about time that she changed her approach and began talking to the people who have served that system for many, many years and stopped taking unilateral action against them and their terms and conditions at work?

Elizabeth Truss: I have had many discussions with prison officers across the prison estate, and I agree that there are issues with safety, which I am seeking to address. I want the job of prison officer to be highly respected, as it is a very important role in our society. What I am saying today is that we have been having discussions with the Prison Officers Association, and that it has failed to respond to the offer that has been put on the table and, instead, called unlawful industrial action. It is very, very poor indeed that the Opposition refuse to condemn unlawful industrial action, because that is what we are talking about.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I was particularly interested to hear the Secretary of State's comments about the measures to tackle psychoactive substances. Does she agree that the rise in psychoactive substance use in our prisons has been a contributory factor in the increased levels of violence that we are seeing today?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that psychoactive substances have played a large part in the violence issues, which is why it was so important that we rolled out those drugs tests over the past month or so and that we have trained dogs to detect those substances. We have also seen a rise in the use of mobile phones and drones, which poses a new security threat. Again, we are dealing with that.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): In order to get staff numbers up quickly before the fresh permanent recruitment kicks in, will the Government consider

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swallowing their pride and launch a programme to re-recruit prison officers who have recently left the service on temporary six or 12-month contracts?

Elizabeth Truss: We are absolutely willing to consider those people returning to the service. We want to recruit high quality officers.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The Justice Secretary says that she wishes to recruit high quality officers. Does she agree that veterans of our armed forces have exactly the type of skills needed to deal with challenging situations in our prisons? Will she update me on what is being done to ensure that they are recruited into the Prison Service?

Elizabeth Truss: We have a specific programme to recruit former armed service personnel who are highly suitable to working in the Prison Service as they bring with them values of discipline and hard work, which are so important in turning the lives of offenders around.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the plans to ensure that prisoners are rehabilitated so that when they leave prison, they do not reoffend?

Elizabeth Truss: We are putting the role of the Secretary of State into primary legislation to ensure that we are not just housing offenders, but turning lives around, getting people the education that they perhaps have not had in the past, getting them into work once they leave prison and getting them off drugs. All those things lead to a reduction in reoffending.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I for one have enormous respect and admiration for our prison officers and for the difficult work that they do. A fortnight ago, the Secretary of State came to this House and committed to bring on stream an additional 2,500 prison officers. What reaction has she had to that announcement from the Prison Officers Association?

Elizabeth Truss: We did announce an additional 2,500 prison officers. That will enable every single officer to be responsible for six prisoners, which we know will achieve the results of improving safety and ensuring that we reform offenders. I would like to see the Prison Officers Association support that change.

HS2 Update

1.8 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement about HS2.

One of my first steps as the new Secretary of State for Transport was to reiterate the Government's backing for HS2. I did so from the conviction that it is essential to delivering a modern, vibrant economy for the United Kingdom.

This is a Government who deliver the infrastructure projects that the economy needs, which is core to delivering a country that works for everyone, wherever in the country they live. Last month, we announced support for a new runway at Heathrow, showing that Britain is a dynamic country that is open to the world.

Today I am announcing the Government's preferred route for HS2 lines from Crewe to Manchester and from the west midlands to Leeds, known as phase 2b, which will help to rebalance our economy beyond London and the south-east, ensuring that economic prosperity and opportunities are shared throughout the country. That means that following on from the 2013 consultation and work that we have done since, I am today confirming the majority of the route. There are a number of cases, including the proposed route through south Yorkshire recommended by Sir David Higgins in a report earlier this year, where I am proposing substantial refinements. I am launching a consultation to seek the views of communities and other interested parties before reaching a decision on those sections next year.

The first phase of HS2 from London to the west midlands is just over 100 miles long, but phase 2 is significantly longer at 174 miles. The route that I am confirming today represents a huge commitment to the midlands and to the north. HS2 is not just about a faster connection between the south-east, the midlands and the north. It represents a bold vision for connecting up the great cities of the north of England and of the midlands, both east and west. Connectivity is central to HS2. Poor connectivity between the cities and regions of the midlands and the north has restrained their economic growth. High quality transport allows businesses to grow, work together and access a wide range of customers, suppliers and skilled labour markets. By improving connections between our great cities, HS2 will generate jobs, skills and economic growth and help us to build an economy that works for all.

Today, only 4% of people who travel between Birmingham and Manchester do so by train—hardly surprising, when the journey takes around 90 minutes. But on HS2, it will take less than half that time—just 41 minutes—so at a stroke, those two regional capitals are much more closely linked and can deliver increased economic prosperity. The flow of people, ideas and opportunity will follow those new connections.

Work is also progressing to see how HS2 could help to deliver parts of a fast, frequent northern powerhouse rail network for Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Hull and Newcastle. Where necessary, we will include passive provision for these services in the phase 2b hybrid Bill, subject to agreement of funding and the supporting business case. Just as important as connectivity is the uplift that HS2 will deliver to our transport system. It will not be a separate, stand-alone railway,

but an integral part of our nation's future rail network and overall transport infrastructure. It will add to the overall capacity of our congested railways. Even those who never travel on HS2 stand to feel its benefits.

By providing new routes for intercity services, HS2 will free up space on our existing railways for new commuter, regional and freight services, while also taking lorries off our roads. It will provide new options for services to towns which currently do not have a direct connection to London. Tomorrow's HS2 and east and west coast main lines could have 48 trains per hour to Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. That compares with 29 today.

Even those who never travel by rail at all stand to benefit from the thousands of local jobs and apprenticeships created by the better connections that HS2 will bring and by the project itself. It will generate around 25,000 jobs during construction, as well as 2,000 apprenticeships. It will support growth in the wider economy, worth an additional 100,000 jobs. I recently visited the site of the new National College for High Speed Rail in Birmingham. Together with its sister college in Doncaster, it will open its doors next year to provide Britain's workforce with the specialist training, skills and qualifications to build HS2 and future rail projects. It will deliver highly skilled, highly motivated people who will have the opportunity of a great career in a vital industry.

Today's announcement represents an important step forward in delivering HS2, and with it the transport infrastructure essential to the economy of 21st century Britain. However, I am well aware that there are those with the firmly held view that HS2 should not go ahead, and those who doubt whether the case has been made satisfactorily. Indeed, I know that many Members of this House have strong convictions on this issue. I am under no illusions; this is not an easy undertaking, but I believe that it is the right thing to do. The easy thing to do would have been to keep patching the existing railways, making do and mending a railway that the Victorian pioneers themselves would still recognise, and hoping to fit ever-increasing passenger and freight growth in the same pint pot. That is not what the people of this country deserve, nor is it what our economy requires.

In addition to publishing today a Command Paper and accompanying maps, setting out the full detail of my preferred route for the HS2 phase 2b route, I have written to those Members whose constituencies are affected, and the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), will make himself available to Members who wish to meet him later today.

In order to ensure that our case is robust and in line with the requirements of the Treasury's Green Book, we have of course considered alternatives to the phase 2b scheme. We found no alternative that could deliver the same level of benefit for the country, stand the test of time and provide the same level of capacity, connectivity and service as phase 2b does. Over the past few months I have personally visited most places along the HS2 route. I have seen and heard for myself all the issues, and I remain convinced that through this project we are delivering the right solution to the country's transport needs.

It is important to say that I recognise that building major infrastructure will always be disruptive and disturbing for those living nearby, and I am mindful of the concerns of the constituents of very many Members of this

House. In proposing this route, I have listened to the views expressed in the consultation of 2013, as well as those of HS2 Ltd's engineering and environmental specialists.

I am issuing safeguarding directions for the whole of the preferred phase 2b route today. That protects it from conflicting development, but it also means—that is extremely important—that the people who are most affected by these plans will be able to access statutory compensation straight away. In addition, I will be consulting on discretionary property schemes that will go over and above what is required by law and give assistance to those who will be adversely affected by the railway. These schemes are the same as those currently in operation for people living along the phase 1 route. I aim to be able to confirm next year the schemes on which I am consulting today.

Two of these schemes will come into operation from today. They are the express purchase scheme and the need to sell scheme. Express purchase allows owner-occupiers to apply to the Government to buy their home sooner than would be possible under statutory schemes. The Government will buy properties at their unblighted open market value, as if HS2 were not going to be being built, will provide a home loss payment of 10% of the property's open market value up to £58,000, and will pay reasonable moving costs.

Need to sell is a purchase scheme for people who have a compelling reason to sell their property but cannot do so, other than at a significantly reduced price, because of HS2. There is no geographical boundary to this scheme. The Government will agree to buy property for 100% of the open market value if an application is successful.

As I say, I am mindful of the impacts that HS2 has on communities. I can assure every Member of this House that my Department and HS2 Ltd will continue to work with affected communities and local authorities up and down the line of route, and in that process I expect people to be treated with fairness, compassion and respect.

Today marks the end of a long period of uncertainty for communities, councils and businesses along the route of phase 2b. These have been complex and difficult decisions to take, but I make no apology for taking the time to get them right and making sure that the route we are proposing offers the best possible outcomes for passengers, communities, the environment and the economy.

I need to touch briefly on phase 1. I can report to the House that phase 1 from Birmingham to London is progressing well. Construction work is due to start early next year, subject to Royal Assent. Phase 1 will open in 2026. In a clear signal of how work is progressing, this morning I have announced the companies that have been awarded the phase 1 enabling works contracts. These works include archaeology, site clearance and the setting up of construction compounds ahead of the start of the main civil engineering work. These contracts are worth up to £900 million and cover the whole of phase 1 from London to Birmingham and the connection to the west coast main line at Handsacre. Work is due to begin in the spring.

Another aspect of the preparatory work on phase 1 is the considerable engagement with those on the line of route, some of whom have taken up our express purchase compensation scheme. We are continuing this offer of

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support and will be writing to those people whose homes or business may be directly affected by construction. We have a general obligation to continue to seek further reductions to adverse impacts during the design, construction and operation of the scheme. This is something that I will be watching very closely. In keeping with that obligation, HS2 Ltd has continued to look at possible mitigation measures around Euston station where existing rail lines converge. This could significantly reduce impacts on rail passengers and the local community. Any decision on the adoption of these possible mitigations would be taken closer to the letting of main contracts next year, and I will update the House at that time.

This is part of a wider design process, which will continue to add detail to our proposals for phase 1 well into next year and beyond. I would expect similar mitigations to come forward elsewhere along the route as the detailed design stage starts in earnest after Royal Assent.

HS2 is an ambitious and exciting project, and we must seize the opportunity it offers to transform our country for future generations. Local authorities and local enterprise partnerships are gearing up for HS2 and developing growth strategies, supported by UK Government growth strategy funding, to maximise the benefits of HS2 in their area. I am pleased to announce further funding today for Manchester, the northern gateway partnership, Leeds and the east Midlands, and the first tranche of funding for Sheffield, to support this important work.

This Government are planning for the future. We are taking the big decisions and investing in world-class transport infrastructure. We are ensuring that the UK can seize opportunities and compete on the global stage. But we are also aiming to deliver more capacity on our overcrowded railway, which could see a 65% increase in the number of trains on this part of the network.

The route decision I published today takes us an important step closer to realising the full potential of HS2. It means better transport connections and capacity, more jobs and more training opportunities. Just as importantly, it links centres of innovation and opportunity in the cities and regions of the midlands, the north and our knowledge economy. I commend this statement to the House.

1.21 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for advance sight of it, for which I am most grateful.

Labour Members are pleased to finally have a partial announcement of the HS2 route, and it is to be very much welcomed, as the delay in getting to this announcement has been immensely stressful for the communities concerned. Labour supports HS2 because we recognise the need for not only faster journey times and improved connectivity but, most importantly, extra capacity—not just for the benefit of passengers, but to transfer freight from road to rail, as the Secretary of State mentioned in his statement.

The employment, and in many cases the lifelong career opportunities, that HS2 will bring will be immense, and we very much welcome all of that, but that does not

mean that our support is without qualification, as considerable concerns still remain. There are significant details of the route that have not been confirmed in today's announcement—most notably a decision on whether to site a station in or around Sheffield, which has been dodged, along with three decisions on the western leg and three on the eastern leg. This is not the first time we have experienced this Government dithering on key infrastructure decisions. While we welcome the consultation that is to follow, there is clearly a risk that it may cause the Government to overly delay decisions, as we have seen recently on a number of nationally important pieces of infrastructure. I ask for an assurance from the Secretary of State that that will not be the case in this instance.

During the consultation, it is imperative that the voices of local communities be heard—especially those communities that will be particularly disrupted by the route as we now know it. Among other things, we have seen the pain and anguish caused to many villages and communities in the south Yorkshire region and elsewhere, and while we need to study the detail of the proposals we must ensure that proper mitigations and comprehensive compensation schemes are in place. There will be strong arguments made to modify the alignment of the route in many cases, and those arguments will have to be given proper consideration.

Earlier this year, the National Audit Office reported that HS2 had an “unrealistic timetable” and faced major cost pressures, and that too ambitious a timetable meant that not all the intended benefits would be delivered. We have seen similar problems beset other rail projects, with the Government recently reneging on their manifesto commitment regarding electrification works on the Great Western route and refusing to commit to the already delayed timetable of electrification works on the midland main line. The Department for Transport has a track record of being unable to complete works on time or on budget, so there is understandable concern that HS2 will not be delivered to budget or on time, and I ask the Secretary of State to confirm unequivocally that the planned start dates will be met and the project delivered on the planned timescale and costings.

This is not solely about HS2. So-called HS3 has to be progressed, as do the paused and unpaused enhancement works that are essential to bring greater connectivities to communities that are not directly connected to HS2. They cannot be forgotten, and they cannot be left behind. The benefits that HS2 can bring to the country are significant, but the Government must get a grip to keep the project on track and to avoid the concerns expressed in the National Audit Office report being realised.

The Government announced that a new rail franchise, the west coast partnership, which is scheduled to start on 1 April 2019, will combine the current inter-city west coast services with HS2, meaning that HS2 will be run in the private sector from 2026 and that Virgin looks set to be granted a further uncontested 12-month contract to run inter-city west coast trains. The Government seem determined to hand over vast swathes of our public services, and what should be our public services, to Richard Branson en masse. Billions of pounds of taxpayers' money is being invested in HS2, so it is right that the revenues go back to the Exchequer and not into the hands of train operating companies. HS2 should be run in the public sector, as a public service.

Given the concerns about the cost of HS2, the Government should be looking to get the best deal for the UK rather than the shareholders of private train companies or the taxpayers of Germany, France or Holland. It is time to take back control of our railways. Labour is committed to the public ownership and running of our railways, and that includes HS2. A future Labour Government would bring any such franchise back within public operation at the earliest possible opportunity. We support HS2, but it has to deliver for taxpayers and passengers alike, and that will be the consistent challenge for Parliament in the years ahead.

Chris Grayling: First, let me welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the principle of the project, although we obviously have one or two areas of difference.

Let me start with the issue of the route through Sheffield. The hon. Gentleman accuses us of dithering. I would simply remind him that we have a statutory duty to consult. We are bringing forward a new set of proposals. He will not, I am sure, argue that I should break the law when it comes to the consultation process that we need to go through. I clearly want to give people as much certainty as possible, as quickly as possible, but I have a statutory duty, and I intend to fulfil it.

I recognise the issue that local communities face, and part of what we will need to do through that consultation process is listen to those local communities about the things we can do, large and small, to mitigate the impacts on them. That is a very important part of the consultation process.

The hon. Gentleman talks about an unrealistic timetable. I think many people in this country would share my frustration that, actually, it will take 17 years from today to complete the whole of HS2. If that is an unrealistic timetable—if it should take much longer—heaven help us. This project has taken a long time to get to this point and will take more years than I would wish to complete—and we need it to be completed—so the idea that it is an unrealistic timetable to complete this project by 2033 seems to me a strange one.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of electrification. I would simply remind him that, through 13 years in government, Labour electrified 10 miles of railway line. It is small wonder, when we actually started to electrify key main lines, that the expertise was no longer there. It is all very well Labour calling on us to do this, but we are the ones who are undertaking the modernisation of our railways. Through all those years when Labour was in power, the investments in our railways were pitiful by comparison with what we are doing today.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the question of HS3. He will be aware that Transport for the North is working on proposals for what is now being called northern powerhouse rail. That will be much more than a single railway line, and it will build the connectivity we need from east to west. I am waiting with interest to see Transport for the North's proposals for the future.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the west coast partnership. He will understand that, on the day before this line opens, there will be Pendolinos running up the west coast main line, and, on the day after, there will be express trains running up HS2 to Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool. I want that to be a smooth transition. We have to make sure the train drivers are trained. We

have to make sure the staff are ready for the change. I do not envisage a situation where we sack all the staff one day and hire a new group the next. It makes sense to have a smooth transition, and that is what we are planning.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about the private sector, let the Labour party hark back to the days of British Rail; we want a railway that is modern and progressive. Since the railways were privatised, after decades of decline, the number of passengers has doubled and new stations and railway lines have opened. This is a railway that is moving forwards, not backwards, as it would under Labour.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I welcome today's announcement by the Secretary of State, not least because it gives a degree of certainty to all the poor people and businesses that are going to be affected by this project. Perhaps he will forgive me if I do not share his overexcitement about its potential, as no benefit accrues to the Chilterns. He is well aware of my criticism of how HS2 has conducted its operations. Will he therefore give me, and people beyond this Chamber, a personal undertaking that there will be generous, fair and rapid compensation, the highest environmental protection, and timely and thoughtful community engagement? I hope that there will also be a revision of the totally archaic hybrid Bill process, which has in itself added pain to the suffering that people along the line have had to experience so far. It is crucial that lessons are learned from phase 1 before we embark on phase 2a.

Chris Grayling: I absolutely echo the need to make sure that we do the right thing by people affected on the route. I slightly disagree with my right hon. Friend about the benefits in the Chilterns, although it is true that in her constituency, which is on a different line, the benefits are different from those a little further away on the other side of the Chilterns on the line that runs up through towns such as Tring, where there will be a benefit in extra capacity on commuter services—it is estimated that there will be twice as many seats on trains going to Euston station in the morning peak, and I think that will be very welcome to the people who use that line. Of course, I absolutely understand that we have to take great care. I share her concern about the hybrid Bill process. It is clear from the discussions we have had on this in the past that there is a widespread view in this House that we want a simplified and modernised process, and work is being done right now on how that might be achieved. However, I also believe very strongly that we need to invest in our future, and that is what this is about.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement. I have studied all seven pages of it. He starts by stating that in making his decision he "did so from the conviction that it is essential to delivering a modern, vibrant economy for the United Kingdom", and ends by saying that he is "ensuring that the UK can seize opportunities and compete on the global stage." Yet in seven pages mentioning 34 places, including the future beneficiaries, not once does Scotland get a mention. There is nothing about connecting Scotland and there are no options for Edinburgh, Glasgow or any other Scottish city—no passing comment even. We

[Drew Hendry]

support high-speed rail, but not just to Birmingham, Leeds or Manchester. This announcement, unless followed by a commitment to speed up links to Scotland, means, in effect, our getting further away from London, in relative terms. When did he discuss this announcement with the Scottish Government, and what guarantee did he give for high-speed rail to be connected to Scotland?

Chris Grayling: Let me start by reminding the hon. Gentleman that I have made two very significant transport announcements in this House in the past month, the last of which was very specifically focused on ensuring that we had better aviation links both to London and internationally via our expansion of Heathrow airport. I was particularly keen to stress the importance of protecting connectivity particularly to Scotland and Northern Ireland, because the air links are so crucial to the economies of those nations. Let nobody suggest that I am not interested in connectivity to Scotland; it is a priority for us. Let us be clear about what this project delivers for passengers travelling down the east coast and west coast routes, who will benefit as much as anybody else from the increased speeds at which they are able to travel over most of the route to Scotland. There is therefore a benefit to Scottish passengers as well. Let us also remember that this is much more than simply a transport project: it will generate a whole set of new skills and business opportunities for this country—for this United Kingdom. Indeed, the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), recently spoke at a suppliers' conference in Aberdeen. I fully expect to see jobs created in Scotland and opportunities for business in Scotland. That is all part of how we seek to represent and support this entire United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State is clearly a very lucky fellow indeed; I am sure that he much enjoyed orating to the said conference.

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the massive improvement programme for our railways—not just HS2 but the existing network—is a fundamental part of the Government's programme to deliver economic success and economic rebalancing?

Chris Grayling: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is very important to see today's announcement in a broader context, because while we are investing in the long term we are also investing in the short term. To give just one example, £350 million is being spent on improvements to the rail network around Liverpool. There are many other examples around the country—indeed, there are improvements in Scotland and in Wales. Our Government strategy is about much more than this railway line; it is about delivering transport improvements across the whole United Kingdom.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Those of my constituents who are affected by this will be appalled that none of their proposals on the route has been taken into account, either on the route itself or on mitigation, and will, frankly, wonder why they bothered. There is a concern that the Government

and HS2 are taking seriously the concerns and interests of cities but not those of towns and smaller communities, and that there is a willingness to invest in mitigation or tunnelling for the south but not for the north. What can the Secretary of State say to my constituents to give them any good reason to carry on engaging with this process at all?

Chris Grayling: I would say to the right hon. Lady's constituents that we fully intend to go through a process of detailed engagement. I am happy, as is my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, to meet her to talk about these issues. I have travelled the route and seen for myself some of the issues and challenges. I have in mind some things that we might do to help improve the design of the route and reduce its visual impact. I will listen to her and to other Members. Fundamentally, though, she will understand, as a Yorkshire MP, the importance of this kind of connectivity to the economy of her region and the jobs it will create. We have to do this in the best possible way.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): As my right hon. Friend is aware, many of my constituents have been living under a great deal of stress for three years now. I am sure that residents and businesses alike will welcome the compensation package that he outlined, especially those directly on the route through Long Eaton, but will he reassure the whole of Long Eaton that it will not be cut in half by the track that will go through it?

Chris Grayling: I have been particularly concerned about Long Eaton, for which we have tabled two options for consideration: a high-level viaduct and a low-level viaduct. I am well aware of the issue that the town faces; this is a complicated piece of engineering. Of course, the jobs created by the new development around Toton will be of benefit to Long Eaton. We will do our best to get this right, and that is why we have tabled more than one option for consideration by the local community.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome this statement, with its promise of much-needed increased rail capacity, together with the jobs that go with that. Will the Secretary of State tell us more about how this investment will benefit the whole network, and how the economic benefits will actually be achieved? In particular, how much is he working with Rail North in bringing maximum benefit to the cities of the north, including Liverpool?

Chris Grayling: We are awaiting the proposals of Rail North and Transport for the North on the connectivity that runs east to west, which I regard as very important. For a city such as Liverpool, there are two particular benefits. One of those will come through the part that this development has to play in that east-west connectivity, particularly with the routes around south Manchester. In addition—as the hon. Lady knows, I have been a regular user of the route to Liverpool over the years—there will be more trains to Liverpool and they will run faster from Liverpool to London than they do now. That will knock a significant amount off the journey time, making a real difference to her and her constituents when they travel not only to London but to Birmingham.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Network Rail purchases much of its rail track from the Scunthorpe steelworks in the neighbouring constituency to mine. What efforts will my right hon. Friend make to ensure that British manufacturers are used in the production of most of the HS2 infrastructure?

Chris Grayling: I am pleased to say that the contracts announced today will involve very substantial British participation in the early works. The vast majority of steel used on our railways today comes from British plants. I do not expect that to change, nor do I want it to change. I am also very clear that the businesses that take part in this programme have to leave a skills footprint behind them. I am not interested in firms that just turn up and do not expect to invest in the next generation of skills that this country needs. We need to be very robust on that throughout the procurement process. Moreover, this will allow us to provide extra connectivity to towns that do not currently have direct services to London.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): The Secretary of State should not airbrush history and the massive £8 billion upgrade to the west coast under the last Labour Government. There was a huge improvement in services and a huge increase in the number of passengers using them.

I want to ask a specific question about my constituency. The Command Paper states that there will be an additional train to Liverpool, so there will be two trains per hour. Will the Secretary of State confirm that they will also stop at Runcorn, as is currently the case?

Chris Grayling: I do not expect any changes to the service to Runcorn. It would be a big step in the wrong direction if that service changed. The Liverpool trains have always stopped at Runcorn and Liverpool, and I would not want that to change.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Whole new areas in my constituency will be blighted as a result of today's announcement, although other parts of it will benefit from the hub at Crewe. Given the blight on my constituency, will the Secretary of State agree to visit Eddisbury to speak to my local residents and hear their concerns about how it will impact on them?

Chris Grayling: As my hon. Friend knows, I lived very close to the route some years ago, so I had advance knowledge of how difficult it will be for many of her constituents. Of course, we are very happy to engage with her and her constituents on the issue. As I have said, there is no easy way of delivering such a big infrastructure project without consequences for some people, but we will do everything we can to mitigate its impact wherever possible.

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): HS2's rejection of the Sheffield Meadowhall option—it said that there was a lack of consensus—is a stab in the back for the south Yorkshire economy. The reroute through the three villages of Wales, Aston and Bramley in my constituency will knock down homes and businesses. There is no consensus for that, either. Can we just have some common sense, instead of moving around all the time? If the

decision was made about Meadowhall and compensation paid to householders as a result, why should there be a reroute?

Chris Grayling: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, Sir David Higgins did a lot of detailed work on that issue. Strong views were expressed in Sheffield about what worked best for the city. I have been to Aston and seen the potential impact. I will work to try to ensure that we get the maximum possible mitigation in such areas, but the right hon. Gentleman will understand that, if we are to deliver opportunities and prosperity for the northern part of the country, we need to make sure that it has the connectivity it needs.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend set out in a little more detail the additional inter-city and commuter services from which places such as Milton Keynes will benefit once HS2 is operational?

Chris Grayling: One of the benefits that will be experienced by towns on the existing west coast main line will be the potential for a significant increase in the number of services. For example, for those who commute from Milton Keynes to London, we expect twice as many seats to be available on suburban routes to Hertfordshire and beyond to Milton Keynes, and greater opportunities for semi-fast services. The route from the town of Coventry to Birmingham is two tracks wide and constantly congested, as freight, express and passenger trains jockey for position. The proposal will create a huge additional amount of much-needed capacity for commuters to Birmingham on that very busy route.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I welcome the fact that HS2 has listened to residents in the Lowton and Golborne area and moved the depot off a site of special scientific interest to more appropriate location. Is it not the truth, however, that the investment in HS2 will make sense to the majority of people in the north only when it is combined with investment in new east-west, high-speed lines linking the great cities? Our roads are full and cannot take any more, so will the Secretary of State press the Chancellor to use the autumn statement to set out a clear timetable for northern powerhouse rail, including a completion date to tie in with HS2? Will the Government make that investment a higher investment a higher priority for transport investment than spending billions more pounds on London with Crossrail 2?

Chris Grayling: The right hon. Gentleman is, of course, a powerful advocate of the city that he hopes to represent as mayor. He is also a Liverpoolian, so he will be aware of the substantial amounts of money that we are spending on improvements in both Liverpool and Manchester. One of the benefits of the arrival of HS2 in Manchester will be to create much more connectivity on the suburban routes to Manchester Piccadilly, which is much needed. We are also poised to open links between Piccadilly and Victoria, so improvements are happening today and the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that more are needed for the future.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State is prepared to listen to pleas for mitigation. In my constituency, three or four

[Jeremy Lefroy]

communities are bisected by the rail. There are alternatives, such as tunnelling, and we need to continue to look at them.

Chris Grayling: I give my hon. Friend an assurance that that will happen. It happens, of course, as part of the consultation process for such proposals, and the hybrid Bill process that lies ahead will give his constituents every opportunity to seek change from this House, in the same way as they previously sought change from this Government.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): The original justification for the spur that goes through my constituency was the stock depot at Golborne. It has now been announced that that depot will move to north of Crewe, so why is the Secretary of State continuing with a spur that will devastate the village of Hollins Green in my constituency, have a huge environmental impact on Culcheth, even though the line has moved slightly, and does not even give Warrington a station so that it can profit from all that disruption? There are other places in the north-west besides Liverpool and Manchester, but the Secretary of State seems to have forgotten that, if we are going to have the HS2 line, they need to profit from it, to compensate for all the disruption.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady of all people should know that the last thing I would do is forget that places such as Warrington exist. The issue on the west coast main line north of Crewe is that much of the route through Warrington and up to Wigan is two-track. To try to fit the HS2 trains while meeting existing demand for freight and for passenger services from Liverpool and Manchester is almost impossible to engineer. We have, therefore, chosen the route that maximises rail capacity through Warrington. There will be HS2 services that serve Warrington and that, in addition, create the speed, connectivity and extra capacity that we need.

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): This is, indeed, good news for the city of Leeds, which is already starting to experience the economic benefits, with companies such as Burberry investing in it because of HS2. I welcome in particular the integrated approach to Leeds station. Does the Secretary of State agree that all the towns and villages across west Yorkshire have an opportunity to benefit from HS2 through a properly integrated station, and that what we really need now is a properly integrated transport system in the city of Leeds, to cope with the number of people who want to invest there?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Such investment builds economic strength in cities such as Leeds, and that ripples out across the whole region by creating not only jobs in Leeds, but opportunities for businesses in west Yorkshire. This will be of huge benefit to the economy of the whole area around Leeds, permeating into the rural areas, and it will deliver real improvements to the economy of the north as a whole.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): The Secretary of State will no doubt have seen last Thursday's ITV programme supporting the powerful case against HS2.

I am not alone in considering HS2 to be wholly unnecessary, and it will, indeed, be horrendously expensive. For much less than its likely eventual cost, essential modernisations, electrifications, additions and upgrades on our railways could all be funded. Would not that be a much more sensible investment?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman misses the central point, which is that this is a project about capacity. Whenever we have Transport questions, we hear about the pressures and congestion on, and the challenges for, our rail network. The west coast and east coast main lines, which are principal routes, are mixing together express long-distance trains, intermediate semi-fast trains, local community trains and freight trains. When things go wrong, they become congested and the trains are mixed and matched. We have to create extra capacity if we are going to be able to deliver solutions to the demands of the next generation. That is what this project is all about.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): May I start by thanking my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin), my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State? As one of my constituents put it to me, what has happened today, with the actioning of my proposed reroute of the branch line to Leeds at Woodlesford, shows that the political system does work. However, the main line past Swillington and Garforth in my constituency remains unchanged, so will my right hon. Friend meet me at the earliest opportunity to discuss mitigation and landscaping that will limit the impact on my constituents?

Chris Grayling: I am pleased that my hon. Friend's constituents are happy with the change in his area. My hon. Friend the Minister will be happy to meet Members from across the House later today if they wish to raise specific issues, and of course we will have those discussions.

I want to mention something that I should have said in my earlier remarks. I cannot remember which Opposition Member's constituency includes Crofton, where one of the depots is planned. I have been to the site and I am looking actively at whether we can find an alternative location for the depot. I hope to be able to bring forward an alternative, but I cannot provide guarantees today.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The Secretary of State mentioned Aberdeen. In 2013, KPMG found that the annual impact of HS2 on the economy of the north-east of Scotland would be £220 million a year. Can he update that figure, and will he tell the House what he is doing to mitigate the possible economic loss?

Chris Grayling: I do not have an updated figure for the hon. Gentleman, but to ensure that Aberdeen prospers, we are making sure: first, that we have a growing economy; secondly, that we continue to provide financial support to the Scottish economy from across the rest of the United Kingdom; and, thirdly, that we continue to look to create job opportunities and business opportunities in this programme for people in Aberdeen. That was why my hon. Friend the Minister went there.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that to get the full benefit of HS2 in the east midlands, the midland mainline needs to be electrified right through to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield? Will he therefore confirm that there will be no further delays in that project?

Chris Grayling: We are moving ahead now and work is being done on the next stage of electrification. I am very keen to ensure that, by 2020, we will be able to deliver improved capacity and the improved speed on trains, but we will make sure that all the benefits are delivered as quickly as possible.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): HS2 can be justified only if its full benefits are spread across the country and it is not simply a link between major city centres. For Cheshire, that means that we must proceed with the Crewe hub to spread those benefits around. The Secretary of State has not made his decision yet, so will he tell us when we can expect to hear about the Crewe hub? Will he also confirm that investment in HS2 will not detract from further electrification along the Chester and north Wales line?

Chris Grayling: The improvements that we are making to the rest of the network are separate from HS2. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we are doing a vast amount of work around the rail network—we will continue to do so. With regard to Crewe, we will have to put forward new proposals for consultation, but it is clear to me that Crewe station will have improved connectivity and will play a central part in our plans.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): We would like a tunnel, please, at Strelley village, but HS2 enjoys widespread cross-party support in Broxtowe and beyond, because we get the east midlands hub at Toton sidings, Stapleford. HS2 delivers capacity and growth. To that end, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that at Toton we get a world-class business park, not just hundreds of homes and houses?

Chris Grayling: I have been to Toton. The site was once one of Britain's great railway centres, so it is sad to see it overgrown, as it is at present. I fully expect that we will engender a real process of regeneration, with both residential and commercial development around the site. It will, of course, be for the local authority and Members of Parliament such as my right hon. Friend to shape exactly what that development should be. We want her region to be a major centre of economic regeneration, and the Toton site, large as it is, provides a real opportunity for that.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I have long campaigned for high-speed rail for Leeds, but the HS2, HS3, and phases 2a and 2b proposals are clearly flawed. Not to have a station in Sheffield is simply ludicrous. Why will the Government still not look properly at the alternative High Speed UK proposals, which are £20 billion cheaper and far more environmentally friendly? The scheme would also provide better connectivity and would not plough through the Chilterns. Why will the Government not consider that?

Chris Grayling: With all respect, I think that turning the clock back and starting the process all over again—going through the process of another hybrid Bill to get this

project off the ground—would delay the project further and further into the future. We have taken a project that originated from the previous Labour Government and developed it further. We have put in place a clear plan, and next spring we start construction. I, for one, am not in favour of turning the clock back.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. Does he agree that the project will have a significant impact for the midlands engine for growth, and particularly for Derby, which is known as a rail city?

Chris Grayling: Derby is one of the places that will benefit from the proposals. Having the new east midlands hub between Nottingham and Derby will give both cities the opportunity to benefit enormously from it. I will be surprised if the great rail industries of Derby do not play a pretty active part in the programme.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): I extend an invitation to the Secretary of State to come to Bolton and travel with me on the trains during rush hour. He would see how my constituents are squashed like sardines, how short the trains are, and how many of my constituents miss their trains and are late for work. Why can the Government not find some investment—proper money—for Bolton and the surrounding areas?

Chris Grayling: I hope that the hon. Lady welcomes the new northern franchise, which includes longer and newer trains, more services and the electrification of key routes around Greater Manchester. It should deliver a much better travelling experience for the public of the north, because that experience has not been good enough for a very long time. We are taking the action that is needed to make it much better for the future.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): May I give the Secretary of State one more opportunity to confirm the huge investment in the great north railway? That is not instead of, but as well as, investment in our local and regional services. Does he agree that to win hearts and minds, we must emphasise quality jobs and apprenticeships, connectivity between towns as well as cities, and a supercharged HS3 between Liverpool and the city of culture, Hull?

Chris Grayling: I agree with my hon. Friend. Part of the job of delivering the northern powerhouse is delivering connectivity that goes from east to west—or west to east, depending on which way we look at it. This is about not just rail but road improvements. In my work on how we shape the next generation of investments, I am mindful of the need to ensure that that east-west connectivity for the north is delivered.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I have been open-minded about the right location for the Sheffield station, but may we have a clear indication from the Secretary of State of when a decision will be made? Many of my constituents have had their homes and lives blighted for many years. Will he give us some clarification about the possible Sheffield city centre station? Is it true that the trains that run there will be shorter and narrower than the full HS2 trains? In other words, is it true that they will not be full HS2 trains?

[Mr Clive Betts]

Given that it does not look as though the midland mainline electrification will happen, will HS2 now have to pick up the full bill for electrification from the HS2 line into Sheffield station?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes some assumptions on the latter point. The trains that operate off the HS2 network will be a different design from those that operate exclusively on the HS2 network—that is to do with platform widths and gauges. That does not mean that they are slower trains or that they are less good trains; they are simply trains that can operate both on HS2 and on a conventional network. Clearly, if those trains go through Sheffield midland station, which is on the conventional network, we will be using them.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): North Warwickshire has consistently suffered due to a lack of engagement from HS2, so I was alarmed to learn this morning that despite assurances given by HS2 to my local council just three weeks ago, there would be no changes to the line locally. The line will, in fact, move around 150 metres nearer to the village of Austrey, although that significant change was not even mentioned in the route refinement document. That the very first paper published on phase 2b directly contradicts information offered by HS2 so recently is cause for great concern. What assurances can my right hon. Friend give me that communication will actually improve? Will he meet me to discuss the impacts of the most recent changes on my constituents?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. I was not aware of the situation that he describes, and the Minister and I will talk to him about how we address it.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): Hitachi Rail Europe in Newton Aycliffe in my constituency is well placed to manufacture the rolling stock for HS2. It has a long track record of more than 50 years of building high-speed trains, such as the bullet train in the 1960s in Tokyo. Will the Secretary of State outline the procurement timeline in the coming years, and will he tell us when the rolling stock will start to be produced?

Chris Grayling: I can start by letting the hon. Gentleman know in advance that I will be visiting the plant in Newton Aycliffe next month. It is a great addition to our manufacturing base, and I look forward to seeing the first trains from that plant operating on our network. The team at Hitachi is doing a great job for us.

I obviously cannot prejudge the outcome of the tender process—it will take place towards the end of this decade—but I am clear that the company that builds the trains for HS2 must leave a skills footprint in this country. We will not simply bring trains in on a ship, with no benefit for engineering skills or apprenticeships in this country. I want a genuine process that will leave behind a skills footprint with regard to not just rolling stock contracts, but the whole contract.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): Like many, I very much welcome the statement, including the link into the existing network at York. However, what assurances

can my right hon. Friend give that York will not be bypassed in any future development further north beyond the second phase of HS2?

Chris Grayling: I cannot judge future developments, but York will be one of the places that benefits from HS2 connectivity: trains will run up the HS2 line and on through York. The extra capacity and extra speeds—the extra capacity on the east coast main line, and the extra speed and connectivity to London—will very much benefit my hon. Friend's constituents.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Having regularly buttonholed the Secretary of State's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin), to ensure that Chesterfield was included in HS2, I am highly delighted with the Secretary of State's proposal. Will he, however, confirm that passengers boarding HS2 at Chesterfield will have single-train access to Birmingham and London, as well as north to Sheffield and Leeds?

Chris Grayling: It is certainly our intention that people who board at Chesterfield and Sheffield will have good connections to London. I expect that there will be through trains. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a number at the moment, but I am expect that to happen.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I congratulate the Government on their joined-up thinking on the west coast franchise and HS2, and welcome today's announcement. Will the Secretary of State confirm that there will, in due course, be a third stage to take the route further north—arguably to the true north—and will he take Carlisle into account as a possible station?

Chris Grayling: I hear my hon. Friend's representation. I am not in a position to give him such a guarantee today, but Carlisle will benefit from faster services, and specifically from the HS2 rolling stock that will come up the west coast main line to Carlisle, which will improve connectivity for his area from north to south. I am looking forward to talking to him about the A69 connectivity from east to west.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): If HS2 is indeed to benefit the whole of the UK, it is important that areas such as north Wales, with its important routes to Ireland, receive investment and connectivity. May I therefore press the Secretary of State on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) about Crewe? Will the Secretary of State ensure that connectivity to north Wales, and beyond it to Ireland, is an essential part of any plans relating to Crewe station?

Chris Grayling: I am well aware of the issues about the north Wales line and its importance to the economy of north Wales. I recently discussed that with the Secretary of State for Wales and, indeed, the Welsh Assembly Government. This is very much on my to-do list as we look to the future.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I was interested to read that high-speed rail services are being considered for

rail passengers in Macclesfield and, indeed, in Stoke-on-Trent. Will he tell the House the time within which these decisions are likely to be made, and will he confirm that, whatever the outcome, passengers from Macclesfield will continue to enjoy the same speed and frequency of rail services as they do today?

Chris Grayling: It is certainly our intention that HS2 services should not reach Manchester exclusively by the existing route. We have talked about Stoke-on-Trent, and Macclesfield is one of the places on the same line. The other benefits to my hon. Friend's constituents, many of whom work in Manchester, is that this will provide far more opportunity for commuter services, and far more space on those commuter services, for them and people living further north on the way into Manchester, which in my view they very much need.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): As the Secretary of State is an avid Manchester United fan, may I ask him what first attracted him to extending the high-speed line from his home in the south-east to his beloved Old Trafford? Secondly, what discussions he has had with Transport for Greater Manchester about extending the light rail network out to the HS2 station at Manchester airport in my constituency?

Chris Grayling: On the latter point, there is an obvious logic in continuing to develop the Metrolink network. We have just announced additional routes to the west of the centre—indeed, passing pretty close to Old Trafford—so I am very open to discussing with the new Mayor, when he or she is elected in the summer, the ways in which we can continue to develop the transport system in Manchester.

As for the direct route between Surrey and Old Trafford, although they say that most Manchester United supporters live in Surrey, I suspect that we might struggle to get the passenger numbers to justify a high-speed route all that way.

Mr Speaker: I hope I am a lot happier just after 2.30 this Saturday afternoon than the Secretary of State, who knows my allegiance in this matter.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Midland main line electrification has a better benefit-cost ratio than any other electrification scheme and a better benefit-cost ratio than HS2. For a fraction of HS2's cost, it would deliver momentous line speed and capacity improvements for towns across the east midlands, including Kettering. Will the Secretary of State use this opportunity to commit to fulfilling the Government's pledge to complete the electrification of the midland main line by 2023?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend will be aware that work has already started on the electrification process that will, in the next stage, go as far as Corby, as well as—this tends to be seen rather as the poor relation—on track improvements and extra tracks passing up through his constituency to Corby, which will enable us to have much faster trains and much more capacity. My goal is to deliver faster journey times and extra capacity by 2020—long before the date he mentioned.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): In the statement of funding policy that accompanied the comprehensive spending review, Wales was allocated a 0% Barnett rating, whereas Scotland and Northern

Ireland both got a 100% rating. This means that Wales will lose out on a full Barnett allocation from HS2. As expenditure increases during the construction phase, so will the impact on the Welsh Government's budget compared with those of Scotland and Northern Ireland. Will the Secretary of State look at this issue once again and ensure that this injustice is rectified?

Chris Grayling: My view is that this is about transport improvements around the country. I, of course, regard improvements in Wales as extremely important. I met the Minister responsible for transport in Wales last week, and we will work together to deliver the improvements that Wales needs.

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for indulging a west country interloper on these proceedings. I very much welcome the improved connectivity to the midlands and the north that HS2 will bring, but an awful lot of the country lies to the west, so it is regrettable that key parts of the electrification programme on the Great Western Railway have been deferred. As we build an economy that works for all parts of the UK, will the Secretary of State look again at the benefits of running fully electric trains all the way from Paddington to Bristol Temple Meads, which for so many rail users is the entry point to Somerset and the whole of the south-west of England?

Chris Grayling: I am as frustrated as anybody by the challenges we have had on the Great Western Railway route. One of the great ironies is that while the Labour party attacks us on rail issues and talks about the need for renationalisation, one of its targets is the one bit of the rail industry that is in the public sector. The fact is that Network Rail has not been involved in electrification for many years. It did virtually nothing in Labour's years in power. This first project has developed more problems and challenges than expected, but I still want it to be completed as quickly as possible.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I very much welcome what my right hon. Friend said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), but I will unashamedly ask for more. I want more services, both northbound and southbound, running to Corby. Our town is growing hugely and at a rapid rate, and we need more capacity to meet growing demand and to utilise the existing lines. How will phase 2b of HS2 help to unlock opportunities through the midland main line?

Chris Grayling: The more that we take express trains off the existing main lines and the more we move passengers on to the new capacity, the more capacity will be created for intermediate journeys. The big difference for my hon. Friend's constituency is the unheralded one of just building an extra track to Corby. That will make more difference to his town than almost anything else. By 2020, we need to have delivered much more capacity on the routes used by people represented by him and my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone). That will be essential to deliver a proper, effective commuter rail network, alongside what needs to continue to be a good express system to the midlands and the north.

Defibrillators (Availability)

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

2.9 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the provision of defibrillators in education establishments, and in leisure, sports and certain other public facilities; to make provision for training persons to operate defibrillators; to make provision for funding the acquisition, installation, use and maintenance of defibrillators; and for connected purposes.

The purpose of the Bill is to increase the rates of survival from non-hospital cardiac arrests across the UK. Currently, our record in this country for survival from cardiac arrest is dismal. According to the British Heart Foundation, almost 30,000 cardiac arrests a year occur outside hospitals, and less than 10% of the people who suffer those cardiac arrests survive. In fact, in parts of England survival rates are close to 2%. Behind those statistics are people, families and communities.

Cardiac arrests can happen for many reasons, from trauma right through to congenital heart defects. Even more frightening than the 10% survival figure is the fact that 12 young people each week will die from arrhythmic death syndrome, a hidden condition that can strike at any time—young people such as Oliver King, who died from a cardiac arrest aged 12. A young lad from Liverpool, he was popular and very sporty, and died after winning a swimming competition. When he died, no defibrillator was available. Paramedics took just 24 minutes to get to the scene. His father, Mark, is here in the Gallery today, along with other members of the Oliver King Foundation, because they are convinced that if a defibrillator had been available at the scene Oliver would be alive now. They have campaigned week after week in this place, with many Members, for defibrillators to be made available throughout the country. Today, we are just short of two months away from what would have been Oliver's 18th birthday.

Let us be under no illusion about the difference defibrillators could make. A defibrillator can greatly increase survival rates from cardiac arrest, by almost as much as 80%. But for them to be successful, minutes count, and quick access to a defibrillator is crucial. A defibrillator needs a shockable heart rhythm; if too much time elapses, a shockable heart rhythm will turn into a non-shockable one, and the chance of survival decreases rapidly. If a heart is not started within four minutes of cardiac arrest, a person's chances of living are reduced by almost 80%. Even the speediest paramedic in the country would struggle to get to someone in four minutes. That is why it is crucial that defibrillators are accessible everywhere in this country. We have laws that mandate smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, seatbelts and life jackets to save lives, but not a single law mandating a simple piece of equipment that could restart the lives of 12 young people each week.

The Young Mayor of Seaford in my constituency, Jessica Batchelor—she is also here in the Gallery—at the age of 15 witnessed first-hand a close family friend die suddenly from a cardiac arrest when no defibrillator was available. As Young Mayor, she has raised thousands of pounds to put in as many defibrillators across Seaford as possible. She has lobbied me, as her local MP, to do something about this, and has worked with me on the Bill. I pay tremendous tribute to her.

The aim of the Bill is not to undermine the excellent work of existing charities, such as the British Heart Foundation with Heartstart or St John Ambulance, but to support it. I want to achieve two things. The first is to improve access by using key community facilities. We know that for survival after a cardiac arrest, time matters. Making sure that people know where their nearest defibrillator is, therefore, is key. The British Heart Foundation would like a national database, so that we can ensure not only that there is adequate defibrillator coverage but that the defibrillators are maintained and replaced where necessary.

In the Bill, we have suggested schools, sports facilities and public buildings as locations, so that there is somewhere in every town and village in the country where a local defib can be installed. But that is not enough. Defibs need to be accessible 24 hours a day. In rural communities such as my constituency, many villages do not have a school. It is therefore key that somewhere is designated and, more importantly, that people know where that place is.

Currently, there is a postcode lottery—even in schools, despite the Department for Education's efforts, as it has pursued the option of defibrillators but has not mandated them. In England, we know of 1,389 defibrillators available in schools; in Northern Ireland, we know of one, and in Scotland we do not know of any. That is not to say that they do not exist; but without a register, no one is able to check. Although it is good news that only this month the Department of Health awarded the British Heart Foundation another £1 million to make defibrillators accessible across the country and provide cardiopulmonary resuscitation training, until provision is mandatory, defibrillator access will remain hit and miss.

The Bill's second aim is to increase the use of defibrillators—it is important not just to have them but to make sure that they are used. That is why the Bill mandates training. I have talked to residents in my local villages. Many have seen their local defibrillator, but say they would be reluctant to use it, because they think that training is needed to do so. Although nothing could be further from the truth—all a person has to do is stick the two pads on someone's chest and press the button, as the machine will tell them what to do then—without training, people are afraid to use them. The Bill's aim is not to state that only trained people should use defibrillators but to mandate training for local communities with every installation, so that people feel confident using them.

I wonder how many Members present know how many defibrillators there are on the parliamentary estate. There are 20 in total, in the House of Lords, House of Commons, Norman Shaw North and Portcullis House, with two in Big Ben. I am sure you know, Mr Speaker, where the nearest defibrillator is to the Chamber, in case one of us needed it in an emergency; Members will be reassured to learn that it is in the Members' Lobby.

I therefore move that the Bill be introduced, so that we can mandate that defibs are installed across the whole of the UK in publicly accessible places, and that training is available so that people know what to do in the event of a cardiac arrest, and are not afraid to use those defibs. It is crucial to support the work of our many charities, such as the Oliver King Foundation and

the British Heart Foundation, including the request for a live register to ensure that there is adequate coverage and that that coverage is maintained.

Twelve young people will die of a cardiac arrest this week, and 28,000 people will die this year. Those lives could be saved by the Bill. I urge Members to support it.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Maria Caulfield, Andy Burnham, Stephen Twigg, Mims Davies, Anna Soubry, Dr James Davies, Mike Wood, Mr Edward Vaizey, Dr Philippa Whitford, Douglas Chapman, Dr Lisa Cameron and Peter Aldous present the Bill.

Maria Caulfield accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 January, and to be printed (Bill 91).

Investigatory Powers Bill

Consideration of Lords message.

After Clause 8

2.19 pm

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): I beg to move,

That this House disagrees with the Lords amendments 15B, 15C, 338B, 339B and 339C.

Two weeks' ago, we considered Lords amendments to the Investigatory Powers Bill. In accepting unopposed all amendments that relate directly to the subject matter of the Bill, this House demonstrated the value we all place on legislative scrutiny in the other place, and recognised the many improvements made by their lordships to this important legislation. We welcome the spirit of cross-party co-operation on this crucial matter. I would like to put on record again my admiration for the approach taken by all parties in both Houses in contributing to this landmark Bill.

Together, we have created a world-leading framework for the use of investigatory powers by law enforcement and the security and intelligence agencies. We have strengthened the authorisation processes and safeguards around the use of those powers, and we have created a powerful new body that is responsible for the oversight of those powers.

During that debate, however, we also gave thorough and anxious consideration to the amendments tabled by Baroness Hollins, supported by others, which sought to use the Bill as a vehicle to change the law in relation to the regulation of the press. The amendments would introduce a presumption that a court should award costs against a publisher in cases of unlawful interception if it is not part of a recognised regulator, regardless of whether or not it won a case.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Did my hon. and learned Friend see the article in *The Times* last week by the noble Lord Pannick? He is not necessarily always a friend to the Government on these matters, but he very clearly said that the Lords amendments should be rejected, that this was an important and well-thought-out Bill, and that the sooner we got on with it, the better.

The Solicitor General: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. Lord Pannick played an important part in helping to refine other parts of the Bill, most notably on legal professional privilege. Lord Pannick said that we "should reject the Lords' attempt to hold such an important bill hostage on issues of press regulation that are far from central to the bill's purposes."

The Bill does not, and never was intended to, provide for the regulation of the press. It is about providing vital tools for our law enforcement and security and intelligence agencies. The Lords amendments we are considering today differ slightly from those we debated last time. The noble Lady revised her proposal to remove the link to clause 8 in order to avoid any risk that it could have an impact on the provisions already in the Bill. She also added a six-year sunset, which she suggests means that the change could be allowed to fall away after the process of reform of press self-regulation is complete. I

[*The Solicitor General*]

thank the noble Lady for her efforts to minimise the collateral impact of her amendments and I recognise the goodwill she is showing in doing so, but I am afraid that the fundamental problem remains. The amendments are simply not appropriate at this time, or in this legislation.

The public consultation announced by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), who is on the Front Bench today, speaks directly to the concerns of those supporting the amendments. It provides everyone—whether a publisher or a victim of phone hacking, a parliamentarian, journalist, police officer or a member of the public—with their rightful opportunity to contribute to the debate on the issue of press self-regulation, an issue that affects each and every one of us in this country. The consultation document not only sets out the position but asks a series of questions to consultees. The questions are wide-ranging and allow a number of options to be explored. As is proper with a consultation, they allow consultees to express their views fully and to provide evidence to support their contentions. A number of options are set out. It is not just simply a question of commencement, but whether part of section 40 should be commenced to afford protection to members of a recognised regulator, whether to not apply the particular provisions to publishers outside a recognised regulator, and to consider whether section 40 should be fully commenced, repealed or kept under review. This is an important consultation. It allows adequate time for people who are either well-versed in the issues relating to the Leveson process, which occupied this House some years ago, or people who come new to the issue and want to have their say, bearing in mind the passage of time since the introduction of section 40 pursuant to the Crime and Courts Act 2013.

The Government have been absolutely clear that they recognise the very serious intrusion and anxiety suffered by victims of press misconduct.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Will my hon. and learned Friend tell the House what the double lock for the most intrusive warrants will achieve, and why it is so very important?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House about one of the truly innovative parts of the Bill. The mechanism proposed by Government was refined in Committee by representatives from other parties, as well as the Government. It allows for not only a politician, a Secretary of State, to make a decision about authorisation, but for that decision to be then reviewed by a judge who will apply principles of judicial review—not just *Wednesbury* unreasonableness, but principles relating to proportionality and human rights matters that are properly engaged in considering what we accept are serious intrusions when it comes to this type of warrantry.

The Bill is unprecedented and world-leading. The double lock represents the Government's commitment to maintaining the balance between the need for the security and intelligence agencies and other investigative agencies to be fleet of foot when it comes to investigating

serious crime. It will ensure that, with judicial input, the interests of privacy and human rights are kept very much to the forefront of these decisions.

On press misconduct, we must ensure that victims have appropriate means of redress. The situation, however, is complex and the overall solution is far from clear. We must do our utmost to avoid unintended consequences of what I accept are well-intentioned actions.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The hon. and learned Gentleman was referred earlier by the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) to the words of Lord Pannick. Does the Minister also agree with Lord Pannick that there can be no doubt that the amendments are within the scope of the Bill, which was one of the Government's previous objections?

The Solicitor General: The hon. and learned Lady will know that the interpretation of scope taken in the other place is somewhat different from the one both she and I understand in this place, having both served on the Public Bill Committee. I pay tribute to her for the considerable number of amendments she tabled in this House. I think we have to accept that the Lords' interpretation allowed for the introduction of these amendments. The Government rightly had issues with some of the technical deficiencies in them. I paid tribute to the efforts made by Baroness Hollins to amend the provisions to meet some of the Government's concerns. However—this is why we seek to reject the amendments—they have no place in a Bill that relates to the regulation of investigative powers. This is all about national security and dealing with crime, whether that be child abuse, trafficking, drug dealing or any other criminality we want to deal with in society. That is why the amendments are not only out of place but pre-empt the outcome of the consultation launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

2.30 pm

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Would my hon. and learned Friend not go further and say that a Bill on national security is precisely the wrong place for restrictions on the press, as it would make it look as if we were really trying to hit them hard?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Bill is all about balance and the importance the Executive attach to the way they seek to interfere or intrude into the private lives of individuals and to setting out clearly the criteria that must be met before they can act. It would be wrong to take any measure that sends a message that the Government wish to ride roughshod over the interests of individuals and freedom of speech. He knows that the consultation launched two weeks ago will deal with the very issues that have caused him concern over a number of years, although it would be wrong for me to pre-empt the outcome of that open process.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that phone hacking, which we hear so much about, particularly from those who support these press rules, is already a criminal offence for which people can go to jail? In addition, we have the libel laws, so anything the press does, in a major regard, is already very much covered.

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to remind us that where we have existing mechanisms—and the criminal law is, of course, there—they must be used. To be fair to both sides of the argument, the issues about redress of grievance and the mechanism of press regulation, which he knows from his experience as a journalist has existed for years, are important ones. I know that he would be as anxious as anybody in the House to make sure that, rather than the focus being on celebrities and the like, ordinary people who end up as victims—chiefly of inaccuracies reported in the media—have a reasonable and cost-effective means of redress. He is absolutely right, however, to talk about existing mechanisms and the criminal law, and of course the criminal law was used in a significant investigation by the Metropolitan police that resulted in several convictions.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that, in respect of the consultation that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has set out, we have to get the balance right between respecting the freedoms of the press and the rights of innocent people who have never sought publicity but who find themselves on the wrong side of an investigation and need a low-cost method of arbitration to bring their grievances forward?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee puts it more succinctly than I did, and he is absolutely right about the balance to be struck and the need for ordinary people who might be the victims of misconduct to have access to meaningful redress of grievance, so I am grateful to him. Having been here in the previous Parliament, he and I will remember debating the Leveson process and the aftermath of the findings of Sir Brian Leveson.

Turning back to the consultation to which my hon. Friend referred, the Government have set out a clear timetable, and we have committed to responding to that consultation in a timely manner.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Who exactly is going to be consulted?

The Solicitor General: It is a public consultation and invites comment from all members of the public, from whatever corner of the country they might come and whatever interest—it might be no interest—they represent. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to emphasise the important point that the Government would welcome as many responses as possible to the questions posed in the consultation—and not just responses but evidence to support the contentions made by those who take part.

Damian Collins: I should note that the Select Committee will be taking evidence from victims of phone hacking and press representatives and will make its own representations to the Government through the consultation process.

The Solicitor General: The Government warmly welcome that approach. The work of the Select Committee—indeed all Select Committees—is invaluable and carries real weight, and the Government will consider it carefully

when the consultation responses are assessed by the Secretary of State and those who serve her in the Department.

After the Government's response, there will be ample opportunity for the House and the other place to consider and debate it in due course. As I said earlier, however, now is not the time to do so. The Bill, which we have all recognised is so important to our collective security, should not, with the greatest of respect, be used to force that debate.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I am glad to rise in support, once again, of these very important amendments. I believe that any member of the public who just heard the Solicitor General's speech will be puzzled about the Government's resistance to implementing an aspect of Leveson that they agreed to in principle some time ago.

Labour fully supports the Lords amendments and has consistently and genuinely called for the Leveson recommendations to be implemented in full. A new system of independent self-regulation was agreed by the three main political parties in 2013, following extensive consultation with victims of press intrusion, and Labour believes that the promises made to them should be honoured. If the best that the Government can come up with is that hoary old doctrine of unripe time—"It's a good idea but not now"—they must be a little desperate. It is disappointing that we have to speak to the amendments yet again to get the Government to honour their agreements. It is a breach of the cross-party agreement, and breaks promises made by the House to the victims.

Lords amendment 15B would not be necessary had the Government fulfilled their stated commitment to implement section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, which they have promised to do innumerable times. Happily, the amendment goes further than section 40 and would not require ministerial approval, meaning that it would automatically implement section 40 in relation to phone hacking claims. This would restate the clear intention of Parliament as previously expressed in 2013. Ministers have talked about riding roughshod. The Society of Editors, the National Union of Journalists, with the backing of the TUC, and many others concerned with the freedom of the press, have said that there is the potential to ride roughshod over freedoms.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Will the hon. Lady explain one point about the amendment? Why should the press be punished if it is not in fact guilty of phone hacking?

Ms Abbott: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will complete my next paragraph and then address his point.

The ability of journalists to protect their sources is a vital part of a functioning democracy. It means whistleblowers, important sources and others can divulge matters sometimes of the utmost public interest—there is a host of whistleblowers in the NHS, to take just one example, and there have been important whistleblowers in almost every area of public life. However, we have to once again flag up the powers in the Bill—although it is a Bill we support—and say that simply being able to identify internet records without ever examining the content would potentially allow the identification of whistleblowers in many cases. This represents a potential

[Ms Abbott]

infringement of civil liberties, a riding roughshod over civil liberties and a riding roughshod over the freedom that ultimately benefits us all.

As for the point raised by the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), if the Government do not want to implement this aspect of Leveson and if they do not think it necessary, why have they on so many occasions, including to the victims themselves, promised to do so?

The claim that these measures will impinge on the freedom of the press is factually inaccurate. Instead, they would allow for a low-cost and timely mechanism for redress on behalf of those who have been or believe themselves to have been mistreated or maligned by the press. I repeat the point that was made earlier: this is not about celebrities, but about ordinary people who through no fault of their own get caught up in the maw of the tabloid press and have to put up with seeing their picture appearing on the front page of tabloid newspapers day after day—often on the basis of misinterpreted tips from the police force. These people need to be able to get redress. That is why we support the amendments.

This amendment 15B, which the Government intend to vote down, was proposed and improved in the House of Lords by the Cross Bencher Baroness Hollins and overwhelmingly passed. It would implement the same provisions as are contained in section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 in respect of claims against media organisations over phone hacking and other unlawful interception of communications. While there is a free-for-all by ignoring Leveson and a failure to implement section 40, the most irresponsible practices of the press, which can ruin the lives of ordinary people, will go unchecked without any recourse—except for celebrities and the ultra-rich, who can afford libel lawyers.

It was always envisaged that as soon as pending legal proceedings were complete, we would see the second phase of the Leveson inquiry. The Minister had a lot to say about the consultation. Does he remember that Leveson lasted over two years and cost £5.4 million in total? Why, having spent so much money and so much time—and particularly the time of so many distinguished lawyers—why on earth do we need another consultation? Opposition Members believe that this is merely a stalling mechanism, and we think that the Government's continuing to stall on this issue is disrespectful of, and inappropriate for, the ordinary victims of phone hacking.

Richard Drax: The hon. Lady mentions phone hacking again, so let me remind her that phone hacking is an illegal act. People go to jail for it. Will she acknowledge that this is already a criminal offence?

Ms Abbott: It may be a criminal offence, but the entire House knows that time after time, tabloid editors and their staff engaged in phone hacking, betting that the people whose privacy was being infringed would not have the money or the knowledge or the social capital to take them to court.

This consultation is the Government's most recent attempt to kick this issue into the long grass. The victims of phone hacking—many of whose lives have been ruined—are being forced to relive the traumatic experiences of Leveson. The understanding was that so

many millions of pounds were spent and so many top-flight lawyers engaged in order to arrive at a conclusion on these issues—not so that the Government could continue to stall.

Joanna Cherry: Does the hon. Lady agree that the virtue of Leveson was that it was an inquiry held in public with an independent judge in the chair? The problem with the Government's consultation is that it will effectively put politicians—and Government politicians—in the chair to re-run these issues in private?

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for that very important point. Leveson was public and engaged, and it expressed widespread concern. With millions spent on Leveson, the Government now propose a private, secret consultation.

2.45 pm

The Minister said that this set of amendments was inappropriate. He has said that he opposes them because of the doctrine of unripe time. I put it to Members that it is for the House to decide whether these amendments are appropriate and timely. I support the Lords amendments.

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): I rise to support my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General in his resistance to the Lords amendments, which was based on principle rather than over-excitement or hyperbole. It seems to me that the motion put forward in the other place—no doubt well intentioned—does not entirely cover the justice of the case. Before I move on to the main part of my argument, I would like to declare an interest, in that I have some 40 or 45 years' experience as a member of the media and libel Bar.

The first Lords amendment proposes a new clause to be inserted after clause 8, and I am particularly disturbed by one or two aspects of it. I fully appreciate that as a matter of policy and politics, we in the House, the Government and Parliament generally frequently make use of what I would call the nudge system of trying to encourage people to be of better behaviour. We introduce laws that seek to persuade people not to behave in an antisocial or criminal manner. Broadly, it is the use of incentives to encourage better behaviour, and I have a suspicion that that is what is behind the Leveson report and their Lordships' proposed new clause.

In some respects, the provision is in the wrong place. The Bill is about investigatory powers and although I accept and applaud the ingenuity of those who introduced the new clause in the other place, I believe that introducing it into this important Bill, though understandable, is not the best place for them to have done so. They risk imperilling the policy behind the Investigatory Powers Bill without advancing their own cause in respect of those grievously and adversely affected by phone hacking.

While the proposed new clause is, on the face of it, of course related to phone hacking, it seems to me that it is not limited to phone hacking. If we look at subsection (1)(b), we see that the defendant in question needs to be “a relevant publisher”—that is fair enough—but if we look at subsection (1)(c), we find that it deals with claims

“related to the publication of news-related material.”

It may be that the news-related material has come as a consequence of phone hacking, and as my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) has correctly pointed out, phone hacking is already a crime and the criminal justice system is already able to get a grip on it. When it comes to the consequences of hacking someone's phone, there could be a public interest defence to the criminal charge of phone hacking. The newspaper might publish material that a claimant says is in breach of his rights of privacy or a misuse of private information or a breach of confidence, or it could amount to a defamation. None of those additional civil claims is covered by this nudge or incentive proposal. I think that we need to be wary lest a legitimate exposure of misconduct on the part of, say, a public authority or a person in the public sphere might be inhibited by this no doubt well-intentioned new clause.

The first point that I would make to my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General is that subsection (1) of the new clause does not limit the nudging or the incentives to the misdemeanour of phone hacking. It goes beyond that, and in doing so, it seems to me, could put a defendant newspaper or publisher in danger of being penalised for doing what might turn out to have been the right thing. As I said a moment ago, it might well be that the initial phone hacking was on the face of it criminal, but there might be a defence for it, and, moreover, the product—the fruit—of that phone hacking, legitimised because it was in the public interest, might lead to a further claim in a cause of action under civil law.

The defendant publisher might win the case, because what had been written might be true, and it might not be against the public interest to publish the confidential information because it had exposed iniquity or something of that nature. The defendant newspaper—if it is a newspaper—should therefore be entitled to win the case and defeat the claim. Under the new clause, however, although the claim had been defeated and the publishing defendant had won the case, the defendant would be required to pay the undeserving claimant's costs as well as its own because the defendant might not be a member of some approved regulator.

Joanna Cherry: I am listening with great care to what the right hon. and learned Gentleman is saying. May I suggest to him that the situation that he has just described is covered by the proviso in subsection (3)(b) of the new clause proposed in Lords amendment 15C, which states that the court may take account of whether

“it is just and equitable in all the circumstances of the case”

to make a different award of costs? May I suggest that in the circumstances that he has described, the “just and equitable” exception would kick in, and a newspaper that had a valid defence and had revealed iniquity as a result of hacking could pray it in aid?

Sir Edward Garnier: It might if both new clauses became law, but it might not if the new clause to which the hon. and learned Lady has referred did not become law, and we were left with only the one with which I am dealing.

My second point is this. Why should a well-intentioned and successful defendant publisher have to risk the expense of successfully defending a claim and then having to pay the costs of the unsuccessful claimant?

That strikes me as unjust. The House is famous for passing laws that are laden—replete—with unintended consequences. It seems to me, however, that when an amendment paper contains a proposal that will clearly lead to a problem—although I am not suggesting that it would be an insoluble problem—we would be foolish not to warn the Government against it. I am delighted to see that the Government seem to have mustered their forces and thinking processes in such a way that an unjust law will not be passed.

When I spoke in the House following the publication of the Leveson report, I was sufficiently pompous and self-confident to rebuke Members who thought that the inquiry, and the report that followed it, meant that there would be state regulation of the press. There will be no such thing as a consequence of the Leveson inquiry. However, I feel that I am entitled to warn Members who, like me, thoroughly disapprove of illegal phone hacking not to assume that once the words “phone hacking” have been uttered, that permits the House, the Government and the courts to rain down on successful, innocent and well-intentioned defendant publishers the burden of the costs of successfully defending a claim.

It should be borne in mind that defendants do not choose to be defendants. Of course they choose to publish the material that they have got hold of, but it is the claimant who feels obliged, or makes the choice, to sue the defendant. To be sued as a defendant is tedious enough, but to be sued as a defendant, to win, and then to be required to pay the costs of the unmeritorious claim must surely constitute even more of a punishment.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): Is there not another choice that the media can make? Can they not choose to subscribe to a compliant regulator and thereby avoid the need for all the regulation and legislation that we do not want to see in the Bill?

Sir Edward Garnier: Of course I understand what my right hon. Friend has said. He is one of the most sophisticated proponents of the “nudge” or incentive system of lawmaking, and I salute him for that. I sometimes wonder, however, whether it is a good idea to use the force of what are essentially the punitive elements of the legal system to encourage innocent defendants to pay the costs of unmeritorious claims. Yes, in a perfect world we would all settle our disputes, and people would not even provoke disputes in the first place; but to be compelled, on penalty of having to pay out large sums in legal costs, to join an organisation of which one either does not approve for one reason or another, or does not wish to join for one reason or another, strikes me as unjust.

I have been a victim of, shall we say, stupid conduct by the press. It is very annoying. I have seen others, not only my friends and colleagues but people for whom I have acted, having to deal with the misconduct of the media. But I would rather have a system which recognised justice—

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not see a difference between himself—as he has already told us, he is a leading advocate at the criminal Bar dealing with these matters

[Lyn Brown]

on a day-to-day basis to earn his crust—and someone who does not have those advantages and who is caught in the same snare?

Sir Edward Garnier: I do not wish to be rude to the hon. Lady, but I did not say any of those things. I am not a leading member of the criminal Bar. I happened for some little while to be a member of the media and defamation Bar, which may be a distinction without a difference as far as she is concerned. [Interruption.] She may disagree with me—she may disagree with me vehemently—but what we are trying to do is to pass good law. If my colleagues on the Front Bench, and those around me, disagree with me, fine: go ahead and disagree with me.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): We do.

Sir Edward Garnier: My hon. Friend clearly does.

Bill Wiggin: I absolutely disagree with my right hon. and learned Friend. I have been sitting here listening to him carefully, but I cannot think of any other industry that does not offer any sort of guarantee. If people make faulty washing machines, they replace them, but if they publish stories about people, they have already made their money by the time they end up being sued, and that is why the papers have to bear some of the cost.

Sir Edward Garnier: My hon. Friend's intervention demonstrates to me that I have not made myself clear. What I am suggesting is that it is wrong for a claimant who has lost his case to demand the costs from the successful defendant. I am not suggesting that if I make a faulty washing machine, I should not be liable, under law or morally, to put the matter right. However, if I have made a good washing machine, the fact that my hon. Friend does not like the colour of it, or the fact that it revolves in any number of ways—[Interruption.] I am in danger, Madam Deputy Speaker, of reducing the level of the debate to something that it should not be. I will stop now, because I think I have made the points that I wish to make with sufficient clarity. Some will agree with me and some will not, but I urge the Government to be very wary about passing unjust laws for very well-motivated purposes.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) on behalf of the Scottish National party, let me say that we have 19 minutes left in this very important debate and I have noticed several accomplished and learned colleagues are attempting to catch my eye. I know they are as capable of making a good argument in three minutes as in 15 minutes, and I implore them to take the former course.

3 pm

Joanna Cherry: I rise to support the shadow Home Secretary and her motion to accept these amendments. I will keep my comments brief. I will not go into the Scottish angle because I covered that in some detail last time.

The other place is clearly seeking to use these amendments to bring pressure on the UK Government to bring section 40 into force. The SNP is happy to lend its support to that effort, particularly as these amendments would afford protection and legal redress for those who suffer as a result of the most egregious sort of interception without legal authority when phone hacking is carried out by newspapers. Those who have not hacked, do not hack and do not intend to hack have nothing to fear from these provisions. Contrary to what has been said in the newspapers by many who advocate on behalf of wealthy newspaper proprietors and contrary to what has been said by some Government Members, there is a get-out clause in these provisions where a newspaper is sued unfairly and unjustly, and that is the just and equitable exception. We have to trust that the courts will implement that properly, as we trust them daily to implement justice and equity.

In the other place Baroness Hollins pointed out what this is really about. A widespread criminal conspiracy involving more than one newspaper group lasted, and was covered up, for many years. It was combined with unexplained failures in police and prosecution action and allegations of political involvement in a cover-up. As a result, there was a public inquiry, which came to conclusions that were supported cross-party in this House. The Government committed to implementing them; they are now failing to do so. As I said in an intervention, they are seeking to replace the public semi-judicial inquiry that was Leveson with a consultation in which the Government will consider proposals behind closed doors without the benefit of submissions and evidence being given in public, and that is not right.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Does the hon. and learned Lady recall that the reason we reached the agreement we did was a determination that politicians should have no role in this, so does she share my frustration that we are here again in November 2016 still discussing this?

Joanna Cherry: I agree. I was not here when these matters were previously discussed in this House but I followed that closely and it was all about taking politicians out of the mix. The Government's consultation is putting politicians into the driving seat—and Government politicians at that. That is exactly what many of us did not want to happen, and it is what Leveson said should not happen.

I support these amendments because they now stand alone and do not impinge on the other provisions of the Bill. As Lord Pannick said in the House of Lords, these amendments are now in scope. They are supplementary to what is there already and they do not detract from the security issues in the Bill. I believe these two points meet many of the objections put forward by Ministers.

The amendments are on point and relate to the subject matter of the Bill because they deal with the consequences of unlawful interceptions of communications. At the risk of tooting the SNP's trumpet too often, I simply remind the House again that new clause 8 came into the Bill as a result of a suggestion made by me and my colleague in the Bill Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands).

These amendments will apply to new and old phone hacking claims alike, but they are not objectionable as retrospective because in considering how to deal with costs the court must look to the issue of whether the defendant was registered with an approved regulator at the time when the claim was commenced.

I believe the remaining objections to the amendments are misplaced. If the Government are concerned about these amendments causing delay to the passage of this important Bill, all they need to do is bite the bullet and implement section 40 and then we can forget about the amendments, and I invite them to do that.

Bill Wiggin: In all the years I have been here, I have never before found myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) so I am deeply unhappy about this debate and the fact that I have been put in this position.

I also feel very uncomfortable with some of the things my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General has said, because I know that in his heart he, like me, would like to see low-cost arbitration. That is why I am so pleased with the Culture Secretary and the wonderful steps she has taken to keep people like me onside—people who passionately care about redress for ordinary people. This is the 21st century; it is the age of information and that is why the quality of information is so critical. We as a Government cannot police the media, and I believe my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) understood that when he put forward his royal commission proposals, but we must do our bit to ensure the quality of information is good enough, and at the moment it is not.

Richard Drax: What plans does my hon. Friend have for the internet, which is not governed by these measures and on which reprehensible things are said every second of every day?

Bill Wiggin: The internet is not policed and that is as it should be, but my hon. Friend has to understand why people have stopped reading newspapers and take their news from the internet now. There is a choice, and the choice they can make is to favour the sources they believe in. That presents a different set of challenges to the individual than having a quality media.

I absolutely believe in the freedom of the press, but not in the irresponsibility of the press. That is why I welcomed the conclusions to the Leveson inquiry and why I welcome the Secretary of State's inquiries. We have to get the balance right between policing and responsibility, and while this Bill is about security and information I do not agree that it is an inappropriate place to bring forward this debate. Given what the Government have agreed to do, I think we should take full advantage of that, but remember that the people who are most likely to contribute are those who write for a living and are therefore most likely to be journalists. It will be difficult for the Government to maintain that balance of common sense, but I have absolute confidence that they will achieve it.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): First, I echo what Members have said across the House about the importance of a free press and a press both acting freely and speaking with confidence to the powerful. We

have seen the role of British investigative journalism in taking on corruption in international sport, where it could without fear or favour pursue its investigations and therefore brought down powerful and mighty people. We do not want that to be jeopardised in any way. At the same time we should be conscious that if we just implement the section 40 provisions as they currently stand, some of the biggest victims would be small newspapers and magazines that have never been part of these bigger things. We should also at this time reflect on the nature and purpose of section 40. That is why I believe the Secretary of State is right to have a further consultation.

The idea was not necessarily that the section would be required; the hope was that the press would seek recognition through a recognised authority and have a proper, robust system of self-regulation recognised by the press recognition panel. The press have decided not to do go down that path. Many of them have set up the Independent Press Standards Organisation as their own regulator. They do not wish to see recognition, which in itself would solve the problem; if IPSO had sought recognition we would not be having this debate about costs and extra damages, but it has not sought that. So this should be a time to see whether IPSO can become recognised, with public confidence, as being Leveson-compliant, meeting the standards and providing, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) said, the right level of proper low-cost arbitration. Section 40 is really about saying there must be a robust system of self-regulation and low-cost arbitration and if that cannot be put in place the alternative is someone going to court and the industry having to pick up the costs in the courts, rather than paying for the arbitration system.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the demands that the nation puts on the media would be satisfied if IPSO were to establish the low-cost arbitration, even if it did not formally seek recognition? Does he agree that most Members would be satisfied with that as an answer?

Damian Collins: My right hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. If such an accessible arbitration system were to be established—which would involve going further than the pilot scheme—it would be churlish of the House to ignore that progress and to insist on the point of principle involving going before the recognition panel. This matter should be pursued, and that is why it is right to use the consultation process to explore what more can be done to ensure that IPSO is compliant, that it offers the access to low-cost arbitration that the public want, and that it can win public respect as an effective means of self-regulation for the press.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): I rise briefly to express my agreement with the Solicitor General and particularly with my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins). A vibrant, responsible local press that is able to speak freely and report stories within the law is a pillar of our democracy. It is something we should be proud of and always strive to protect. What concerns me, and the press, is the potential for the press to have done nothing wrong—having not misreported a story or wronged an individual—and yet to find itself on the receiving end of costs that threaten its existence.

[Edward Argar]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe has eloquently set out, no one disputes that there should be a way for people who have been genuinely wronged by the press to have access to affordable and effective redress. It is beyond doubt that this need must be addressed. To that end, I fully support the approach put forward by the Solicitor General and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in undertaking a further consultation to see whether a way forward can be found that strikes the right balance. The Secretary of State has adopted an open, measured, sensible and appropriate approach to implementing our clear determination to provide redress while safeguarding the freedoms and viability of our hugely precious local press.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): This is an absolutely dreadful amendment and it should be thrown out, rejected and sent back to the House of Lords. It is fundamentally wrong. It seeks to punish those who might be innocent and to fine them for telling the truth and for saying things that people in power do not like. This amendment goes to the heart of our free press, and it should be thrown in the bin. IMPRESS is already an organisation of ill repute, founded, funded and paid for by somebody who is known to us only because of his misdeeds. A degenerate libertine has provided all the money for IMPRESS, which only the most junior newspapers will sign up to. It is a dreadful body.

We should maintain the freedom of our press to help us with our liberties. We have only to look at the policeman who went to prison a few weeks ago. He successfully sued the press in the 1990s, but it turned out that he was in fact a child molester. Whenever we put constraints on the press, we help the powerful to get away with misdeeds. This House should stand up for freedom. It should stand up for liberty and it should reject the unelected House of Lords trying to prevent scandal from being reported freely.

Richard Drax: It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who was most eloquent. I have a disadvantage in following such eloquence with a short speech. I believe that I have just a few minutes left. I must declare an interest in that I was a journalist for 17 years. Perhaps I saw a little bit of the worst, but most of it was good. It is the local and regional press—the majority of our press today—that I am concerned about. It simply will not be able to take the risk of reporting at local level, albeit accurately and fairly, lest it should incur a costly exercise in court, and that is not acceptable.

In the first week of my career, the editor called me in and said, “Richard, you cannot go far wrong if you report fairly and accurately.” I agree with other hon. Members who have said that the message to the editors must be that they should report fairly, accurately and truthfully. Truth is the biggest sword of defence for the press. As my editor said: if in doubt, leave it out. I implore all editors who want a free press, as I and many other hon. Members do, to behave honourably, truthfully and in good faith. If they cannot report something that they long to report because they know it will result in a huge sale of newspapers, I suggest that they delay publication until they have the facts.

3.15 pm

I am here to defend the press, because the press in this country is one of the cornerstones of our democracy. I do not want IPSO to sign up to the royal charter, which represents state intrusion, not through the back door but quite openly. As I understand it—I hope that I am reporting the facts correctly here—IPSO is considering a system of low-cost arbitration. But what is low-cost arbitration? I suspect that local newspapers and those taking cases against them often employ expensive QCs. How do we cap the cost? I am not quite sure what “low-cost arbitration” means.

I agree that if a grievance is found to be justified, and the press is found to have got its facts wrong, it has a duty to publish that inaccuracy on its front page and to give it the same prominence as it gave to the original story on its inside pages or perhaps its front page. Any editor worth his salt should drag in the journalist responsible and say, “Enough is enough.” The free press: that is what we are here for and that is what I am fighting for. I totally back the Government in not supporting this Lords amendment.

The Solicitor General: We have heard many heartfelt contributions to this debate from Members on both sides of the House and I recognise the strength of feeling on this issue. Time does not permit me—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I think the hon. and learned Gentleman is seeking the leave of the House to respond to the debate.

The Solicitor General: I certainly am. I seek the leave of the House to respond to the debate, but time does not permit me to say much more.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I congratulate the hon. and learned Gentleman on his excellent brevity.

Question put,

The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 245.

Division No. 78]

[3.17 pm]

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Bone, Mr Peter
Afriyie, Adam	Borwick, Victoria
Aldous, Peter	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Allan, Lucy	Bradley, rh Karen
Allen, Heidi	Brady, Mr Graham
Amess, Sir David	Brazier, Mr Julian
Andrew, Stuart	Bridgen, Andrew
Ansell, Caroline	Brokenshire, rh James
Argar, Edward	Bruce, Fiona
Atkins, Victoria	Buckland, Robert
Bacon, Mr Richard	Burns, Conor
Baker, Mr Steve	Burns, rh Sir Simon
Baldwin, Harriett	Burrowes, Mr David
Barclay, Stephen	Burt, rh Alistair
Bebb, Guto	Cairns, rh Alun
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Campbell, Mr Gregory
Benyon, Richard	Carmichael, Neil
Beresford, Sir Paul	Cartlidge, James
Berry, Jake	Caulfield, Maria
Berry, James	Chalk, Alex
Bingham, Andrew	Chishty, Rehman
Blackman, Bob	Chope, Mr Christopher
Blackwood, Nicola	Churchill, Jo
Blunt, Crispin	Clark, rh Greg

Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, rh Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg

Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kinahan, Danny
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Liddington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie

Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline

Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Chris Heaton-Harris and
Steve Brine

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Arkless, Richard
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackford, Ian

Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen

Burton, Richard
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 Debonnaire, Thangam
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Furniss, Gill
 Gapes, Mike
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayman, Sue

Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie

Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat

Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thompson, Owen
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Nick Smith and
 Vicky Foxcroft

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House disagrees with Lords amendments 15B, 15C, 338B, 339B and 339C.

3.31 pm

More than one hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Lords message, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, 1 November).

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

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

That Ms Diane Abbott, Robert Buckland, Joanna Cherry, Nic Dakin, Andrew Griffiths, Andrew Stephenson and Matt Warman be members of the Committee;

That Robert Buckland be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee;

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—
(Andrew Griffiths.)

Question agreed to.

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

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. If Members are leaving the Chamber following the previous business, I hope that they will have the courtesy to be quiet while we begin the next business.

Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Bill

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee.

New Clause 1

PREVENTION OF FRAUD AND ABUSE OF SMALL DONATIONS SCHEME

(1) The Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 16, insert the following—

“16A Prevention of fraud and abuse of small donations scheme

(1) Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs must, in respect of each tax year beginning with 2017-18, prepare an annual report specifying—

- (a) the number of penalties imposed under this Act,
- (b) the circumstances giving rise to the imposition of such penalties,
- (c) its assessment of the extent to which charities have been established or operated for the primary purpose of securing benefits from the small donations scheme, and
- (d) its assessment of the evidence available on the role of the gift aid matching rule in preventing fraud and abuse.

(2) A report prepared under subsection (1) must be laid before each House of Parliament by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

(3) In this section, “the gift aid matching rule” has the same meaning as in section 14(3).” — (*Rebecca Long Bailey.*)

This new clause requires HMRC to indicate how, each tax year, it has exercised its powers to impose penalties and in what circumstances and to provide an assessment of evidence on the role of the gift aid matching rule in preventing fraud and abuse.

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.34 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2— *Review of operation of gift aid matching rule—*

(1) The Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 16, insert the following—

“16A Review of operation of gift aid matching rule

(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer shall, no later than the end of the 2017-18 tax year, undertake a review of the operation of the gift aid matching rule.

(2) As part of the review of under subsection (1), the Chancellor of the Exchequer shall consult charities and other organisations that he considers relevant about—

- (a) the role of the gift aid matching rule in preventing fraud and abuse, and
- (b) the appropriateness of the Treasury exercising its order-making powers under section 14(2).

(3) A report of the review undertaken in accordance with this section must be laid before each House of Parliament by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

(4) In this section, “the gift aid matching rule” has the same meaning as in section 14(3).”

This new clause requires the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the gift aid matching rule and to consult charities and other organisations on the appropriateness of exercising the Treasury’s

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

powers to amend or abolish that rule which limits the amount of top-up payments to which a charity is entitled by reference to the amount of gifts made to the charity in respect of which it has made successful gift aid exemption claims.

New clause 3—*Regulations on local branches and groups*—

“(1) The Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 is amended as set out in subsections (2) and (3).

(2) After section 5(1) (general provisions on meaning of “connected”), insert—

“(1A) This section is subject to the provisions of regulations made under section 5A (regulations on local branches and groups).”

(3) After section 5, insert the following—

“5A Regulations on local branches and groups

(1) The Treasury shall by regulations prescribe organisations in which local or regional branches or groups may not be considered to be connected for the purposes of sections 4 and 5.

(2) The Treasury shall publish the first set of draft regulations made under subsection (1) no later than 31 October 2017.

(3) Before publishing draft regulations under this section, the Treasury shall consult—

- (a) the Scout Association;
- (b) the Guide Association;
- (c) the Combined Cadet Force Association; and
- (d) such other organisations as appear to the Treasury to be relevant.”

This new clause requires the Treasury to identify organisations with local or regional branch or group structures in order that those local and regional branches or groups can be separately eligible under the scheme, and to consult certain organisations about the regulations in draft.

New clause 4—*Abolition of Gift Aid donations threshold*—

“(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must carry out an assessment of the impact on charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs of amending the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme so as to remove the 10% Gift Aid donations threshold that must be met in order to access the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme, including an assessment of the differential impact on different sizes of charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs concerned.

(2) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must lay a report of the assessment before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.”

Charities and CASCs must give gift aid exemption claims on donations received in order to make a claim under the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme. The total gift aid donations must be at least 10% of the amount of the small donations on which top-up payments are claimed. This new clause would require the Chancellor to assess the impact of abolishing this requirement.

Rebecca Long Bailey: New clause 1 would require Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs to publish in each tax year a report detailing the number of penalties imposed under the Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 and the circumstances giving rise to the imposition of such penalties; HMRC’s assessment of the extent to which charities have been established or have operated for the primary purpose of securing benefits from the small donations scheme; and an assessment of the evidence available on the role of the gift aid matching rule in preventing fraud and abuse. New clause 2 would require the Government to conduct a review of the operation of the gift aid matching rule, which is the rule that the total gift aid donations operation for a charity must be 10% or more of the amount of small donations

on which top-up payments are made. The new clause stipulates that the Chancellor should consult charities and other relevant organisations about the role of the matching rule in preventing fraud and abuse, and the appropriateness of exercising the Treasury’s powers to amend or abolish the rule. New clause 4, which was tabled by the Scottish National party, would also require the Chancellor to assess the impact of abolishing the matching requirement.

During the Bill’s passage through the House, we have had extensive debates about the matching requirement—rightly so, because it is the biggest issue affecting the efficacy of the scheme, according to the charities that use it. The sector thinks broadly that the requirement is arbitrary and is a significant barrier to charities being eligible for the scheme. A consultation with members of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations showed that it is the most significant barrier to access for smaller organisations. The survey found that 50% of respondents with an income under £10,000 wanted the removal or reduction of the matching requirement.

Ahead of Second Reading, the NCVO argued that the Government have presented no evidence to demonstrate the extent to which the matching requirement is a necessary mechanism to prevent fraud and error, or that the matching ratio of 1:10 is the minimum necessary to achieve this objective. Despite considerable debate on this matter, we have got all the way to Report and the Government have still failed to provide any evidence that the matching requirement works. I would welcome the Minister’s comments on that today.

New clause 2 would force the Government to produce evidence in the form of a review and report on the operation of the gift aid matching rule, and whether it should be changed or removed entirely. New clause 4 would require a similar review, so we will be happy to support that measure. I would rather not have to press our new clauses 1 and 2 to a Division unless we have to. They call for a review of something that the charity sector says is hindering the scheme. I hope for some movement from the Minister on the issue today, but if the SNP’s new clause is pressed to a Division, we will support it wholeheartedly, as it reflects many of the principles that we have outlined in new clauses 1 and 2.

I am sure that the Minister will repeat her argument that the matching requirement is necessary to prevent fraud. I agree that we need measures to safeguard against such abuses. The Charity Commission has provided figures showing the extent of fraud in the charity sector. In 2014-15, 417 serious incidents involving fraud and/or theft or the misapplication of funds were reported by charities to the commission, and 255 operational compliance cases were completed. As Members are aware, just last week the commission announced in a press release that it was investigating the charity Our Local Heroes Foundation. According to the commission, it had received information about a proposed disposal of land owned by the charity, concerns regarding the founder of the charity receiving significant personal benefit through the charity, and a complaint that the charity was receiving only 20% of funds raised through a fundraising company.

This is just one case, but it is a sad example of charities being used as vehicles for tax avoidance and fraud. It is therefore incumbent on us to make it as hard as possible to abuse charitable status. That was why we have tabled new clause 1, which would require a review

of the prevention of fraud and abuse in the small donations scheme. As I said, the review would need to address the number of penalties imposed under the Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 and the circumstances giving rise to the imposition of such penalties. It should include Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' assessment of the extent to which charities have been established or have operated for the primary purpose of securing benefits from the small donations scheme, and HMRC's assessment of the evidence available on the role of the gift aid matching rule in preventing fraud and abuse.

The Government's guidance on the scheme explains that if a charity or community amateur sports club "incurs a penalty in respect of an incorrect Gift Aid claim or GASDS"—

gift aid small donations scheme—

"claim, it won't be eligible for the scheme both for the tax year in which the incorrect claim was made and in the following tax year."

I would argue that the link between gift aid and the scheme is stronger than the matching requirement. Charities claiming gift aid can still be, and indeed have been, fraudulent organisations, so simply having a monetary link to the gift aid is not enough. This provision—that if a gift aid claim is wrong, a charity cannot claim through the scheme for that tax year and the following tax year—seems to be a stronger safeguard against fraudulent organisations than the matching requirement. Things might be more complex than that, but a review would clearly be beneficial, because we could assess where the matching requirement actually works effectively. In that way, the Government and the charities sector would be able to see clearly which anti-fraud measures were most effective.

Let me turn now to new clause 3, which deals with a different matter. Members and the Minister will remember that we made the case in Committee that certain groups—the Girl Guides, the Scouts, and the Army, Navy and Air Force cadet groups—were not able to get the full benefit of the small donations scheme. That was after feedback from the respective charities' representatives that, because of the structure of the groups, they were able to make only one claim for the entirety of the group, even though individual groups within them fund themselves.

The Minister responded that the measure proposed in Committee was unnecessary because the Bill allowed for what it proposed. She neatly illustrated why she would reject it—because, at the time, it carved out a few selected charities—but we want provisions to benefit a broad range of charities, some of which were not named in the original new clause tabled in Committee.

New clause 3 attempts to address the Minister's points by allowing the Treasury to make regulations to exempt certain organisations from the connected charities rules. The Government would have to consult the Scout Association, the Guide Association and the Combined Cadet Force Association, in particular, before publishing those regulations. The Minister said she would reflect on the points raised in Committee, so I hope that she will accept the new clause today. It would not carve out a few selected charities, but give the Government the power to consult organisations that are mistakenly affected by the connected charities rules. It would, therefore, make the scheme run more smoothly, which is, after all, the point of the Bill.

I hope that the Minister has listened carefully to the rationale behind the new clauses and recognises that we are genuinely trying to achieve the same end: to make the gift aid small donations scheme work as well as possible for as many charities as possible. I hope that the new clauses will be accepted. We will not press new clauses 1 and 2 to a vote, but we will divide the House on new clause 3, and we will support new clause 4 should the SNP choose to press it to a Division.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): I speak in support of the points made by our shadow Minister about new clauses 1 and 2, which deal practically with the issue of fraud and put the onus very simply on HMRC to establish the extent of the problem. The difficulty facing the voluntary sector is that even with the £15 million of additional support in the Bill, the gift aid small donations scheme will distribute roughly £40 million, which is only about a third of the £115 million that was, according to Government opinion, projected to be distributed next year. This scheme could and should be growing. It is important because it helps and develops the smallest charities, and that must continue.

3.45 pm

In speaking to new clause 2, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) referred to the matching arrangements. I stand here with a certain amount of hope, because I remember that four years ago, when the first version of this Bill was born, the Government proposed 1:1 matching, and now we see matching of 1:10. All we—and, more significantly, many charities and charitable bodies' organisations—respectfully ask is that the Government consider how sacrosanct that 1:10 matching rule is. That is well put in our new clause 2 and in new clause 4, which was tabled by the SNP.

I hope that the Minister will consider these points. A few years ago in this Chamber, we were told that such provisions could not possibly include contactless payments. The Government moved on that, and they moved on the rate of matching. To be optimistic, as we all want this Bill to work, I very much hope that the Government will shift a little on these issues too.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I rise to speak to new clause 4, which stands in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin), although I shall touch on the other new clauses in the group.

New clause 1, which would require HMRC to present an annual report, is reasonable and sensible. I was surprised by the amount of discussion we had in Committee and elsewhere about the possibility of charities using such a scheme for fraudulent purposes. Perhaps I was being naive as that had not crossed my mind a great deal, but apparently people are genuinely concerned about it. If the Government were to take on board Labour's proposal in new clause 1, it would help to allay the fears of the general public about how charities are acting. I think that only a very small minority of charities are set up to act fraudulently, and the publication of such information would help to ensure that the public are aware of that.

New clause 2, not dissimilarly from a number of measures that we discussed in Committee, deals with the matching requirement. I will come on to that later. I understand why Labour Members have tabled new clause 3,

[*Kirsty Blackman*]

which addresses local organisations that, unfortunately, are caught by some aspects of the way in which the Bill is written. I appreciate that that is an issue, so my colleagues and I will support Labour Members if they press it to a vote.

New clause 4 relates to the matching requirement and the associated threshold. When the first draft of the Bill was introduced in the previous Parliament, the Government supported a different matching requirement from what was eventually approved. During the consideration of that Bill, they also changed the proposals on the matching requirement so that they could edit it in the future, if necessary. That was a result of pressure by charities and organisations that had raised concerns about the arbitrary nature of the level that was chosen for the matching requirement.

I appreciate that the Government have moved on this in the past, but charities are now asking them to move further. As the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) said, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Charity Finance Group, the Institute of Fundraising and the Small Charities Coalition produced a paper saying that it was vital that the matching requirement was changed or removed. That is why we have brought the proposal before the House. Although we discussed this in Committee, we still feel that the Government need to look at it, while appreciating that they have the power to do so outwith this Bill.

If the Government do not accept the new clause, I would very much appreciate it if they considered the proposal in the future. This is not just about the SNP; our proposal is widely supported, including by the Labour party and by charities across the UK such as the Churches Legislation Advisory Service and the Charity Tax Group. If fears can be allayed about fraud, in particular, it would be reasonable for the Government to take some steps towards change. I do not want to talk for long, but I would appreciate it if the Government would seriously consider taking up this proposal. If they do not agree to the new clause, I hope that they will at least commit to looking at it at some point in the future.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jane Ellison):

I appreciate the spirit in which the new clauses have been spoken to, because we are all here for one purpose, which is to make sure that the Bill works as well as possible for the benefit of as many charities as possible. In responding to this short debate, I will try to offer evidence of the reasons why we cannot, or do not think that it is right to, accept the new clauses.

New clause 1 would require Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to publish every year an analysis of the number of penalties imposed; the circumstances giving rise to the imposition of those penalties; an assessment of the number of charities set up with the primary purpose of accessing the small donations scheme; and an assessment of the efficacy of the matching rule in preventing fraud. That relates to the general debate that we have had throughout the Bill's progress about how we prevent fraud and a minority of people from exploiting the rules.

New clause 2 would require the Chancellor to undertake a review of the matching rule—the same is true, as we have just heard, of new clause 4—in consultation with the charity sector, and to lay a copy of the report by the end of the 2017-18 tax year.

New clause 3 seeks a power to prescribe by regulations an exemption for certain charities from the connected charities provision. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), is right to say that we debated that proposal in Committee and that I undertook to reflect on it. I will tell her where I have got to shortly. The new clause would require the Treasury to consult the Scouts, Guides, military cadet groups and other organisations before publishing draft regulations on or before 31 October 2017.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): On consultation, the Minister has mentioned the Scouts and a number of other organisations, but has she considered consulting the Brethren? I am sure that she will recall that, during the last Parliament, the Brethren lost its charity status for a while and there was a large number of debates.

Jane Ellison: Obviously, I was not in this post at the time, but I recall someone in my constituency drawing my attention to that. As I will come on to say, the consultation process leading up to the Bill was exhaustive, but I also hope to reassure the House that the ongoing consultation with people who have an interest in the issue is significant on the part of HMRC and the departmental team led by the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson), who has responsibility for civil society. It is fair to say that we have a good, constructive and ongoing dialogue with the charity sector and those affected by the provisions, but I acknowledge that there was a slightly different concern in relation to the group mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

New clause 4 proposes that an assessment be put before the House within six months of the passing of the Bill, and it centres on the gift aid matching requirement and its impact on charities of different sizes. We debated similar amendments in Committee and, although I accepted that they were well intended, I decided that they were unnecessary, so it will probably not surprise the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles and the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), who spoke on behalf of the SNP, that I will make some of the same points again today, but I hope to build on what I said in Committee.

New clause 1 concerns fraud—a vital issue that we have discussed a number of times and that we take very seriously. I am grateful to Opposition Members for giving us the opportunity to return to this important subject. I welcome, as I did in Committee, the fact that we have a cross-party consensus on protecting the gift aid small donations scheme from fraudulent attack. Opposition Members have raised on several occasions the efficacy of the matching scheme as a deterrent against fraud, and they asked us on Second Reading and in Committee to prove that the matching rule prevents fraud. At each stage, particularly in the debate on the matter in Committee, I drew the House's attention to a few examples of the shocking abuses of charitable

status that have resulted in criminal convictions this year alone. Sadly, I have a reasonably extensive list of quite recent events, but I sense that I do not need to persuade people that fraud does happen in a minority of cases.

I am not sure exactly what further evidence Opposition Members would like me to provide. As I said in Committee, the Government are, in essence, being asked to prove a negative. That is a risky proposition, and I will illustrate why. If the suggestion is that the Government should adopt a wait-and-see approach, remove all the protections and then attempt to close the loopholes when fraudulent attacks take place, I cannot agree that that is the right approach. Opening up the scheme to abuse would be irresponsible, could waste a large amount of public money and—probably most importantly—could cause untold damage to the reputation of our fantastic charity sector. I cannot recommend that course of action to the House.

To be clear, we know that the majority of charities are honest. They are run by dedicated and trustworthy people—the sort of people whom we all know in our constituencies. For the fraudsters, however, nothing is sacred. It is a sad fact that if they are presented with an opportunity, they do not hesitate to exploit it. I gave examples on Second Reading and in Committee of fraudulent activity seen by HMRC, and I am sorry to say that, as I have mentioned, further examples are easily provided. It is not just HMRC and the Treasury that recognise that fraud in the charity sector is a problem; there is wide acknowledgment in the sector that fraud is a costly issue, particularly because of the reputational damage it causes. Some Members may be aware that last month saw Charity Fraud Awareness Week and the launch of a new “Charities against fraud” website, which is a joint initiative between the Charity Commission and the Fraud Advisory Panel to help trustees and volunteers to recognise the risks and take action to prevent fraud in charities.

There is also recognition from charity umbrella bodies that charity fraud can be incredibly damaging. The Charity Finance Group noted in its guide “Countering Fraud”, which was published during Fraud Awareness Week:

“Fraud is a problem that can affect any charity from the very large to the very small. Falling victim to fraud can undermine a charity’s reputation, damage donor confidence and reduce a charity’s ability to help its beneficiaries. On occasion fraud has even led to the forced closure of a charity.”

The Government will not tolerate the abuse of charitable status, for the reasons so eloquently expressed by the Charity Finance Group. The Government will continue to take action to tackle and disrupt the dishonest minority who attempt such fraud.

I am simply not convinced that it would be helpful to publish an annual report detailing the compliance activity that HMRC has undertaken. Indeed, I fear that doing so could have the unintended consequence of assisting the very people whom HMRC is attempting to weed out. HMRC’s operational performance in this and every other respect is, quite rightly, the subject of independent scrutiny by the National Audit Office and Parliament, through the Treasury Committee and the Public Accounts Committee. For that reason, I believe that new clause 1 is unnecessary, and I hope that the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles might consider withdrawing it.

Kirsty Blackman: None of us has suggested, at any stage of the proceedings on the Bill, removing all the anti-fraud measures. In fact, we were quite clear and measured in everything that we moved; it was about an assessment. New clause 1 is about responding to our concerns about the actual level of fraud and providing us with the relevant information to enable us to have a much more knowledgeable debate next time the matter comes up—specifically around the level, the percentage and the money that is involved—rather than about removing the measure entirely.

Jane Ellison: I understand that point, but my real concern is that the matching rule is the only remaining condition on this particular scheme. Obviously, there are other aspects to wider gift aid, but on the scheme that is the subject of this Bill, we are down to a simple last remaining condition that we believe helps to avoid the scheme being exploited fraudulently. I just do not accept the premise that it is sensible to remove it, to see what happens and then to come back to Parliament and say, “We removed it and, as we thought, it was exploited, so now we have to close that loophole again, but in the meantime we have lost public money and, more importantly, charities have lost reputation.”

4 pm

Susan Elan Jones: I accept that the Minister may want to keep the matching rule to some extent, but what is so sacred about 1:10?

Jane Ellison: I will say a little about that. As other hon. Members have said, there was movement on this during the passage of the original legislation. The figure is reasonable and strikes a sensible balance. A ratio of 1:10 is an easy one for those administering this to remember. If hon. Members accept that the matching rule is sensible in principle, I am prepared to say that it is something we would anyway keep under review in the normal course of events. The civil society Minister and I were saying to each other on the Front Bench a moment ago that, given hon. Members’ interest in this, we will keep an eye on it in particular and draw it out in the ongoing dialogue that we naturally have with charities. However, I cannot accept that removing it entirely is a good idea. These things are kept under constant review, and both the Treasury and the civil society parts of Government have a very good relationship with the charities sector, so we will have plenty of opportunities to continue to have such a dialogue with charities and to understand where this comes in. In a few moments, I will say a little more to demonstrate that it is not the barrier that some hon. Members have suggested it is.

Let me turn to new clauses 2 and 4. New clause 2 is a request for a review of the matching rule in consultation with the charity sector. As I have said, the Government have already undertaken a full review of all aspects of the gift aid small donations scheme, including the matching rule, and the Bill is a result of that review. However, I will always be happy to keep an eye on this issue. The Government’s review was comprehensive and open, and it was carried out in full consultation with the charities sector and, indeed, with anyone with an interest in the scheme or in charity tax reliefs more generally. Some hon. Members will recall that, as I have said, back in 2012, the Government committed to reviewing the operation of the scheme after three years, so the Government have made good on that promise.

[Jane Ellison]

We recognise how important the scheme and the promised review were to charities. We listened to the sector, and that is why we announced in the autumn statement last year that we would bring forward the review of the scheme to December 2015. To inform the review, HMRC published a call for evidence in December, seeking charities' views about the operation of the scheme, including its eligibility rules and processes. The call for evidence asked five questions about the scheme's eligibility criteria, including two questions specifically about the gift aid matching requirement. The call for evidence closed on 2 March. HMRC received 197 responses from charities, representative bodies and other interested parties. The Government reviewed all the submissions and published a response on 20 April.

In the responses document, which is available on the Government's website, we explain that the vast majority of—indeed, almost all—the respondents to the call for evidence did not identify the matching rule as a major barrier to accessing the scheme. The Government recognise that many of the responses reflected the experience of charities already successfully using the scheme and may not therefore be representative of the sector as a whole. We take that point, so HMRC has supplemented the data provided by charities with an analysis of its own data. As I explained in Committee, the data showed that 92% of charities claiming gift aid for the tax year 2014-15 claimed on donations of £500 or more, entitling them to the maximum small donations allowance at that time of £5,000. HMRC's analysis also showed that 98% of charities claiming gift aid in 2014-15 claimed sufficient amounts to receive a small donations allowance of at least £1,000.

The Government also considered data produced by the charity sector. A survey carried out by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Charity Finance Group, the Institute of Fundraising, the Small Charities Coalition and the Association of Independent Museums found that just 5% of respondents claimed no gift aid at all, and only 10% did not feel that their charity claimed enough gift aid to make the small donations scheme worthwhile.

Following the call for evidence, HMRC published a further consultation on reform options on 20 April, which was yet another opportunity for stakeholders to put forward reform ideas for consideration. That consultation closed on 1 July this year. It received 46 responses. Again, interestingly, the matching rule was not raised as an issue by the vast majority of respondents.

Quite simply, none of the available data, whether produced by the Government or the sector itself, support the assertion that the gift aid matching rule is a significant barrier to accessing the small donations scheme. The Government have already collected data on the matching rule, carried out a full objective review of the whole scheme and consulted the charity sector. That is why we believe that repeating the consultation process again, so soon after the last consultation, would not produce a different outcome, and why, therefore, I urge the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles not to press new clause 2 to a Division.

As I have said, given the clear interest in the House, we will continue to take a keen interest in this matter,

and will listen to the views of the charity sector. The civil society Minister and I are already talking about how we can do more to publicise some aspects of the scheme, and in particular how to get those that do not take advantage of the small donations scheme at the moment to do so. There is a charities day on 16 November, about which we will say a little more later; that will be an opportunity to say and do more to promote the scheme to that small minority not already using it.

I appreciate that in tabling new clause 4 the hon. Members for Aberdeen North and for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) are seeking to understand the differential impact that abolishing the matching rule would have on charities of different sizes. I have already set out why we do not support the removal of the gift aid matching rule, but I have to tell Opposition Members that it is simply not possible to provide them with the level of analysis that they are seeking. Although HMRC holds data on charitable tax reliefs, it quite rightly collects and retains only those data that are necessary to support its function of administering gift aid and other reliefs. Size and turnover are not relevant for gift aid purposes; HMRC therefore does not routinely collect data on the size or types of charities claiming gift aid or small donations top-ups.

As I explained in Committee, HMRC is transparent with the data it holds, and publishes a national statistics package every year that provides a wealth of information about the take-up and use of charitable tax reliefs, including the gift aid small donations scheme. Hon. Members may also be interested to know that HMRC makes many of its datasets, including those relating to charitable reliefs, available—suitably anonymised, of course—to academics and other individuals who approach it with a suitable research proposal. I can tell the House that a number of organisations have recently made use of HMRC's charities data for research purposes. That is a good example of open government and open data being put to good use.

I hope I have reassured the hon. Member for Aberdeen North that where HMRC possesses data, those data are transparent and, where appropriate, open to outside scrutiny. New clause 4 is not appropriate, because it would require, in legislation, the Government to do something that we simply cannot do. On that basis, I hope the hon. Lady will consider not pressing the new clause to a Division.

Let me turn finally to new clause 3. As I have explained in previous debates, the connected charities rules are intended to protect the gift aid small donations scheme from abuse. They work in conjunction with the community buildings rules to deliver fair and broadly equal outcomes for charities structured in different ways. Without the connected charities rules, larger charities would be faced with a perverse incentive to splinter into artificial groups of smaller charities to increase their entitlement to small donations allowances. New clause 3 would grant the Treasury the power to exempt specific named charities from the connected charities rules. It would also require the Treasury to publish draft regulations, following consultation with the Scouts, the Guides and others.

The new clause is unnecessary. As we have heard, the Government have just concluded a full and open review of all aspects of the gift aid small donations scheme. That review included the gift aid matching rule and the connected charities rules. In that very open consultation,

many representations included the Scouts and other uniformed groups. The Government listened to the representations from the uniformed groups. They told us that they welcomed the gift aid small donations scheme, but were unable to benefit fully from the current community buildings rules because most of their fundraising, as Members will know, takes place outside in their local community. The Bill will therefore relax the community buildings rules to allow donations collected outside the building to be counted for community buildings purposes. As discussed on Second Reading and in Committee, this will help bob-a-job work and so on that is done outside the scout hut or other building.

The intention is to allow groups such as the Scouts to benefit more fully from the scheme without the need to specifically exclude them from the connected charities provision. We debated a similar amendment in Committee and had a thorough and thoughtful debate on the implications of the Bill for the youth groups in question. The shadow Chief Secretary raised a number of good points and I undertook to reflect on them and look at them more closely. Having done so, I confirm to the House that a scout hut is an eligible community building and there is no requirement for the building to be rented out or for access to be granted to other community groups. That means that the Scouts and other similar uniformed groups will benefit from the changes contained in the Bill. Whether it is bag-packing at the local supermarket or bucket collections at the local fete, donations in the local community will count for the small donations scheme. The Bill's provisions already deliver the outcome Opposition Members seek. I therefore suggest that new clause 3 is unnecessary and I hope the hon. Lady will withdraw it.

Rebecca Long Bailey: With the leave of the House, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 3

REGULATIONS ON LOCAL BRANCHES AND GROUPS

‘(1) The Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 is amended as set out in subsections (2) and (3).

(2) After section 5(1) (general provisions on meaning of “connected”), insert—

“(1A) This section is subject to the provisions of regulations made under section 5A (regulations on local branches and groups).”

(3) After section 5, insert the following—

“5A Regulations on local branches and groups

(1) The Treasury shall by regulations prescribe organisations in which local or regional branches or groups may not be considered to be connected for the purposes of sections 4 and 5.

(2) The Treasury shall publish the first set of draft regulations made under subsection (1) no later than 31 October 2017.

(3) Before publishing draft regulations under this section, the Treasury shall consult—

- (a) the Scout Association;
- (b) the Guide Association;
- (c) the Combined Cadet Force Association; and

(d) such other organisations as appear to the Treasury to be relevant.”—(Rebecca Long Bailey.)

This new clause requires the Treasury to identify organisations with local or regional branch or group structures in order that those local and regional branches or groups can be separately eligible under the scheme, and to consult certain organisations about the regulations in draft.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 254, Noes 287.

Division No. 79]

[4.11 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Abrahams, Debbie	Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Doughty, Stephen
Alexander, Heidi	Dowd, Peter
Ali, Rushanara	Dromey, Jack
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Durkan, Mark
Arkless, Richard	Eagle, Ms Angela
Ashworth, Jonathan	Eagle, Maria
Austin, Ian	Edwards, Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah	Efford, Clive
Beckett, rh Margaret	Elliott, Julie
Benn, rh Hilary	Elliott, Tom
Berger, Luciana	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Black, Mhairi	Elmore, Chris
Blackford, Ian	Esterson, Bill
Blackman, Kirsty	Evans, Chris
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Farron, Tim
Blenkinsop, Tom	Fellows, Marion
Blomfield, Paul	Ferrier, Margaret
Boswell, Philip	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Brabin, Tracy	Fleelo, Robert
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Fletcher, Colleen
Brake, rh Tom	Flint, rh Caroline
Brennan, Kevin	Flynn, Paul
Brock, Deidre	Furniss, Gill
Brown, Alan	Gapes, Mike
Brown, Lyn	Gethins, Stephen
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Gibson, Patricia
Bryant, Chris	Glass, Pat
Buck, Ms Karen	Glindon, Mary
Burgon, Richard	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Butler, Dawn	Goodman, Helen
Byrne, rh Liam	Grady, Patrick
Cadbury, Ruth	Gray, Neil
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Griffith, Nia
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Gwynne, Andrew
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Haigh, Louise
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Hanson, rh Mr David
Champion, Sarah	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Chapman, Douglas	Harris, Carolyn
Chapman, Jenny	Hayes, Helen
Cherry, Joanna	Hayman, Sue
Clegg, rh Mr Nick	Healey, rh John
Clwyd, rh Ann	Hendrick, Mr Mark
Coaker, Vernon	Hendry, Drew
Coffey, Ann	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Cooper, Julie	Hillier, Meg
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Cowan, Ronnie	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Coyle, Neil	Hollern, Kate
Crausby, Mr David	Hopkins, Kelvin
Crawley, Angela	Hosie, Stewart
Creagh, Mary	Howarth, rh Mr George
Creasy, Stella	Hunt, Tristram
Cryer, John	Huq, Dr Rupa
Cummins, Judith	Hussain, Imran
Cunningham, Alex	Jarvis, Dan
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Johnson, rh Alan
Dakin, Nic	Jones, Gerald
Danczuk, Simon	Jones, Graham
David, Wayne	Jones, Helen
Davies, Geraint	Jones, Mr Kevan
Day, Martyn	Jones, Susan Elan
Debbonaire, Thangam	Kane, Mike
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Keeley, Barbara

Kendall, Liz
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Kinahan, Danny
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCaig, Callum
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McGarry, Natalie
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
Meale, Sir Alan
Mearns, Ian
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Morden, Jessica
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Albert
Paterson, Steven
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Jamie

Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip
Simpson, David
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thompson, Owen
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Weir, Mike
West, Catherine
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Phil
Wilson, Sammy
Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete
Woodcock, John
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Nick Smith and
Vicky Foxcroft**

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi

Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria

Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie

Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, rh Ben
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkyns, Andrea
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline

Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Philp, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robinson, Mary

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

Tellers for the Noes:

**Guy Opperman and
Chris Heaton-Harris**

New Clause 4

ABOLITION OF GIFT AID DONATIONS THRESHOLD

(1) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must carry out an assessment of the impact on charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs of amending the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme so as to remove the 10% Gift Aid donations threshold that must be met in order to access the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme, including an assessment of the differential impact on different sizes of charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs concerned.

(2) The Chancellor of the Exchequer must lay a report of the assessment before the House of Commons within six months of the passing of this Act.' — (*Kirsty Blackman.*)

Charities and CASCs must give gift aid exemption claims on donations received in order to make a claim under the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme. The total gift aid donations must be at least 10% of the amount of the small donations on which top-up payments are claimed. This new clause would require the Chancellor to assess the impact of abolishing this requirement.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 256, Noes 287.

Division No. 80]

[4.25 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Clwyd, rh Ann
Abrahams, Debbie	Coaker, Vernon
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Coffey, Ann
Alexander, Heidi	Cooper, Julie
Ali, Rushanara	Cooper, rh Yvette
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Arkless, Richard	Cowan, Ronnie
Ashworth, Jonathan	Coyle, Neil
Austin, Ian	Crausby, Mr David
Bardell, Hannah	Crawley, Angela
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Creagh, Mary
Beckett, rh Margaret	Creasy, Stella
Benn, rh Hilary	Cryer, John
Berger, Luciana	Cummins, Judith
Black, Mhairi	Cunningham, Alex
Blackford, Ian	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Blackman, Kirsty	Dakin, Nic
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Danczuk, Simon
Blenkinsop, Tom	David, Wayne
Blomfield, Paul	Davies, Geraint
Boswell, Philip	Day, Martyn
Brabin, Tracy	Debbonaire, Thangam
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Brake, rh Tom	Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Brennan, Kevin	Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Brock, Deidre	Dorries, Nadine
Brown, Alan	Doughty, Stephen
Brown, Lyn	Dowd, Peter
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Dromey, Jack
Bryant, Chris	Durkan, Mark
Buck, Ms Karen	Eagle, Ms Angela
Burgon, Richard	Eagle, Maria
Butler, Dawn	Edwards, Jonathan
Byrne, rh Liam	Efford, Clive
Cadbury, Ruth	Elliott, Julie
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Elmore, Chris
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Esterson, Bill
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Evans, Chris
Champion, Sarah	Farron, Tim
Chapman, Douglas	Ferrier, Margaret
Chapman, Jenny	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Cherry, Joanna	Flelo, Robert
Clegg, rh Mr Nick	Fletcher, Colleen

Question accordingly negatived.

Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Glass, Pat
Glendon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Gray, Neil
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Alan
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCaig, Callum
McCarthy, Kerry

McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McGarry, Natalie
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
Meale, Sir Alan
Mearns, Ian
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Morden, Jessica
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Albert
Paterson, Steven
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Jamie
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Salmond, rh Alex
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip
Simpson, David
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thornberry, Emily

Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Weir, Mike
West, Catherine
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan

Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Phil
Wilson, Sammy
Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete
Woodcock, John
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
**Marion Fellows and
Owen Thompson**

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afrিয়ে, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Elliott, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew

Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkyns, Andrea
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kinahan, Danny
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel

Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Philp, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie

Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Vera, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David

Warman, Matt
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
Steve Brine and
Chris Heaton-Harris

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 2

MEANING OF "SMALL DONATION"

Rebecca Long Bailey: I beg to move amendment 1, page 2, leave out lines 1 to 6 and insert—

“(a) in the heading after “small”, delete “cash payment” and insert “donation”;

(b) in sub-paragraph (1) omit the words “in cash”;

(c) after that sub-paragraph insert—

“(1A) The gift must be made—

(b) by cheque;

(c) by electronic communication; or

(d) by a contactless payment.”

(d) in sub-paragraph (3) after the definition of “cash” insert—

“cheque” means a written order instructing a bank to pay upon its presentation to the person designated in it, or the to the person possessing it, a certain sum of money from the account of the person who draws it; “electronic communication” means a payment made via the internet or text message.”

This amendment would extend the range of methods by which payments can be made under the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment 2, page 2, line 6, at end insert—

“or

(c) by a comparable method prescribed by the Treasury by regulations.”

This amendment would give the Treasury a power to prescribe by regulations other methods of payment comparable to contactless payment in the future.

Rebecca Long Bailey: Opposition amendments 1 and 2 relate to the types of payment eligible for the gift aid small donations scheme. Amendment 1 would extend the range of payment methods to include cheques and electronic communications—that is, texts. The Bill itself extends the methods to include contactless payments. Amendment 2 would give the Treasury powers to prescribe by regulations other methods of payment comparable to contactless payments in the future. I will keep my remarks on these two amendments relatively brief as we had an extensive debate of this issue in Committee, although I did not push it to a vote.

[Rebecca Long Bailey]

Currently, cash donations under £20 are considered eligible for the scheme. The Bill brings contactless payments into the scheme, and we support that measure. However, the charity sector has said that it would be more beneficial for other types of payment, particularly cheques, to be eligible as well. When this was discussed in Committee, the Minister said that amending the Bill in such a way was

“contrary to the stated policy intention of the scheme.”—[*Official Report, Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Public Bill Committee, 18 October 2016; c. 10.*]

I want to take this opportunity to disagree.

The intention of the scheme is to allow charities to get a gift aid-style top-up on donations made in situations where it is infeasible, but not impossible, to get a gift aid declaration. I would argue that donations made by text are a prime example of such a situation. The Minister has said that receiving gift aid declarations on donations via SMS is a straightforward process: the donor simply needs to reply to a follow-up text message giving their name and address and confirming that they are a taxpayer. It might be straightforward, but people tend to be wary of disclosing personal information. I certainly would not feel comfortable sending my address and other details to an unknown number.

The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) helpfully alerted us to paragraph 1.8 of the Treasury consultation “Gift Aid and Digital Giving”. I am sure that the Minister has had time to check it out, but I can remind her that the document states:

“Individual donations online or by text are often small. In these cases for the donor it may not seem worthwhile to go to the trouble of filling out a Gift Aid declaration for a small additional amount to go to the recipient charity.”

It is therefore clear that getting a gift aid declaration via text is not as straightforward as the Minister would have us believe.

Similar situations can arise with cheques, as detailed in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley). Elderly people in particular often send cheques in the post, making it impossible for charities to track them down and get a gift aid declaration—it is probably not worth it if it is a small amount. Amendment 1 would simply allow such donations to be eligible for the scheme. I hope the Minister will offer some movement on this area as I simply cannot see the logic in saying that extending payments in that way would somehow encourage charities to move away from traditional gift aid claims.

Amendment 2 would allow the Treasury to make regulations to tweak the legislation to allow types of payments similar to contactless payment to come under the scope of the scheme. It was argued in Committee that technology is moving forward at an incredibly fast pace and that next year people might be using a new type of card or gadget to donate to charity. The Opposition are convinced by that line of reasoning and the amendment would simply give the Government the power to make changes to allow Oyster cards, for example, to come within the scope of the legislation without having to create a brand-new Bill. It is not often the Opposition’s desire to give the Government more powers, but it would be worthwhile in this scenario.

In conclusion, the Opposition strongly support the move to include contactless payment, but we do not see the logic in singling it out when the sector is saying that other payment methods would provide a greater boost to the scheme. I look forward to the Minister’s response. I will be pushing amendment 1 to a vote should she not see fit to accept it.

Jane Ellison: As we have just heard, amendment 1 would extend the gift aid small donations scheme to include donations made via cheque, online or SMS. Amendment 2 would give the Treasury the power to amend the Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 through secondary legislation to include other unspecified methods of payment in future. As the shadow Minister said, we debated this area in some detail both on Second Reading and in Committee, so I am afraid that I will be making many of the same points.

When I opened the Second Reading debate, I told the House that it is a Government priority to maximise the gift aid claimed by charities on eligible donations. It is worth reflecting on that because during the Bill’s passage through the House we have quite rightly focused on the gift aid small donations scheme, but the scheme—important though it is—forms just one part of the package of generous tax reliefs the Government use to support our charity sector. Gift aid was worth over £1.3 billion to the charity sector last year—a significant amount—but we want to see gift aid claimed on even more eligible donations, and we want charities to claim gift aid because it is a much more beneficial scheme and has many advantages for charities over the longer term. The shadow Minister said that she was not seeking to undermine gift aid, but it is worth reminding ourselves that it is the more beneficial scheme, so we want to encourage people to take it up.

One reason is that gift aid is not capped—relief can be claimed on individual donations worth hundreds or thousands of pounds. There is no annual limit—charities can claim on as many eligible donations as they are able to solicit. The act of obtaining a gift aid declaration provides charities with the opportunity to build a relationship with their donors, leading to a more sustainable and resilient funding stream.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Rob Wilson): Exactly.

Jane Ellison: As the Minister for civil society indicates from a sedentary position, that is absolutely key to the long-term health of many charities.

We fully accept that there are situations in which, with the best will in the world, charity fundraisers cannot stop donors to ask them to complete a gift aid declaration. The gift aid small donations scheme is therefore intended to be used for those small, low-value, spur of the moment donations when contact between donor and charity is fleeting and it is not practical or feasible to solicit a gift aid declaration. Those will primarily be the small cash donations that the small donations scheme was originally designed to cover, but we also accept, following discussions with the sector, that this should also apply to contactless donations. However, the Government are not persuaded that this is the case with other methods of donations such as those made by text, online or by cheque, and I set out reasons for that on Second Reading and in Committee.

4.45 pm

I have listened with interest to the arguments advanced by right hon. and hon. Members, including the shadow Minister, and I completely understand the points they are making. However, if the argument is that the process for claiming gift aid on electronic donations, such as those by SMS, is too onerous, that is a separate issue and the solution is not to try to shoehorn methods of donation into the gift aid small donations scheme which it was never intended to cover.

The Government completely agree that the process for claiming gift aid on SMS and online donations made through digital intermediaries should be simpler. We have discussed this issue in detail with the sector and have published several consultation documents. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) made reference to one such document in Committee, and it has been referred to again today. I am pleased to tell him, the shadow Minister and other hon. Members that we have made progress on this issue. Primary legislation was included in the Finance Act 2015 and the Finance Act 2016, and draft regulations were published for technical consultation earlier this year. The Government intend to lay those regulations shortly, and they will simplify the process of gift aiding donations through digital intermediaries. Instead of completing a gift aid declaration for every donation made, donors will be able to sign a one-off authorisation allowing the intermediary to create gift aid declarations and claim gift aid on the donor's behalf for all subsequent donations made in that tax year.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I was about to rise to congratulate the Minister, as this seems like a really good initiative, but why apply this for only just that tax year? Given that someone is able to donate to an organisation and do it within a tax year, why not roll this over into future tax years to extend this provision? Perhaps I am being uncharitable to her, as this is a good provision, but it could be even better.

Jane Ellison: I strongly suspect that there are technical reasons why that would be difficult, but I am happy to take my hon. Friend's suggestion away, look at it and respond properly to him. In the spirit of simplification, he seeks to make it ever easier to make these donations. As a result of the way Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs operates—within tax years—I could foresee difficulties with this approach, but I will look at it and write to him with a bit more detail.

There are more things we can do to make things easier for charities, and the Government are constantly looking at ways of achieving that—we have just heard another suggestion from my hon. Friend. I am pleased to tell the House that we have a very good track record of simplifying gift aid processes for charities. For example, in 2013 we introduced Charities Online to help charities to claim gift aid even faster, and 95% of charities now use this service. Instead of having to fill in paper forms and post them back to HMRC, charities can claim their repayments online and have them paid directly into their bank account. Under the old paper system it could take up to three working weeks for charities to receive their repayments, whereas most claims are now paid within five working days. I am sure hon. Members would agree that that is a welcome boost for charities.

Just last year, HMRC introduced a new, shorter model gift aid declaration to make it easier for donors to understand their obligations under the scheme, and it worked in close collaboration with the Charity Retail Association to simplify and clarify the Government's guidance on the retail gift aid scheme. Earlier this summer, the Treasury published a consultation exploring ways of simplifying the gift aid donor benefits rules, and we looked carefully at the responses received before publishing a response.

Of course, we will keep looking for ways to simplify and improve gift aid, but these are questions about the wider gift aid scheme, not the gift aid small donations scheme. My hon. Friend might be pleased to note that one reason I foresaw difficulties with his proposal is that people's tax status can change from year to year—for example, when they move from work into retirement—and this would make things difficult. I hope that that response is helpful, but I will follow up with him in more detail.

Amendment 2 would grant the Treasury the power to amend the Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 in the future in the event that new donation technology develops. Members who were present at the original Bill discussion reminded us in Committee that they had made points about future-proofing the scheme in terms of technology at that time. My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley and the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) are nodding. It is an interesting point, which we have debated.

The Government have consulted fully on the changes to the scheme, and as part of the consultation that we have just undertaken, the extensive nature of which I outlined earlier, HMRC officials went out and met with charities and other groups to discuss contactless donations and other technological developments. They considered methods of donation that are not currently in use but might be in the pipeline. I understand that there was no suggestion from the stakeholders that there are other imminent technological developments in the pipeline that would be suitable for the small donations scheme. In any event, we have deliberately drafted the definition of "contactless payment" quite widely.

As I explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley in Committee, the definition in the Bill would cover donations from, for example, Oyster cards, as the shadow Minister mentioned, or other smart cards. It would also cover new payment services similar to Apple Pay and Android Pay. We believe that the definition in the Bill is sufficient to cover most of the technological developments that we are likely to see in the reasonably foreseeable future.

James Duddridge: My hon. Friend will not be surprised that I expressed some degree of sympathy with amendment 2, given that I raised some of these points. I am reassured about the extension of contactless payments, particularly to Oyster cards, as was mentioned from the Opposition Front Bench. However, I do not support the amendment because of its wording. It refers to "comparable method". The shadow Minister used the word "similar", and my hon. Friend the Minister used the term "unspecified". That is all unclear. There will be further technological changes and we will probably look back and say, "Wasn't there a formulation that we could have used to include this new technology?" The wording of the amendment is not satisfactory and unfortunately I cannot offer a suggestion to improve it.

Jane Ellison: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. Learning, perhaps, from the time when the predecessor Bill was before the House, we have tried to look ahead, consult widely, and future-proof this Bill against forms of payment that are not yet widely used. It is sensible to try to provide a definition of those, rather than leaving the Bill overly vague. We have done a sound job of future-proofing the Bill as much as is reasonably possible.

I fully accept that at some future stage, perhaps some years from now, a new donation method could be developed which would not be covered by the current definition. We cannot know whether that future method might have implications for other parts of the Bill. That is why I am nervous about writing a woolly definition into the Bill. If and when there is a new donation method not foreseen or covered by the Bill, it is important that the Government come before the House with primary legislation, explain their decision and allow Parliament to scrutinise the proposed changes properly. As this Bill has proceeded relatively uncontroversially through the House, it would be hard to argue that the scrutiny of it and the attention that it has allowed us to focus on the scheme and on gift aid more widely have not been a good thing. The Bill demonstrates that we keep matters under review and that, when there is a case for change, we come back before Parliament and engage in a full and proper debate.

Gift aid is hugely beneficial for charities and we want as many charities as possible to benefit from gift aid on the eligible donations that they receive. I have given an undertaking that the Treasury will work with the Minister for civil society to publicise the charities day on 16 December and to look more widely at what we can do to make sure that take-up continues to grow. The small donations scheme is a separate scheme intended to bridge the gap caused by small, fleeting donations. It is not a replacement for or an alternative to gift aid, and if charities can obtain a gift aid declaration, they should do so because it is in their best interests, for reasons that I have touched on.

This Bill will improve the gift aid small donations scheme. Separately the Government are taking action to improve the wider scheme, and I hope that that action will address a number of the concerns raised in the debate by hon. Members. The small donations scheme is not the right vehicle to bring about the changes that have been suggested and that the shadow Minister is seeking. I hope that, having heard these reassurances, she will withdraw her amendments.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 248, Noes 279.

Division No. 81]

[4.55 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Black, Mhairi
Abrahams, Debbie	Blackford, Ian
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Blackman, Kirsty
Alexander, Heidi	Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Ali, Rushanara	Blenkinsop, Tom
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Blomfield, Paul
Arkless, Richard	Boswell, Philip
Ashworth, Jonathan	Brabin, Tracy
Bardell, Hannah	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Beckett, rh Margaret	Brake, rh Tom
Benn, rh Hilary	Brennan, Kevin
Berger, Luciana	Brock, Deidre

Brown, Alan	Grady, Patrick
Brown, Lyn	Gray, Neil
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Griffith, Nia
Bryant, Chris	Gwynne, Andrew
Buck, Ms Karen	Haigh, Louise
Burgon, Richard	Hanson, rh Mr David
Burnham, rh Andy	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Butler, Dawn	Harris, Carolyn
Byrne, rh Liam	Hayes, Helen
Cadbury, Ruth	Hayman, Sue
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Healey, rh John
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Hendrick, Mr Mark
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Hendry, Drew
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Champion, Sarah	Hermon, Lady
Chapman, Douglas	Hillier, Meg
Chapman, Jenny	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Cherry, Joanna	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Coaker, Vernon	Hollern, Kate
Coffey, Ann	Hopkins, Kelvin
Cooper, Julie	Hosie, Stewart
Cooper, rh Yvette	Howarth, rh Mr George
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hunt, Tristram
Cowan, Ronnie	Huq, Dr Rupa
Coyle, Neil	Hussain, Imran
Crausby, Mr David	Jarvis, Dan
Crawley, Angela	Jones, Gerald
Creagh, Mary	Jones, Graham
Creasy, Stella	Jones, Helen
Cryer, John	Jones, Mr Kevan
Cummins, Judith	Jones, Susan Elan
Cunningham, Alex	Kane, Mike
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Keeley, Barbara
Dakin, Nic	Kendall, Liz
Danczuk, Simon	Kerevan, George
David, Wayne	Kerr, Calum
Davies, Geraint	Kinahan, Danny
Day, Martyn	Kinnock, Stephen
Debonnaire, Thangam	Kyle, Peter
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Lamb, rh Norman
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel	Lavery, Ian
Donaldson, Stuart Blair	Law, Chris
Doughty, Stephen	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Dowd, Peter	Lewis, Clive
Dromey, Jack	Lewis, Mr Ivan
Durkan, Mark	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Eagle, Ms Angela	Lucas, Ian C.
Eagle, Maria	Lynch, Holly
Edwards, Jonathan	MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Efford, Clive	Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Elliott, Julie	Madders, Justin
Elliott, Tom	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Ellman, Mrs Louise	Malhotra, Seema
Elmore, Chris	Mann, John
Esterson, Bill	Marris, Rob
Evans, Chris	Marsden, Gordon
Farron, Tim	Maskell, Rachael
Fellows, Marion	Matheson, Christian
Ferrier, Margaret	McCaig, Callum
Fitzpatrick, Jim	McCarthy, Kerry
Flello, Robert	McDonagh, Siobhain
Fletcher, Colleen	McDonald, Andy
Flint, rh Caroline	McDonald, Stuart C.
Flynn, Paul	McDonnell, rh John
Furniss, Gill	McGarry, Natalie
Gapes, Mike	McGovern, Alison
Gethins, Stephen	McInnes, Liz
Gibson, Patricia	McKinnell, Catherine
Glass, Pat	McLaughlin, Anne
Glindon, Mary	Meale, Sir Alan
Godsiff, Mr Roger	Mearns, Ian
Goodman, Helen	Monaghan, Carol

Monaghan, Dr Paul
Morden, Jessica
Mullin, Roger
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Albert
Paterson, Steven
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Jamie
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, rh Angus
Rotheram, Steve
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip
Simpson, David

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thompson, Owen
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, Valerie
Weir, Mike
West, Catherine
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Phil
Wilson, Sammy
Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete
Woodcock, John
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Nick Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian

Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crouch, Tracey

Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, rh Ben
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin

Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkynts, Andrea
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen

Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham

Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
Stephen Barclay and
Mark Spencer

Question accordingly negatived.

Third Reading

5.9 pm

Jane Ellison: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is a pleasure to move the Bill's Third Reading. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken the time to scrutinise and engage with the Bill so constructively during its passage through this House. It is a short and technical Bill, but it is nevertheless important and it delivers real benefits to our vibrant charity sector and for working families.

I am very pleased that during its passage through this House, the Bill has received broad cross-party support and provided an opportunity for Members on both sides of the House to highlight and champion the wonderful work that local charities do right across the country. On Second Reading, we heard from the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) about the volunteers in her constituency shovelling snow to keep the pavements clear in winter. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) spoke of the work done by a charity in his constituency to help people living with HIV/AIDS. We heard about the work of animal welfare charities, including

Waggy Tails Rescue in Mid Dorset and North Poole, and of course I took the opportunity to mention Battersea Dogs and Cats home in my constituency.

It is not just charities that will benefit from the reforms to the gift aid small donations scheme. As several hon. Members pointed out, community amateur sports clubs will also be able to access top-up payments sooner, and we heard examples of local sports clubs in Taunton Deane, Chippenham and Congleton that could benefit. The small donations scheme is a good thing for charities. It allows them to claim a gift aid-style top-up payment of 25p in the pound when it is not practical or feasible to obtain a gift aid declaration from a donor.

The Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Bill will make it even easier for charities to access those top-up payments by removing entirely two of the existing eligibility criteria. The Bill will also simplify and clarify the rules, ensuring that the scheme remains fair and delivers broad parity of treatment for charities structured in different ways. We are reforming the community buildings rules to make the scheme much more generous for local charities that operate out of community buildings. I sought to reassure the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) about organisations such as Scouts and Guides by confirming the eligibility in their case. In Committee and again on Report the Opposition Front-Bench team tabled probing amendments on that point and others, and we have had a couple of thorough debates. I reiterate what I said earlier to the House: a scout hut is an eligible community building, so scouts and other uniformed groups will benefit from the changes in the Bill. I hope that all Members here will join me in supporting this enabling reform. We have heard from some Members about their yesteryears in the scouts, and anything that helps scouts to continue with "bob a job" and all their other community fundraising schemes can only be a good thing.

We are also taking action through this Bill to future-proof the gift aid small donations scheme by extending eligibility to contactless donations, so that charities can continue to benefit from the scheme for many years to come. The message that the Bill sends is clear: the Government want a strong, vibrant and resilient charity sector and we will do all we can to support it through the tax system.

In addition to celebrating the work of our charities and sports clubs, the Bill's passage through the House provoked an important wider debate about the threats that the sector faces, and particularly the importance of a robust regulatory regime to protect the reputation of charities from the dishonest minority who seek to abuse charitable status. It is not necessarily a pleasant issue to have to contemplate, but we have had an important debate. It is good that we are continually pushed to think about how we can protect our charities further. The sector is one of our great assets. It is very important, and we need to do all we can to protect it. I have argued consistently that the Bill strikes the right balance between simplifying the gift aid small donations scheme, making it easier for charities to claim top-up payments and protecting the Exchequer from abuse and charities from reputational damage.

During the Bill's passage through this House, hon. and right hon. Members have expressed some concern about take-up of the gift aid small donations scheme.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson), the civil society Minister, told the House on Second Reading, last year 21,300 charities benefited from the small donations scheme, claiming a total of £26 million of Government support. That is a lot of charities, but we accept that it is fewer than forecast. That is why we are simplifying the scheme by removing two of the main eligibility criteria and relaxing the community buildings rules.

I can also tell the House today that once the new rules take effect, HMRC will undertake a broad communications exercise to promote greater awareness of the gift aid small donations scheme. I have also asked what targeted activity can be undertaken. I encourage charity sector bodies and representative groups to work with the Treasury and HMRC to make the reformed scheme a success. I thank them and the officials concerned for the constructive approach that they take and the work that is done to bring this legislation to the House.

Let me say a quick word about the tax-free childcare portion of the Bill, which makes a small number of minor and technical, but important, amendments to the tax-free childcare scheme. That fact has not limited the interest shown in the scheme during the debates, and tax-free childcare continues to enjoy cross-party support. A number of speakers have looked forward to being able to use the scheme for their own children, and such a prospect draws ever closer as the scheme is set to commence next year.

For many, this will be the first time they will be able to access Government support with childcare costs as tax-free childcare will be available to all working parents, regardless of whether they are employed or self-employed. HMRC is about to begin inviting parents to test the new service in trials. As in bringing forward these changes, HMRC will again listen to parents to ensure that it provides the best possible service. The responses made in the Bill, with the minor and technical changes, will help HMRC to ensure that it is quick and easy for working parents to access the support they need with their childcare costs.

The Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Bill is a short and, it is fair to say, uncontroversial, yet important Bill. Its passage through the House has seen thoughtful and constructive challenge that has allowed us to debate a number of important principles, as well as to praise some of the vital charities that are forces for good in our communities and our wider society. The Bill is therefore a positive Bill. We are making life easier for small charities and for working parents, and I commend it to the House.

5.16 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey: Hon. Members will be pleased to hear that I will keep my comments very brief in this stage in the proceedings. The Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Bill as a whole makes positive changes to the gift aid small donations scheme and very minor changes to the tax-free childcare scheme.

The Opposition have welcomed the Government's aim throughout the passage of the Bill to make sure that the gift aid small donations scheme is more accessible and to encourage charities to take part. The scheme has not been as successful as the Government had hoped, and the Bill certainly makes changes to improve that situation. In particular, the abolition of the two-year

eligibility rule and the two-in-four years claims rule will open up the scheme to new charities, while bringing contactless payments into the definition of a small payment will bring the scheme into line with how donations can be made in the modern day.

However, as the Minister is aware, the Opposition think the Bill could have gone further, as do representatives of the charity sector. Indeed, the Charity Finance Group has said that the Government were "locking in future failure" by not introducing wider reforms. We have tried to improve the Bill after receiving feedback from the sector. Along with SNP Members, we have tried to address the key issue coming out of the feedback, which is the matching requirement. Our amendments in Committee and on Report would have forced the Government to conduct a specific review of the rule and of how the scheme fits within the framework of anti-fraud measures in the scheme. Unfortunately, the Government have not made any movement on this issue, which is a barrier to entry to the scheme, according to charity representatives. However, I note the comments that the Minister made earlier, and I look forward to receiving any further updates from her on this matter in due course.

We have also tried to widen the payment methods eligible for the scheme beyond cash and contactless payments. Our amendments would have included cheques and donations via text and online. Again, unfortunately, the Government have not seen fit to work with us on this part of the Bill, simply using flawed logic, as it were, to prevent the changes that the charity sector wants from happening. I hope that the Minister will reflect on the comments made during the passage of the Bill, and consider whether amendments can be made in due course to make the use of cheques and, in particular, of text messages more accessible to the gift aid sector.

Finally, we have tried to address what appeared to be a flaw in the original legislation, preventing the scouts, guides and cadet groups from gaining the full benefits of the scheme. For the benefit of hon. Members who are not aware of the issue, the connected charities rule means that the scouts, guides and cadet groups are each treated as one charity, despite the fact that local groups are individual and self-financing, and that means only one top-up payment can be received. As I highlighted when we discussed this amendment in the Public Bill Committee, the Charity Finance Group has suggested that such treatment means they receive only 17p per individual group a year.

The Minister had a few issues with our amendment, as drafted, and we listened to her concerns and modified it to reflect them. I particularly appreciate the comments she has made in relation to scout groups and their bases. However, she will recognise that the comments made in Committee related to the need for the scope of our amendment to go further to include groups beyond the scouts and girl guides. I hope she will consider that very carefully and see whether she can put in place any future amendments or provisions to deal with any other groups in a similar position that are not, as it were, mopped up by the Bill.

To conclude, perhaps once the Government have reviewed the scheme's effectiveness in the light of the changes the Bill makes we may have an opportunity to come back to some of those changes, as I have said. Overall, however, the Opposition support the Bill and

[*Rebecca Long Bailey*]

its aims. I hope it will succeed in making the small donations scheme more accessible and in supporting smaller and new charities. I look forward to an update on the impact of the revised legislation in due course.

5.20 pm

Kirsty Blackman: It is nice to speak on Third Reading of a Bill when there has largely been agreement on many of the measures it contains.

The Government's measures on the gift aid small donations scheme are sensible and logical steps forward, and it is good that more charities will be able to benefit from the scheme as a result. We were very clear that we would have liked the Government to go further, but we appreciate the steps they have taken, and the wide-ranging consultation they have undertaken.

We raised the matching requirement a number of times. My understanding is that the Government have the power to make changes to that requirement without the need for primary legislation anyway. It is useful to know that the Government can consider that if they receive future representations on the matter. Our concerns related in particular to volunteer-led charities—the very smallest charities, which perhaps do not have the administrative capacity to access some of these schemes. But I appreciate that the Government have committed to undertake a wider publicity effort on the gift aid small donations scheme and on how charities can access tax reliefs. I hope that charities across the UK will benefit from those changes.

The changes to the way that people will access childcare payments are sensible and seem more accessible than the current system. Having used the current system and struggled with some of its administrative impacts, I think the new scheme will iron out some of those flaws, and am pleased that even before the new scheme comes in the Government are re-evaluating it and looking to make it as accessible and as easy for parents to navigate as possible. I understand that a pilot will take place and that, by the end of next year, pretty much everyone should have moved over to the new scheme. I hope the Government will commit to re-evaluating the scheme as it goes forward, to ensure that it is as accessible as possible.

On that re-evaluation, in Scotland we are making changes to the early learning and childcare system, and are looking at a mass expansion so that as many families as possible can access free, good quality childcare that is easily accessible in local communities. In my local community, at Manor Park Primary School, 20 two-year-olds will take part in a trial that is taking place in my area and in a number of other places across Scotland. I am sure that the UK Government will be keen to learn from Scotland's experience of the expansion of free childcare and will be looking at it for the future.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Third Reading. As I have said, we are broadly supportive of the Bill but would have liked it to go further in some areas. However, we will not oppose its Third Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Business without Debate

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Ordered,

That Deirdre Brock be discharged as a member of the Public Accounts Commission under section 2(2)(c) of the National Audit Act 1983, and that Philip Boswell be appointed.—(*Heather Wheeler.*)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 10 October, be approved.—(*Graham Stuart.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Contracts for Difference (Allocation) (Excluded Sites) Amendment Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 11 October, be approved.—(*Graham Stuart.*)

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN UNION DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 119(11)),

ESTABLISHING A EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR ASYLUM, ALLOCATING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ASYLUM CLAIMS WITHIN THE EU (REFORM OF THE DUBLIN RULES) AND FINGERPRINTING OF ASYLUM APPLICANTS AND IRREGULAR MIGRANTS (THE EURODAC SYSTEM) (OPT-IN DECISIONS)

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 8742/16, a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Union Agency for Asylum and repealing Regulation (EU) No. 439/2010, endorses the Government's decision not to opt in under Protocol 21 on the Position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice annexed to the EU Treaties (Protocol 21), notes that the Government is able to opt in post-adoption and supports the Government's intention to continue supporting other Member States on asylum matters; further takes note of European Union Document No. 8715/16, a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast), also known as the Dublin Regulation and endorses the Government's decision not to opt in under Protocol 21; and further takes note of European Union Document No. 8765/16, a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of Eurodac for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of Dublin Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 and endorses the Government's decision to opt in under Protocol 21.—(*Graham Stuart.*)

Question agreed to.

Leaving the EU: NHS Funding

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Graham Stuart.)

5.25 pm

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): On 23 June, our country voted to leave the European Union. The result was not a landslide: 48% voted to remain; 52% voted to leave. London, Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain; the majority of England and Wales voted to leave. The young overwhelmingly voted to stay; older voters opted to go. Socioeconomic classes and ethnic groups also voted in different ways.

I was immensely proud to play a leading role in the “Labour In for Britain” and “Britain Stronger in Europe” campaigns during the EU referendum. To my core, I still believe that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more together than we do alone, not only as individuals but as a nation state, as we seek to amplify Britain’s role in the world and achieve as much for our community of nations around the world as possible. However, I accept the result. Before the vote, remain campaigners accepted the rules under which the referendum was fought. I do not think that, having had a referendum conducted under those rules, which we debated in the House, we can now reject them because we do not like the outcome. Either you are a democrat or you are not, Mr Speaker, and I am a democrat.

Various promises were made by each side in that referendum campaign. Now it is over, it is important that we hold to account the winning side for the policies and claims that were made and upon which people voted. I say “hold to account” deliberately. We on the remain side would not want all of Vote Leave’s promises to be delivered, but it is right and proper, for the sake of our shared values of democracy, accountability and transparency—the foundations upon which this House is built—that Vote Leave campaigners who are Members of the House should be tested on whether they deliver what they pledged to the people. If they do not, they should explain why not to their constituents and the nation in this House. Thousands of people agree—they have joined the Vote Leave Watch campaign because they care about this, too. I chair that campaign, and I draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

One promise that the overwhelming majority of people—both the 16 million who voted remain and the 17 million who voted leave—want to see kept is the Vote Leave campaign’s pledge to put £350 million extra per week into the NHS. That was the key pledge of the Vote Leave campaign. Prominent members of the current Cabinet—the Foreign, Environment, International Development, International Trade, and Transport Secretaries—went around the country in a big red bus that said, “We send the EU £350 million a week. Let’s fund our NHS instead”. They gave speeches in front of a sign saying, “Let’s give our NHS the £350 million the EU takes every week”. None of them disowned that pledge during the campaign—not a single one. The clear message they sought to give to the people was that if we leave the EU, £350 million a week extra will be put into our national health service. No qualification was given to that pledge.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. This is such an important point for our economy, as we know in my part of London, where the Barts trust has the largest predicted overspend in NHS history. Does he agree that it is vital that those who campaigned on the pledge that this money would be provided are held to account, because communities such as mine are suffering without investment in the NHS?

Mr Umunna: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. When I had the pleasure of visiting her constituency the other week, I saw for myself the situation that she describes.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the claim of £350 million a week for the NHS was at the centre of Vote Leave’s campaign. Leave campaigners were given a number of opportunities to review, qualify or disown the claim, including following strident criticism from all members—remainers and leavers—of the Treasury Committee. The fact they chose not to distance themselves from the claim surely demonstrates that this is a promise that ought to be delivered. If it is not delivered, they will have some explaining to do.

Mr Umunna: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. As he said, it was significant that the Treasury Committee came to its conclusion, since it is a cross-party Committee whose members include leavers and remainers.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) said, we know that the NHS needs extra cash. The Minister also knows this. As members of the Health Committee pointed out last month, the deficit in NHS trusts and foundation trusts in 2015-16 was more than £3.5 billion.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes a powerful argument for extra NHS funding, but does he share my concern that our NHS could actually be worse off as a result of the decision to leave the EU, given that the reduction in our exchange rate will make it more expensive to purchase products from abroad? Does he also share my concern that, when I asked the Secretary of State for Health how much and what proportion of the total NHS budget was spent on imports, the Department was unaware and therefore unable to give me that information?

Mr Umunna: It is outrageous that Ministers were unable to give my hon. Friend those figures. Ministers themselves exacerbated the knock-on impact on the economy of the depreciation of the pound. It depreciated in value by 6% before October, and then by a further 15% because of uncertainty around our trading arrangements that was triggered by comments made by the International Trade Secretary that differed from those of the Chancellor to the Treasury Committee and in other forums. The knock-on effect is not, however, just on household budgets. As the cost of things increases, of course the NHS will take a big hit. Public services in general will be affected if growth reduces and Exchequer receipts fall.

Ministers’ claimed increases in NHS funding, which the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), might mention, are actually being funded by reductions in other areas

[Mr Umunna]

of health spending that fall outside NHS England's budget. Reductions in spending on social care are having a serious impact on the NHS, and that is translating into increased accident and emergency attendances, emergency admissions and delays to people leaving hospital. I have talked about what Select Committees, Ministers and Members of Parliament are saying, but we have also heard from third parties. The King's Fund, the Nuffield Trust and the Health Foundation are clear that current Government spending plans through to 2019-20 will not be enough to maintain standards of care, to meet rising demand from patients and to deliver the transformation in services outlined in the NHS five year forward view.

I and more than 40 Members from different parties, including all my hon. Friends in the Chamber for the debate, have written to the Chancellor asking that when he presents his first autumn statement on 23 November, he sets out how he will put the Government on a path to increasing national NHS spending by that promised £350 million extra a week once we have left the EU. To be clear, that additional funding must be over and above the amount currently planned to be spent on the NHS. The British Medical Association has made the same demand.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Government have to honour a promise made by others to the tune of £350 million a week extra for the NHS? My hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and other notable leavers have now conceded that the actual figure was £120 million. Would it not be unfair to say that the Government have to deliver that pledge, given that they never made any such promise to the British people?

Mr Umunna: I am grateful for the right hon. Lady's intervention; I shall come on to those precise points shortly. I note, however, the public statements she herself made when she was a member of the Government. She criticised the way in which her fellow Ministers were going around making these big promises, perhaps on her behalf.

Anna Soubry: We must be very clear about this. During the referendum, we campaigned individually, not as Ministers on behalf of the Government. The hon. Gentleman is right that some Ministers campaigned for leave and made this promise—and indeed many other promises that I do not think they will be able to deliver—but there is a distinction to be made between the promises of the Government and those of people who now happen to be in government. It is really the leave campaign that must be held to account, not the Government.

Mr Umunna: The right hon. Lady pre-empts what I am about to say; I shall come on to that precise point.

To be clear, I want the Minister, on behalf of his Department, to give the same commitment that we are asking the Treasury to make, and to outline how his Department will make good on this pledge. I shall explain why this is a pledge that the Government should deliver. The Minister might give a number of reasons, perhaps echoing the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), to explain why the promise given by his

ministerial colleagues during the referendum should not be treated as such. I will deal with each of the main possible reasons in turn.

First, there are those who claim that this was not a pledge at all. Nigel Farage, the interim leader of the UK Independence party, said that it was one of the mistakes that he thought the leave campaign made. The current Transport Secretary, who was also a member of the Government at the time of the referendum, has said that Vote Leave's specific proposal was, in fact, to spend £100 million a week of the £350 million for the NHS that was originally hoped for, commenting that that would be an "aspiration" to be met. Let me tell the Transport Secretary that the poster that the Vote Leave supporters all stood next to did not say that this was an "aspiration"; it was a pledge—pure and simple. There was no qualification on the poster or on the big red bus. This statement was made, and the people who made it should be held to account for it.

Secondly, many leave campaigners deny ever using the £350 million figure. One of them said:

"I always referred to Britain's net contribution of nearly £10 billion—some £200 million a week...rather than £350 million."—*[Official Report, 5 September 2016; Vol. 614, c. 20WH.]*

It is true—my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) touched on this—that the Office for National Statistics said that the £350 million figure was misleading, but the head of the Vote Leave campaign said:

"the £350 million figure is correct and we stand by it."

Vote Leave, whose banner Government Ministers campaigned under, carried on citing the figure, as my hon. Friend said, and those Ministers must now be held to account.

Stella Creasy: I take my lead from the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who sadly does not appear to be in his Chamber. He was one of the most prominent members of the Vote Leave campaign and said that Brexit must give the NHS a boost. In my part of town, a boost to the NHS is the vital funding that we need to get our NHS back on track. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should listen to the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip about that point?

Mr Umunna: I shall come on to him shortly.

A further thing that is said—again, I think this has been touched on—is that not all the people who made these pledges were members of the then Conservative Government. Perhaps that could be said of the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). Well, of the five current members of the Cabinet whom I mentioned, three were members of the then Government and one—the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip—attended the political Cabinet at the time. Yes, the Secretary of State for International Trade was sitting on the Back Benches, but countless other Ministers from outside the Cabinet at the time who are now serving more than make up for that—for instance, the hon. Members for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) and for Stockton South (James Wharton). I could go on. Those are just a few of the people who posed by those posters and next to that big red bus, and they must be held to account.

Finally, it is said—this is the crux of the argument advanced by the right hon. Member for Broxtowe—that the commitment was given by one side in a referendum campaign, not by a Government. I am sorry but that simply will not wash. Many of those people were put up to appear in the media and to campaign on Vote Leave's behalf precisely because they carried the authority that attaches to Government Ministers. That was why they were used. That was why they were asked to stand by that red bus, and to stand by those posters.

All those key Vote Leave campaigners, whether they were Ministers or not, were Members of this House. If our democracy is to mean anything, it must mean that Members are answerable to the electorate for their policies, and held to account in the House for the things that they say. People cannot go around the country casually promising the world and betraying people by failing to deliver, but then expect to get away with it. We will not forget; we will not let up. It was in the name of parliamentary sovereignty that those Ministers campaigned, and it is time that the House, on behalf of the people whom we are elected to represent, took back control, if we want to use that phrase, and made those Ministers answer.

Lilian Greenwood: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way again. He is being very generous with his time.

Is this not dangerous and damaging not only to parliamentary democracy, but to the morale of workers in our national health service? I was told by the chair and chief executive of my local NHS trust, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, that they are frequently stopped by members of staff who ask, "When are we going to get the extra money?" Those people will surely be not just incredibly disappointed but doubly disappointed, given the difficulties that they are facing because the trust has a huge deficit and is struggling to provide the services that they know that patients require.

Mr Umunna: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am very grateful for all the interventions that Members have made today.

Either those Ministers made this pledge to the people in the expectation of delivering on it, in which case they must now show us the money, or they made it in the sure knowledge that their promise would never be fulfilled, in which case they will never be forgiven for their betrayal of those who, in good faith, relied on them. Perhaps the Minister can tell us which it will be.

5.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): I congratulate the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) on securing the debate, and on the points that he made. Like him, I voted and campaigned for the remain side, and, like him, I accept the result. I am now part of a Government who are responsible for delivering what was democratically decided by the British people. I should say at the outset, however, that I am speaking today for the Government and not for the leave campaign. If the hon. Gentleman feels that he is taking part in the wrong debate, I apologise for that in advance.

I will, however, address some of the points that have been made about the impact of Brexit on the NHS, because valid points were made about staff morale, the

level of funding and the exchange rate. All those are variables, and I think it is good for us to spend a bit of time talking about them this evening. I will also talk about what stage I think we have reached on the pledge and the amount of money that we will no longer be giving to the European Union when we leave—although, as the hon. Gentleman knows, that depends on how we leave, and on the nature of the agreement that we eventually reach.

Let us begin by agreeing on one point. The single most important thing that the NHS needs to be properly funded is a strong economy. To the extent that Brexit may have positives and negatives, that fact is relevant, but the NHS is properly funded at the moment. We have heard some stuff about budgets and all the rest of it, but let me tell the hon. Gentleman that the OECD's analysis of health and social care spending in every OECD country shows that we are now above average, although that has not always been the case. We are possibly 1% lower than the best of class, including France and Germany. That figure was for 2014, and the gap is likely to have been filled because this year we gave an increase to NHS spending of three times the rate of inflation and we have pledged that the NHS budget will increase in real terms by £10 billion between now and 2021. I do not believe Brexit will make any difference to that; indeed it is a commitment and priority of this Government that it will not.

We do know, however, that there are issues in how that money is allocated within the NHS. We are broadly at the average point of the OECD, and we do and could spend that money more efficiently and effectively. We could spend more on primary care, cancer and mental health than we do, and those are Government priorities, and we hope the sustainability and transformation plan process will help to deliver that because at the moment we spend too much on acute care.

Of course we can find efficiencies, too. Agency staffing is too high and we need to address that. There is a lot we can do on procurement—Carter and new care models and all that go with that.

Stella Creasy: The Minister could also work to renegotiate the private finance initiative loans that are crippling our NHS, and not use PF2 to do that. In order to do that, we need money in the NHS to be able to renegotiate. Surely the £350 million would help get us to that place; it would help us to renegotiate our debt, get our constituents back into work and get our NHS fit for purpose in the 21st century?

David Mowat: Nobody in this House would be more pleased than I if we did not have the PFI millstone around our neck. The hon. Lady talks of renegotiation; this is real money, and these are real contracts that were signed more or less entirely by the last Labour Government. There is no magic wand that enables us to just to set those PFI contracts aside, although I wish there was; that is not how the commercial world works.

Mr Umunna: I am sure the Minister will be aware that the £10 billion figure for increased funding he has just cited is rejected by the cross-party Select Committee on Health. It is also very well him referring to what he alleges are increases in NHS funding, but the other cuts his Government have made over the last five to six

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years, in particular to local authority budgets, have put huge pressure on social care, which has led to a knock-on impact on the NHS and its funding.

David Mowat: The hon. Gentleman mentions social care, and that is fair. It is funded separately to the NHS, and the budgets are separate. During the course of this Parliament the social care budget will increase in real terms. I do accept that the social care system is under pressure, but there is a massive disparity in performance in social care between councils. The top 10% of councils are about 20 to 25 times better in terms of outcomes for delayed transfers of care and so forth than the bottom 10%. There are many facets to this, therefore, but I accept the basic point. I think that, all other things being equal, Members on both sides of the House would like the NHS to have more money; let us agree on that and see how we make progress on it.

Brexit introduced a number of variables that may not have been there before. What will be the impact of Brexit on our economy? Our GDP in three or four years could be higher, but also could be lower, because of Brexit. The truth is neither the hon. Gentleman nor I knows the answer to that. There are different views on that in this House, too, although some with other views may not be here today. This is important and relevant because if the economy were to have a significant difficulty, that could impact on spending commitments.

The second variable is a very substantive one and was mentioned earlier: the exchange rate. Our exchange rate went down about 15%, principally, it would seem reasonable to say, as a consequence of Brexit. That is a good and a bad thing for the economy. Many countries in the world are trying to get their exchange rate down. I represent a constituency in the north of our country where we have a more manufacturing-based economy. Frankly, a lower exchange rate will help the economy there. That may not be the case in other parts of the country and in the City.

The exchange rate has an impact on the NHS. In fact, it has two impacts. As the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) mentioned, it will be more expensive to import products such as scanners and, potentially, to import drugs. She asked what the figure was, but I cannot give her an exact figure. My understanding is that it is considerably less than 5% of the total NHS expenditure of about £100 billion. Nevertheless, this is a relevant factor and it makes a difference.

The other impact of the exchange rate, which the hon. Lady did not mention, is that it will affect the attractiveness to overseas workers of the UK economy in general and the NHS in particular. If someone comes in from the EU to work in our economy and the value of the pound is 15% lower than it was a year ago, they will be earning 15% less in their home currency. That will have an impact on the margin in relation to staffing, and that is an issue that we need to manage.

The third variable is the one that we have spent so much time talking about—namely, the payment that we make to the EU. I am not going to get bogged down in the numbers, but I believe that we pay the EU about £20 billion a year, of which we get roughly £10 billion back. Leaving the EU would therefore create a bonus. The hon. Member for Streatham mentioned a letter.

Even if that bonus were to materialise, as I expect it to, it will not happen until after we have left the EU, so his writing a letter to the Chancellor now strikes me as somewhat symbolic.

Mr Umunna: To be absolutely clear to the Minister, the ask was that the Chancellor should set out the path for achieving this payment after we have left. I want to ask the Minister two questions. First, given his view that the pledge to make a payment to the NHS was made not by the Government but by the campaign, would he say that it was wrong for people to go around giving the impression that the Government would dish out that money? Secondly, for the record, is he saying that this Government will not meet that pledge?

David Mowat: Just for the record, I am not saying that this Government will not meet it. All I can say is that this Government have yet to decide how they will spend any bonus that comes from any rebate we get. This will all depend on the precise negotiations that take place and the precise type of exit that we make from the EU. Nobody in this Chamber knows the answers to those questions. For example, we could get a Norwegian-type deal that could entail paying money to the EU. I am not a member of the Department for Exiting the European Union and I do not know where the current thinking is on that, but this is of course a variable.

Mr Umunna: Given what the Minister is saying, does he believe that it was wrong to go around giving people the impression that all they needed to do was vote to leave the European Union in order for £350 million a week to be dished out to the NHS?

David Mowat: Had I been writing something on the side of the bus, and had I been campaigning on that cause in the referendum, I might have been more circumspect. I might have said that £350 million could become available and could be spent on whatever the Government's priorities were, one of which was very likely to be the NHS. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I regret that I seem to have stumbled into a sort of elongated primal scream therapy session involving refighting last June's referendum. The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) would have a more persuasive and cogent argument if he saw the other side of the equation. Yes, EU workers have a massive impact on and are committed to the NHS, but unrestricted EU migration over a number of years has put massive strains on the delivery of our health services. He has never conceded that point.

Mr Umunna: That is not what I am talking about.

David Mowat: I want to make some progress in the debate, although I understand that I have until 7.30.

We have mentioned the payments to the EU, and there is also the point about staff. Another point that has not been mentioned—I shall mention it for completeness—is that there will be an impact on EU institutions. For example, the European Medicines Agency is located in London, which is of benefit to our pharmaceuticals

industry. Where it ends up should be an issue for the people negotiating this deal, because of the potential impact involved. From my point of view, we talk too often about the conditions in relation to the EU for the City of London and passporting and all that goes with it, but not enough about other world-class industries, one of which is pharmaceuticals. I hope that those responsible will listen to that.

We have talked about the economy, which is a big variable. To be frank, neither I nor the hon. Member for Streatham knows whether the economy will be better or worse as consequence of leaving the EU, but it is true that the 15% fall in the value of the pound is helping manufacturing firms in the north and will have an effect on GDP, but it will also have some effect on imports of, for example, scanners, accelerators and drugs.

The NHS is hugely reliant on staff from the EU. Some 58,000 people from EU countries work in the NHS, and another 90,000 work in social care. I want to take this opportunity to reiterate the Government's position that we understand that massive contribution and know that it is important to our NHS that it continues. The Secretary of State said exactly that to the Health Committee and the Prime Minister has said that she hopes and expects citizens from the EU to stay in our vital services. I would like—perhaps the hon. Gentleman and the group he is speaking for today can help with this—some of our EU colleagues and friends to make a similar commitment about people from this country who are working in EU countries, because that has not yet happened.

Mr Umunna: I speak for my constituents above all others whenever I speak on such issues in this House. On that specific point, will the Minister explain why the Government do not simply guarantee the right to stay of EU citizens working in our health service? I understand the demand for the reciprocal right to be given to UK citizens living in other EU countries, but they should not be used as a bargaining chip. When the Immigration Minister appeared before the Home Affairs Committee, he admitted that we do not know where most of the EU citizens are in this country or who they are, so if we were not to deliver on the promise to guarantee them the right to stay we would have no way of removing them.

David Mowat: It is not for me to make that specific guarantee. The Prime Minister clearly said that she hopes and expects them to remain. It is disappointing that a similarly strong statement has not been made by any Head of State in any other European country.

It is also right that we do more to train more of our own nurses and doctors—not because we need to replace people from the EU, but because it is the right thing to do. We should try to become self-sufficient in these matters, and that will happen.

We have knocked around this point quite a lot during the debate and have talked about variables such as the exchange rate, GDP and the EU bonus or payment that we will get, but there is one thing that is not a variable and it is probably the single most important constant: the extent to which this Government give priority to the health service in their spending commitments. That constant is absolutely clear. The previous Prime Minister treated the NHS as his No. 1 commitment, as does the current Prime Minister. Many of the points we have discussed this evening are things that should properly form part of the negotiation that we are going to have after we trigger article 50, as we hope to do by the end of March, and I am certain that that will be the case. What is not negotiable is that our commitments to NHS funding and social care funding are unmoved by any of these things; this is the No. 1 priority for this Government.

Mr Jackson: Is it not the case that in the future dispensation after Brexit we might have a fairer system of recruitment and retention of NHS staff? In all our constituencies, we have staff from outside the EU—my constituency has Nigerian, Ghanaian and, in particular, Filipino nursing staff—who have hitherto been discriminated against inadvertently vis-à-vis those from the European Union, and we will have a much fairer system in reaching out and getting the brightest and best to work in our NHS in the future.

David Mowat: My hon. Friend uses the word “fairer”, and of course we do have staff from other parts of the world. I will be honest and say that part of me has difficulty with this country taking large numbers of doctors and nurses from places such as Nigeria and others parts of Africa that need them more than we do. So it is right that we try to train more of the people that we need in these vital public services, but it is also right that we make it absolutely clear how important the people who currently work in our NHS and in social care are—those from the EU and from outside it, as my hon. Friend reminded us. That is important.

I make the point again, because I will not go on until 7.30 pm, that the NHS is this Government's No.1 spending priority and it will continue to be so.

Question put and agreed to.

6 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 15 November 2016

[MR DAVID NUTTALL *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

State Pension Age: Women

9.30 am

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered acceleration of the state pension age for women born in the 1950s.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall, and to appear in front of the Minister. I look forward to a positive response from him to all the remarks made today.

A woman born on 6 March 1953 retired on 6 March 2016, aged 63. A woman born a month later, on 6 April 1953, retired on 6 July, aged 63 and three months. A woman born on 6 May 1953 retired a few days ago, on 6 November, aged 63 and six months. A woman born on 6 June 1953 has to wait until 6 March 2017, when she will be aged 63 and nine months. A woman born on 6 July 1953 will not receive her pension until her 64th birthday, in July 2017. We are beginning to get the picture. For each month that passes, women's pensionable age increases by three months. Let us just dwell on that—a three-month addition to someone's pensionable age for each month that they were born later than their neighbour, friend or colleague.

I spoke of a woman born in March 1953, who retired this year aged 63. A woman born a year later, in March 1954, will not retire until September 2019, when she will be aged 65 and a half. She will be two and a half years older than a woman born a year earlier before she receives her state pension. A woman born six months later, in September 1954, will have to wait until she is 66, in September 2020. Over an 18-month period, women's pensionable age will have increased by a whopping three years. As we keep saying, we are not against equalisation of the state pension age. The issue is the pace of change, as well as the lack of appropriate notice.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and on making these compelling historical points about women. For that reason, and because of the documented evidence that he has submitted here today, does he agree that there is a compelling need—and an imperative on the Government—to bring about transitional protection and transitional payments for these women?

Ian Blackford: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention. She makes a telling point. The significance of having the debate today, for which I am grateful, is that next week we will have the autumn statement. That is the opportunity for the Government to respond to the injustices that women are facing and to do the right thing. We often hear about people who have been left behind. The Women Against State Pension Inequality have been left behind, and the Government must act.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate. He has certainly done women a great service, because he has been working on this issue for a long time. The other dimension to the issue, which we see when we do an analysis of it, is that it affects women in different ways. There are different poverty levels involved, so things such as bus passes may not be accessible to them.

Ian Blackford: Absolutely. The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. I will come later to the proposals that my party has made. We have been able to test the number of women who would be taken out of poverty as a consequence, and it is a very important point.

We should remind ourselves what a pension is. It is deferred income. Women and men have paid national insurance in the expectation of receiving a state pension. That is the deal, plain and simple: people pay in, and they get their entitlement. They do not expect the Government, without effective notice, to change the rules. What has been done to the WASPI women has undermined fairness and equity in this country.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman is certainly painting a picture. Does he agree that the impact of the changes to the state pension age cannot be seen in isolation from the impact of historical gender inequality?

Ian Blackford: Absolutely. The hon. Lady makes a valid point, because women have faced inequality in pension entitlement, whether in the state pension or occupational pension schemes. In the past, they were even denied access to occupational pension schemes, and we are still battling for equal pay for women. It is simply not right that in addition to all the injustices that women have faced, they now face the injustice of having to wait much longer than they expected for their pension.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. He is making a compelling case and outlining the lottery of the current arrangements. The WASPI petition was signed by 2,249 of my constituents and I also received many letters. Does he agree that additional transitional arrangements are needed to support a group of women who in the past have often been working mothers and are now carers for elderly parents and sick husbands, and who have often had low-paid manual jobs and just have not been able to build up private pensions?

Ian Blackford: Absolutely. The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point and demonstrates, rightly, why hon. Members across the House need to unite. This is not about one party—let me make that absolutely clear.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Blackford: I will in a second. This is about all of us recognising that, as a House, we have a responsibility to do the right thing. It is about giving encouragement to the Government, just as happened last year with tax credits when we realised that we were going to be punishing hard-working families, to do the right thing

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by the women affected by this issue. That is what the Government have to listen to and respond to in the autumn statement.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con) *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I will take another couple of interventions and then I need to move on.

Dame Caroline Spelman: Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), the fact that this issue kicks in at the latter stages of a woman's career, when her caring responsibilities can increase significantly because of elderly parents and her own health may start to deteriorate, means that the level of uncertainty and anxiety is greatly increased. Suddenly, the prepared-for pension does not materialise, and women with caring responsibilities are left in limbo.

Ian Blackford: The right hon. Lady makes a valid point, and I will come later to the notice period because the issues are both the lack of time that women have had to prepare for the changes and the caring responsibilities that many women in particular have. She is right to raise that point. I will take one more intervention and then move on.

Ian Austin: This is a very important point. I have lost count of the number of women in Dudley who have told me that they have not had time to make plans for the new arrangements. They have had to take time off to bring up their children, or reduce their hours or retire early to care for ageing parents or grandchildren. Other women have told me that they have lost their husbands and have not just had to come to terms with the bereavement, but have been thrown into financial turmoil as a result.

There is an additional unfairness in former industrial areas such as the black country, where women typically left school at 15 or 16, started work and did hard work all their lives. That is very different from someone graduating in their early twenties and doing an office job. Women in the black country have done their bit, and that is why the Government should be coming up with proper transitional arrangements so that they can plan properly for their retirement now.

Ian Blackford: I agree with that point. Many of the 2.6 million women affected have made more than 35 years' worth of national insurance contributions. They have paid their way. They have paid their dues. This is about us accepting our responsibility. As I mentioned, 2.6 million women are affected by the increase in pensionable age and have an entitlement to a pension that they should have had. They need to be treated fairly—no more, no less.

The Government often state that the increase in pensionable age under the Pensions Act 2011 means that no woman will have to wait more than 18 months for their pension. That is disingenuous, as it came as an addition to the changes in the Pensions Act 1995, which are still being implemented. It is a fact that women's pensionable age is increasing by six years over a very short number of years. That is the issue and the reality.

It is about the combined impact of the 1995 Act and the 2011 Act. The Government have a duty to be truthful about the matter.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I am conscious that many Members want to speak and I do want to take interventions, but I will press on, if I may, and take interventions later.

The issue is not only the sharp acceleration of pensionable age, but that many women were unaware of the increase in pensionable age. As the Select Committee on Work and Pensions reported in March this year, "more could...have been done"

to communicate the changes, especially between 1995 and 2009. Women have been let down not only by the rapidly increasing pensionable age, but by a failure of communication. We face the rapid acceleration of pensionable age and also the nightmare scenario, for many women, that they were not aware that it was coming. They have had little notice and no time to prepare for an increase in pensionable age. They have not been able to adjust accordingly, and in many cases we are talking about women and families who are struggling.

The Prime Minister talks about those who have been left behind and the duty the Government have to deal with it; the WASPI women have been left behind and it is now our responsibility to deal with it. We cannot just shrug our shoulders and blame past Governments for the failure to give women notice. We have a collective responsibility to deal with this issue and we have to show leadership. We cannot take the line that the last Parliament made a decision and there is nothing we can do; that is an abrogation of responsibility by all of us.

When the Government came forward with proposed changes to working tax credits that would have damaged millions of families in the UK, after much opposition, the Government ultimately relented and removed the proposals. We need to campaign in Parliament and throughout the United Kingdom to achieve the same objective here. We are not going away. The Government have to recognise that women should not be punished in the way that they are being by this increase of three months for every month's difference in their age.

The Government have asked what we would do. That is why, in September, we in the Scottish National party published our own report looking at various options. We suggested a return to the timeline of the 1995 Act, which would slow down the increase to a pensionable age of 65 by 18 months, and defer the increase to a pensionable age for women of 66 years into the next decade. The cost of deferring over an additional 18 month period would be £7.9 billion. The Government estimated that the acceleration of state pensionable age in the 2011 Act for both women and men saved around £30 billion from 2016-17 to 2025-26, but that is simply not the case. That was scaremongering from the Government and, not for the first time, they got their numbers wrong. Depending on the timescale for the increase to age 66, there will be additional costs in the next decade.

I am grateful that, through the Backbench Business Committee, we have secured this debate, which is supported on an all-party basis, with a number of Conservative Members supporting the motion that was originally put

forward. Of course, that happened on the back of many of us here today and in Parliament putting petitions down on behalf of the WASPI women. The WASPI women are going to be knocking on Members' doors this week, next week and until we do the right thing.

We are often told that this is about the money. "We can't afford it," they say. This is not about women getting something they are not entitled to; it is about entitlement based on national insurance payments and about the Government meeting their obligations out of the national insurance fund—yes, for those who were not aware, inside Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs there is a national insurance fund. I am grateful to the Government, or more specifically the Government Actuary's Department, for stating that there is a projected fund surplus of £26.3 billion at the end of 2016-17, rising to £30.7 billion in 2017-18. The argument that the Government cannot do this is therefore bunkum. The money is there. These women have paid into the fund and we should meet our obligations. Women have paid their dues, the fund is in surplus and the Government can make restitution.

Next week we will have the autumn statement. If the Minister chooses, he could tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the strength of feeling on this issue. Next week the Chancellor could, if he is minded, deliver some good news for the WASPI women. Will the Minister demand that the Chancellor uses the surplus to do so? The money is in the national insurance fund to allow the Government to take action—to right a wrong, to reflect on the injustice of a sharp increase in pensionable age, to show leadership and to recognise that Parliament collectively got it wrong with the timetabled increases. This is, after all, about fairness. Men are seeing a one-year increase in pensionable age; for women it is six years, over too short a period. The Minister can be a hero to 1950s women by addressing the injustices that many are facing.

We are often told that there was no choice in the scale of the increase or the timing, and Europe was forcing equalisation upon us. In our report, we published the scale of increases in pensionable age in each European country. There are only two countries that are seeing such a rapid increase in pensionable age: Italy and Greece. When the Prime Minister took office, the first debate she fronted was on Trident renewal. The motion did not have a price tag, but the Chair of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), informed the House that it could be as much as £205 billion. The Government effectively asked Parliament to give them a blank cheque. We can find hundreds of billions of pounds for weapons that can blow humanity to smithereens, but we cannot meet what should be a contractual obligation to 1950s women. Where is the fairness? Where is the humanity? Of course, the Government will be prepared to find £7 billion to renovate this place. If I had a choice, I would fund the WASPI women's pensions first, and not spend a fortune on this place.

I know that a number of Conservative Members are here, and they are broadly supportive of the WASPI campaign. It is a pity that we do not have those who so far do not support it, but I say to the Conservatives: is there anyone on the Government Benches who is prepared to stand up and say that it is right for women's pensionable

age to increase at the rate of three months per month? How can anybody possibly think it is right that pensionable age should increase by three months per month? I would be happy to give way to anyone who wants to stand up and say that it is right, but I suspect that we will get what we always get: silence—silence and the hope that we, the Opposition, the Tories who support this and the WASPI women will go away. As I have said, we are not going away. We have given the Government an option and, unlike their Trident nuclear weapons commitment, it is costed. More importantly, not only are we not going away; the WASPI women are not going away.

The Pensions Commission that reported in 2005 suggested that at least 15 years' notice should be given on any future increase in pensionable age. Given that, I ask the Minister: how can the Government defend the 2011 Act and some women receiving pretty negligible notice? Does the Minister think that is acceptable? There would be uproar, and no doubt legal challenges, if occupational pension schemes behaved in such a way. Can we imagine the outcry from Members of Parliament if we were told, with little notice, that our pension payments would be deferred by an additional six years?

Ian Austin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Blackford: I want to make a little progress, and will take interventions later.

Just as workers pay into occupational schemes, men and women pay national insurance in return for a state pension. Why should women be treated so shoddily? It is little wonder that WASPI women are considering legal action. For too long women have suffered injustices as far as equal pay is concerned. They tend to have much poorer workplace pension protection than men and are now facing state pension inequality. Why do we not stop, take stock and put in place mitigation? Let us have equalisation, but let us do so fairly. When we consider what has been done as far as communication is concerned, it is dismal. Women should have been written to at the earliest opportunity, letting them know what was changing and allowing them to consider their options. Yet in 2011, the Government said their approach was to inform women through leaflets and publicity campaigns. That was a failure of responsibility to act and inform appropriately.

It was only in 2009 that the DWP began to take responsibility and proactively write to women to tell them about the 1995 Act. They started to tell women in 2009, but it took the DWP years to issue all the letters. Last night I was given the response to a freedom of information request on the timeline of the letters—perhaps the most damning thing about this whole debate. Women born between April 1953 and December 1953 were formally told of the increased pensionable age only in January 2012. Women born between December 1953 and April 1955 were told only in February 2012. A woman born in April 1953 under the old regime of retiring at 60 would have expected to retire in April 2013. She was given just one year of formal notice of her new retirement date of July 2016. It was 17 years after the 1995 legislation before the DWP could be bothered to formally tell the women involved—too little notice; too little, too late. We should all hang our heads in shame at the way the WASPI women have been treated. If there is

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one issue that should force the Government to agree to change now, it is that new information and the timeline of notice given.

Why have we been able to find this out through a freedom of information request from the WASPI women? Why have the Government not come clean about this before? Who knew about this in Government? Did the Minister know? I have had many letters on this issue from the women affected. Rosina wrote to me:

“When the 2011 Pensions Bill was announced, it accelerated these changes, so that Women’s SPA would be 65 by November 2018 and then both Men’s & Women’s SPA would rise together to 66 by 5th April...Letters began to be sent out...but many never received them. I received my letter in early 2013, just before my 58th Birthday and just 2 years before my expected retirement age of 60. The letter advising me that I would now have to wait until I was 66 before I could draw my pension! How can I be expected to plan for a 6 year increase with just 2 years notice? How can this be acceptable? I had already made plans for my retirement. I will lose over £40,000 of pension because of this. I have paid into the system in good faith and the system has now failed me. I want the Government to stand up and admit that they have ‘wronged’ us Women of the 50’s by their gross mismanagement and...that they will now do the right thing and pay us what we are due.”

I cannot put it any better than Rosina. Will the Minister now accept that we have a responsibility to Rosina and the 2.6 million women who have been cheated out of their entitlement?

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): My hon. Friend has come forward with a shocking revelation today, thanks to the WASPI women who made the FOI request. Nearly half a million women had only a year’s notice to change their retirement plans. I do not think that is acceptable, particularly given everything we have heard about why women are more likely to be dependent on a state pension and likely to be in poverty in old age. Does he agree that it puts an absolute moral imperative on the Government to take responsibility for their failure to let women know before a year in advance that they were going to lose out in such a way?

Ian Blackford: Absolutely. My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. I know that the Minister is a decent and honourable man. I hope he listens to the evidence and will go back to his colleagues in Government and recognise that the surplus we talked about is there in the national insurance fund. He would make us all happy, but more importantly he would make the WASPI women happy, if the Government showed they were prepared to act.

Peter Aldous: The issue of notice is raised a great deal, and it has been said that notice was given in magazines and the like. Given the high profile television campaign at the moment for workplace pensions, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the issue should have been on television 15 or 20 years ago?

Ian Blackford: Absolutely. There has been a gross failure of communication at all levels. Many of us have access to occupational pension schemes. We are members of the House of Commons scheme. We get an annual statement of our pension entitlement. That is what the DWP should have been providing, rather than waiting 17 years before communicating with the women involved.

I am conscious of time and I want to begin to wrap up. Much of what I have been talking about was picked up by the Select Committee report in March this year. It said:

“Well into this decade far too many affected women were unaware of the equalisation of state pension age at 65 legislated for in 1995.”

The National Centre for Social Research stated:

“In 2008, fewer than half...of the women who, at that point, would not be eligible for their state pension until they were 65 were aware of the...change.”

That statement referred to research carried out in 2011. Given that we knew there was a lack of appreciation of the 1995 changes, why pour oil on troubled waters by accelerating the timescales in 2011? That was simply vindictive and cruel. Today, let us correct that. Let us show compassion and deliver fairness to the WASPI women.

I have been dealing with this issue on a UK-wide basis, but I want to briefly touch on Scotland. To put this into context, there are 243,900 WASPI women in Scotland. I would dearly love for us to have responsibility for pensions in Scotland, but we do not. The commitment the SNP has given in supporting the slowdown of the increase in pensionable age is one we would legislate for if we had the powers, but we do not. The powers that Scotland has over social security are limited to 15% of such spending in Scotland. We have limited powers. Section 28 of the Scotland Act 2016 grants exceptions to reserved areas where we can top up payments, but this does not include pensions assistance or payments by reasons of age.

I mention that because the Secretary of State, responding to a question I asked about WASPI mitigation last month, said that the SNP

“now control a Government who have the power to do something about this and put their money where their mouth is.”—[*Official Report*, 17 October 2016; Vol. 615, c. 580.]

The Secretary of State created the impression that we hold powers in areas where we do not. I sought to be charitable to him in a point of order I raised later that day; rather incredibly, I received a letter from the Secretary of State on the 19th arguing that his statement was correct. Let me be clear: it was not. I then raised a further point of order on the 19th, when the Speaker suggested I apply for a face-to-face debate. I am grateful the Minister is here, but it is unfortunate that the Secretary of State is not. He should be dragged to this House and forced to accept that he cannot blame the Scottish Government when they do not have competency for the failures of this Government, and it must stop.

This is an important matter. We cannot have the UK Government suggesting that the Scottish Government have powers that they do not have. I wish we did have powers over pensions. If we had those powers, we would do the right thing by the WASPI women. Until such time as we have such powers we will push the Government to accept their obligations. This Tory Government have ducked their responsibility to the WASPI women for too long. It is time to face up to reality. Pensions are not a privilege; they are a contract, and the UK Government have broken that contract with the WASPI women.

Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair): I am looking to start the contributions from Front Benchers at 10.30 am, so based on the number of speakers I have been notified of, that will mean about five minutes maximum per speaker. I call Tom Elliott.

10 am

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I congratulate and thank the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for securing the debate, which is very timely. The most recent changes to the women's state pension age will have a direct impact on around half a million women across the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman outlined the historical issues extremely well.

It is estimated that in Northern Ireland around 80,000 women will be affected. A number of weeks ago I, like other Members, presented a petition to the House containing the signatures of hundreds of residents of my constituency who are concerned about the unfair changes to the women's state pension age. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Wilma Grey, who lives in my constituency and is the co-ordinator of Women Against State Pension Inequality in Northern Ireland. She tirelessly campaigns on a voluntary basis to raise awareness of this issue.

Nobody would disagree that rationalisation of pensions is necessary, but it must be sustainable and ready for an ageing population who are living longer. If pensions are not properly funded and addressed, they have the potential to be a millstone around the neck of future Governments. We accept that, but few things are so clearly deserved in life as the state pension. I reiterate the promise that if someone works hard their whole working life, the state will take care of them in their old age. That ideal has underpinned our society for more than 70 years, but the promise is precisely why I am deeply worried about the manner in which the Government have decided to equalise pension ages.

This is the key issue: women who were born in the 1950s were made a promise and the promise is now being broken. Worse still, the changes are being made with little to no notice. These women, who have rightfully been considering and planning for retirement, now face uncertainty that threatens what should be the most relaxed period of their lives. Today's national insurance contributions pay for today's pensions, and many of these women believed that when they started paying national insurance contributions—some of them at the age of 16—they were entering into an agreement with the Government to retire at 60.

Raising the retirement age may be a necessary evil. With life expectancy climbing, it is unavoidable that we must work longer and retire later. However, the problem is that although that principle may be sound, the reality is somewhat different. When Her Majesty's Government introduced the Pensions Act 1995, women were supposedly given 15 years to prepare, as the women's pension age would not begin to equalise with men's until 2010. However, no one who was aged 44 or over would have been affected at the time. It is therefore understandable that any discussion of pension changes was viewed as irrelevant.

The Government at the time should have made a concerted effort to publicise the changes widely and to spell out the implications for the women affected, but that was glaringly absent. To compound that, the Pensions Act 2011 increased the overall state pension age to 66 by 2020, accelerating the rate of increase for women. Because they had not been notified previously, it was only at that

point that many women learned of the changes to the state pension age, with some women reaching state pension age at 66 when they had anticipated drawing their pension at 60.

It is therefore no surprise that the women affected by the changes are frustrated by the implications for their post-retirement planning, both financial and otherwise, and by the fact that the Government have substantially moved the goalposts without effective communication. That unfairness must be addressed and the Government must now consider the introduction of appropriate transitional payments.

10.4 am

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for securing the debate.

I find myself speaking on the Women Against State Pension Inequality women for, I think, the fourth time. Frustratingly, despite three previous debates and the launch of a UK-wide petition, which attracted 2,534 signatures in my constituency and would have attracted more had there been more time; despite legal action from the WASPI women being seriously on the table due to what has been, in effect, the mis-selling of this group of women's pensions; and after a Work and Pensions Committee report concluded that "more could and should have been done"

to communicate the changes, we seem to be no further forward. Everyone is feeling the frustration.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The situation is worse than the hon. Lady described. Five and a half years ago I stood in this Chamber with my colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves)—our then Front-Bench spokesperson—and challenged the Government on this issue. We did that again the year after and again the year after that. The hon. Lady described recent action, but the situation is even worse: we have been telling the Government that this is wrong since 2011.

Patricia Gibson: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention, and I go back to my original point: after all this time, all this activity, all the warnings, and all the stories of hardship, we are still no further forward. When will this Government waken up to the fact that pensions are not a benefit? The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott) described them as a promise. They are not a promise; they are a social contract, which has been cruelly and thoughtlessly broken. It is time for the Government to step up and take responsibility for the way in which this matter has been mishandled over a number of years, and stop dragging this misery out for the women caught up in this injustice.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Patricia Gibson: I will not—I am very conscious that other people want to speak, so I apologise to the hon. Lady.

[Patricia Gibson]

Around 2.6 million women have been affected by these changes, and in Scotland, the number of women affected is 243,900. On behalf of the Scottish National Party, Landman Economics analysed the costs and distributional impacts of potential changes to pension arrangements for women born in the 1950s who are losing out, in the context of the surplus in the national insurance fund, which is projected to stand at around £30 billion at the end of 2017-18 according to the Government's own figures. With that surplus now forecast to be larger than it was before, the £7.9 billion that it will cost to give those women relief and a delay in the rise of their pension age is very much affordable.

The Landman report costed a return to the Pensions Act 1995 by immediately restoring the timetable in that Act, raising the pension age for women from 63 in March 2016 to 65 by April 2020, with no further increase to 66 until the mid-2020s. That is the second most expensive option, costing about £7.9 billion over five years. That cost is not trivial, but as we have heard today, it is not prohibitively expensive either in the context of other Government spending plans. It has the merit of completely eliminating the problem of an accelerated increase in pension ages for women born in the 1950s by returning to a timetable set out two decades ago, giving women much more time—necessary time—to adapt to the changes. It would then be possible to increase women's pension age to 66 at some later point in the 2020s. That measure has the benefit of being progressive and reducing relative and absolute pensioner poverty.

The UK Government's position, even after all the mistakes in the process have been laid bare for all to see, has been characterised by intransigence and wilful stubbornness. It is time to do what is right, fair and just. It is time for the Government to stop telling us that they have no choice. It is time to make the right choices, and it is time for justice for the WASPI women.

10.9 am

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): My thanks go to the hon. Members who secured this important debate. I want to contribute on behalf of the women in my constituency who find themselves affected by the change to the state pension age. They are angry about the pace at which the change has been accelerated, angry about the way it was done and how it was not communicated properly—many learnt about it from the media, not a Government body—and angry that the Government have not acted to help them.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government are being cloth-eared, that they should listen to the cries of anger across the UK and that these women need to be heard?

Jessica Morden: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) said, clearly the Government have failed to listen over successive years when the issue has been raised. As other hon. Members have mentioned, there has been debate after debate, and question after question.

The women affected in my constituency are not just angry but anxious and worried, because they face real financial insecurity. I will focus on that. Some 3,100 women are affected in Newport East, and 135,000 are affected in Wales. Many have been hit particularly hard, with significant changes to their state pension age and, as was mentioned earlier, a lack of appropriate notification.

Last week, a new constituent—I very much welcome new constituents—contacted me. Her story illustrates the financial insecurity facing many people. She had to sell her long-term family home in Bristol and move away from her children, parents and friends in order to make ends meet and to tide her over until she is 66. This is a woman who, as a single parent, received no support when her children were small. She worked all her life and then discovered, far too late in the day, that she will have to survive for longer. She is recovering from breast cancer but does not feel able to work at the moment, and she is trying to navigate the disability benefits system. This is a woman who explained to me how she would ring the DWP every single year when she was working to check that she had paid enough contributions to get her full pension at 60. In her words:

“This is not the retirement I planned at all—I live in a constant state of worry due to the cancer and financial pressures. The goal posts have been moved twice”.

She said that this is surely discrimination against women at its worst.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an important point. Is she as surprised as I am that there are no Government Back Benchers here? Could that be because there are no WASPI women in their constituencies?

Jessica Morden: The constituent I speak of moved, in fact, from a constituency where she was represented by—

Mrs Hodgson: Or not?

Jessica Morden: Or maybe not in that case, but I will leave that there.

Another constituent explained to me the impact of her pension date being deferred for the second time with little time to make compensatory arrangements. She has worked for 45 years and paid her way, and the changes to the pension age, which mean that she is not in receipt of her state pension at 60, will deny her more than £38,000. She, too, has cancer and is considering whether she has to give up work.

Alison McGovern: My hon. Friend was also in the debate with me and our hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) back in 2011, so we are veterans of this campaign. Does she think that the Government should look at the net cost of any transitional arrangements? As she points out, many women who are missing out on their pension are now relying on disability benefits because of the incidence of ill health among the women affected.

Jessica Morden: My hon. Friend makes a crucial point. The change to the state pension age is affecting people who are ill and on disability benefits, and the Government should look into that.

My constituent who has cancer and is considering giving up work tells me that instead of seeing retirement as a positive development, she is dreading the financial insecurity after having worked for 45 years. These women had a picture of what their retirement might look like and it has been cruelly taken away. They did not expect the Government to change the rules. It would be good to know whether the Minister gets just how tough it is for many trying to find work at this stage, especially those who are ill or who have a disability. What will Ministers do for that group of women?

Women who have contacted me from Newport East add their voices to the calls for more reasonable transitional arrangements that are particularly mindful of those who are ill, who depend more on the state pension in retirement and who have limits on their ability to work. We need the Government to move on this issue and ease the impact of the changes on those most affected. The Government have an opportunity in the autumn statement. There are a number of options on the table and they are all ways in which the Government could act. We need them to take responsibility for what has happened to these women.

10.15 am

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) not just on securing the debate, but on bringing forward the report and putting on the table some real facts and figures that the Government cannot deny.

I often tell constituents that I speak from a different world from the Government, and today the Government's attitude to the WASPI women has proven that to be the case. I come from a world where women worked, often intermittently because of family commitments that involved childcare and family caring. Those women suffered lower pay and a lack of pension contributions, often due to part-time work. However, they always had the comfort of their contract with the Government that they would receive their pension at the age of 60. That contract was broken by the Pensions Act 1995, and the women were not notified. Yet the previous Minister continued to tell us that women were generally aware of what was happening with pension changes. They may have been generally aware, but they did not know that it was happening to them in their personal circumstances. That has been proven by the lack of notification and the fact that the information that did come from DWP was often conflicting.

In the Government's world, these women were deemed suitable for a rapid increase in pension age. Into the bargain, it was deemed necessary for them to pay more national insurance contributions than they were originally contracted to. Since then, as the proverbial has started to hit the fan, we have all become aware of the bigger picture and the implications for the women. In the past year, the Government's Budget contained inheritance tax cuts of £2.6 billion, capital gains tax cuts of £2.9 billion, corporation tax giveaways of £8.5 billion, higher rate tax relief of £3 billion, and individual savings account and savings relief of £2.5 billion. That is nearly £20 billion of tax giveaways for the people who live in the Government's world, but not for the people who live in our world. At

the same time, the Government brought in the right-to-buy discount on social housing, which will cost something like £12 billion.

This is an alien world to the one that me and my constituents inhabit, and yet the previous Minister hid behind the stock answer that the alternative transition will cost too much money, and asked where that money will come from and what cuts we, in opposition, would make. As we have heard, our preferred option would cost £8 billion and there is no need to make cuts. I have outlined simple tweaks that could be made to the Budget. There is £30 billion of surplus in the national insurance contributions fund, so the money is clearly there, and there is an autumn statement coming up in which the Government could do something.

The name "national insurance fund" is a misnomer, given the way things are happening. This generation of women has lived through the endowment mis-selling scandal and the payment protection insurance mis-selling scandal, but to have to live through the state mis-selling pensions is something else. It is no wonder these women are going to court. This is not about where to make cuts; it is about making the correct moral decision.

Last week I went to the funeral of a former councillor colleague, Jim Buchanan. He was a great campaigner for social justice and could not believe this position, which affected his wife—and, by default, the two of them as a couple—and many others. Jim actually joked that he would need to work longer to keep bringing extra money into the household. Instead, sadly, he died at 63, leaving behind a widow who is still affected by the pension increases. There are many such cases across the country.

I say to the Minister that there are now Tory Back Benchers involved, and there is cross-party support for the campaign. Do the right thing and act. The forthcoming autumn statement is a golden opportunity to do something that these fantastic WASPI women, and the local Ayrshire WASPI campaigners in my constituency, deserve.

10.19 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I thank the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for securing it and for giving us all a chance to speak. It was a pleasure to join him and others in going to the Backbench Business Committee—this debate is the result of a combined request from many of us here in the Chamber. It is good to see a goodly number of Opposition Members, although there are perhaps not so many Government Members.

I welcome this debate, which was secured with a great work ethic. If people do not work, they do not eat. If people pay their dues, they reap what they sow. That is the premise on which an entire generation was raised, but I have been told that the dues have been uplifted and that, for some, the harvest is not due for another three and a half years, so they have to keep slogging on.

That might seem okay. What is three and a half years in the grand scheme of things? It is not that long. I want the House to consider a lady who left school at 14, as was then permissible, to work in a local sewing factory. She worked there for the next 35 years, until the factory was closed and relocated abroad. With no education and no skills, she took on a job cleaning the floors of schools and buildings, which she has done on her hands

[*Jim Shannon*]

and knees for the past 11 years. For that lady to wait another three and a half years is not a small thing—it is more years of an aching back, fingers that remain bent and knees that are worn away.

Liz McInnes: I have a constituent who describes herself as “June ’54 and furious.” One source of her fury, apart from having to wait for her pension, is that she is having to wait for her entitlement to winter fuel allowance and a bus pass. We need to remember that it is not just about pensions; it is about things that will help these women in their declining years as their health declines. Small things are adding to my constituent’s fury.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady is very clear. Many of my constituents are equally furious. They might not have been born in June ’54, but they are equally furious. The lady she mentions and the lady I spoke about, who worked for 35 years in a sewing factory and 11 years in a school, are representative of ladies across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Northern Ireland pensioners’ parliament, which has done tremendous work? One person in my constituency, Mr Nixon Armstrong, has been a great ambassador in getting rights for these women.

Jim Shannon: All Members from Northern Ireland have had a chance to meet the pensioners’ parliament, which has lobbied us on this issue. We are here today to speak on their behalf.

We all know the background to this debate. The Government changed the timetable because of the increase in life expectancy, but as we have illustrated, the numbers do not equal the human cost or the health implications. Even for women who have a job in an office and are expected to continue working for another six years, the repetitive strain of typing, and so on, has not been taken into consideration and has been ignored.

Women born in the 1950s are justified in their argument that they have been hit particularly hard by the significant changes to their state pension age, which was imposed without appropriate notification. They have not been looking to the future and thinking, “I’ll take a high-tech job at night-time and do a course to get a qualification. I can’t do this hard-labour job for the next 30 years.” The fact is that these women have been subject to the whim of Government, with no notice for them to change their future potential.

I understand how the world works. If the Government continue to borrow, the debt continues to rise. We all know the story. Changes must be made, but how we make those changes is a problem. I fully support the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign in calling for a fair transitional state pension arrangement that translates into a bridging pension between the age of 60 and the increased state pension age.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that most people accept that there has to be some change because of the increase in life expectancy?

The problem is the utter confusion, the lack of clarity and the complete absence of proper, coherent information. Does he agree that one small thing the Government could do today is to be completely upfront, honest and transparent and say exactly where we are? My constituents and his constituents are in the dark on this issue.

Jim Shannon: Some 4.5 million people in Great Britain will have their SPA increased by less than a year, and 500,000 born between October 1953 and 5 April 1955 will have their SPA increased by more than a year. In Northern Ireland, 76,000 people face a further one-and-a-half-year wait on top of previous rises, which is simply not acceptable. Something must be done to bridge the gap, especially for those who physically cannot keep working. Is there an argument for opening the door to the personal independence payment just a little further to enable these women to have an income without working? That is unlikely, as the Government have made it clear that they are determined, by hook or by crook, to lessen the number of claimants, despite what people’s doctors say—that is a debate for another day.

Jobseeker’s allowance is restricted, and the employment and support allowance criteria ask, for example, whether a person can lift a cardboard box or move a £1 coin. If only that was all it took for a woman to work again, but it takes more than that. I am sorry to say that the Government have not understood the real issue.

We do not have a benefits system that allows us to bridge the gap, so who will help these women? They do not seek to have something for which they have not worked. They are not asking for a handout, like so many people do; they are asking for a return on their hard work over 45 years or more. Why have we let these people down? What will be done today to help those whose hard work means their bodies can no longer continue at this pace?

Individual cases do not necessarily make good law, but I have not recounted an individual case. There are many such women in my constituency and across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is time that the Government acknowledged the effect that the acceleration has had and is having. They should seek to do the right thing for this generation, who have worked hard in all areas to build this country and who deserve the same respect and attention that they have given to this country all their lives.

10.25 am

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I am grateful for the chance to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) on his excellent, terrifically detailed speech. I will not go into great detail, but I wish to make three points. When I first got involved in politics, which was not long ago, I was shocked when an old hand said to me, “Politics isn’t fair.” I hope that we can all prove him wrong. This debate is about fairness for women who have had their pensions taken away. They are struggling at the moment, and they need the Government to be fair.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): It is kind of the hon. Gentleman to allow me to intervene. Not long ago, on 13 July, the new Prime Minister stood on the steps of No. 10 and talked about all parts of the nation, including Northern Ireland, and about bringing the United Kingdom

together. She said that her Government would be not for the privileged few but for the many. We need to hear from the new Minister—I welcome him to his place—the new Prime Minister and the new Government that thousands of women have suffered an injustice. I am one of those women born in the 1950s who is affected; I am one of the furious ones. This is an opportunity for the Prime Minister to meet her words with action. Does the hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) agree?

Danny Kinahan: I certainly agree. That goes to the heart of what I was saying about the world needing to be made fair for these women.

Do the Government have the will to deal with this matter? As my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott) did, I congratulate Wilma Grey on all her work. What came home when we petitioned Stormont and others is that there is still a mass of women who do not know that this is happening—or they vaguely know. Do the Government have a complete database in Northern Ireland? If 76,000 women are affected, how many of them actually know? Are we working on a database? Will that database be used to ensure that everyone knows? We can then concentrate on whom we can help. If we cannot help everybody, can we look for those who really need help, such as those with ill husbands or ill children to look after, those who cannot get a job and those who live out in the sticks? So many different areas have been addressed today. I would rather see the Minister helping everyone, but if not, let us look at the details and make sure that we know who needs help so that we can get involved.

I have spent my life trying to get people in Northern Ireland working together. Will the Minister work with the four separate campaigns so that we get much better detail on this issue and a result that is fair to everyone?

10.29 am

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. This is the fifth or sixth time that we have had this debate, and every single time the Government's response and stance has been littered with absolute hypocrisy. This Government lecture the Opposition about how they are the Government of responsibility, the ones making the difficult choices and the ones who can be trusted, yet they do not even allow people the chance to be responsible for their own pensions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) made clear in his speech, women were not given the slightest notice. Some of the women with the steepest hike were given a year's notice. How does that encourage responsibility?

If anything, the Government have shown how irresponsible they are in working out solutions to problems in society. We have said for years now that people have to make 30 or 35 years' worth of national insurance contributions to get their pensions. The generation of women that we are discussing have been paying in for 45 or 46 years now, yet they are being told, "Sorry, you still can't get your pension." We say that we care more about our pensioners than anybody else, and we pride ourselves on how we look after them, yet as has already been stated, the only other European country that has hiked the pension age at such an incredible pace is

Greece, which a few weeks ago tear-gassed pensioners for protesting against austerity. Is that really where we want to put ourselves in terms of how we deal with constituents?

The thing that blows my mind is that if a private company were acting in this way, it would be taken to court. By the sound of things, if the Government do not act soon, they might be taken to court as well. We cannot blame individuals for being pushed to it; the Government are leaving them with no option. This is the last chance for the Government to do something right.

In every debate on this subject, we have called for transitional arrangements, and the Government's response has always been, "What transitional arrangements are you asking for?" The Scottish National party has gone away and paid our own money to commission a report. I have printed it out, and I am happy to give it to the Minister at the end of this debate in case he does not have a copy.

Our report—I must give credit to Howard Reed of Landman Economics, which did a power of work for it—found independently that the figure of £30 billion being thrown about by the Government was nonsense. Implementing some form of transitional arrangement would cost £8 billion spread across five years. Bearing in mind that we are spending money on nuclear weapons, airstrikes in Syria and renovations to this building, I think it is about time that we got our priorities straight in terms of who needs what most. Even if we were to forget or not bother criticising the poor choices made by this Government, by the end of this year, the national insurance fund will sit at a surplus of £26.3 billion, which is expected to rise to £30.7 billion. The idea that we cannot afford it is nothing other than a bare-faced lie from the Government.

I must say, not just for the Government's benefit but for that of any women from Women Against State Pension Inequality who might be watching, that we know that our report is not completely perfect and involves an element of compromise. We recognise that this Parliament has only a couple of months left to make an effective change to get something for these women. Therefore, we suggest delaying things for the people with the greatest hike for another two and a half years, to give them an extra chance. Also, all women benefit from the fact that the rise to 66 is pushed to the next Parliament, so the report affects every single woman affected by the changes, although in different ways. We have been reasonable and tried to be genuinely conscientious in coming up with something that the Government can support.

I am at my wits' end to know what we need to do for this Government to act. We have proved that women in every constituency and from all backgrounds are affected, brought hundreds of petitions before Parliament with thousands upon thousands of signatures, had umpteen debates and gone away and done the Government's homework for them, and yet we are still told that the Government will not act. What more do we need to give them in order for them to give us something?

I thought that the Government were just arrogant, but now I see that they are both arrogant and incompetent. They do not know what notice they gave women. They do not know the effect that the changes have had on people. They do not even know what powers they have

[Mhairi Black]

given to the devolved Administrations to deal with things. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber said, the Scottish Government do not have the power to top up pensions. Even if we did, I would ask why the Government should effectively ask the Scottish Government to tax Scottish people twice so that they can receive a pension they have been paying into all their lives. However, we do not have those powers. We have argued that we would quite like them; if the Minister is prepared to move on that, we are more than happy to listen.

Most of all, the Government have managed to allow a genuine problem that transcends party political leanings and affects every constituency to become a party political issue in their own minds. The Government are so adamant that they cannot give the Opposition an inch that they are prepared to put this on the backs of women who have suffered their whole lives from inequality and unjust policies. That is completely unforgivable. If this Government are so arrogant and obsessed with not giving the Opposition an inch, they should come up with their own plans to sort the issue. We have jumped through every hoop that the Government have put before us since I first raised the issue during this parliamentary term.

Surely by now the Government recognise that this issue is not going away. It is a reasonable ask, and it is doable. The Government are out of excuses, and hell mend you if you do not do anything to fix it.

10.36 am

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) on securing this debate on an important issue. I am sure that '50s-born women up and down the country will be listening eagerly to hear whether the Minister is prepared to do anything more to alleviate their plight. I also pay tribute to the many MPs across the House campaigning on the issue, particularly the all-party parliamentary group on state pension inequality for women, which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley).

I was never in any doubt when I took on my role as shadow Pensions Minister that this issue would be one of the biggest and most contentious, and I have been proven right. I have already had contact with groups from across the country, all campaigning on the same message: the previous Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition Government's rapid changes to the state pension age are simply unfair.

Most of the women recognise, as others have said, that the state pension age must be increased in recognition of a workforce that is living longer and to address the gap in the retirement age between men and women. However, what cannot be accepted is the unfair and unjust approach that the previous Government took and that the current Government are not prepared to change. The policy has had failures from the start. There has been a severe lack of communication from the Government on the changes, leaving 2.6 million

women in doubt about their circumstances and providing only uncertainty to potentially vulnerable people up and down the country.

The Minister has heard many Members outline the case on behalf of '50s-born women. The hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber made a comprehensive speech that left us in no doubt about how unfair it all is and how the Government could change things. Although I do not recognise some of his financial numbers, we agree that some changes could certainly be funded if the Government had the will.

There is some Conservative support for the WASPI women. The hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who has now left, spoke about the lottery faced by '50s-born women when it comes to retirement age. That is hardly fair. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) spoke about the different levels of poverty created by the Government's policy, and another Conservative, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), spoke about people in the latter stage of their careers who find themselves with caring responsibilities and little income to support them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) spoke of bereaved women left with no support. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) described herself as a veteran of the campaign and reminded us that we have been having this debate and talking to the Government about the issue for more than five years, yet they do nothing. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) spoke of angry women, but also of anxious women, one of whom has had to sell her home and move away in order to make ends meet. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke of the hardship of a woman in her sixties forced on to her hands and knees to scrub floors to make ends meet. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford) spoke of the half a million women given too few years to prepare for retirement, many of whom probably have some of the lowest incomes in the country.

I know of another example: a 61-year-old woman having to live with a friend, who receives just £8 a week from a private pension and is worried how she will afford basics such as dental treatment. She is like so many others: not fit for work, but not sick enough for employment and support allowance. She walks to the jobcentre every day, even in the snow, with her walking stick. She was let down by the last Parliament, and now this Government are letting her down.

I believe the Minister to be a caring and compassionate man who is looking for answers to a problem that is not of his making but is tricky for the Government. Indeed, the absence of Conservative Members in the Chamber illustrates how tricky this issue is for the Tory Government. Sadly, some very specific ideas put forward by the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), have been rejected by the Government. That has probably been driven by the Treasury's not being prepared to invest in a better quality of life for the women most affected.

That is very disappointing, but there is still time: the Minister has an ideal opportunity to do something positive. He can go to the Treasury before the autumn statement and fight for the resources that are needed,

and he can then have clauses added to the Pension Schemes Bill that is currently in the other place, to allow the necessary changes. Then again, he may feel constrained by the threat of legal action from WASPI, which has raised more than £100,000 to challenge the Government's failures in the courts. Perhaps he can confirm whether he feels that his hands are tied.

Contrary to what the Prime Minister claimed, the Opposition have tried to help her out of this hole and laid out plenty of options for the Government. Labour set out six transitional options and we are still waiting for the Government to properly address them and their potential. We proposed delaying the state pension age increase until 2020; capping the maximum state pension age increase from the Pensions Act 2011 at 12 months; keeping the qualifying age for pension credit on the previous timetable; allowing those affected to take a reduced state pension at an earlier age during the transition; extending the timetable for increasing the overall state pension age by 18 months so that it reached 66 by April 2022; or paying those affected a lower state pension for a longer period. Sadly, the Government chose not to follow up any of Labour's suggestions.

Of course we recognise that solutions cost money, but the Government have made vast savings as a result of the late changes to the pension age and should be able to reinvest some of them to do something to help the vulnerable women who have been ruined because of a decision that they had no say in and certainly did not vote for.

Alan Brown: The hon. Gentleman says, rightly, that the Labour party has presented options. Does he welcome the fact that the Scottish National party is presenting a costed option? The Government cannot argue with the figures.

Alex Cunningham: I do not recognise some of the numbers that the SNP is using, but believe me, we want a solution just as much as the SNP. I believe that Conservative Members do too, and we need to work together to achieve that solution.

We have had half-hearted attempts from the Government to quell the voices of women who are rightly angry about these changes and the impact they will have on them and their families, but those attempts are not good enough. An independent review into the future of the state pension age that will not even consider the existing accelerated timetable is not good enough either. Sadly, previous Pensions Ministers have chosen to bury their heads in the sand, but I hope the new Minister is as anxious to find solutions as we are. Failing to use the Pension Schemes Bill to marshal in change would be a missed opportunity by the Government to address the concerns that are being raised by hundreds of thousands of women throughout the country. The Government must think again, and they must do so urgently to cause minimum hardship.

I am well aware that past Ministers have ducked the issue, claiming that sufficient transitional arrangements are in place. The accounts we have heard today, and many others that I am sure the Minister is aware of, demonstrate that those arrangements are totally inadequate. Despite his past misgivings, the Minister can provide real hope for the women affected. I hope he will take the opportunity to do so today.

Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, I ask him gently to allow a couple of minutes at the end, so that Mr Blackford can sum up and wind up the debate.

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions (Richard Harrington): It is a great privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. It is also pleasing to see so many Members present, which shows the importance of the issue. The Westminster Hall debates that I address usually have a much smaller audience. It is also fair to say that Members from all political parties have been present at different times in the debate.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): The Minister studied jurisprudence at university and had a career in the retail industry, so he will recognise the concept of good faith. Does he accept that the women concerned in this matter entered into a contract with the state about their pensions in good faith and that the Government's actions amount to bad faith? If so, what is he going to do about it?

Richard Harrington: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, which I will attempt to answer in a moment, after I have thanked the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for opening the debate and hon. Members from both sides who contributed.

I must say that this is the first time that my rather limited attempts at jurisprudence between 1976 and 1979 have been mentioned in the House. At least they will now be recounted in *Hansard* rather more than they are by my tutors of the time. The serious point that the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) makes is that hon. Members feel that the Government have broken some form of contract, presumably non-written, with state pensioners generally or WASPI women specifically. I have heard that point made several times today, but the Government's position is very clear: this was not a contract. State pensions are technically a benefit. I add no value judgments to that, but since he made a legal point, I felt I should place the answer to it on the record.

Ian Blackford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Harrington: I think I should continue, but the hon. Gentleman will have time at the end.

Mr George Howarth: I am sorry, but—

Richard Harrington: I am very sorry, but to allow time for the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber to wind up, I have to continue. I am happy to discuss the matter—although not my jurisprudence degree—outside the Chamber.

I have been quite clear in public and in the House that the Government will make no further changes to the pension age of those affected by the 1995 Act and the 2011 Act, nor pay them financial redress in lieu of pension. I know that Members present do not agree with that, but I feel it is right to state our position clearly without leaving any doubt. That view has not changed.

[Richard Harrington]

It is important to acknowledge that state pension age increases cannot be looked at in isolation. The acceleration of the state pension age is a consequence of serious and fundamental changes that continue to affect the wider state pension system, such as the significant changes in life expectancy in recent years, the huge progress made in opening up employment opportunities for women and the wider packages of reforms that we have introduced to ensure a fair deal for pensioners.

Life expectancy, as everyone knows, has been increasing for a number of decades; people are living much longer. However, the increase in life expectancy over time has not been linear. Between 1995 and 2011—in just 16 years—remaining life expectancy at age 65 increased by 3 years for women and 4 years for men, an unprecedented increase compared with past decades. There are significant variations across council authorities and within Scotland, for instance. I could spend a lot more time going into those differences, but I feel I have made the point.

Employment prospects for women have changed dramatically since the state pension age was first set in 1940, especially for women affected by the acceleration of the state pension age. The number of older women aged 50 to 64 in work in 2016 stands at more than 4 million—a record high. Some 150,000 more older women are in work than this time last year, and 580,000 more than five years ago. In addition, independent research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that employment rates for women aged 60 and 61 have increased as a direct result of the changes in state pension age. Furthermore, to help older women remain in work, the Government have abolished the default retirement age.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Richard Harrington: I am really sorry but there is not enough time. Members should hear me out.

Some women may wish to continue to work but be unable to do so. The welfare system provides a safety net for those of working age, which has been ignored by many speakers, and there are a range of benefits tailored to individual circumstances. The system is designed to deal with problems ranging from difficulty in finding work to disability or ill health making work difficult, and to help those with increasing caring responsibilities.

Alex Cunningham: Will the Minister give way?

Richard Harrington: I am sorry, but there is not enough time. [HON. MEMBERS: “Oh!”] Well, okay, out of respect for the hon. Gentleman.

Alex Cunningham: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I took eight minutes, leaving him with around 15.

I gave the example of a 61-year-old woman in dire straits, and we heard many other examples of individual women who are not being looked after by the state benefits system. What can we do together so that the most vulnerable can live a life?

Richard Harrington: I know about the eight and 15 minutes, but I was asked by the Chairman to leave some time for the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber; I was not being discourteous at all.

Benefits are a complex subject that I am sure we will have plenty of time to discuss elsewhere. Suffice it to say that the range of benefits is quite wide. If the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) feels that there are gaps in the benefits system, I would be pleased to discuss them with him, but obviously not now because there is not enough time. I am trying to make progress, as you requested, Mr Nuttall.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and many other MPs shared cases of hardship, and of course I am sympathetic to them.

Ian Blackford: Will the Minister give way?

Richard Harrington *indicated dissent.*

Ian Blackford: I will be very specific.

Richard Harrington: Okay.

Ian Blackford: The new information that I provided in my introductory speech was that a woman who was born in July 1953, who would have expected to retire in July 2013, was told by the DWP only in January 2012 that she would not be retiring until 2017. When did the Government and the Minister know of those facts? Why will they not now listen on that basis? The statement is that there will be no further changes, but these women have been seriously negatively impacted. The Minister must respond.

Richard Harrington: I shall respond in due course. I want to finish my point about the welfare system. The Government are spending £60 billion on supporting people on low incomes, £50 billion on supporting disabled people and £15 billion on incapacity benefits for working people. According to some of the contributions we have heard, it would appear that the Government are really not spending any money at all.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Will the Minister give way?

Alison McGovern: Will the Minister give way?

Richard Harrington: I really cannot take any more interventions, simply because of the time. It is not in my nature, because I like interventions, but I really cannot.

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) and others mentioned a notional national insurance surplus fund. The fact is that, in order to maintain the minimum work balance of the national insurance fund, a Treasury grant of £9.6 billion was made in 2015-16. Public sector finance is complicated. It is easy just to pick out one bit.

I wish to spend a little time discussing the Scottish National party's proposals. Its independent report suggests rolling back the 2011 Act and returning to the timetable in the Pensions Acts of 1995 and 2007, but that is simply too expensive for the Government to consider. The report puts the cost at £7.9 billion, but my Department's direct comparison for the same period is £14 billion. We can discuss it however many times, but our modelling is comprehensive and no one is trying to take advantage of anybody else. I really believe that the SNP report has underestimated the impact by somewhere in the region of 50%. It has done so by ignoring most of the costs

and applying costs only to the five-year window from 2016-17. Costs beyond that horizon have simply been ignored.

The Pensions Act 2011 not only increased the female state pension age to 65 sooner, but brought forward the increase to 66 for both men and women. The increase to 66 generates significant savings of more than £25 billion, yet such an important element of the Act is omitted from the paper, along with the associated costings.

John Ralfe Consulting, which is independent, reviewed the SNP option. Mr Ralfe concluded that:

“Sadly, the SNP has not managed to pull a Rabbit out of its Hat. The real cost of Option 2”—

the SNP’s preferred option—

“is almost £30bn...The SNP can claim the cost is much lower simply because it has chosen to ignore most of the costs.”

I hope that demonstrates that that option is simply not deliverable.

In the limited time remaining, I shall address the notification issue. In answer to the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott), between 2003 and 2006, the DWP issued 16 million unprompted products called automatic pension forecasts. People contacted the Department and it gave out all those forecasts. In 2004, the Department ran a pensions campaign that included informing people of the future equalisation of the state pension age. The Government made sure that the information was there, but I accept that it was not communicated by individual letter, as it was later when, as I am sure Members will be aware, millions of letters were sent out.

To say that nothing happened is not true. I have seen a leaflet on equality in the state pension age that was widely circulated, with many, many copies printed. A summary of the changes was issued and the general public were advised, although I accept that they were not informed by specific direct mailing in the way mentioned by some Members.

Lady Hermon: It is very kind of the Minister to give way. He will recall that in an earlier intervention I quoted the Prime Minister, whom he serves. Does he appreciate that his words make the Prime Minister’s words sound extremely hollow? This is not a nation in which the Prime Minister appears to care about all the people of the United Kingdom. Will the Minister please take that message back to the Prime Minister?

Richard Harrington: I certainly will not take that message back to the Prime Minister, because I do not accept that anything I have said today is incompatible with what the Prime Minister said on the steps of 10 Downing Street. Governments have to make difficult decisions, and the allocation of public spending is one of the most difficult.

It is not fair to say that the acceleration of the women’s state pension age has not been fully considered. It went through Parliament, there was a public call for evidence and there was extensive debate in both Houses. The Government listened during the process and made a substantial concession worth more than £1 billion. Finally, Parliament came to a clear decision. As it stands now, it would cost more than £30 billion to reverse the 2011 Act.

Alison McGovern: Will the Minister give way?

Richard Harrington: I am very sorry but I cannot give way because there are only three minutes remaining.

I conclude by reiterating what I have told the House and, indeed, the public before: we will not revisit the policy or make any further concessions. The acceleration of state pension age was necessary to ensure the system’s sustainability in the light of increasing life expectancy and increasing pressure on public resources. Mr Nuttall, I have left three minutes, as requested.

10.57 am

Ian Blackford: I thank all Members who have spoken in the debate. I have enormous respect for the Minister, as I think he knows, but I must say that I am plain disgusted with the response we have had this morning. To that end, I shall be contending that we have not considered the acceleration of the state pension age for women born in the 1950s.

This is not acceptable, because we are now looking at a cliff edge. As I explained, there is an increase in pensionable age of three months for every month that passes. The Minister talked about a leaflet—a leaflet!—that went to the women concerned. We now know that a woman born in 1953 was given just over one year’s notice in 2012 that her pension age was going to increase to July 2017. We now know that a woman born in September 1954 found out in February 2012 that, rather than retiring in 2014, she would be retiring in 2020. Where is the fairness? Where is the notice from this Government?

I have heard various figures from the Government, but this is the first time the House has been told about that £14 billion. The Minister should come with me and I will take him through the Institute for Public Policy Research model. I stand fully behind the £7.9 billion. To hear him dispute that figure is disingenuous, to say the least. The Government have failed to accept responsibility for the WASPI women. The Minister should hang his head in shame. The Government must act, and we will continue to push them.

Question put,

That this House has considered acceleration of the state pension age for women born in the 1950s.

The Chair’s opinion as to the decision of the Question was challenged.

Question not decided (Standing Order No. 10(13)).

Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair): The fact that the Question is not decided shall be reported to the House. It is possible for the Question to be put to the House subsequently for a decision without further debate.

Ian Blackford: On a point of order, Mr Nuttall. Given that this debate was granted by the Backbench Business Committee, I understand that it is open to any Member to take this to the Committee and ask its members to push for a vote on the matter in the House. The Government must and will be held to account.

Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair): As Mr Blackford will be aware, that is not a point of order for me. He is aware of the rules relating to access to the Backbench Business Committee, as all Members are.

Could Members who are not taking part in the next debate leave quietly and quickly, so we can make progress?

Yazidi Former Sex Slaves: UK

11.1 am

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the treatment and care of Yazidi former sex slaves of Daesh in the UK.

As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I will begin by putting on the record my thanks to Members from all parties in both Houses of Parliament for the good will and support that they have shown in the days leading up to this debate. I also thank politicians from as far afield as Canada and Germany for the support they have shown me, as well as the many UK and Irish citizens who have contacted me in recent days to thank me for securing this debate and to urge me not to forget the plight of the Yazidi women and children who are currently being held in sexual enslavement by Daesh, particularly those in the city of Mosul, which we hope will be liberated soon.

My reason for seeking this debate is very simple. While every one of us earnestly hopes that in the coming weeks or months the liberation of Mosul will be complete and that Daesh will finally be driven from the city and out of Iraq once and for all, we also recognise that, as a result of that liberation, there will be hundreds of thousands of terrified people fleeing the city, and that a massive humanitarian support operation will be required to help to rebuild Mosul, allowing its citizens to return home and resume their lives in peace. I applaud the efforts being made by the UK Government, the Iraqi Government and the international community to prepare for that operation.

However, I will concentrate today on the fate of one small, specific group of people who are being held inside Mosul—3,000 or so Yazidi women and children. Since 2014, they have been raped, tortured, brutalised, bought, sold, held in sexual slavery and even murdered by Daesh. I plead with the UK Government not to allow this group, which is arguably one of the most abused and vulnerable groups of people on this earth, simply to be subsumed into the greater refugee crisis that is being predicted for northern Iraq in the coming months.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab) *rose*—

Brendan O'Hara: I will give way briefly to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. This subject is very important and I thank him for bringing it to Westminster Hall for consideration.

None of us fail to be moved by the violence and degradation that has been carried out against those who have been made sexual slaves. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we must address not only the victims' physical issues but their mental issues, including the trauma that they have suffered? The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development

should work together to ensure that they can help these Yazidi families, especially as they are in our hearts every day.

Brendan O'Hara: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I know that he is a great champion of minority communities in the middle east and I entirely accept what he says. I will develop that point later in my speech.

Graham Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. It is very timely that he has brought this subject to Westminster Hall. I was fortunate enough to be on the edge of Mosul last week and I saw six of the camps for internally displaced persons, which is why I have come here today to contribute to the debate.

However, I would like to ask the hon. Gentleman a question of fundamental importance. We all want to help those people who are victims of sexual slavery. The British Government and the Ministry of Defence have provided forty 50 calibre machine guns to the Peshmerga, to try to help to relieve the situation in Iraq. In addition to wanting to help the Yazidis, does he support the position of the British Government and the MOD in helping the Peshmerga?

Brendan O'Hara: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and yes I do. However, that is an entirely separate issue to the one I am considering today. While we support and will continue to support the military defeat of Daesh, I will concentrate today specifically on this tiny minority—the members of the Yazidi community—who are in desperate need of our help.

These innocent women and children—whose plight, in many ways, has become emblematic of the base depravity and callous barbarism of Daesh—need our help. These innocent women and children have witnessed the slaughter of their husbands, their sons and their brothers as Daesh has attempted genocide to try to erase all trace of the Yazidi community, and they need our help. These innocent women and children, who come from a very traditional and conservative religious community, and may well have been physically and psychologically irreparably damaged, need our help.

My motion today simply says to the Government: when Mosul is liberated and these innocent Yazidi women and children are free from the sexual enslavement of Daesh, please do not let them become lost in the throng of civilians fleeing Mosul towards the refugee camps. I ask the Government to recognise what these women and children have gone through; to see them as the unique case that they are. Together let us find a specific UK response that recognises the unspeakable atrocities that they have suffered, simply because of who they are and what they believe.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am sure that we are all aware that there are British citizens among the members of Daesh in Mosul and in Syria, and that they have committed crimes of violence against Yazidi women and other women. Will the hon. Gentleman join me—I am sure he will—in urging the Government to act as an agent of justice, collecting evidence so that justice may be brought against those British citizens?

Brendan O'Hara: I absolutely concur, and the full force of the law must be brought against any British citizen who is in any way involved in what has been happening within Iraq and Syria.

I am sure that everyone in Westminster Hall today is very well aware of the catalogue of atrocities carried out by Daesh against the Yazidi community. I will not go into too much detail, but it is worth reminding ourselves of the level of barbarism displayed by Daesh in its genocidal assault; some of it beggars belief. At the start of this year, I arranged for a young Yazidi woman to come to the UK to speak to this Parliament. Her name was Nadia Murad and the personal testimony that she gave that evening in February will live long with everyone who heard it.

Until August 2014, Nadia lived quietly in the village of Kocho with her mother, her brothers and her sisters. Then Daesh arrived, with the sole intention of completely destroying that small community through murder, rape and kidnap.

That evening in February, Nadia told us in her own words that

“They used rape as the means of destruction for Yazidi women and girls, ensuring these women will never return to a normal life.”

Days after Nadia was taken captive, she had to watch from a school building as six of her brothers were executed. Thereafter, she was taken to Mosul, where she says she was among thousands of women and children being held in the city. It was there that she was given to a Daesh fighter. She was repeatedly tortured and raped by the man, before one night, in desperation, she tried to escape. She was caught and punished. She said, about the man,

“he beat me up, forced me to undress, and put me in a room with six militants. They continued to commit crimes to my body until I became unconscious.”

Three months later, remarkably, and showing incredible courage, she attempted another escape. This time she was successful and is now resettled in Germany.

Graham Jones: As I said, I was in the camps last week. What the hon. Gentleman says is very powerful and true. Just how bad the situation with the Yazidis is cannot be overstated. When I asked the people who work in the camps, “How bad is this? What is the youngest person who has been raped and abused by Daesh?”, the answer that came back was, “A two-year-old”. That is the youngest person they have had in the camps who has been raped and sold as a sex slave. I just want to put that on the record, to reinforce the hon. Gentleman's point.

Brendan O'Hara: I genuinely thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It is unthinkable to any normal person what the community have had to suffer. I do not want to go into too much detail because I believe it is far too upsetting, but the detail is there for people to see. But what I will say in praise of Nadia Murad, who was a teenage girl at the time, is that rather than hiding away from the world she has devoted her life to highlighting the plight of the people of her community, pleading with the world not to turn its back on them.

Graham Jones: I want to add that it is not just women; young boys are being sold for sexual slavery as well, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will mention that.

Brendan O'Hara: Yes, absolutely. I take the hon. Gentleman's point.

Nadia Murad is, without doubt, one of the bravest and most courageous people I have ever met or, indeed, am likely ever to meet. I am absolutely delighted that her selfless dedication to the cause of her people has been recognised internationally. As well as being nominated for a Nobel peace prize, she was recently awarded the Václav Havel human rights prize by the Council of Europe, and the highly prestigious Andrei Sakharov award along with another young Yazidi girl, Lamiya Aji Bashar.

In September, I was given the enormous honour of being asked to go to the United Nations with Nadia, where she was made a UN goodwill ambassador for the victims of people trafficking by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. It was while I was in New York that I met a remarkable man—Dr Michael Blume from the State Government of Baden-Württemberg in Germany. Dr Blume runs what is known as the special quota programme, a scheme that has taken approximately 1,100 Yazidi women and their children to Germany so that they can receive specialist psychological treatment as well as get the much-needed physical and emotional support that will assist them in their recovery. Working alongside Dr Blume is Dr Jan Kizilhan, who this year was the joint winner of the Geneva summit's international women's rights award for what was described as his “extraordinary and inspiring” work in rescuing Yazidi and other women who had been enslaved, assaulted and sexually abused by Daesh.

Together, Drs Blume and Kizilhan have taken some of the most terribly damaged and vulnerable women and children out of northern Iraq and are currently providing them with treatment they could not have had if they had stayed there. As Dr Blume explained, part of the problem is that there are only 25 psychologists in the whole of northern Iraq and the vast majority of them are male and Muslim, meaning that a heavily traumatised Yazidi woman would not want to be treated by them.

Let me be clear that I am not demanding that the UK Government adopt the Baden-Württemberg model lock, stock and barrel, but what I am saying to the Government is, “Please look at what can be done by an Administration with the desire and willingness to make things happen”. The Minister-President of Baden-Württemberg, Mr Kretschmann, said when launching the scheme:

“This is an exercise in humanity, not in politics”.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): How we deal with the plight of these innocent Yazidi women and children speaks to our collective attitude to supporting the rights and safety of religious minorities. Does my hon. Friend agree that more than ever we must commit to helping these poor women and children and say that we will always stand with those who are so vulnerable?

Brendan O'Hara: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. We must commit to helping. We cannot stand by and leave it to others to take up what is a very challenging position.

I would like to point out briefly how the Baden-Württemberg scheme works. Dr Kizilhan, himself a German-Yazidi, and his team go to northern Iraq to identify women and children they believe they can best

[Brendan O'Hara]

help. The selection is based on the following criteria: first, whether the woman or girl has escaped from Daesh captivity; secondly, whether there is clear evidence of severe abuse and psychological damage from their period of captivity; and, thirdly, whether treatment in Germany will help, beyond what is available locally. If those three criteria are met, with the approval of the Kurdish Regional Government the women and her children are offered refuge and intensive treatment in Germany. As I said, there are currently 1,100 former Daesh sex slaves, both women and children, in the Baden-Württemberg area—the youngest is eight, the oldest is 55 and the average age is about 19.

In Germany, once the women and children are sufficiently settled in shelters, they receive not only specialist trauma counselling but German language lessons, and for those who are of school age it is compulsory for them to attend school. I understand from what I have read that the results of the programme are very encouraging. Indeed, some of the women now have jobs and are able rent their own apartments. Admittedly, recovery varies considerably, and for some it will take much longer, but Dr Blume told me that in Germany they have not had a single case of suicide, whereas in the camps in Iraq suicide among traumatised women is, tragically, fairly common.

This is a programme that works and I believe that the Government would do well to look at it very closely, to see how this country can directly help those innocent victims of Daesh. When we spoke in September in New York, Dr Blume was clear that any Government or Administration wishing to establish a programme to help these women and children would be welcome to avail themselves of the tried and tested model currently in place. Germany provides a safe haven for the women and children, and I can see absolutely no reason why the United Kingdom cannot also do that.

Graham Jones: My experiences last week showed me that a lot of the Yazidi women are traumatised because their children have been taken off them. All of a family's members are not located in the camps—they did not escape together. One of the psychological problems the women have is coming to terms with the fact that some of their children remained in Mosul and were sold on as sex slaves, and they do not know where they are. They do not want to be located further away from Mosul. They want to be located back there, so that they can go and find those children, who are being repeat sold on as sex slaves.

Brendan O'Hara: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. It comes down to choice. The women are given the choice to go to Germany; they are not forcibly taken there. Many women who apply do not go; likewise, many women who could go choose not to.

As I said at the start of my speech, it looks increasing likely that the people of Mosul, having been held captive by Daesh for more than two years, could be liberated within weeks. In the immediate aftermath, there will be an urgent need to care for civilians fleeing the fighting. In that maelstrom, we must ensure that the Yazidi women and children, who have been most wickedly and cruelly affected by Daesh, are given the care they urgently

require and deserve. If learning from what others have done is the best way to do it, I urge the Government to do that and to act quickly and decisively.

As I understand it—the Minister can confirm this—the Government's policy for victims of modern slavery recognises that up to two and a half years of discretionary leave to remain can be given precisely in such cases as that of the Yazidis. If that is the case, I urge her to move quickly to ensure that the United Kingdom becomes a safe haven for those victims.

Time is running out. I hope that the liberation of Mosul is near, but let us be honest: if we do not do something now, we will not do anything. If we do not do anything, history will be our judge, and I predict it will pass a particularly harsh judgment on us.

11.20 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): This has been a wide-ranging debate, and I will not have the opportunity to answer every point in these 10 minutes. I will ensure that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development respond to some of the specific questions. I thank the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) for securing this debate on an incredibly important subject. To hear about the plight of the Yazidi people at the hands of Daesh is utterly harrowing. We must do all we can to support the victims and defeat the vile perpetrators.

It is inspiring to hear about the case of Nadia Murad, who survived such appalling abuse and is now using her freedom to raise awareness about these terrible crimes. Nadia's Initiative is working to ensure that all marginalised communities subject to mass atrocities, sexual enslavement and human trafficking can have a global voice and get the support they need. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman invited Nadia to speak in Parliament earlier this year and attended her appointment in New York as the first United Nations goodwill ambassador for the dignity of survivors of human trafficking.

Tackling modern slavery, which includes human trafficking, is a top priority for this Government. The enforced sexual slavery of Yazidi women by Daesh is a particularly horrendous example, but sadly modern slavery is a global problem that exists all around the world, including our country. That is why just three weeks ago at the Vatican the Home Secretary announced a new modern slavery innovation fund of up to £11 million. It will be used to test innovative programmes to reduce the prevalence of modern slavery, particularly in those countries from which we see the greatest number of victims in the UK. That is also why we have announced a new child trafficking protection fund of up to £3 million, which will primarily fund work in the UK to support victims of child trafficking from aid-eligible countries.

Both funds are primarily seeking innovative ideas and are open to bids from organisations in the private, public and third sectors. Both funds form part of the £33.5-million UK aid programme that the Prime Minister announced in July. Working with our partners, that investment will help to tackle the root causes of slavery. It will support effective co-ordination among international partners and help to uncover and test new ways to tackle this horrendous crime.

Brendan O'Hara *rose—*

Sarah Newton: I will just make a bit more progress.

The hon. Gentleman talked about what more we could be doing right now for the several thousand women he identified who are in Mosul. While I totally agree with him, we need to be focused on defeating Daesh and bringing lasting peace to these countries. Clearly there is more that we need to do right now. Through our human rights and democracy fund, we are supporting projects on the ground in Mosul that are particularly targeted to support those members of the Yazidi community, whether male or female, who have been exposed to the most appalling sexual violence, as the hon. Gentleman said. That work is reaching several thousand people right now.

We have a long and proud tradition of bringing people into our country who seek refuge. There will be the possibility of the victims of this awful sexual exploitation coming to our country, but our priority is to support those communities on the ground now. As Members have said, people want to stay in their communities and their homes.

Brendan O'Hara *rose—*

Graham Jones *rose—*

Sarah Newton: I will give way once I have finished this point. We are providing psychiatric help and all sorts of other help on the ground to the people who have experienced these horrendous things.

Brendan O'Hara: Will the Minister accept the voice of experience that says that specialist treatment for the most traumatised victims of Daesh is not available on the ground and that there has to be something more than just saying, "We can deal with this problem in northern Iraq"? We have a responsibility to ensure that we give them the best, and the best is not in northern Iraq.

Sarah Newton: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to provide good psychological and other support for people in Mosul right now. My understanding is that the available DFID funding is being put in place. I am sure that more can be done. Because we have so little time this morning, I will ensure that the DFID Minister who is funding this work writes to the hon. Gentleman and other Members who have raised the issue this morning to ensure that we communicate exactly what is happening on the ground, including the amount of money, support and specialists we are sending over there to support local people in delivering these things.

Graham Jones: I concur with the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara). There are very few mental health services. There are also very few non-governmental organisations operating in the field of mental health services in northern Iraq, as he said. It is

a huge problem. The first thing the British Government could do to try to resolve the situation is ensure that the Yazidis are kept in a Yazidi camp, with other populations, such as Arabs—the Yazidis may fear them due to the mental issues and torment they have experienced—located in a different camp. At the moment, they are in the same camp, and that is proving exceedingly destructive. The first thing the British Government and the Minister could do is ensure that Yazidis are looked after in a camp of their own.

Sarah Newton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. We are part of a global coalition of 67 countries working hard to support the Iraqi Government as Mosul is liberated to ensure that civilians are protected and the humanitarian impact is minimised. We are also looking at long-term programmes of reconciliation and peace in the area. Good progress is being made, with several dozen settlements already set up.

I happened to visit a fantastic NGO in my constituency on Friday, called ShelterBox, where I met someone who is a frequent visitor to Iraq. ShelterBox is part of the team of British NGOs setting up new camps literally as we speak. Its intention is to provide support in a co-ordinated way. With people flooding out of Mosul, it wants to ensure that each of those communities is properly looked after, with all the issues about their different faith backgrounds and the levels of trauma they have faced properly taken into consideration. I heard at first hand from people who are in Iraq and are going to Iraq—I hope they have arrived safely today—about the work that is going on. The best thing I can do is ask the Secretary of State for International Development to provide the quantum of the activity that is going on. Members will appreciate that it is a fast-moving, dynamic situation, but we will ensure that they get the latest information about the number of people going there, the type of support and the specialist provision that has been called for that focuses on the Yazidis.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute asked another important question, which was about whether we would be doing everything we can to ensure that data and evidence are being gathered so that we can secure prosecutions. I reassure him that we are doing everything to collect and preserve evidence so that it can be used by judicial bodies to make a judgment about the atrocities that have been taking place. Any UK nationals who have gone there and are participating in those atrocities can be prosecuted for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide in our domestic courts. Our absolute priority is to do our best to support the victims now. It is important that we send out a clear message that people cannot act with impunity. The appalling atrocities will be dealt with and people will be brought to justice. I hope that reassures Members that we take this matter extremely seriously and are doing everything we can to help the victims of the appalling situation in Iraq.

Question put and agreed to.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Circular Economy: Leftover Paint

[MR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the circular economy for leftover paint.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I thank those Members who have turned up for the debate on this important issue. Originally, my near neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) was to lead the debate, but was unfortunately unable to do so at the last moment and I gladly offered to take over. Had he been able to be here, my hon. Friend, whom I have known for a long time, would have been a great champion on this issue, not least because he sponsored early-day motion 300 on the remanufacturing of paints in July last year. I am pleased that that early-day motion was tabled, as it shows the widespread support in Parliament for creating a circular economy for leftover waste paint.

To create a truly circular economy takes time and co-operation and needs the backing of the Government, largely because markets cannot deliver this new concept, a circular economy—although, when I think about it, I am not always sure it is that new—through business as usual. Government support is often required to get markets aligned and to make sure that we have developed those markets to maximise the potential of the concept. Although the Waste and Resources Action Programme has helped to make progress, much more remains to be done.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): As the hon. Lady may have heard before the start of the debate, the British Coatings Federation is headquartered in my constituency and, unsurprisingly, I have been nailed to the floor several times on this issue. She is right: what we need to do is get a critical mass of sales of recycled paint, as paint, to stimulate the market and move the issue in the public's mind. Government, particularly local government, should be able to do that. I was also interested in the briefing. As hon. Members can tell from my accent, I come from New Zealand, where, despite being an earthquake country—as people may have recognised—paint materials are being used to make a sort of porous concrete, although I hope not load-bearing.

Angela Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. He points to the importance of society recognising the win-win situation here. Nobody likes waste, and common sense tells us that if we can re-use it, we should. The ingenuity of modern science is such that it looks as though waste paint can be used to manufacture certain types of concrete. Work on that is ongoing. One only has to look at the paper industry to see what can be done if our minds are truly focused on maximising the potential from waste products.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned that the BCF is in his constituency. I have the world-famous Ronseal in my constituency, a very old company headquartered in Chapeltown. It is now officially Sherwin-Williams, but to local people it will always be Ronseal, a famous

name. I have to say this: it does exactly what it says on the tin. No doubt every hon. Member present has used one of its products at some point.

I am proud to have such a company in my constituency, not just because of its amazing slogan that is now part of the language, but because it is good in every way. It makes quality products. It has a workforce to be proud of, which is very loyal to its employer, and it has a real commitment to innovation. I had the pleasure of visiting the company once again the other week to be shown how it is changing its manufacturing processes to decrease waste wherever it possibly can, not just because that is good for the environment but because it is good for the company as well. It reduces cost and effectively improves productivity.

I do not think there will be any division here today on just how important the paint and coatings industry is to the British economy. The sector supports some 300,000 jobs and sells 675 million litres of coatings each year. If we do the maths, that works out at 21 tins of coatings sold each and every minute of the year. The sector directly contributes £180 billion per annum to the UK's GDP and is a great exporter to the rest of the world.

Why do I and the industry believe that a circular economy is important to the sector and to consumers? Before answering that, I will first set out the scale of the problem that we as a country face with leftover paint. The best way of putting it is to relate it to everyday experience, and I do not think Members of the House will be any different from the rest of society on this one.

There is no doubt that in our garages and sheds we all have unwanted and unused paints. The average UK household has six cans of leftover paint—probably more in my case, if I am honest—taking up space somewhere on the premises. Although some of that paint is no doubt kept for repair and touch-up work in the future, some 30% of people have responded to surveys saying they over-purchased the product in the first place. It is easy to see why that might happen. People overbuy paint because they want to buy from the same batch to get the same colour, which can lead to some of the oversupply problems. Through the project PaintCare, the industry is trying to develop tools to enable customers to be more precise about what they buy, which can only help the situation. I applaud that initiative.

The cost to local government of disposing of the 55 million litres of waste each year, or 71,500 tonnes, which is equivalent to the weight of a luxury cruise ship—albeit, I admit, a fairly small luxury cruise ship nowadays—is estimated at about £20.6 million. The problem is mainly left to local authorities to deal with through general waste or at their household recycling waste centres.

Currently, only 2% of paint or other coating is reused or remanufactured. Most of the remaining 98% is lost to us as a resource, principally because it is incinerated or ends up in landfill. The reasons for that are many and varied, but in the main it is due to the fact that two-thirds of household waste recycling centres do not accept liquid paint, because the disposal of liquid waste, including liquid paint, to landfill is banned in the UK, pursuant to EU requirements. The cost to local authorities of dealing with it is very high, which means they are effectively disincentivised and feel unable to accept liquid paint as part of their waste collection service. Householders

are therefore often left with no option but to dispose of paint in general waste. In other words, many residents throw away their waste paint in the normal waste collection, no doubt in black bags so that the bin men do not see it. By so doing, they pass on the problem to others to deal with.

PaintCare consumer research also indicates that 62% of households would use their household waste recycling centre to dispose of waste paint given the opportunity, which points to the importance of that network as a means of disposal for leftover paint. I therefore very much welcome the BCF PaintCare project. I pay tribute to the BCF—it is located in the constituency of the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford)—which has been assiduous in pursuing this project for the reason I outlined earlier: it is good for society, the environment and business, so it is a win-win all around.

The PaintCare project is attempting to turn an environmental threat into an opportunity by working towards a systematic approach to collecting and sorting waste paint. It will also make the remanufacturing of paint from waste products a more viable economic process, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. However, a remanufacturing industry needs a market—I will come to that point later. The project also involves the BCF working with local government to develop new processes to deal with the waste. At the same time, paint manufacturers are investing millions of pounds in projects to demonstrate how remanufacturing can be made more viable, with a view to developing a long-term market for it.

That innovative work is an excellent example of how a circular economy can work and secure both waste reduction and economic growth. I know that the Minister has a certain view of circular economies—at least, she said in a previous debate that she does not like the term. I also know that there can be a negative side to the concept of the circular economy, because it can be seen to trap economic growth within a certain space, but in my view it is a sophisticated way of describing a common-sense process that has the potential to make the circle bigger and encourage economic growth. There is a saying—I do not know whether it is special to the north of England—“Where there’s muck there’s money.”

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): Brass.

Angela Smith: Yes, where there’s muck there’s brass.

The important point is that, wherever possible, we should be generating economic growth from waste. It does not matter which term we use to describe the process by which we systematically embed this concept into our economy more generally; we should be committed to doing it. If we are to embed the circular economy on a national scale, it needs Government support. I therefore challenge the Minister to act and to commit to ensuring that 5% of all Government painting contracts use paint products containing a significant percentage of remanufactured content. That will help to stimulate a market for reused paint.

Paint manufacturers are doing their bit; the Government must now step up and play their part too. After all, many companies of all sizes are demonstrating their willingness to invest in this sector and in solutions. Several million pounds has already been invested in commercial ventures and in supporting social enterprises.

If the Government are really going to have an industrial strategy—I believe they are serious about doing that—let us ensure that that kind of commitment is at the heart of the process. Let us ensure that the concept of making the best possible use of our resources and recycling them over and over again is embedded within the industrial strategy.

As long as we have houses to paint, and as long as consumers have a desire to protect and look after their homes, we will need a painting industry, which means that we will also have an issue with leftover paint leaking into our environment or being disposed of in general waste. We need to tackle that issue, so creating a circular economy in paint surely makes perfect sense. Not only will it benefit the environment; it will help hard-pressed councils to reduce costs and create a new industry in the remanufacturing process. Like many things, however, Government assistance is needed to help that contribution to the circular economy to grow and prosper. I therefore ask the Minister to update the House on the Government’s progress in this area. Will she commit to a 5% Government target? It is interesting to note that California in the United States—one of the more progressive elements of that continent as it stands now—has made that kind of commitment to procurement, and I think there are initiatives along those lines in New Zealand. The UK should take the lead in Europe. If we are going to leave the European Union, let us at least make the most of where we are and show a bit of leadership on this issue.

What work is the Minister doing with the industry to develop the innovative approaches we need to deal with leftover paint? What will she do to help local government to develop capacities to deal with the mountain of waste paint that we consumers leave behind each year? I look forward to her response and the responses of the other Front Benchers.

2.46 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady—I never thought I would be saying it is a pleasure to speak in a debate about paint so early in my parliamentary career. I thank the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) for introducing the debate and for being an able substitute for our colleague, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman).

What we are discussing is a very simple concept, but given the statistics that the hon. Lady outlined, it is clear that action is needed. The fact that only 2% of leftover paint is recycled and reused at the moment is startling, especially given that we have a drive towards recycling in general and that people are more aware of the issue in a wider context. As she outlined, disposal to landfill results in £20.6 million of extra costs to taxpayers, although that comes through at local level.

Another issue is the widely adopted waste management strategy of the non-acceptance of liquid paint at recycling and waste disposal centres, which runs the risk that people may dump paint, although it does not give them an excuse to do so. I always get really irritated when the public complain that dumping has happened and blame it on the local council. It is not councils’ fault, but they can sometimes allow bad behaviour to happen. As the hon. Lady outlined, people may hide paint disposal in

[Alan Brown]

black bags in their general refuse, which defeats the purpose of disposal. Another risk is that people seem to think that sinks, drains and toilets are a fantastic disposal mechanism. They think that liquid paint can go down there, but unfortunately it still goes into the waste disposal system. It either goes through the sewage treatment works or, worse, there is a risk that it enters the river system, which presents another hidden risk of pollution.

We need to ensure that people recycle more and buy less. We need to work with retailers, because they actually encourage us to buy more. Many of the paints and coatings at DIY shops are three for two, so our human instincts kick in and we say, “Well, I’ll just buy the extra tin to get a saving, and if I’ve got any left over I’ll keep it for the future.” We have to educate the wider public and retailers.

I double-checked the waste management strategy at the local authority where I used to be a councillor, and it has fantastic recycling rates, but it confirmed to me that it is unfortunately now in the same position as many other local authorities and does not accept liquid paint. It had a tie-up with a charitable organisation, RePaint Scotland, which folded locally due to a lack of funding, so now there is no way to recycle paint. So my local authority, too, only takes paint to landfill, once dried out or filled with sand to continue the drying-out process. We need to consider how to support such charities. We are paying for paint to go to landfill anyway, so it would be much better to support the charities instead. In the long run, they can also make a difference by supporting other community organisations, vulnerable tenants, or people in new tenancies, and giving them pride in their homes.

Without wanting to allude to typical jokes about Scotsmen, I have an instinct for recycling and reuse. Last year, I was in the States with my in-laws—I was staying there because my wife is American—and they were selling a property, which had a basement full of leftover things, including years of leftover paint. However, we cleaned out the basement and actually used a lot of the paint to paint it, brightening it up, which made a huge difference and made the house sellable. That was my instinct: not to dispose of the paint, but to reuse it.

I discovered something else with the remnants of the leftover paint. As has been outlined, we were not able to dispose of liquid paint in waste disposal, so we had to dry it out. I can tell the House that sometimes drying out paint is not an easy job, believe it or not. It was really warm in the States, we had the paint tins sitting out open and we spent days literally watching paint dry—I had to get that pun in. So we can see how, if people without patience want to dispose of paint quickly, the risk is that they will choose the wrong behaviours.

I also want to touch on the wider circular economy. We buy into the principle of it, and I will mention a couple of things that the Scottish Government are doing for the wider circular economy. They are starting to lead the way, and I hope that the UK Government will follow suit. Earlier this year, the Scottish Government published “Making Things Last”, a strategy to do with developing a circular economy strategy for Scotland. They also launched a £70 million circular economy fund, which is aimed at stimulating innovation, productivity and investment.

At the time, David Palmer-Jones, the chief executive of Suez Environnement’s UK recycling and recovery business, suggested that the UK Government should take

“a leaf out of the Scottish administration’s book”,

by incorporating circular economy principles into business, energy and industrial policy, and I hope we will hear something from the Minister on that. I also agree with the proposed challenge to achieve 5% of Government contracts using recycled paint—I am interested to hear about that as well. I again commend the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge for introducing the debate.

2.52 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) for putting on the agenda this important issue of the circular economy—important to debate in itself, and important in the context of where leftover paint fits into that agenda. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) for her contribution, which outlined the importance we should give to some of these niche areas, because the principles behind them then obviously expand to so many other areas.

A startling amount of paint is left over—55 million litres a year, which I understand is equivalent to 20 Olympic swimming pools-worth of paint. That is a baffling thought. I want to put on record my thanks to PaintCare and the British Coatings Federation for their interest in the subject. They are really putting an aggressive agenda forward on how we draw the reuse of leftover paint into the circular economy, and on the opportunities before us, which we are debating this afternoon. There are real opportunities in the reuse and remanufacturing of paint.

I always think that any debate on the circular economy has to begin with the issue of consumption. As the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) said this afternoon, offers that encourage us to overbuy clearly move things in the wrong direction. We also know that there are issues around the size of containers, because they are so large. Price is not proportionate to volume in those containers, so we often buy the larger pot of paint, just in case we need it and, obviously, to see the same colour match, as opposed to buying smaller quantities, which is de-incentivised by the size of the containers. That in itself is an issue that the paint industry could look at. Again, I ask for the Minister’s comments on that, and perhaps on how the Government could help the paint industry look at how to reduce the amount of leftover paint. We know that this is an issue right across industry, and hits on so many other areas too.

We recognise the incredible work of PaintCare in trying to educate the public about the use and volume of paint. PaintCare has a calculator for use on its website, which I had a look at, to help customers make better choices about volumes of paint. We can all benefit from that, because it means a reduction in cost for ourselves as customers, and it provides very useful advice using the technology that is available.

There are other principles to look at, and this afternoon I want to focus on the opportunities we have to reuse and remanufacture paint. We all understand that too

much paint is being disposed of at landfill sites or going to incineration, which clearly has a detrimental impact on the environment. Therefore, it is really important that we ask why that is happening and what steps we have to take to move the agenda forward not just in generality, but by having targets year by year.

First, many have identified the fact that far too few household waste and recycling centres accept paint. There should be a universal approach, not a postcode lottery. Will the Minister therefore look at how she may support local authorities to ensure that all centres accept paint that has not been used? Having that postcode lottery is detrimental to the whole recycling business. We know how there are different rules from local authority to local authority. We press the Minister to move forward and to have a universal system, so that we may all understand what gets recycled and how we can dispose of things in the best way possible, and so that we have that link back to reuse and remanufacturing. Everything should be collected in the best way possible, and not put into landfill or sent for incineration.

I was struck by a meeting I had recently with Tetra Pak, the manufacturer, looking at how it disposes of its materials. It is a unique manufacturing sector, and it now recycles 100% of its products through a process that begins with universal collection. Tetra Pak itself, as an industry, started to put its own banks in place for waste products. It then worked increasingly with local authorities to incorporate Tetra Pak products into kerbside collection. It continued, where kerbside collection points were not being taken up by local authorities, by having Tetra Pak's own collection, so there is now 100% coverage of opportunity.

That seems to be a sensible way of introducing a universal approach, but clearly we want to see local authorities having the responsibility, with support from Government, to take waste products. There are of course issues about storage, but they can be addressed. What Tetra Pak does with the products, once collection is done, is carry out its own remanufacture of 100% of the materials—the aluminium, the plastics and the pulp of cardboard is remanufactured by Tetra Pak and put into other products. That just shows what can be done, and we urge the Minister to look at that.

The UK clearly needs to ensure that there is continued research into the chemical composition of paint and how it can be reused. We know that the paint that is currently remanufactured is mainly water-based paint, and therefore we need to look at the science behind paint to ensure that we can recycle an increasing amount of the material. That is an important part of this—putting money into research is so important in the whole waste sector. Likewise, there is an onus to deal with packaging for paint—the paint containers can often be appropriately recycled, but at the moment they themselves end up in landfill, which is a blight on our environment.

We have heard that only 1% of paint products are reused and 1% are remanufactured. Just 2% are reutilised; 98% go to waste. That is a very poor statistic, and having a 5% obligation on local authorities through their procurement processes would be a good way to start to move the agenda forward.

We also have to look at the opportunities for reusing paint. We have heard that there are lots of opportunities for local authorities to be in touch with local projects and voluntary sector organisations that could really

benefit from that as opposed to having to budget for paint. If such projects are properly managed, they could be scaled up nationally, not just focused on locally, to support voluntary organisations and other community interest companies to reuse paint.

I observed a couple of weeks ago a fresh pot of paint being used on external boarding around a building site and thought, "Actually, that could be reused or recycled paint that has been collected from elsewhere." We know that there is a lot of waste, and that adds to the on-costs of projects. Dialogue could therefore take place not just with the voluntary sector but with the construction trade, where there could be real opportunities in looking at how organisations could use remanufactured and leftover paint. If we are going to see an expansion in the construction industry, there is certainly an opportunity to reuse such products and ensure that they do not go to landfill.

People probably do not know much about remanufactured paint, but it is around 25% to 30% reused paint, to which new paint is added. There is an opportunity for remanufactured paint to be available on the market, perhaps at a reduced cost. That could address some issues around inequality and help to move paint on an industrial scale. There are opportunities that we can look at to address that issue.

I want to raise the issue of why paint ends up in incinerators or landfill at all. What I will say about paint applies to so many other products; this is about the whole approach that the Government need to take—whether it is about organic material or manufactured goods—to the whole issue of the circular economy, and why it is so important to mainstream the circular economy into manufacturing processes, everyday public sector use and the way we think and operate as a country.

Yesterday, in another debate, I mentioned the research that is being undertaken into how we mitigate sending anything whatever to landfill and move away from incineration. The techniques of chemically breaking down materials or autoclaving them with high-pressure steam enable waste products to be separated into raw products in different ways, so that a far higher proportion of the components of the original material can be put to alternative use. Those components can be put back into manufacturing processes or even put into energy production. I know that work is being undertaken on how paint can be reused in products such as load-bearing concrete, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), who I am sorry to see is no longer in his place. It is important that we look at all options for repurposing paint.

Investment in research on those processes is vital to prevent so much more from ending up in landfill. As I mentioned yesterday, the Biorenewables Development Centre just outside York, a project that has sprung from the University of York, is looking at how we can mitigate waste altogether. That is of huge interest to me, and I know that it will also interest the Minister, given her background. I urge her to look at the opportunities that are being created through the research that is being carried out and try to bring that agenda back into the mainstream.

Ahead of next week's autumn statement, I note the call from the British Coatings Federation and PaintCare for remanufactured paint not to be subject to VAT. Not only has VAT been paid previously on part of the

[*Rachael Maskell*]

product, but that would result in a narrowing of price margins between remanufactured paint and new paint. That seems a sensible incentive, and I trust that the Minister will raise that with the Treasury ahead of the autumn statement.

This has been an interesting debate. I have to say that I did not know we could debate the reuse of paint in such depth, but it springs into so many other agendas. I trust that the Minister will embrace the circular economy, as the Opposition do. I know that she has some issues with it, including its name, but it is being promoted heavily and the concepts are good and right for our future. It is right for our environment, after all. I therefore trust that she can move on from that position to ensure that we see the research and long-term funding that are needed.

I make one final plea in light of the uncertainty about the future and our relationship with Europe. Many of the research projects that are currently being carried out are funded by the EU and involve relationships that have been built between academia and industry across Europe. I would like to see the Minister get behind those projects and ensure not only that they continue, even if that takes us beyond 2020, but that those relationships are sustained into the future and that we will be able to take forward many more initiatives to ensure that our environment is safe.

3.5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I thank the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) for leading this debate on the circular economy for leftover paint. I am off script now, but I also want to thank my officials for doing their best to produce an interesting speech. This issue clearly matters, but let us try to spice it up a bit with some real candour.

We have all been through the ritual when doing DIY of going to B&Q, Homebase or whatever, doing the painting and ending up with half a tin of paint that simply is not used. Being the good people that we are, we do not like to throw anything away, because we may need to touch it up again later. That has led to the situation that has already been described. The average UK household has six cans of leftover paint stored in their home, and surveys show that people buy more than they need. I agree strongly with the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) that a lot of focus needs to be put on consumers thinking about what they actually need to paint the rooms that they are looking to decorate. I am afraid I do not think a website will particularly help with that, so there is a lot to be said for retailers and manufacturers being proactive in their discussions with customers and promotion of products.

Only a small proportion of leftover paint is remanufactured, despite the economic and environmental benefits that it is suggested that could deliver. The all-party sustainable resource group and the all-party parliamentary group on manufacturing have produced some interesting reports, including the “Triple Win” report, which the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) co-authored. PaintCare’s report “Creating a circular economy for leftover decorative paint in the

UK” was launched about a year ago. Both those reports offer suggestions about how to increase the opportunity for this market.

Like others, I do not really like the phrase “circular economy”—I am more into thinking about being resource efficient—but I accept that it has become the lingua franca. There are opportunities to make money; one person’s waste can be another person’s raw materials. It is important that we do our best to make best use of materials and resources and keep them in circulation for longer, wherever that makes sense for the environment, the economy and society as a whole. I would argue that the market and businesses already get that, especially in an age when precious resources are increasingly scarce and regulatory frameworks and fiscal challenges promote the reuse of products rather than the use of virgin raw materials.

I accept that if we are to achieve the transition to a circular economy, innovation is essential—not only the development of efficient new business models but the innovations to which the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) referred. I will bring to the attention of my hon. Friends in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy the research project and the institute that she mentioned, but she will be aware of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor’s comments about Horizon 2020 projects and his intention for the United Kingdom to remain engaged in those—and indeed our own funding streams—on the basis of value for money.

Rachael Maskell: One of the concerns from both academia and from where there is applied research is that 2020 is only just round the corner. People are now looking beyond 2020, to what their futures are. Although I heard what the Chancellor said, it is important that we look to the future and give further guarantees to ensure that projects continue.

Dr Coffey: I recognise what the hon. Lady says, but it is not unusual for a Government to talk about the spending envelope for which they have responsibility. I am not privy to what will be in the autumn statement next week or in future Budgets, but given that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has talked keenly about the need for future investment and having innovation as a key priority, I am sure the hon. Lady and I will both be listening with interest to what he has to say next week.

The hon. Lady also referred to VAT. She knows it goes against EU law to not charge VAT. A considerable battle was eloquently championed by her hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff), among others, to try to secure zero rates for certain products, but who knows what the future holds once we leave the EU or what the future of VAT will be?

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I apologise for not being here at the start of the debate, Mr Brady. I was making an application to the Backbench Business Committee for another debate.

Is the Minister aware of the report by WRAP—Waste and Resources Action Programme—which claims that by 2030 the circular economy sector could require an extra 205,000 jobs, but that if we embarked on what it calls a transformational scenario, whereby we are incredibly ambitious about it, it could create more than half a million jobs? Does she feel this is something that can

simply be left to the market or should we be far more proactive? It would also potentially offset about 18% of the future job losses expected in skilled employment, so it could be of real benefit.

Dr Coffey: The good news is that this Government have successfully created more jobs than the rest of the European Union put together over the last six years. I am not aware of the unemployment forecasts the hon. Lady is referring to. I have no doubt that new and efficient profit-making business models will create jobs. The Government are currently negotiating with the rest of the European Union on the circular economy package, so there is an element of the regulatory framework that may create incentives. However, Governments often create regulations that prevent the circular economy from functioning as effectively as the markets coming up with those opportunities. Often, regulation gets in the way.

In DEFRA we have been working constructively with organisations such as the British Coatings Federation on making better use of leftover paint, including identifying potential regulatory barriers to its recycling and remanufacture and how those might be overcome. We welcome the federation's voluntary initiative, PaintCare, which aims to promote the reuse or remanufacturing of about 20 million litres of paint that would otherwise end up being disposed of. It is good to see the paint industry seeking to resolve this waste problem through creative thinking and working in partnership.

As the PaintCare initiative has developed, DEFRA has been looking at the regulatory barriers. As part of that, the Environment Agency is providing detailed guidance to determine the parameters within which materials such as leftover paint can meet end-of-waste criteria, through its IsItWaste tool. The agency will continue to work with such programmes and businesses to facilitate the development of operations to encourage further reuse of valuable materials.

We are aware of the challenges with many household waste recycling centres not accepting paint for recycling. The PaintCare report points out that councils face various challenges with that. DEFRA is engaged in regular discussions with the Department for Communities and Local Government about providing effective household waste and recycling services, but it is for local authorities to decide the best disposal options for paint and other materials, based on what options and facilities are available locally and what the market generates.

Rachael Maskell: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Coffey: I was about to answer the hon. Lady's point about the postcode lottery and wanting a universal system. She gave the interesting example of how Tetra Pak, which is subject to elements of extended producer responsibility, came forward with its special process to try to make sure that as many Tetra Pak cartons as possible are collected. The EPR principle does not currently apply to paint, but perhaps it should. Instead of putting the onus on—dare I say it?—councils and central Government, perhaps the paint manufacturers themselves should think about how they start to ensure that paint is collected in every local authority area, which would then help them to reuse it in remanufacturing and similar.

On pricing, I was surprised when I suddenly detected some conservative notes from the hon. Member for York Central. She is absolutely right that one of the best ways to shift remanufactured paint would be for it to be cheaper than standard paint, and people can feel virtuous about it as well. I recognise that that is not as straightforward as it sounds, because the process needs investment and so on. Nevertheless, there are ways to encourage people to do things, often by pricing.

Through WRAP, guidance is provided to local authorities, including options for best practice when dealing with paint through reuse schemes such as Community RePaint, which I am sure hon. Members are aware of. It is a UK-wide network of more than 60 community-run paint reuse projects. However, the numbers are limited and quite a lot of them are concentrated in certain parts of the country. Perhaps we will want to consider not only encouraging manufacturers but good local schemes to come forward.

Rachael Maskell: I want to come back to the relationship between central Government and local authorities, because we clearly have a problem at the moment. Only 2% is reused or remanufactured, yet we know the potential in the industry is huge. What interventions will the Government make to support local authorities to be able to increase beyond the 2%?

Dr Coffey: To be candid, I am not sure that central Government are going to do anything apart from what I have already described in relation to the WRAP guidance and the Environment Agency. I personally believe we should try to reduce the amount of paint coming into the system in the first place. We need a better consumer understanding of how much paint is needed to paint a room. People should be able to take the room measurements to the shop and easily calculate how many litres are needed. That is the best way to prevent the problem in the first place.

Rachael Maskell: The circular economy is not an either/or strategy; it is both. It is about having active interventions to drive an agenda forward. We have a real problem with paint, as we have heard so eloquently put this afternoon. The Government standing back and saying they will make no further interventions means that local authorities will never have the means to move the agenda forward, so I press the Minister again about what interventions she is prepared to make to progress the circular economy around this issue.

Dr Coffey: I have already answered the hon. Lady. I have said what I was going to say. From what she has said, I take it she agrees that perhaps having extended producer responsibility on the paint industry might be the way to go. That is not currently being considered by the EU in the circular economy package, but perhaps we will consider it when we leave the EU. The concept of extended producer responsibility is about trying to reduce waste and recovering the cost of waste. The Government have supported a pilot paint reuse project in Cheshire. We have provided more than £30,000 in match funding through the innovation in waste prevention fund.

3.17 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.32 pm

On resuming—

Dr Coffey: It is a pleasure to resume the debate. I was pointing out how the Government have supported a pilot paint reuse project in Cheshire with more than £30,000 of match funding through the innovation and waste prevention fund. That project involves local charities and work with the local recycling centres and housing associations to increase paint donation and minimise disposal. The provision of clearly marked paint collection containers, the training of recycling centre staff to sort paint and advise the public, and an awareness-raising campaign led to 23.5 tonnes of paint being collected, which is more than double the original target of 11.4 tonnes. The reuse rate was also much higher than anticipated, with 78% of the donated paint—more than 18 tonnes—being reused and only 22% needing to be disposed of.

WRAP will publish a summary of the project and lessons learnt along with a video case study next year. That shows there was an opportunity for other people to use the leftover product. In that case it was housing associations, but in other cases it could be the construction trade, to which the hon. Member for York Central referred earlier.

A question was asked about Government procurement. Government buying standards do not currently include remanufactured paint, and DEFRA and other Departments do not purchase a great deal of paint directly; contractors who undertake work on the Government's behalf tend to purchase the paint. Overall, the Government's policy commitment is to buy sustainably, which is set out in "Greening Government Commitments", and Government procurement officers will take account of that when buying more sustainable and efficient products and getting suppliers to understand the need to reduce the impacts of the supply chain.

Industry-led initiatives such as PaintCare are important if we are to achieve the vision of a more resource-efficient circular economy.

Rachael Maskell: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Coffey: I will not.

We must make the best use of resources in a way that supports growth and protects the environment and human health, as has already been said. The industry's proactive action so far should be supported by an efficient and effective regulatory framework. That is why we are working with the industry to look at regulatory barriers. As I have already indicated, the Government are undertaking some projects through WRAP or the Environment Agency to try to stimulate admittedly modest changes, but I genuinely believe that the real impetus will come from the industry, whether that is about establishing a wider network for recovering paint or helping consumers generate less waste in the first place.

This has been an important debate. The hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge will be delighted to know that I have started to use the phrase "the circular economy". I recognise what she said: it is sometimes limiting. However, I assure her and others that businesses—especially high-value businesses—are clear that recycling and recovering materials is an important part of helping

the environment, and it makes sense commercially. To that end, I thank all those who participated in the debate.

3.35 pm

Angela Smith: This has been an interesting opportunity to air the issues relating to paint. The Minister seemed to indicate—I am sure she did not mean it this way—that this is a rather boring topic. The old saying is that something is "like watching paint dry", but most people use paint decoratively to make life better, not worse, to cheer themselves up and make their homes look brighter and nicer to live in. I therefore think that paint, and the paint and coverings industry, is an important part of our everyday lives and plays a significant part, too, in our economy. I contest the view that paint is a niche topic or that it is not really something that should engage the interests of parliamentarians.

The role of Government in our economy is increasingly clear—they have acknowledged it with the industrial strategy they have promised to develop—so I was surprised to an extent by the Minister's remarks, which, in summary, were focused on a hands-off approach to the development of the circular economy and the work being done by the coatings industry in particular. I recognise that the Minister supports the work being done by the industry and that many of the efforts of Government have been delivered through WRAP and the environment agency. Nevertheless, the feeling was, "It is up to the industry and consumers, and the industry working with consumers, to deliver what the industry is looking for."

Developing the remanufactured paint aspect of the industry is not just about supply and demand, pricing and markets. It is actually about confidence in the recycling process and the quality of what is produced. One of the reasons why the industry is keen to see Government take on a 5% target for procurement is that it would send a strong signal to consumers more generally, both commercial and domestic, that that paint is worth buying, worth using and serves a valuable purpose. I think that the Minister missed that point in her response.

I would also compare the Minister's response with what we heard from Ministers in what was the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which we now call the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy or BEIS—I cannot get my head around that acronym—in relation to other manufacturing processes. In the steel industry, the message about procurement has been heard, and procurement rules have been changed not just for steel but for the benefit of manufacturing more generally. On top of that, real efforts have been made to enable the steel industry to develop extra capacity to meet future demand. For instance, in relation to shale gas, there are projects, I believe supported by Government, to ensure that UK steel can—if possible—take advantage of that developing industry. It is really disappointing to hear that kind of commitment on the one hand, and the lack of commitment we have heard today on the other.

The point about jobs is moot. We do not really know whether any extra jobs will be created, in terms of recycling and remanufacturing paint, because we do not know whether the overall demand in the UK would increase. The Government believe that exporting—building

free, international trade—is our way out of Brexit and, even without Brexit, that would be the way to grow our economy. I actually believe that that is correct. On that basis, it is absolutely right that we should expand our economic activity. We should consider manufacturing more paint but, when doing so, we should maximise our resources. I do not accept the argument that there is not necessarily any job potential in that kind of initiative, because the more that we can produce and export, and the more that we can produce paint and coverings material sustainably, the better it is for UK plc.

On household waste recycling centres, I was particularly disappointed. When it comes to plastic, paper and glass, we no longer expect consumers or industry to take responsibility for the collection of those waste materials. That job is now with the local authorities, and local authorities up and down the country are working with the recycling industry—companies such as Viridor—to ensure that that material is collected properly, sorted and processed and then used for the purpose of making new materials.

Dr Coffey: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Smith: In a moment. On that basis, it is absolutely inexplicable to suggest that consumers or industry should take responsibility for waste materials. I take the point entirely, and I made it myself, that paint use should be reduced wherever possible, but there will always be a quantity of leftover paint. Different people paint in different ways, believe it or not. There will always be a market for collecting paint for recycling, and on that basis it is hard to understand why the Minister seems to think that dumping waste paint in general waste, which is actually illegal, is something for the industry to think about. I accept that it is the

consumers' responsibility, but we need to make it easier for consumers to dispose of their waste paint sustainably. I give way to the Minister.

Dr Coffey: I cannot intervene on a closing contribution.

Angela Smith: Okay. Finally, I will go back to procurement. The Minister admitted that buying sustainably is at the heart of the Government's procurement strategy. In that sense, it is really hard to understand why the Government cannot make a simple commitment to a 5% target. It is not a particularly ambitious target; it is a fairly sensible, modest target. If the Government sent out a clear signal to all of those public sector bodies that procure and use paint—prisons, schools, hospitals and so on—that they expect 5% of paint and coatings orders to be made up of remanufactured paint, that in itself would help to send out a signal to the market that this is a serious business that is capable of growing in the future.

I have to say that I have been very disappointed indeed with the Minister's response. I would have thought that an industry that is so important to UK plc—I gave the statistics earlier—is not being given more support by the Government. We have illustrated in the debate that it is doing everything it can itself to ensure that it becomes more sustainable, that it reduces waste and that it absolutely makes the most of the resources that are wasted at the end of the day. The Government are doing very little to support that industry, and in the context of Brexit, that is very disappointing indeed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the circular economy for leftover paint.

Red Wednesday Campaign

[ROBERT FLELLO *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Robert Flello (in the Chair): We have an extra 15 minutes for this debate, given the earlier suspension.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Red Wednesday campaign against religious persecution.

It is a pleasure to speak on this very important subject under your chairmanship, Mr Flello. All over the world, thousands of people are persecuted because of their faith, through false imprisonment, physical and mental torture, rape, slavery and, more subtly, discrimination in education and employment. For some, their faith can cost them their lives.

In partnership with the charity Aid to the Church in Need, on Wednesday 23 November Westminster abbey and Westminster cathedral will be lighting up their iconic buildings in red. Other faiths will join in that act of solidarity as a tribute to the people worldwide who are suffering injustice and risking their lives for their faith. I have written to Bolton Council to ask it to join this movement and light up Bolton's historic town hall in red on 23 November to promote solidarity with those who are suffering. Aid to the Church in Need is also encouraging smaller, more personal acts of recognition on that day that everyone can take part in—for example, simply wearing red for Red Wednesday or using the hashtag #RedWednesday on social media to raise awareness of the plight of others. Having greater awareness and understanding will help to ensure that we never take our freedoms for granted.

This year, I joined colleagues from both sides of the House on a visit to northern Iraq to meet persecuted Christians fleeing the terrorist group Islamic State. In Mosul and elsewhere, Christians have been systematically targeted and the noon symbol, the Arabic equivalent of the Latin N for Nasara or Nazarene, has been daubed on their homes. They have been given the grim choice of paying the jizya tax, converting to Islam or being put to death. Many chose to flee, especially when their money had run out and they could no longer pay the extortion. That persecution, along with that of the Yazidi and many Muslims, led last April to the debate, granted by the Backbench Business Committee and led by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), on recognition of the genocide perpetrated by ISIL in the region.

The Christian community in Iraq is one of the oldest in the world, dating back to the first century. There were thought to be 1.5 million Christians in Iraq before the invasion in 2003. However, that number is reported to have fallen now to about 230,000. Although many people have been persecuted and have fled the region, that figure shows the targeted nature of the persecution and, if it carries on in that direction, we will soon see the end of Christianity in much of the middle east.

We know that there is a civil war in Syria and Iraq, but sometimes the religious context is overlooked or obscured by more dramatic events. When we met His Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II, the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, he gave us a sense of how overlooked many people feel. He used the example of the protection given

to eight frogs in Australia. The pond in which the frogs lived was the subject of a huge local campaign, and a small fortune was spent to save them. He said that, in comparison, many Christians in Iraq felt ignored. Of course we have to protect our natural environment, but I am sure that many colleagues would be as concerned as I am about the scarcity of letters and emails on religious persecution compared with, say, badgers and bees.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on initiating this timely debate. Is he aware of the persecution faced by the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan? Since they faced criminalisation in 1984, hundreds of Ahmadis have been murdered in sectarian hate crimes. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government must continue dialogue with countries such as Pakistan to better promote religious tolerance?

Chris Green: I agree wholeheartedly with what the hon. Lady has said. It is so important now to reflect on the effects of increased globalisation. What goes on in one country, especially if endorsed by the Government—I am thinking of the Ahmadiyya community no longer being recognised as Muslim and being proscribed from describing themselves as such—is transmitted around the world as an idea and does not help to foster community relations here, so the hon. Lady makes a superb point.

In October 2016, Archbishop Sebastian Shaw of Lahore, Pakistan, told a Foreign and Commonwealth Office conference about his niece's first year at school. That Christian girl was required to memorise a lesson that she was a Muslim and all non-Muslims were infidels. He spoke about how some textbooks in Pakistan's schools foster prejudice against members of religious minorities, including Christians, Hindus, Jews and Sikhs.

Studies of the problem have been carried out both by the Catholic Church in Pakistan's National Commission for Justice and Peace and by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. The report, which covered the Punjab and Sindh provinces, noted more than 50 hate references against religious minorities in those provinces' textbooks. That is a very important example of religious persecution not always being about death and destruction. It can be found in all kinds of other measures, including ones that normalise the sense of persecution in schools. That kind of literature or information and that kind of understanding can be developed in schools and the wider community. I would be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister included in his reply what steps the Government are taking to stop that happening, particularly in nations that receive British aid to provide not just education but security in the region and beyond. I think that that is an aspect of what the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) was highlighting.

Oppression of religious communities is not always due to conflict between religions; it can also be part of state oppression, particularly in the remaining communist countries. North Korea is perhaps the most notorious, but we can also see the oppressive treatment of Christians in Cuba and of Muslim Uyghurs in western China.

Britain has her own problems with religious persecution, so it is not just an international problem. The case of Nissar Hussain from Bradford is a particularly shocking example and has gained widespread public attention only after 20 years of suffering following his conversion from Islam to Christianity. Violent punishment for apostasy has no place in any society.

Organisations such as Aid to the Church in Need and Christian Solidarity Worldwide have done a huge amount of work to improve the lives of the persecuted across the world, but we are looking for long-term solutions and, especially for the middle east, one that does not lead to the disappearance of Christianity or other religious groups.

I encourage colleagues and people watching the debate to take part in Red Wednesday next week, to read the report, which will be released on 24 November, or to write to their local council to turn a local monument red. The importance of raising awareness of this issue cannot be overstated.

I will conclude with the words of an Iraqi Christian.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this very important issue to Westminster Hall. The Red Wednesday campaign against religious persecution is very important. The hon. Gentleman and I were together on a trip to Iraq just in September, so we know very well about the persecution. It is good to remember such persecution on Red Wednesday, because this year 100,000 Christians will be killed because of their faith; 200 million Christians live in a persecuted neighbourhood; and 2 billion will face persecution and discrimination. If ever there was a good cause to follow and to recognise, Red Wednesday is it. Does the hon. Gentleman agree? I am sure he does, but let us see what he says.

Chris Green: I absolutely agree. The figures that the hon. Gentleman highlighted show how widespread concerns about persecution across the world are. On every continent, people of all religions suffer in so many different ways. I will conclude with the quotation, which sums up the way many Christians feel at the moment:

“The attacks on Christians continue and the world remains totally silent. It’s as if we’ve been swallowed up by the night.”

4.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): It is a pleasure to work under your chairmanship, Mr Ffello, and an honour to respond to this important debate by spelling out our approach to human rights. I am pleased to see hon. Members here in the Chamber who have gained a reputation for raising these matters and for holding the Executive to account to see what we can do to make sure we underline the values that are important to us in the United Kingdom.

After the last election, we had a rethink about how best to consolidate our international approach to promoting human rights and democracy abroad. Our manifesto commitment was:

“We will stand up for the freedom of people of all religions—and non-religious people—to practise their beliefs in peace and safety”.

Before the election, we had eight themes, which I think was a bit too cumbersome. They have been narrowed down to three core pillars. They are, first, the values,

including democracy, the rule of law, freedom of the media, freedom of religion or belief and women’s rights; secondly, the rules-based international system, supporting human rights as one of the UN’s three pillars that help to provide a nominative framework for the prevention of conflict and instability; and finally, human rights for a stable world—so, managing the risks of UK engagement in countries with poor human rights records, which includes our overseas security and justice assistance framework and contributing to tackling extremism.

4.12 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

4.37 pm

On resuming—

Mr Ellwood: Before we were interrupted by the Divisions, I was explaining that in this House we often ask ourselves what is the value of international aid. We can contextualise the support we give and the trade we do with other countries in terms of the influence we derive when we have questions about their democratic values, concerns about how they follow the rules-based international system or, indeed, worries about whether they are following human rights. I make it clear that, where we can, our support and financial assistance go to non-governmental organisations, rather than directly to Governments. When we provide support to Governments directly, we try to ensure that they abide by our shared commitments and standards.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): When the Minister has discussions about international trade and aid in relation to human rights, for example, what sort of response does he get? More importantly, what is the role of the United Nations? Does it make much progress?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman speaks of the United Nations as if it were another organisation. We are part of the United Nations. We affect the approach of the United Nations on such matters. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, we are concerned not only about security matters but about improving standards of life, democratic values, the rule of law and humanitarian rights across the world. We want to use the UN as a vehicle through which we can leverage change.

Let us look at our own history. Without going into detail, it took us time before monarchs did not have their head removed, before people were not sent up chimneys and before the slave trade was abolished. I am not making an excuse for not pushing such things but, ultimately, we have to effect cultural change at a pace that works, rather than galvanising the opposite message from the one we want to push.

Jim Shannon: The Minister knows, as he said earlier, that I am one of those who have spoken out many times in this House on behalf of Christians. The all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief, which I chair, speaks out for those of the Christian religion, those of other religions and those of no religion. When it comes to human rights, we want Muslims to speak up for Christians and Christians to

[Jim Shannon]

speaking up for Muslims. Has the Minister seen much evidence of that taking place around the world, when he has had an opportunity to speak to other countries?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to stress that. We want believers and non-believers to allow freedom of belief. That is what we are pursuing, and it is exactly Britain's approach when we have dialogues with other countries. The fact that we have an economic relationship with other countries allows us to have necessary frank conversations, sometimes behind closed doors; I appreciate that many hon. Members might feel that they do not hear enough of what we are saying and what pace of change we expect from other countries as they raise their game. A great example, which I know the hon. Gentleman has raised on many occasions, is the use of the death penalty. We abhor it, we ourselves have moved through it and we encourage other countries that use the death penalty to meet EU guidelines and ultimately to remove it.

If there are no further interventions, I will move on. I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on securing this important debate. It is an opportunity to confirm the Government's commitment to the right to freedom of religion or belief. It is understandable that his speech focused on the harrowing situation faced by Christians in parts of the middle east. I certainly share his concern. As I mentioned earlier, this Government have a manifesto commitment to support freedom of religion or belief for people of all religions and non-religious people, which is exactly the point raised by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). In particular, we are working internationally to deliver our commitment for Christians in the middle east.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): The Minister will recall the debate held on 20 April this year, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) referred and to which the Minister responded. The House unanimously called on the Government to make an immediate referral to the UN Security Council, with a view to conferring jurisdiction on the International Criminal Court so that perpetrators could be brought to justice. I was pleased that the Minister said in that debate that the Government were

“supporting the gathering and preservation of evidence that could in future be used in a court to hold Daesh to account”

and

“will do everything we can to help gather evidence that could be used by the judicial bodies”.—[*Official Report*, 20 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 996.]

I have two questions for the Minister. How have the Government been facilitating the gathering and preservation of evidence of crimes, as they promised, and what steps are they taking to ensure that members of the global coalition, united to defeat Daesh, are also gathering and preserving such evidence? Given that Daesh is now rapidly losing ground in Syria and Iraq, and with the battle of Mosul raging, does he not agree that the Government should make clear how they intend to deal with the perpetrators when they are caught, and should do so with a sense of urgency?

Mr Ellwood: I remember the debate well. I made it clear—I think that I was the first Minister to do so—that I believe that war crimes have been committed in Iraq and Syria and that crimes against humanity have been committed by Daesh and other extremists in that location, but it is not my opinion or the Government's opinion that counts, because it is not a political judgment. It must be a legal judgment, and there is a process that must be approved. We cannot get a UN Security Council resolution passed until the evidence is gathered. There is a mechanism to get to the International Criminal Court, and it includes the collection and collation of evidence, as my hon. Friend highlighted.

I will not go into too much detail, other than to say that gathering the evidence, by its nature, requires people to expose themselves to dangerous circumstances. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has said on a number of occasions, the wheels of justice grind slowly, but they grind fine. As we saw in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia, it can take many years until those people end up in The Hague, but they are held to account. That is why the Foreign Secretary, when he visited Washington DC in July, made the case and encouraged others to support his view that we must not allow the issue to be missed. We must collect the evidence. If I may, I will speak to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) outside the Chamber and familiarise her with a bit more of the detail, but I hope that she understands the sensitivities of spelling out too much, simply because of the dangers entailed.

Fiona Bruce: I welcome that, because evidence has come to my attention that several prominent leaders of Daesh are individuals in respect of whom the ICC has the ability to exercise its jurisdiction now, due to their nationality. I would be grateful if the Minister met with me to discuss it further.

Mr Ellwood: I would be delighted to do so. I simply make the case that the Foreign Secretary is extremely passionate about the issue. Indeed, it came from the voices in the Chamber saying, “What is Britain doing to hold these perpetrators to account?” We must work with the Iraqi Government, UN organisations and other members of the international community to deliver justice and promote the rights of all minorities, as well as to hold perpetrators to account.

It is also worth mentioning that we are working further afield than the middle east, as well. In Pakistan, we regularly raise concerns about the freedom of religion or belief. In March 2016, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, the then Foreign Secretary, raised the importance of safeguarding the rights of all minorities, including religious minorities. In Nigeria, we are providing a substantial package of intelligence, military development and humanitarian support in the fight against Boko Haram, including training and advice on counter-insurgency, and £5 million in support for a regional military taskforce.

Promoting religious tolerance is critical to reconciliation and securing a lasting peace in any combat area, but particularly in Syria and Iraq. That is why we developed the Magna Carta fund, which is being used to support several projects to promote freedom of religion or belief. In Iraq, we have funded a series of grassroots meetings between religious leaders of all faiths to promote religious

tolerance. Over the past year, we have supported a project promoting legal and social protection for freedom of religion or belief in Iraq. The project aims to prevent intolerance and violence towards religious communities by inspiring key leaders in Iraqi society to become defenders of freedom of religion or belief.

Our commitment to promoting freedom of religion or belief is not confined to the middle east but extends right across the piece. It is integral to our diplomatic network in promoting fundamental human rights around the globe through our conversations with host Governments and other influential actors such as faith leaders, and through our project work and organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union and the OSCE.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Is the promotion of religious tolerance in Iraq being done from primary school age? I have seen some documentaries in which certain charities run schools to promote better understanding between different religions. Has there been much success with that?

Mr Ellwood: Yes. I can write to the hon. Gentleman with more detail, but he is absolutely right that that is the age at which messages about understanding, reconciliation and recognition of the various pressures and influences are most received. Our work involves primary and secondary schools as well.

The foreign and commonwealth conference on this matter, which took place last month, was a ground-breaking conference on how protecting freedom of religion or belief can help combat violent extremism by helping make societies more inclusive and respectful of religious diversity. The conference brought together a range of experts and high-profile speakers. All participants, including many Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff, shared and benefited from practical and innovative ideas to advance the cause. We have also updated and reprinted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's "Freedom of Religion or Belief" toolkit, which provides officers with guidelines on how to identify violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief and what to do about them, and with further sources of information for those who wish to examine the subject in more depth.

In conclusion, the Government will continue to fight for the freedom of religion or belief internationally. We do so not only because it is right and is enshrined in the universal declaration of human rights and in article 18 of the international covenant on civil and political rights but because extending freedom of religion or belief to more countries and more societies helps to make the world safer and more prosperous, which is in all our interests. We recognise that progress requires a response from the whole of society, so we welcome the opportunity to work with this Parliament and other Parliaments, with religious groups and with civil society partners such as Aid to the Church in Need, Open Doors and Christian Solidarity Worldwide. We believe that freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right and we will continue towards the ambitious goal of ensuring that it is enjoyed by everyone everywhere.

Question put and agreed to.

Release of Spectrum Band

4.51 pm

Calum Kerr (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered release of the 700 MHz spectrum band for mobile data in 2020.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Ffello. I vote that we also give you control over air conditioning. I hope that this afternoon we can provide a beacon of hope for people with poor connectivity in rural areas, but that beacon might be my face after standing here talking for more than 10 minutes.

Robert Ffello (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman reminds me to say that if right hon. and hon. Members wish to remove their jackets, they may do so.

Calum Kerr: Definitely my favourite Chair.

There can be little doubt that mobile connectivity is changing every aspect of our lives. Even in Westminster, this new way of doing things has had an impact—we need only look around this Chamber to see that. Someone somewhere in the country might be live streaming this very debate on a mobile device—I would not want to bet on that, but the appearance of the former Minister, the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), may enhance the chances of it.

We can all agree on the basic truth that mobile connectivity, which was once a luxury, has become a fundamental part of the way we now live. I am sure I am not alone in being able to remember having to drive around looking for a phone box when my pager went off—I was just out of school at the time—but we now constantly carry around devices that far exceed the functionality and processing power of the desktop computers that not so long ago seemed to represent the cutting edge of what digital technology could offer.

I want to use this debate to underline the ever growing importance of mobile connectivity and to consider the specific potential of the release of the 700 MHz spectrum band, which if correctly managed could make a major contribution to a society that is more connected than ever before. Using 700 MHz mobile data could provide coverage over a wider geographical area, and the signal could effectively penetrate buildings, so it could play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between where the UK is now and the next wave of connectivity-driven innovation with the emergence of 5G. As we move towards the 5G world, we will require a mix of short-range high-frequency spectrum bands, backed up by long-range low-frequency bands such as 700 MHz.

I want the debate to demonstrate that the type of digital infrastructure that we choose to create involves fundamentally political decisions. Although this place may not be renowned for moving with the times, it must be recognised that we need frequent, better-quality debates in Parliament about connectivity. With that in mind, I want us to consider how other European countries are tackling the connectivity challenge, and how different political choices have been made on spectrum and different outcomes achieved, but let us first consider the reality today.

We already know that a major shift in consumer behaviour means that many people are switching to mobile devices for access to the internet. In 2016, 66% of

[Calum Kerr]

adults used their mobile phones to go online, up from 61% in 2015. Some 86% of UK mobile customers currently use a smartphone. Perhaps most significantly, 92% of under-35s now view their smartphone as their primary device for accessing the internet. We can also point to a growing trend of favouring mobile data over public wi-fi. Research has found that 72% of people prefer to use their device's 3G or 4G connection to access the internet even when they are in a public space. That demonstrates that behaviour is already straining at the leash when it comes to—

4.56 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

5.6 pm

On resuming—

Robert Ffello (in the Chair): The debate may now continue until 6.15 pm.

Calum Kerr: I return to the theme of the importance of mobile connectivity. I was about to mention the transformative potential of what is generally known as the internet of things, which we see on the horizon. It is becoming more of a reality day by day, and will involve a tremendous number of devices being hooked up and the aggregate power of the internet really bearing fruit. With that, the demand for mobile connectivity is only going to increase.

Mobile data will underpin the use of new technologies such as precision farming, driverless cars, remote healthcare and smart energy grids. We are already seeing the cutting edge of the process coming into play with the increasing use of immersive augmented reality apps such as Pokémon Go, which is the reason why my phone is currently broken—thanks to my two sons, it went for an 8 km walk to hatch an egg, but that is a different story. At the same time, media companies are increasingly adapting their content for mobile users, and technology is constantly pushing the parameters of what mobile devices are capable of.

It is clear that we know why we want to transform mobile data connectivity, but I want to focus on how we can make that change happen. We know that the Government agree that connectivity represents a fourth utility, but they need to match the rhetoric with unambiguous action. I put it to them that we have moved far beyond the stage at which spectrum licensing could be seen as a cash cow for the treasury. Previously, the 3G spectrum auction raised about £22 billion, while the 4G licence auction raised £2.34 billion. In contrast, other countries sought to raise much less, in return for operators delivering greater coverage.

Spectrum should be considered in terms of the wider economic and social benefits it can provide, particularly when considering the ongoing challenge of rural connectivity. The UK's approach to the mobile sector has left more than a quarter of Scotland's landmass without any voice coverage, and nearly half of it without any data coverage. Across the mobile networks, indoor coverage drops to 31% in rural areas, compared with 91% in urban areas. Those are exactly the kind of disparities that 700 MHz could be pivotal in redressing.

The problems currently facing rural mobile customers are well documented, and will be particularly familiar to rural MPs. Unless the Government tackle the problems at the outset, when they are setting the terms for spectrum licences, they will end up having to apply retrospective sticking-plaster solutions to problems ultimately of their own making. We saw that with measures such as the mobile infrastructure project, which delivered only one tenth of the 600 potential mast sites identified in its original plan.

Although we can recognise the pragmatism behind such projects and the current positive direction of travel on getting more from existing licences, the UK should be moving much further, much faster on rural connectivity. As new licences for spectrum become available, let us get things right from the outset. There is an historic opportunity to redress centuries of rural isolation and exclusion by making mobile a truly universal service, which means access to the internet on any device, any time, anywhere.

That is why we need a better picture of the Government's thinking on spectrum policy at this crucial moment. One solution that was proposed recently—it has received a great deal of coverage, but in my view that coverage was unwarranted—is so-called national roaming. That may be attractive on the surface but it is fundamentally flawed, because on its own it will not encourage mobile network operators to improve coverage. In fact, it could end up acting as a disincentive to the improvement of coverage.

What the proposal for “national roaming” demonstrates is the basic difficulty we face when it comes to making the mobile marketplace work. Currently, mobile network operators lack the significant profit motive to roll out infrastructure and improve rural coverage. A network operator's revenue comes from subscriptions and the consumption of content. So from a purely market-driven perspective, those companies have little incentive to invest in comprehensive rural infrastructure.

To get the best outcome from 700 MHz, we can learn a lot by looking at licensing models that are already in use throughout Europe. In Germany, coverage obligations for 700 MHz state that providers must get broadband coverage to at least 98% of households nationwide and at least 97% of households in each federal state. Indeed, across Europe we see far more comprehensive 4G coverage on offer than is the case here. If Swedish network operators can offer 99% population coverage for 4G, in a country that has a larger landmass and a lower population density than the UK, why are we lagging so far behind?

How competition works in practice is also key. The UK has gone from having an equitable distribution of spectrum holdings to having the worst spectrum imbalance in the G20 countries. With half of UK operators now constrained by small spectrum holdings, the competitive pressure that kept prices in the mobile market low is lessening. Will the Government consider a cap on spectrum allocation to redress that imbalance, and will they consider having a fundamental review, which will be needed anyway when 5G comes?

We also need to consider additional mechanisms that target market failure in areas of low population density. As with broadband, getting mobile connectivity to households that are very hard to reach will be a challenge, but not an insurmountable one. In Germany, the 800 MHz

licence involved an “outside to in” approach across four stages, requiring operators to provide 90% coverage in smaller towns before moving on to the next stage. Will the Government consider using such a model?

One nation—one small nation—that has made strong is the Faroe Islands. With challenging topography and a population density of 91 per square mile, it now has 100% population coverage and 98% geographic coverage for 2G and 3G, including 100% coverage on roads, even in tunnels, and in a radius of about 100 kilometres in the seas around the islands. The Faroese are currently in the process of rolling out 4G, which is expected to achieve a similar level of coverage to 2G and 3G. Faroese Telecom has shown that that is the way forward, and it is keen to offer solutions for rural Scotland and engage with the challenges we face, which are similar to those it has already faced. I believe that the Minister or his officials may already have a meeting coming up with its representatives.

Such willingness only underlines the case, which I know Ofcom recognises, for a “use it or share it” solution in rural areas. Such a policy is a sensible and workable alternative to a step such as national roaming. As groups such as Faroese Telecom show, there are organisations willing to step forward to fill any gap. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s views on such a policy, which has already been put in place in other countries, including the US.

If digital connectivity is now considered a utility, a radical shift towards comprehensive mobile data coverage is required. Will the Government commit to looking at the examples I have cited as they consider the criteria for new licensees? Will the Minister also consider setting new targets of 95% landmass coverage and 99% population coverage indoors, not only for voice but for data?

I want the debate around spectrum policy to acknowledge that where there is market failure, it is incumbent on Ofcom to intervene to address the situation. Spectrum is a public asset and we must do all we can to make sure that it gets used in the public interest where possible.

There is a compelling case for fresh thinking and a longer-term view of mobile connectivity from the Government. They ought to accelerate the move away from the traditional revenue-focused approach and instead consider this asset in a holistic manner factoring in all the social and economic benefits that comprehensive mobile connectivity can provide.

Before I finish, I will explain the need for universal connectivity in terms that are closer to home. I want visitors to my constituency to enjoy a rail service with world-class connectivity when they travel from Edinburgh down the Borders railway, which was recently recognised as the best tourism project in the UK. I want visitors who opt instead to take in the stunning coastal scenery along the Berwickshire coast to get constant access to mobile data throughout their visit. On arrival in my constituency, I want all visitors to have constant access to online information about local businesses and landmarks. I want them to visit hotels and restaurants that can receive electronic payments. When they take to the hills around Liddesdale, I want them to be connected when they visit remote but remarkable sites such as the imposing Hermitage castle, so that they can make use of an immersive app to enhance their experience. I want people in every corner of these islands to have the

option to experience the benefits that connectivity brings, and I want them to be able to do so on any device, any time, anywhere.

5.17 pm

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr) on securing this important debate.

As the hon. Gentleman has already mentioned, there are obviously many benefits to releasing the 700 MHz band, but we should not lose sight of the fact that there are some current users of the spectrum who will be negatively affected. Chief among them are the UK’s programme making and special events, or PMSE, sector. It is the backbone of our creative industries, using wireless radio equipment such as microphones and in-ear monitors to stage concerts, festivals, west end musicals, sporting events and a whole host of other key cultural events in the United Kingdom.

I recently met the British Entertainment Industry Radio Group, or BEIRG, the industry body that represents the sector. It is profoundly concerned that unless adequate mitigating steps are taken, the industry faces severe problems as a result of the 700 MHz release. Most notably, without the allocation of adequate replacement spectrum for the sector’s use, standards of production will fall, as more wireless devices are forced to operate in a much smaller amount of spectrum, increasing the risk of interference.

Ofcom has allocated the 960-1164 MHz band, for which the sector is grateful, but no other Administration or regulator in the world has shown any intention of following Ofcom’s lead and allocating this band for PMSE use. That means that the market for new equipment to operate in the new spectrum will be UK-only, which means it is too small for any serious manufacturer of wireless equipment to make the business case for, or to commit to making new products for. PMSE users therefore face being forced to vacate the 700 MHz band in quarter 2 of 2020, without being able to use the new spectrum because no equipment exists that can operate within it. With lead times on equipment of around three years for most manufacturers, the UK faces a situation whereby spectrum-intensive events, such as TV broadcasts, festivals and west end theatre, will be unable to continue offering the world-leading production values that consumers have come to expect.

Calum Kerr: The hon. Gentleman is making an important contribution. I could not possibly have got every aspect of the matter into my own speech without talking for far too long, so I welcome what he is highlighting. Does he agree that there needs to be—there already is an element of this—a fundamental review of all parts of spectrum and a strategy for not just tomorrow but further into the future, to address those kinds of concerns, as well as looking at existing allocation across all media areas?

Nigel Huddleston: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. We need to be careful about the unintended consequences of some of these changes. Some of those consequences can, with careful consideration, be anticipated; others will probably come in time, but that needs to be carefully reviewed and monitored.

[Nigel Huddleston]

The PMSE sector comprises many small operators, which are not all in the robust financial circumstances we would like them to be. Without assistance, they face some difficult times in the future. The Government and Ofcom's recent announcement that a compensation scheme will be introduced is hugely welcome, and I thank the Minister for that. Although the importance of increasing mobile phone and broadband coverage is clear for all to see, we must ensure that unintended consequences do not have a negative impact on our hugely successful creative sector and that PMSE operators are able to continue their world-class work. I would be grateful, therefore, to hear from the Minister whether the Government have any further plans to assist the PMSE sector with the transition.

5.21 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Ffello. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr) on securing this important debate. I am sure that the tens of millions of people who have heard about it will be streaming it right now on their mobile phones, to get Members' words of wisdom.

An important set of points have been made. On the point made by the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), there is a clear need for further debate and scrutiny, and for far more attention than is given to the subject at the moment. That was laid bare in the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk, who highlighted a number of issues that are important—nay, essential—to ensuring a fair distribution of the opportunities provided by the technology in the future. He mentioned the need for rural coverage to take priority—for an outside-in approach to be applied. For far too long, people in rural or less commercial areas have found themselves stuck at the back of a queue, unable ever to get to the front because they are always overtaken by a commercial imperative. The situation in the Borders is, I think, similar to that in my own area, where some 432 miles of road are not covered by 2G, let alone 3G or 4G signals. Those issues must seriously be addressed.

I commend my hon. Friend for his suggestion about the approach taken by Germany. He pointed out that not only is there a requirement there to get to 90% coverage in smaller towns before widening access, but they managed to raise €5 billion through the licensing process, so that approach can be taken and at the same time a return made for the public purse.

Calum Kerr: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is also noteworthy that in Germany they have mandated minimum data speeds, with a minimum average of 10 megabits? Coincidentally, our own measly universal service obligation for fixed wired broadband stands at that same speed.

Drew Hendry: My hon. Friend shows just how on top of his brief he is by pointing out that anomaly and the lack of ambition we often see when it comes to broadband and wireless access.

That brings me on to the need to accelerate the process. Although it is important that there is further debate and that the considerations for manufacturers

and those using the facility at the moment need to be carefully taken into account—I think we would all support that—we should not allow that to hold up the development of something that should be giving us not only a commercial edge, but a social edge for people across the whole UK.

There is rural-proofing and the need to accelerate, and I also completely agree with the “use it or share it” approach. There needs to be an acceptance that we must access all the technology as productively as possible. When we consider ambition, it is important to remember that in the United States they freed up the spectrum in 2008. That is how far behind we are. The UK already lags behind countries such as Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden, which have all committed to accelerate the programme. There are important debates to be held, but there is also a need to pick up the pace—I hope the Minister will indicate how that will be achieved—to ensure that we can take advantage of the benefits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk also mentioned the need to be ready for the internet of things. That is not something we need to be ready for; it is being deployed here and now, and nowhere is it more important to rural areas than in mobile healthcare. There is an opportunity to give people the chance to improve and restore their health and get the kind of social benefit from the technology that at the moment they cannot access. Until the spectrum issues are solved, people will not, however, be able to do that.

I conclude by repeating one of my hon. Friend's lines that we should all take away: everyone—the people in every corner of these islands—should be getting the best and fastest possible access and the best possible advantage from new technology.

5.26 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Ffello. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr), who I congratulate on securing this important debate. He has considerable experience and expertise in the area and brings a wealth of knowledge to the debate and to the House in general. He clearly set out what we can achieve if we get this right from the outset, tackling the considerable disparities across the UK.

The hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) clearly laid out the unintended consequences that could arise from the changes, particularly for our creative industries and the PMSE sector. He made clear the need to determine from the outset exactly how spectrum licensing is to be used and how to mitigate any possible issues. I echo many of the comments made, some of which I will come on to.

The auctioning of an electromagnetic frequency for public use may not set pulses racing or minds whirring, but it is the quality of the debate and not the quantity of people here today that shows how important this is. It is a matter of considerable significance for the public, our businesses and our country's economy. In fact, it is one of the public sector's most significant assets. How it is auctioned and regulated and, crucially, how the public stand to benefit from any auction are issues of critical importance to the expansion and growth of the digital

economy and the economy at large. That is why we have been pushing the Government to be so much more ambitious in this crucial area. The sector is crying out for more clarity, vision and ambition.

In an always-on world, where the demand for mobile data is increasing at almost the same rate as digital entrepreneurs can think of novel ways to use it, the provision of mobile data, both geographically and in terms of residences and businesses covered, is crucial. It should absolutely be seen as a utility in this day and age, and we should, as far as practically possible, do everything in our power to achieve near-universal coverage, regardless of any vested interests that may try to hold back progress, and to overcome the flaws and market failures that hold back investment in infrastructure.

Recent analysis by Ofcom made the future trajectory of data usage clear. It suggested that between 2015 and 2030 demand will increase forty-fivefold. Since March 2011, data traffic has increased by 710%. It is not just usage, but the way in which data are used that is transforming our economy. The next decade will see only more change—change that we cannot currently imagine.

Let us look at some recent examples from around the country and the globe. In Germany, the annual harvest is on the cusp of a digital revolution, with sensors monitoring everything from air temperature to harvesting rates in real time, increasing productivity and bearing down on food insecurity. One German company has spent more than €2 million developing ways to automatically transmit information from the harvester operating in the field to grain experts thousands of miles away who can instantly assess the yield.

For there to be a true success story in Britain, data coverage is vital. That is not just in residences and not just on one mobile network, but across all networks, on the many transport arteries that criss-cross the United Kingdom—motorways, train routes, where coverage is still abysmal, and our waterways—and in the most rural parts of the country. The 700 MHz spectrum will help in achieving coverage in hard-to-reach places, particularly due to its ability to penetrate through thick walls. It will help to provide that foundation layer of connectivity. To do that, however, the licensing conditions for auction have to be ambitious and tough. The auction cannot just be a boon for the Treasury; it has to bring substantial benefits to the public at large and to our digital economy.

Drew Hendry: Does the hon. Lady agree that it is possible, as we can see from the German example, to put tough conditions in place and still raise some money from the auction?

Louise Haigh: Absolutely. I could not agree more. The issues that have been raised today need to be seen alongside that point. The income for the Treasury should not be the first and only priority.

In our view, while Ofcom does a fantastic job of regulating and auctioning the frequencies, such decisions are in reality political. Where and how coverage targets are met matters greatly, and we in this place should be setting tough conditions for the auction. We would like the Government and Ofcom to be much more ambitious, and we would like to see clear licensing commitments to reflect that ambition. Geographical coverage is still poor, as we have heard. The targets set by the

Government—to reach 90% of geographical coverage for voice and text by 2020—simply do not go far enough to meet the challenges of a data-driven world. In fact, as the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) mentioned, we are lagging behind many of our international competitors, who have significantly improved coverage through different and imaginative approaches to licence obligations. For example, Denmark has focused on specified postcodes, France has covered an incredible 99.6% of its population, the Netherlands has covered all main roads, waterways and airports, and Cyprus has specified rural areas and high schools as priorities.

With that in mind, I will conclude by asking the Minister a number of questions, in addition to those asked by the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk.

Calum Kerr: Just before the hon. Lady asks her important questions—I can see the Minister is desperate to hear them—does she agree that there is a false economy here? By seeking money up front for the sale of licences, we inhibit the speeds that exist out there in the country. That holds back productivity, where we have an enormous challenge. If we show a bit more vision and foresight and plan for the longer term, we will get faster speeds and the overall benefit to the country and the public purse will be far greater.

Louise Haigh: That is absolutely right. The hon. Gentleman will know that we discussed that point at length in the Digital Economy Public Bill Committee. In fact, we have brought the band back together again—it is nice to be in the Chamber with all the team. He is also right that the Minister is desperate to hear my questions—he always is—so we will crack on.

Does the Minister still expect mobile data on the spectrum to be available by quarter 2 in 2020? Working with Ofcom, what conditions does he specifically expect to set to achieve much improved geographical coverage and coverage along major transport routes? In particular, what consideration has he given to outside-in licensing, as was mentioned earlier? Will he ensure that the prime focus of the auction of an enormously valuable public sector asset is on ensuring public benefit through increased and expanded coverage, rather than on raising revenue or maximising benefits for the mobile network operators? As the hon. Gentleman just mentioned, that will bring incredible benefits to productivity and our economy.

Finally, as regards the European Union, the Ofcom strategy document, which was written before Britain's decision to leave the European Union, makes explicit reference to the importance of the EU to the 700 MHz clearance programme, in terms of consultation and technical considerations. The European Parliament and the European Council are leading the joint decision on the timing and release of the frequency. The Minister will be aware that the European Commission recently published a draft decision that includes proposals that would require member states to allow the use of the 700 MHz band for electronic communications services under harmonised technical conditions by 30 June 2020, yet the timetable laid out by the Prime Minister indicates that we will have left the European Union right in the middle of that deadline. I would be grateful if the Minister confirmed the steps he and Ofcom are taking

[Louise Haigh]

to ensure that Brexit does not adversely impact achieving data usage on the spectrum. Finally, what contingency plans are in place?

5.34 pm

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock): Rarely has Westminster Hall seen a debate of such technical expertise and such unanimity on the thrust and direction that Members want to see. They were unanimous that increased connectivity is important and drives productivity; that when we clear the 700 MHz spectrum, we need to ensure that the concerns of those who currently use it are taken into account; that we need to use licence conditions for mobile operators in order to reach more people; that we must work appropriately to deliver the very best connectivity that we can; and that demand for that connectivity is going up. That is a reasonable summary of the points made on the direction of travel.

First, I will cover the current use of the 700 MHz band, why that is changing and what will happen as a result. I will then turn to the broader points raised on connectivity. This band of spectrum is an important public resource, and we will auction the use of it with the aim of getting the best benefit. It is currently used for digital terrestrial television, which is the TV we get through an aerial. Some 75% of UK households use it in some way. When TV was first launched in 1936, it used a large block of radio frequencies for which there was no competing use. Today those frequencies are in demand for mobile phones—in particular for mobile phone data—and other technologies, such as wireless microphones for the programme making and special events sector, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) referred.

Demand for mobile data is growing exponentially, as Members have said. The figures I have are that in January 2011, 27% of UK adults had a smartphone and 2% had a tablet. By August 2016, that had grown to 71% and 59% respectively. That meant that demand for mobile data doubled every year from 2012 to 2015. That trend is forecast to continue, and Ofcom has decided to reassign some spectrum from DTT to mobile, namely the 700 MHz band. That will mean that there is enough spectrum for DTT services and new spectrum to carry a lot of data longer distances, making it very useful for providing coverage across the UK. The 700 MHz spectrum is important because it can carry heavy data loads over longer distances, which is particularly important to the debate about ensuring that we have rural connectivity.

Working with Ofcom, we have set up a programme to ensure that we can clear the 700 MHz band, and up to £600 million is available to support the necessary changes. The main change is to adapt the infrastructure for TV to ensure that that switchover can happen. Support is also available for that for the PMSE sector, as my hon. Friend for Mid Worcestershire mentioned. To answer his questions specifically, Ofcom is consulting on the assistance to be provided. The details of exactly how that support will flow will follow on from that consultation. I met the industry body last month to hear the concerns directly, and we will continue talking to the industry to ensure that the switchover happens effectively. Although the spectrum is essentially domestic, in that the distances

it covers mean that there is not overlap, there is overlap in the fact that other countries use equipment on similar spectrums, and therefore in the manufacture of equipment. I acknowledge that, but I think that the issue can be dealt with, given the taxpayers' money set aside for mitigation.

On the questions on rural connectivity raised by the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr), I agree strongly that we have seen a positive direction of travel. It is rare that an SNP Member describes the Government thus, but I am delighted that he did. No doubt he will agree that this week's announcement by Virgin that it will cover 360,000 more premises in Scotland, the majority with fibre to the premises, was extremely good news.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh)—I almost called her my hon. Friend, we have spent so much time together—made a very interesting speech. Both she and the hon. Gentleman raised the need to ensure that licence conditions include coverage, which is well understood by the Government. It was a mistake by the Labour Government in the early 2000s to set out licence conditions without such geographic coverage requirements. We had to reverse that after the licences had been set, in 2014, to get enforceable targets into the licence conditions, and we are strengthening that enforcement in the Digital Economy Bill that is currently before the House. There are now licence conditions for the four main providers to reach 90% geographically, which is equivalent to about 98% indoor coverage.

Drew Hendry: Can the Minister confirm that he is saying that the Government will adopt an outside-in approach to licensing in future rounds?

Matt Hancock: We have actively brought that into the existing licences, even after they were struck by the previous Administration. The hon. Gentleman can see clearly the attitude that we take to the need for high-quality, ubiquitous coverage of voice and text and then of 4G, as well as to the groundwork needed to make sure that we prepare for 5G in the years ahead as that technology comes on stream.

Drew Hendry: I just want to push a little further on that point, if I may. The Minister has suggested that there is an attitude and a direction of travel, and has accepted what needs to happen. Will he go a bit further and say that that will be the Government's approach?

Matt Hancock: We expect to auction mobile licences for the 700 MHz band in late 2018 or 2019. It will be for Ofcom to conduct those auctions. The hon. Gentleman can see that the Government's existing policy is to insist on licence conditions on mobile coverage. We are clear about the need for broad mobile coverage and the need to hold the mobile network operators' feet to the fire on their licence conditions. Some licence conditions go further than 90% geographic coverage—not least those of EE, because it has the emergency services licence—and also include road coverage, to make sure that we get not simply geographical coverage but coverage of the geography where people use phones, which, along with premises, is on the roads.

The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk mentioned the Faroes. I am meeting Jan Ziskasen from the Faroe Islands Government tomorrow to understand more about what they have done. Areas of

sparsity with similar geographies to some parts of Scotland can always give us a greater understanding of what can be used to deliver connectivity in those geographies. I am enormously looking forward to that meeting and to hearing what more we can do.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley asked a number of specific questions. First, she asked whether we expect availability by 2020. The answer is broadly yes, we do. As I said, the auctions will take place beforehand, but we want to get on with this as soon as we make the switchover. I have answered her question on coverage being included in licence conditions; that is existing Government policy.

The hon. Lady asked a question about maximising revenue. She said that we should not maximise revenue first and foremost, but should instead look to the benefits of productivity. If only that had been the approach of the last Labour Government, perhaps the list of countries that we are behind would not be so long.

Finally, the hon. Lady asked whether we will work with EU partners. Yes, of course we will. I will be travelling to the Telecoms Council myself next month to make sure that while we are a member of the European Union, we continue to work with our European partners to get the very best connectivity for the whole country.

Calum Kerr: This is a happy, consensual debate, is it not? The Minister almost gave my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) a positive commitment—he managed to row back as fast as possible, but the direction was still positive. Does he support the concept of “use it or share it”, and will he consider it as another potential solution in rural areas, where existing spectrum licence holders are clearly not providing a service?

Matt Hancock: That is a matter for Ofcom to consider in setting the details of how the spectrum is auctioned. It will of course consult on exactly how that auction takes place, and I am sure it will have noted the hon. Gentleman’s comments.

I hope that I have answered all the questions asked today. This is a very important issue, if a rather technical one. I am grateful for the interest in it—

Drew Hendry *rose*—

Matt Hancock: That interest extends to a constant interruption by SNP Members while I am trying to finish my speech—I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Drew Hendry: I am extraordinarily grateful for one last opportunity to intervene on the Minister. I asked a question during my speech about the opportunities for accelerating the process. I wonder if he could give an answer on that.

Matt Hancock: I apologise for not answering that question. These changes are best done in an orderly way, with a clearly set timetable. In this case, there are three and a half years still to run. Having set the

timetable, I think it is best to stick to it, especially because of the impact on existing spectrum users, and to make sure that the changeover happens in the most orderly way possible.

With that, unless there are any further interventions, I will finish by saying that I am grateful to Members for the broad consensus of support for what we are trying to do to improve connectivity through the use of the 700 MHz band.

5.47 pm

Calum Kerr: I will just say a few words to wind up the debate. I thank hon. Members for coming and taking part in the debate.

I am concerned that because of the backgrounds of people in this place, there is not enough knowledge on this subject. The moment my colleagues saw “700 MHz” in the debate title, I got umpteen taps on the shoulder and people saying, “What is that? Is it broadband?” and I went, “Well, actually, it is mobile, but mobile broadband.” I am concerned that there is a lack of knowledge in this place. As I often say, we cannot move for tripping over a lawyer, but try finding somebody who understands technology and it is a challenge. Because of that, the danger is that we shy away from the issue, pass the buck to Ofcom and do not debate it. I say well done to the hon. Members who are here for taking part—we all have a responsibility to keep talking about this.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con) *rose*—

Robert Ffello (in the Chair): Order. It is not usual to have interventions in the winding-up speech.

Calum Kerr: That is a shame. I am sure it was going to be a very good point; the hon. Gentleman is very well respected in the technology space.

We should be more conscious about what we do in that space, because there is a political dimension to policy setting on spectrum. We have talked today about the level of coverage. That is a political decision, and it is not fair to pass the buck to Ofcom. I am not saying that we are doing that fully, but we must debate and decide and be conscious of the direction of travel. The Minister has made some positive noises, but I would like to see more details firmed up. I would like to see 99% indoors coverage, 95% geographical coverage and an out-to-in approach. A fundamental review of spectrum policy is needed if we are to get the infrastructure that will deliver the access that I am sure the Minister and all of us want.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered release of the 700 MHz spectrum band for mobile data in 2020.

5.49 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 15 November 2016

EDUCATION

Higher Education and Research Bill: EVEL

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson): I am pleased to announce the publication of analysis of English votes for English laws in relation to Government amendments to the Higher Education and Research Bill at Commons Report.

The English votes for English laws process applies to public Bills in the House of Commons. To support the process, the Government have agreed that they will provide information to assist the Speaker in considering whether to certify that Bill or any of its provisions for the purposes of English votes for English laws.

The memorandum provides an assessment of tabled Government amendments to the Higher Education and Research Bill, for the purposes of English votes for English laws, ahead of Commons Report. The Department's assessment is that the amendments do not change the territorial application of the Bill.

This analysis reflects the position should all the Government amendments be accepted.

I have deposited a copy in the Library of the House of Commons.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-11-15/HCWS254/>

[HCWS254]

TRANSPORT

High Speed 2

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): I would like to update the House on the progress of High Speed 2.

This Government are planning for the future and investing in world-class transport infrastructure to ensure that the UK can seize opportunities and compete on the global stage.

In a clear signal of how work is progressing on HS2 phase 1, this morning I am announcing that the following companies have been awarded the phase 1 enabling works contracts:

Area South—CS JV (Costain Group Pic, Skanska Construction UK Limited)

Area Central—Fusion JV (Morgan Sindall pic, BAM Nuttall Limited, Ferrovial Agroman (UK) Limited)

Area North-LM JV (Laing O'Rourke Construction Limited, J. Murphy & Sons Limited).

These contracts are worth up to £900 million in total and cover the whole of phase 1. The works include archaeological investigations, site clearance and the setting up of construction compounds ahead of the start of the main civil engineering work.

Today I have published a command paper, "High Speed Two: From Crewe to Manchester, the West Midlands to Leeds and beyond", and accompanying maps setting out the detail of my preferred route for HS2 from Crewe to Manchester, and from the West Midlands to Leeds, with junctions onto the existing network. This is known as HS2 phase 2b.

This means that following on from the 2013 consultation and work we have done since, I am pleased today to be confirming the majority of the route. There are also a number of cases, including the proposed route through South Yorkshire recommended by Sir David Higgins in a report earlier this year, where I am proposing substantial refinements. I am launching a consultation to seek the views of communities and other interested parties before reaching a decision on those sections next year.

In all, there are seven refinements on which we are consulting, these are:

On the western leg:

To move the previously proposed rolling stock depot at Golborne to a site north of Crewe;

To move the approach to Manchester Piccadilly 370 metres eastwards with the northern tunnel portal in Ardwick, to avoid direct impacts on residential properties and a school at West Gorton; and,

To move the route in the Middlewich—Northwich area in Cheshire up to 800 metres westwards.

On the eastern leg:

To move the route to the east of Measham in Leicestershire, avoiding the most significant impacts on local manufacturing businesses and development sites;

To go around instead of tunnel under East Midlands airport;

To amend the alignment of the preferred route as it passes through Long Eaton to reduce severance in the local community and reduce impacts on the highway network and existing rail infrastructure; and,

To move the alignment of the route from Derbyshire to West Yorkshire to reflect a change in the proposals for serving the Sheffield city region, as recommended by Sir David Higgins in his report "Sheffield and South Yorkshire" published in July 2016.

In order to ensure our case is robust we have of course considered alternatives to the phase 2b scheme, but we have found no alternative that could deliver the same level of benefit for the country.

I am also issuing safeguarding directions for the whole of the preferred phase 2b route today. This protects the preferred route from conflicting development. But it also means that those people who are most affected by the plans to build phase 2b will now be able to access statutory compensation.

In addition, I will be consulting on discretionary property schemes. These will go over and above what is required by law and give assistance to those who will be adversely affected by the railway. These schemes are the same as those currently in operation for people living along the phase 1 route and I aim to be able to confirm the schemes on which I am consulting for phase 2b next year.

Two of these schemes will enter into operation on an interim basis, from today; these are Express Purchase and Need to Sell. Further information on property schemes can be found at: www.gov.uk/hs2.

I am placing copies of the documents in the Libraries of both Houses. Following consultation I plan to make a decision on these route refinements next year and to bring forward a hybrid Bill on phase 2b to lay before Parliament in 2019.

HS2 is an ambitious and exciting project and we must seize the opportunity it offers to transform our country for future generations. The route decision I have published today takes us an important step closer to realising the full potential of HS2.

[HCWS253]

Petition

Tuesday 15 November 2016

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts

The petition of residents of Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale,

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.

[P001980]

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PETITION

Tuesday 15 November 2016

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Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts	1P

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**not later than
Tuesday 22 November 2016**

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