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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 6 December 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Prison Safety

1. **Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve safety in prisons. [907674]

3. **Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve safety in prisons. [907676]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): Last month, we launched the White Paper “Prison Safety and Reform” and we are already implementing measures to track all drugs, drones and phones. This major overhaul of the prison system will include the recruitment of an extra 2,500 front-line officers. Our reforms will empower governors to make the changes that they need.

Nusrat Ghani: I warmly welcome the Government’s decision to invest £555 million to recruit 2,500 extra guards, and I hope that Lewes prison in East Sussex, where staff had to deal with a serious incident involving threats of violence a month ago, will benefit from that. The Home Affairs Committee, of which I am a member, released a report on psychoactive substances and their increased availability in prisons. Given the aggressive and violent behaviour that they cause, what is the Secretary of State doing to clamp down on drugs of all types available in prisons?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about psychoactive substances. They have been a serious issue in our prison system. That is why we have developed tests, which we have rolled out across the prison estate, to detect these substances and why we have trained up 300 sniffer dogs.

Karen Lumley: The suicide rates at HMP Hewell in Redditch are unacceptably high. May I invite my right hon. Friend to update the House on what the Government are doing to ensure the safety of prisoners and to reduce suicide rates in our prisons?

Elizabeth Truss: First, may I welcome my hon. Friend back to the House? It is great to see her back on our Benches looking so fit and well.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Radiant!

Elizabeth Truss: Indeed. Finally, I can agree with a comment from the Opposition.

My hon. Friend is right to highlight the issue of self-harm and suicides in our prison. The rates are too high, which is why we are taking steps to increase the number of prison officers. We will have a dedicated officer for every six prisoners and they will be responsible for those prisoners’ welfare and for helping them to turn their lives around so that they do not go back to reoffending.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The suicide rate in our prisons is the highest it has ever been in 25 years. It is absolutely shameful. Just the other week, the Health Secretary appeared before the Health Committee and admitted that he has never visited a prison mental health service. Will the Secretary of State tell us whether she has visited one, and if not, why not and when will she?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that mental health is a real issue in our prisons. I recently had a meeting with the Health Secretary on how we can improve mental health services. We are enabling governors to co-commission those health services. I was recently at HMP Lincoln discussing mental health services with the governor. Such services are available only from Monday to Friday, and he wants them to be available all week round, and we will enable that to happen.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): In part due to increased attacks on prison officers, more than 200,000 days were lost through ill health by prison officers in the past 12 months. Will the Secretary of State update the House on what the figure lost through sick days is as of now, and what steps she will take to reduce that figure?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. There is an issue with sick days. The the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), who is responsible for prisons and probation holds a daily meeting in which he goes through the levels of sickness at each prison and works with the governors on what we can do. One thing we are doing is strengthening the frontline to ensure that we have more officers available for support.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I am glad that the Secretary of State recognises the importance of the number of officers, and I congratulate her on the extra moneys available. Does she agree that in potentially violent situations one of the most important factors is the availability of experienced officers who have the knowledge and the personal relationships with inmates to calm them down? Can she give us more detail about what is being done to deal with the current very high levels of wastage of experienced officers?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with my hon. Friend, and the evidence backs him up that having experienced officers is vital. We have a higher proportion of experienced officers in 2016 than we did in 2010;

more than 80% of our prison officers have five or more years of experience. I am absolutely determined to keep those officers in the service. Two weeks ago, we launched a fast-track programme to help people already in the service to progress in their careers. We are also offering retention payments, particularly in hard-to-recruit areas, because we certainly need to keep those very important staff on board.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): In every one of Her Majesty's inspector's reports on closed male facilities published during the Secretary of State's time in post—reports on Bedford, Chelmsford, Hindley, Onley, Risley, Swaleside and Winchester, and the youth facilities at Isis and Wetherby—outcomes of the test of prison safety deemed them to be either poor or not sufficiently good. When can we expect a positive report on prison safety in closed male prisons?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is right that current levels of violence in our prisons are not acceptable. That is why we launched the prison safety and reform White Paper, with measures to deal with drugs, drones and phones, as well as to bolster the number of front-line staff. We are also working directly with governors to help them to deal with issues that might trigger incidents in their prisons while we build up that front-line capability. I announced in October that we are recruiting an extra 400 staff in 10 of the most challenging prisons; we have already given job offers to 280 people, so we are making progress.

Yasmin Qureshi: The Ministry states in the White Paper that it will trial the inclusion of prison co-ordinates in no-fly zones to prevent banned items from being dropped into prisons. How will that work in practice and what is being done now to reduce demand for banned items in prisons?

Elizabeth Truss: The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey is working with drone manufacturers and leading a cross-Government taskforce to get in place the technology needed to do that. We are also employing solutions such as installing extra netting. Last week I was at HMP Pentonville, which now has patrol dogs whose barking helps to deter drones. We are using all sorts of solutions to deal with contraband entering our prisons.

Mental Health: Prisons

2. **James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): What plans the Government have to tackle mental health issues in prisons. [907675]

15. **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): What plans the Government have to tackle mental health issues in prisons. [907688]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): A key aspect of our prison reform programme will be to address offender mental health and improve outcomes for prisoners. We are introducing co-commissioning, which will make sure that governors are focused on and accountable for those outcomes, alongside health commissioners. I know the Secretary of State has discussed the matter with the Health Secretary and it is a high priority for both of them.

James Duddridge: Last year, I spent more than a month in a small room, unable to leave. I lost track of where I was. I became tearful over the slightest of issues. I felt that I could not breathe. I was not incarcerated in prison; I was in hospital following a physical illness, but the experience made me reflect on how easy it is to develop a mental health issue when confined in a small space and lacking orientation. With that in mind, what assessment has the Department made of people developing mental problems in prison, rather than going in with such problems, and what can be done to reduce that?

Dr Lee: I am glad to see my hon. Friend looking so well, following such a significant illness.

Prisoners are entitled to the same levels of care as those living in the community, but there are specific measures in place for their care. All prisoners have a health assessment on arrival, all prison officers receive training to help them to recognise mental health issues, and all prisons have on-site primary healthcare teams who can provide mental health care, refer to counselling, or refer for a further psychiatric assessment for serious mental illness.

Rehman Chishti: A recent report by the prisons and probation ombudsman found that 70% of those who committed suicide had a mental health issue. What steps will the Government take specifically to tackle this problem?

Dr Lee: Every death in custody is a tragedy. We are committed to reducing the number of self-inflicted deaths. We have reviewed the case assessment care in custody and teamwork process for prisoners assessed as being at risk and we are piloting revised safer custody training in response. All prison officers, both new and experienced, receive training to help offenders with mental health issues.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Statistics show that 50% of those who are in prison suffer from personality disorders. Does the Minister agree that it is important to assess such issues when people enter the criminal justice system—even at the stage of the custody suite—rather than after their incarceration?

Dr Lee: Of course the initial assessment is important, as is who does that assessment. In addition to our work on that, the care following the assessment and ongoing care, as well as the observation of prisoners, are being closely looked at.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) asked the Secretary of State when she had last visited a prison's mental health service. Suicide in prisons is at a 25-year high. It is utterly disgusting that neither the Health Secretary nor the Secretary of State for Justice has visited prisons to see what is going on. What is happening?

Dr Lee: As I have said, each of those suicides is a tragedy. The Government are fully aware of that, and I am aware that the Secretary of State for Health will be visiting a prison. I was at Peterborough prison last week discussing mental health provision there, and I visited the mother and baby unit at the same time. I am under

no illusions about the challenges involved in addressing the problem. We are fully aware of the problem and I intend to make further statements on the subject because the mental health of prisoners is such a key problem.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): However important it is to improve and enhance mental health care in our prisons, little will be achieved without continuity of care once prisoners leave prison. What is the Department doing, with the health service, to ensure that continuity of care is provided for prisoners from day one when they leave prison?

Dr Lee: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question which, as ever, is a wise one. Yes, continuity of care before, during and after prison is key, not just for the mental health of prisoners, but for their physical health too. We have ongoing discussions with the Department of Health on the matter, and my intention is to make the continuity of records and the continuity of care as a consequence much better in the future.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Does the Minister accept that many prisoners with mental health issues would be better served and facilitated outside the prison regime? If so, what alternatives are being looked at?

Dr Lee: Of course, the hon. Gentleman is right. However, prison can be an opportunity to address mental health problems that have not previously been diagnosed and properly treated, so being in prison may be an opportunity for someone to receive proper care, which is ultimately what I am about.

Apprenticeships: Prisoners

4. **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to introduce apprenticeships for prisoners. [907677]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): As outlined in the prison safety and reform White Paper, we will introduce a prisoner apprenticeship pathway that will offer prisoners opportunities that count towards the completion of a formal apprenticeship on release. This scheme is being developed as part of our offender employment strategy which will be published in the new year.

Maria Caulfield: Can the Minister update me on progress in introducing apprenticeships in HMP Lewes?

Mr Gyimah: HMP Lewes is exactly the kind of local prison that will benefit from the new prison apprenticeship pathway. I anticipate that the prison will also benefit from the new Prison Service apprenticeship scheme that we are launching in 2017, which will help recruit members to the Prison Service by widening the number of entry points into the service.

16. [907689] **Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Most apprenticeships require literacy. What proportion of prisoners was functionally illiterate at the start of their sentence and what proportion was functionally illiterate on release?

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Gentleman asks a very important question. At the moment, roughly 50% of prisoners are illiterate as far as English and maths are concerned. Our prison safety and reform White Paper proposes that we test prisoners' literacy on entry and on exit so that we can measure the distance travelled and progress made in prison.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Which prison has the best record for training prisoners for gainful employment once they leave, and how might that best practice be rolled out across the prison estate?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend asks a very important question. Across the Prison Service there are patches of good work aimed at employment post-release. We want to create a system to measure that, and to identify and rank prisons according to how well they do in that respect. That is precisely what our White Paper does. Employment post-release is one of the outcome measures against which governors will be judged once we proceed with reform.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Work experience outside prison can also enhance a prisoner's employment opportunities on release, so what guidance is the Minister giving prisons—not just reform prisons, but governors of all prisons—in relation to release on temporary licence?

Mr Gyimah: Release on temporary licence has a huge role to play in helping prisoners to gain employment in the wider world. I have been speaking with Timpson's, for example, which employs a lot of ex-offenders, and that is how they are trialled before release. We are looking at that to ensure that the guidance that governors receive allows them to do more with release on temporary licence, specifically in relation to employment opportunities.

Prison Reform

5. **Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): What plans the Government have to increase the autonomy of prison governors to enable them to make reforms. [907678]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): We will turn around offenders' lives only if governors have the levers they need over education, work and health in prison. That is why our reforms devolve power over budgets and services to governors.

Victoria Prentis: Procurement is a complicated business. What guidance and training are governors being given to ensure that they can complete the procurement process properly, be that for the provision of mental health services or even the recruitment of the dogs that bark at drones?

Elizabeth Truss: It sounds like my hon. Friend is asking for some of those patrol dogs at her local prison, HMP Bullingdon, which I am delighted to say will be one of the 30 prisons that will be recruiting locally to build up a local cadre of staff, starting next January. The answer is that we will be setting up a What Works network to help governors gain the expertise they need to take those decisions and make those things happen locally.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Government Front Benchers seem to be doing a bit of sleepwalking this morning. I know that it is nearly Christmas, but can I ask them to wake up to the dangers of empowering governors too much? When the former Select Committee that I chaired looked at prison education all those years ago, we found that one real danger was that a very good system of education and training in a prison could suddenly be wiped out by a new governor who wanted nothing to do with it. We need common standards across all prisons. Is that not right?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. We are being very specific about what we are asking governors to achieve in raising education standards, getting prisoners into apprenticeships and work, and improving health standards. We are specifying the what, but giving governors much more freedom over the how, because they are the people with the expertise. The officers on the landing are the ones who talk to the prisoners, and they need that freedom to be able to turn people's lives around.

Dangerous Driving

6. **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): What progress the Government have made on the sentencing review of motoring offences and penalties relating to dangerous drivers. [907679]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): The Government yesterday issued a consultation paper following a review of driving offences and penalties. The consultation focuses on the driving offences that result in death or serious injury and proposes that the courts should be able to impose a life sentence, or longer determinate sentences, in the most serious cases.

Craig Tracey: I welcome the consultation. Does the Minister agree that it presents the perfect opportunity to close a loophole whereby in the event of a pedestrian being hit by a driver under the influence of alcohol or drugs, as happened to my constituent Sean Morley, who was tragically killed as a result, the maximum sentence available for failing to stop and report is just six months, leaving no incentive for the driver to stay around? In Sean's case, the Crown Prosecution Service and the judge had only the charge of failing to stop available to them, not death by dangerous driving.

Mr Gyimah: The case to which my hon. Friend refers is truly horrific, and I extend my personal sympathies to Sean Morley's family. Nothing can compensate for the loss of a loved one by a killer driver who drives irresponsibly. I encourage the family to contribute to the consultation so that we can take their points on board.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Campaigners and families are delighted that the Government have now announced this review, and I pay tribute to all of them, and to all hon. Members on both sides of the House who contributed to the cross-party manifesto in 2014. The direction of travel is clearly welcome, but I just ask that consideration is given to getting rid of the charge of careless driving, because at the moment some of the most dangerous sorts of reckless, criminal driving are called careless, and that is wrong.

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I congratulate him on his long-standing campaign on the issue. We looked very carefully at the distinction between careless and dangerous driving, which he wants us to get rid of, but we came to the view that a sense of culpability needs to be reflected in the decisions that the courts come to. For example, someone could be momentarily distracted by their children crying in the backseat and—God forbid—something bad then happens. That is very different from someone involved in speed racing. That is why we have chosen to keep that distinction.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): My constituents George and Giulietta Galli-Atkinson set up the Livia awards in memory of their daughter. She was killed by a driver who mounted the pavement, but who was found guilty of causing death by dangerous driving and received only a fine. My constituents have campaigned for over 20 years for tougher sentences. How might that be achieved as a consequence of the Minister's consultation?

Mr Gyimah: We are proposing a new life sentence as a maximum penalty for those convicted of dangerous driving. As a consequence, we are giving the courts the tools they need to make the punishment fit the crime, and that is testimony to the campaign my hon. Friend's constituents have been running for years.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I welcome the consultation on this matter, but I seek some clarity from the Minister on the distinction between careless and dangerous driving. The consultation makes it clear that the Government do not propose any changes but seek instead to explain and address misconceptions about the law. How exactly does the Department intend to ensure greater consistency across the UK in applying this law?

Mr Gyimah: The consultation does have question 7—an open question—so if the hon. Lady has any specific concerns that are not reflected in the consultation, she can by all means submit them in that question.

Prisoners: Rehabilitation and Work

7. **David Warburton** (Somerton and Frome) (Con): What further plans the Government have to provide prisoners with (a) drug rehabilitation and (b) education and skills training to improve their prospects for finding work on release from prison. [907680]

10. **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What further plans the Government have to provide prisoners with (a) drug rehabilitation and (b) education and skills training to improve their prospects for finding work on release from prison. [907683]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): As part of our reforms, we are going to set clear standards on the outcomes we expect each prison governor to achieve on drug rehabilitation, education and other drivers of rehabilitation.

David Warburton: I thank the Minister for that. Given that 42% of adult prisoners in England and Wales were permanently excluded from school, does he agree that it

is only through education that the cycle of reoffending can be stopped? What more can be done to ensure that this message properly resonates across the prison estate?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend makes an important point: education is one of the key ways in which we can help to break the cycle of reoffending—when the offender, obviously, is willing. One of the things we have done to speed up this process is to transfer the education budget from the Department for Education to the Ministry of Justice. That budget will be delegated to governors so that they can organise education that suits individual prisoners' needs.

Stephen Metcalfe: I am pleased to hear about the steps that have been taken to improve drug rehabilitation and education. Could I suggest that prisoners close to release are also given careers advice and experience mock interviews to aid their search for work on release?

Mr Gyimah: Again, that is an important point. If someone has spent quite a lot of time inside, it is highly likely that they will be unused to the world of work and certainly to interviews. One of the things we are doing is having Department for Work and Pensions work coaches work with prison governors as part of the regime. Their job is to help to prepare prisoners, alongside rehabilitation companies, for life after release.

17. [907690] **Mrs Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): A constituent of mine has a criminal record but has been a law-abiding citizen for over 40 years. Should there not come a time when she is able to move on and no longer has to explain to prospective employers the mistake she made when she was much younger?

Mr Gyimah: My right hon. Friend raises a point around conviction and time spent. Obviously, there is the Ban the Box campaign, which we are supporters of, that encourages employers to look beyond these things, certainly when it comes to employing ex-offenders. I would be happy to speak with my right hon. Friend directly about the case of her constituent.

22. [907696] **Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): In Havant, the Hampshire community rehabilitation company helps offenders and drug users to find employment and training opportunities. Will the Minister continue to support its excellent work in breaking the reoffending cycle?

Mr Gyimah: Yes.

Prison Safety

8. **Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): What steps she is taking to reduce the number of assaults, incidents of self-harm and deaths in prison. [907681]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): We take the safety of prisoners in our jails extremely seriously. It is of paramount importance that they are kept safe and given the opportunity to reform.

Rosie Cooper: At the Justice Committee last week, the prisons Minister said in reply to a question regarding the recent escape from Her Majesty's Prison Pentonville,

that the frequency of cell searches was determined locally by the governor. Does he remain satisfied that the coalition decision to end daily cell searches was right, or does he think they might have prevented this escape and limited the use of mobile phones, drugs and weapons?

Mr Gyimah: Cell searches are carried out on an intelligence-led basis at establishment level. In addition, we are investing £3 million on a regional and national intelligence network so that we can identify where phones, for example, are being smuggled in to aid criminal activities in our prisons and deal with such situations appropriately.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Our prison chaplains deal with all these issues daily and are almost universally well thought of, so will the Minister tell the House what steps he is taking, first, to recruit the full number of chaplains, and secondly, to make sure that they have the time to do the important work they are there to do?

Mr Gyimah: That is an excellent suggestion, which I am willing to look at in detail.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): Is the Secretary of State for Justice aware of the situation at HMP Maghaberry, where three prisoners have tragically taken their own lives, and will she and her team use all their influence on the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Justice Minister to make sure that this is dealt with immediately?

Mr Gyimah: As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice said, every death in prison is a tragic one. Such people are in the care of the state, and we have to make sure that we take good care of them in that respect. I am willing to look in more detail at the situation that the hon. Gentleman has outlined.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): As I have mentioned on a number of occasions, there is no real incentive for prisoners to behave themselves in prison because of the law introduced by the previous Labour Government that prisoners have to be released halfway through their sentence irrespective of how badly they behave or whether they are still a danger to the public. I am still waiting for the Government to give an explanation of why they think this law should still be on the statute book, and I have yet to receive a satisfactory response. Will the Minister now give us the reason why, by law, prisoners should be released halfway through their sentence irrespective of how badly they behave or whether they are still a danger to the public?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend raised this issue at the Select Committee last week, and I will give him the same answer I gave then. When prisoners are released, even at the halfway point, they remain on licence, and if there is a breach of the licence, they are recalled to prison. That remains the case.

Prison Officers

9. **Sir Kevin Barron** (Rother Valley) (Lab): What steps she is taking to improve levels of recruitment and retention among prison officers. [907682]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): A core part of our prison safety and reform plan is the recruitment of an additional 2,500 prison officers. In 10 of our most challenging prisons, we have already started a recruitment programme, and we have made 280 job offers.

Sir Kevin Barron: We have nearly 7,000 fewer prison officers in our prisons than in 2010. The Government have announced an increase in the prisons budget of £100 million to recruit or re-recruit an extra 2,500 officers. Is it a wonder that the service is in a mess?

Elizabeth Truss: In our “Prison Safety and Reform” White Paper, we make it very clear that it is important to have a skilled force of officers. That is why we are investing £100 million, which will enable us to make sure that one officer is responsible for six prisoners. Through our work, we have shown that that is effective in keeping a prison safe, and in being able to turn around the lives of offenders.

Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): I have three prisons in my constituency. Combined, they have one of the largest concentrations of prisoners in the country. The prison officers in Sheppey’s prisons are fantastic people—dedicated, hard working and highly responsible—but Sheppey’s prisons are seriously understaffed. Because of our location in the south-east of England, it is difficult to recruit officers, given the number of other jobs available to them. What reassurance can my right hon. Friend give my prison officers that steps will be taken to solve the problem of recruitment on Sheppey?

Elizabeth Truss: I agree with my hon. Friend that prison officers do a fantastic job. When I visit prisons up and down the country, I meet officers and see the great work they do, their dedication to the job and why they have gone into it. There are staff recruitment issues in about a quarter of our prisons because there is high demand for employees, particularly in the south-east of England. That is why we are enabling governors to offer market supplements of up to £4,000 to recruit officers, and retention payments of up to £3,000 to keep those officers on board.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): It is not just the cut of 7,000 prison officers, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) talked about; another 7,000 non-officer grades are also being cut. That is a total cut of 14,000 staff—2,000 is a drop in the ocean. That is why people are getting hurt and killed in Britain’s prisons. When will the Secretary of State return staffing to pre-2010 levels, which is needed to ensure safety in prisons?

Elizabeth Truss: The important point is that the staffing that we are putting into our prisons is evidence-based and enables us to operate with a ratio of one officer for every six prisoners. That is what works.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): In a Westminster Hall debate last week, the prisons Minister confirmed that it is his intention for each prisoner to have a dedicated prison officer, who will be responsible for six inmates. He called it the new offender management model and the new staffing model. Will the Secretary of State explain whether that is based on current staffing levels or whether it is an aspiration for the future? What are the details of the new models?

Elizabeth Truss: That is what we will operate when we get up to the full complement of having the additional 2,500 officers. We have already started with 10 of the most challenging prisons. Of the 400 prison officers we are seeking to recruit, we have offered jobs to 280. It will take time to build up the prison officer workforce. That is why we are launching a new apprenticeship scheme, a new fast-track scheme for graduates, and a scheme to recruit former armed forces personnel. We will not achieve this overnight, but it is important to build up the workforce to improve safety and reform in our prisons.

Christina Rees: The prisons Minister also told the Justice Committee last week that, in order to recruit an extra 2,500 prison officers by 2018, the Ministry of Justice would have to recruit a total of 8,000 officers, due to the staff leaving rate. Michael Spurr said that the leaving rate after just the first year as a prison officer is 13.5%. How does the Secretary of State plan to retain the new staff who are leaving and the prison officers that she plans to recruit in future? Will she spend whatever it takes to get a grip on the crisis?

Elizabeth Truss: As I said, we are investing £100 million in recruiting the additional 2,500 officers. We are launching a new apprenticeship scheme, a new graduate scheme and a scheme to recruit people from the armed services. We are improving career progression in the Prison Service to ensure that our experienced officers get the opportunities that they deserve. In the 25% of prisons in which we struggle to recruit in London and the south-east, we are offering additional payments. We are doing everything we can to build up that strength because it is important to delivering safe and reformed prisons.

Human Rights Act

11. **John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): What recent progress has been made on the Government’s plan to replace the Human Rights Act 1998. [907684]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): As is well known, we shall set out our proposals for a Bill of Rights in due course, and we shall of course consult fully on those proposals.

John Nicolson: In the light of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities finding that cuts to benefits meet the threshold for human rights violations, instead of replacing the Human Rights Act, should not the Secretary of State focus on ensuring the protection of rights to which the Government are already committed?

Sir Oliver Heald: The UK Government and this country do not need lectures about our human rights record. Our country has a proud tradition that goes back 800 years of pioneering human rights and spreading our values around the world. We do not need any lessons.

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that not only is it a good idea to make the change, but that we were members of the European convention on human rights for a whole generation before we put human rights legislation into British law, and that the clear understanding needs to be that British courts, informed by legislation from this Parliament, make the decisions?

Sir Oliver Heald: Of course it was Winston Churchill in his famous speech in Place Kléber in Strasbourg who pointed out the importance of fundamental human rights after the second world war, and British lawyers played a very important part in framing the European convention on human rights. Having said that, it is right to consider what that should be in the modern context, and whether we need a British jurisprudence over those rights. That is what we are doing.

19. [907692] **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Five times in the past few years the UK Government have been found guilty of a breach of article 3 of the European convention on human rights for their treatment of people with mental health problems in immigration detention. Many more cases have been settled or are pending. Will the Minister confirm that the solution to that shameful state of affairs is not to water down that absolute right in order to avoid being found out?

Sir Oliver Heald: Of course we respect human rights and the rights that are within the convention. No country has a better record of abiding by those decisions than this country. Having said that, there is a need to look critically at the Human Rights Act and how it operates, which is what we will do.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the example of countries such as New Zealand, Canada and Australia prove that a country does not have to be a member of the European convention on human rights to have an excellent human rights record?

Sir Oliver Heald: My hon. Friend's point is that those countries have the common-law tradition that was founded in this country by our judges and our Parliament. The fact that it is expressed differently in Canada and countries of that sort does not mean that it does not have the same root. We in this country should be proud of that.

Judicial Independence

12. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What steps she is taking to protect judicial independence. [907685]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): The independence of the judiciary is the cornerstone of the rule of law, vital to our constitution and freedoms. As Lord Chancellor I frequently make this clear, both in private and in public.

Liz McInnes: After the press attacks on the judiciary, it took the Justice Secretary nearly 48 hours to release a statement. The former Lord Chief Justice Lord Judge said of that statement that he thought it was "a little too late—and quite a lot too little".

Does she agree with Lord Judge, and if so will she take the opportunity to apologise?

Elizabeth Truss: It is not the job of the Government or the Lord Chancellor to police headlines. The process is working absolutely as it should. People have a right to bring a case to court. The Government have the right to defend our position in the court. The judiciary is independent and impartial, and the press can scrutinise the process within the law.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I agree with my right hon. Friend. As we sit here today in this Parliament, just across Parliament Square the Supreme Court is sitting with 11 Supreme Court justices. Does she not agree—and does this whole House not agree—that the integrity of the Supreme Court and the justices should not be impugned?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. As I said last month, the Supreme Court justices are people of great integrity and impartiality.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): In response to the constitutional change brought about by devolution, the renowned international jurist, the late Professor Sir Neil MacCormick, stressed the importance of the principles that justified judicial independence and the concept of the separation of powers. As the United Kingdom once more faces major constitutional change after the EU referendum, will the Justice Secretary join me in reaffirming the importance of those principles?

Elizabeth Truss: I absolutely will. The independence of the judiciary is a vital part of our free society, as is our free press. Both those things are important. We have seen over the last months that we have a robust independent judiciary and a robust free press, which I look forward to discussing with the hon. and learned Lady very soon.

Joanna Cherry: In recent years, it has become commonplace for some Conservative Members to deprecate the judges of the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights simply for doing their job. Does the Lord Chancellor agree that such scant respect for the rule of law has encouraged a climate in which a major tabloid, which I believe some people call a newspaper, thinks it is appropriate to describe justices of our own Supreme Court as "enemies of the people"?

Elizabeth Truss: I have been very clear that the independence of the judiciary is a vital part of our rule of law. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Courts and Justice has just said, it is important for the UK that British courts make those decisions, and that is precisely what we are going to achieve.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Yesterday, the President of the Supreme Court, Lord Neuberger, said at the beginning of the article 50 appeal:

“This appeal is concerned with legal issues, and, as judges, our duty is to consider those issues impartially, and to decide the case, according to law. That is what we shall do.”

Does the Lord Chancellor agree that if she had done her duty and spoken out at the time to defend the judiciary, those words would not have been necessary?

Elizabeth Truss: As I said earlier, I frequently make it clear that the independence of the judiciary is a vital part of our constitution and our freedoms. I also think that it is absolutely right that the President of the Supreme Court, who has absolute integrity and impartiality, should make that case as well.

Vulnerable Witnesses

13. **Andrew Bingham** (High Peak) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to protect vulnerable witnesses when they testify in court. [907686]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): We are committed to helping vulnerable witnesses to give their very best evidence. A range of measures exist to help to reduce the anxiety of giving evidence, including video-link evidence away from the courtroom, and, within the court, giving evidence behind a screen.

Andrew Bingham: Following the closure of my local court in Buxton, witnesses will have to travel from my High Peak constituency to the nearest court. Can my right hon. and learned Friend provide further assurance that there will be protection for witnesses not only in the court, but when they are travelling to it?

Sir Oliver Heald: Yes, I can do that. When a witness needs protection, the police assess what is required to keep them safe. Witness care officers also help to ensure that the witness has any help that they need to attend court.

Prisoners: Rehabilitation and Work

14. **John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): What steps she is taking to improve rehabilitation in prisons. [907687]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): The prison and courts reform Bill will, for the first time, set out in legislation that the reform of offenders is a key purpose of prison. Prison is not just about housing offenders until release. Everyone involved in prisons, from officers to headquarters, will be focused on turning prisoners' lives around.

John Glen: Will the Lord Chancellor think about the pathway back to independent crime-free living and the use of organisations such as the Amber Foundation, which do a lot to look after people before they have developed the life skills to live independently and free from crime?

Elizabeth Truss: I congratulate the Amber Foundation on its work, particularly in turning around the lives of young people. We will shortly issue our response to Charlie Taylor's review on how we will improve the youth justice system to do just that.

23. [907697] **Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): Given the recent attack on a prison officer in my constituency, what will the Secretary of State be doing to ensure the safety of prison officers at work?

Elizabeth Truss: Making our prisons safer places is my No. 1 priority. That is why we are dealing with drugs, drones and phones, and it is why we are investing in additional prison staff across the estate.

Missing Persons

18. **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to help relatives of missing persons manage financial and other affairs on their behalf. [907691]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): We are preparing legislation to create the new legal status of “guardian of the property and affairs of a missing person”. We will introduce it as parliamentary time allows.

Kevin Hollinrake: I hope to introduce a ten-minute rule Bill on guardianship that would help relatives and friends to manage the affairs of missing people. In memory of Claudia Lawrence, my constituents' daughter who went missing seven long years ago, will the Government offer that Bill their full support? Will they also be willing to honour her memory by referring to it, whenever possible, as Claudia's Bill?

Sir Oliver Heald: That is good news, and I wish my hon. Friend well with his Bill. I understand why he wants to refer to it as Claudia's law. I would like to extend my sympathies, as I am sure the whole House would, to Peter and Joan Lawrence. The Government will formally announce their position on Second Reading, but we are keen for this matter to be tackled.

Topical Questions

T1. [907664] **David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): Our probation officers do a vital job—it is one that I value highly—in turning offenders' lives around, and the prisons and probation Minister is conducting a comprehensive review of the probation system that is focused on improving the quality of our probation services. As with our plans for prisons, we want a simpler, clearer system, with specific outcome measures such as getting offenders off drugs, improving educational standards, and getting offenders into apprenticeships and work. We also want closer working with the Prison Service. We will set out our more detailed plans after our review is completed in April.

David Rutley: Guide dog owners are too often turned away by taxis, despite that being illegal, and research has shown that when offenders are prosecuted, they can be fined less than £200. Will my right hon. Friend review the situation and find ways to increase the penalties to ensure that such discrimination is better addressed?

Elizabeth Truss: It is appalling that some taxi drivers refuse to take assistance dogs. That is an offence under the Equality Act 2010, and it can result in a fine of £1,000. I know that the Department for Transport is looking at improving training for drivers, and at the role that taxi licensing can play in eradicating this discrimination.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Given the Government's climbdown on their outrageous plan for immigration and asylum tribunal fees, and if they really believe in access to justice, is it not about time they listened to opposition to their unaffordable employment tribunal fees and their small claims limit changes, which hit injured people on lower incomes, and to the urgent demands that they finally begin a review into their savage legal aid cuts?

Elizabeth Truss: We have already announced a review of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012—we will shortly be announcing the timetable—but we need a system that is both open and affordable, which is exactly what the Government are delivering.

T2. [907666] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that an independent judiciary and a free press are two pillars of a free society, and that, while we might not always like how each acts, we should be proud of, and protect, those freedoms.

Elizabeth Truss: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. We can be incredibly proud of our independent judiciary, which is the cornerstone of the rule of law and supports our commerce and trade, and we also have a robust free press, which is vital to ensuring a free society.

T3. [907667] **Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): As has been stated, last June the Government commenced their review of the future of employment tribunal fees. As of yet, we have not seen any results. Will the Minister give me a firm date for the review's completion and publication? Is it not time the Government abandoned these unfair fees, which cut across the rights of working people?

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): There is a difference: Government Members think it only fair that those who can afford to should make a contribution to a service that costs hard-working taxpayers £66 million a year. We are reviewing the situation—we are doing a careful job, because this is an important issue—and we will publish the outcome in due course.

T4. [907668] **David Warburton** (Somerton and Frome) (Con): I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agrees that one of the main challenges facing the justice system is integrating ex-offenders back into the outside world upon their release. Does she agree that this requires the co-operation of employers as well as former prisoners? What is the Department doing to ensure that such co-operation is both encouraged and increased?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with my hon. Friend about this vital means of reducing reoffending. We will be launching a new employment strategy next year in partnership with employers, and prisoners can take up apprenticeships in and out of prison so that we

create the link between prison and the outside world. Most importantly, we are matching jobs that are available on the outside with the training and work that prisoners do on the inside so that there is a pathway to employment.

T8. [907672] **Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): The European criminal records information system enables the UK to access information about the convictions of EU nationals, but the future of our involvement is now unclear. What plans does the Department have to ensure that there is effective engagement post-Brexit?

Sir Oliver Heald: It is important that the Scottish Parliament and Government liaise with the UK Parliament and Government about Brexit, and that is happening, as the hon. Gentleman knows. ECRIS is an important system, but the Government are not announcing their Brexit negotiating position at this stage.

T5. [907669] **Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): With care applications rising dramatically in the family courts, what steps is the Minister taking to head off what Sir James Munby, the president of the family division, has referred to as a "looming crisis" in the family courts?

Sir Oliver Heald: My hon. Friend's question is about a very important point. In the same period, the time taken to complete a case has halved, and the Family Justice Board, which I co-chair, is investigating the reasons for the increase in cases and whether it is temporary. I agree that there are some vital issues here, such as helping women not to lose successive children to care. My hon. Friend might have heard about the Pause project, which is doing promising work in this area, and I would be happy to have a meeting with her to discuss the issue further.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Three Secretaries of State—for Justice, for Health, and for Communities and Local Government—believe that parents in Hull should have an independent inquiry to find out what happened to their babies' ashes. Does the Secretary of State fully understand the disappointment of those parents that she will not stand up for justice for them by establishing an independent inquiry to find out what happened to those ashes?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): I am sympathetic to the hon. Lady's concerns and I offer my sympathy again to her constituents. We are supportive of local historical investigations, but we do not plan to order an historical inquiry in Hull or elsewhere. Hull has made significant improvements, including by putting in place measures to improve practices across, and communication between, the cremation authority, local funeral directors and NHS trusts.

T6. [907670] **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): What action are the Government taking to address the specific needs of women in the justice system?

Dr Lee: We are working to ensure that we take proper account of the specific needs of women at every stage of the criminal justice system so that they receive the support that they need to make positive changes in their

lives. We want to see fewer women offending and reoffending, and we will set out our strategy for how we manage female offenders in 2017.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): May I give the Secretary of State another opportunity to answer my question? She told the House that she has had meetings to discuss the record levels of suicide in our prisons. Has she actually visited a prison mental health service—and if not, why not?

Elizabeth Truss: I have visited a number of prisons where I have discussed mental health services. I have already answered the hon. Lady's question.

T9. [907673] **Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con): What specific actions are my right hon. Friend and the Government taking to ensure that the UK remains a specialist leader in world legal services?

Sir Oliver Heald: We are a modern global centre for legal services and dispute resolution, and English law is the international law of choice. Our legal services sector contributes £26 billion to the UK economy. We have the best legal system in the world, and our modernisation programme will maintain that situation. I will be championing, as will the Secretary of State and the whole team, our legal services sector as a key part of post-Brexit global Britain.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): The family of Richard Davies of Yeadon are dismayed that the man found guilty of his manslaughter is being considered for a move to an open prison a year before the family was told that that would be considered and after spending only a year in prison. Is that justice?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): There is obviously a careful risk assessment before people are moved into open prison. I am not aware of the specific facts of the case that the hon. Gentleman has outlined, but I will be happy to meet him to discuss it.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): The hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) said that he thought that Lord Neuberger had mentioned that he would decide the case in accordance with the law on the basis of something that the Secretary of State had or had not said. Does the Secretary of State agree with me that Lord Neuberger said that he was deciding the matter on the basis of the law because that is his duty, and because it was stated that the matter would be decided on law, not politics, in paragraph 8 of the High Court judgment?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right about Lord Neuberger's role—[*Interruption.*] It is pronounced "Newberger"; I have had frequent conversations with him. It is important that the judiciary itself states the case, too.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Prisoners serving IPP—imprisonment for public protection—sentences have remained in custody long beyond their tariff and long after the coalition Government abolished such sentences. I understand that a dedicated Ministry

of Justice unit is looking into the position of IPP prisoners. Will the Secretary of State tell us exactly what it is doing?

Elizabeth Truss: I have met a number of IPP prisoners who are anxious to hear more about the progress that they will make through the system. The unit is ensuring that there are sufficient parole hearings and that sufficient courses are being taken, and getting people to a stage at which they are ready for release. However, it is always important for us to focus on public protection, and we make sure that we only release people who do not pose a huge risk.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): Woodhill prison in my constituency has had more suicides than any other prison this year. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that she is working urgently with the governor to address the situation?

Elizabeth Truss: I can assure my hon. Friend that we are working urgently with the governor to address the situation, as well as addressing the overall issue of the number of suicides in our prisons, which is far too high.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Reoffending rates among young offenders remain stubbornly high. Earlier this year, the Association of Youth Offending Team Managers said that there had been a record cut in funding for youth offending teams. What is the Secretary of State doing to address that?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady will not have to wait long before we release the Charlie Taylor report and the Government's response, which will explain how we will improve outcomes in youth justice.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): In February this year, 21-year-old Croydon resident George Beresford was knocked over and killed by a drink-driver. Because the police and the Crown Prosecution Service were unable to prove that the drink-driver was also driving carelessly, he received only a relatively short driving ban, rather than a custodial sentence. I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), for agreeing to meet the family this afternoon, but does he agree that the case should be considered as part of the consultation on driving offences, and that when a drink-driver kills someone, a custodial sentence is appropriate irrespective of whether careless driving can be proven?

Mr Gyimah: Our consultation proposals make it very clear that when a driver has consumed drugs or alcohol and then kills someone, and if there is sufficient evidence to charge that driver with careless or dangerous driving, he or she could face a life sentence. Obviously it is for the Crown Prosecution Service to prosecute on the basis of the evidence, and it is for the courts to hand down the relevant sentence. I look forward to discussing the details of that specific case with the Beresfords later this afternoon.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): A constituent of mine who has pleural plaques is raising an action against his former employers, of whom there are many because of the nature of his work. His claim is

subject to a time bar and must be submitted by the end of the year. However, he cannot obtain a list of his employers because Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs says that that will take 321 days. I am sure that he would appreciate it if the Secretary of State asked the Treasury to make an exception.

Elizabeth Truss: I shall be happy to look into the case with the hon. Lady.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): On her first day in office, the Prime Minister said:

“If you are black you are treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you are white.”

I am pleased to be working with the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) on a review of the treatment of, and outcomes for, black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system. What steps will the Secretary of State take to act on the emerging findings, which show that, in respect of arrests and charging, such people are disproportionately affected?

Elizabeth Truss: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has joined that review, to which I am sure that she will make a major contribution. Clearly there are issues throughout the criminal justice system that we need to examine, but I am certainly keen to see more diversity throughout our legal services industry and our judiciary, and we are working very hard on that.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Education budgets are being devolved to prison governors. Will each of those budgets be ring-fenced for education spending purposes?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Well! A one-word answer. Absolutely magnificent. I very much doubt that we shall hear a one-word question, but we can always ask the Chair of the Justice Committee, who is himself an accomplished lawyer. There is a hint there. I call Mr Robert Neill.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Given the Government's welcome development of a corruption prevention strategy for our prisons, will the Minister

look personally at the allegations of systemic corruption raised by BuzzFeed News today on the basis that this presents a serious risk of undermining our prison system?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. While the vast majority of prison officers are hard-working and dedicated, there is a small minority that is an issue. We acknowledge that in the White Paper, and we are reporting early next year on our corruption strategy. We are also considering options for a prison-specific offence of corruption to crack down on that scourge.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I have previously raised my concerns with the Lord Chancellor about the rise of gangs promoting extremist ideology within prisons. Will she update the House on how her Department is cracking down on extremist behaviour?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right about our concerns. We launched our response to the Acheson review in the summer. I am pleased to say that all prison officers are currently being trained—and will be by the end of the year—in tackling extremism, but I would be very pleased to have a meeting with her to discuss what further measures we can take to deal with this issue.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: I think we will conclude with another dose from Shipley.

Philip Davies: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

When the previous Labour Government changed the law so that prisoners had to be released halfway through their sentence irrespective of how badly they behaved or if they were still a risk to the public, the then Conservative Opposition were apoplectic and voted against the change. Do the Government think that the then Conservative party was wrong to oppose that change in the law?

Mr Gyimah: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today and last week to the Select Committee.

Mr Speaker: I think this show will run—probably for some years to come.

Rail Infrastructure (Train Operating Companies)

12.37 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Government's plans for train operating companies to take responsibility for track and infrastructure from Network Rail.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): The hon. Gentleman has clearly misunderstood our plans, so let me explain them to him.

This morning I laid a written statement in both Libraries of this House setting out my vision for reforming the railways in a way that puts passengers at the heart. This is about providing better and more reliable journeys for passengers.

Britain's railways are crucial to our economic future, and we have seen very substantial growth in passenger numbers since privatisation, but this growth brings challenges and the impact of disruption can be immediate, significant and wide-ranging. So our railways need to adapt and change in order to be able to cope with this huge expansion in the number of passengers. We are spending very large amounts of money trying to tackle the challenge, with new and longer trains, more capacity being introduced across the country, and big projects like Crossrail and small projects that make a difference locally.

Earlier this year, Nicola Shaw recommended that Network Rail should devolve responsibility to the route level. I support the principles of the Shaw report, and I support Network Rail's reform programme, but there is more to do.

I therefore intend to press ahead with Sir Roy McNulty's recommendations on how to make the railways run better and more cost-effectively. I will do this initially at an operational level. In order for all those involved to be incentivised to deliver the best possible service for the passenger, I expect the new franchises, starting with Southeastern and East Midlands, to have integrated operating teams between train services and infrastructure, working together in the interests of the passenger. I will also be inviting Transport for London and Kent County Council to be more closely involved in developing the next Southeastern franchise by embedding their own representatives in the team that develops, designs and monitors that franchise.

We will continue to develop the model for greater alignment of track and train as further franchises are renewed, including the option of joint ventures. In the meantime, my Department is also publishing an update to the rail franchising schedule, which I am placing in the Libraries of this House.

I also want to bring new skills to the challenge of upgrading our railways. I will begin by looking at the reopening of the link from Oxford to Cambridge. I am going to establish East West Rail as a new and separate organisation, to accelerate the permissions needed to reopen the route, and to secure private sector involvement to design, build and operate the route as an integrated organisation. This East West Rail organisation will be established early in the new year and chaired by the former chief executive of Chiltern Railways, Rob Brighouse.

These reforms will set the railway on a firmer footing for the future. We can, and will, make sure our rail network plays its part in making this country a country that works for everyone. I will bring forward in due course a new strategy for our railways with more detail on what I am setting out today.

Andy McDonald: Private companies will only engage with the Secretary of State's plans if they believe that they will be able to extract yet further value from Britain's railways at the expense of taxpayers and commuters. Not only does this mean poor value for the public, but it also risks compromising safety. The last time the Tories privatised the rail tracks it resulted in a series of fatal accidents, which led to the creation of Network Rail in the first place. Now the Secretary of State wants to start us on a slippery slope back to the bad old days of Railtrack, with profit-chasing companies being entrusted with the safety-critical role of being responsible for our rail infrastructure. Has he not learned the lessons of Railtrack, or is he simply choosing to ignore them? Why does he expect things to be different this time?

Will the Secretary of State explain how his planned "integrated operating teams" will be different from the "deep alliances" between Network Rail and South West Trains, which were abandoned, and from the similar arrangement between Network Rail and ScotRail, which is performing abysmally? Will the same system of regulation apply in his new landscape? What discussions has he had with the Office of Rail Regulation about this? What costings have been done for this programme? Has a cost-benefit analysis been carried out? It is time for our railways to be run under public ownership, in the public interest, as an integrated national asset in public hands, with affordable fares for all and with long-term investment in the railway network. Sadly, today's announcement will take us further away from that than ever before, but an incoming Labour Government will redress that as a matter of urgency.

Chris Grayling: Fortunately, there is not an imminent Labour Government. The trouble is that Labour Members want to turn the clock back to the days of British Rail and of the unions having beer and sandwiches at No. 10. We want to modernise the railways and make them work better. This is not about privatisation. I am not privatising Network Rail. I am creating teams on the ground with the same incentives to work together in the interests of the passenger. An essential part of that—the bit the hon. Gentleman has not spotted—is that the Shaw recommendations on route devolution, which will give real power to local teams to make decisions about their routes without always referring to the centre, will make it possible for those alliances to work much better than they have in the past. We know that where there have been alliances, they have made something of a difference, but they could do so much more.

This is not rocket science. If the trains are being run from over here and the tracks from over there, when things go wrong we get two separate teams waving contracts at each other rather than working together. Of course our railways do not maximise their potential. This is about forging teamwork on the ground to respond to challenges, to plan better and to deliver a better service to passengers. That is what we should all be

aspiring to. Moving the deckchairs around, renationalising the railways and taking away hundreds of millions of pounds a year of investment in new trains from the private sector would take our railways backwards and make the travelling public worse off. This is a sign that, as always, the Labour party has not made it into the modern world.

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I warmly welcome efforts to create greater integration between those who run the tracks and those who run the trains, but will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that a one-size-fits-all model would not be the right one, because certain lines are so heavily used by diverse operators that such a degree of integration would be difficult to achieve?

Chris Grayling: That is absolutely right. It is very straightforward in areas where there is complete synchronisation between the Network Rail routes and the train operators, such as on the west coast main line, which has multiple operators. We also have to be careful to protect the interests of freight operators and open access operators. I am not planning to change the fundamental regulatory structure, but by forging teams together by letting franchises and structuring Network Rail in a way that allows them to integrate, we will be able to deliver better day-to-day performance and a more reliable railway over the vast majority of our network.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The Secretary of State is right to acknowledge the problems with our rail network, but he should not remedy them through further privatisation. There is higher passenger satisfaction and reliability in Scotland than on any other network in the UK, but Scotland could do better. Will he agree to devolve power over Network Rail to the Scottish Parliament?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman has just described progress in Scotland, but the point that he has missed is that Scotland is the one place where we have a working alliance of the kind I am talking about. What he is describing is a step on the road to the model that I want to create across the railway, which he says builds passenger satisfaction. That is why this is the right thing to do. It is not about privatisation; it is about teamwork to deliver a better service for the passenger.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Although Network Rail does many things well, it is often cumbersome and unresponsive to the customer. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the purpose of his virtual operating companies is to bring scale benefits in cost and service to the customer?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend, who has great experience in such matters, is absolutely right. Right now, the incentives for team members in Network Rail are different from those in train operators. The incentive across the entire railway network should be to do a better job for the customer. Part of that process will involve aligning incentives so that everyone has the right motivation to deliver for the people who matter: the customers.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): A joined-up approach could bring benefits and has been called for on many occasions by, among others,

the Transport Committee. How will safety be protected in the specific model that the Transport Secretary now advocates? Could it be the beginning of a highly expensive fragmentation of the system?

Chris Grayling: The opposite is the case. This is not about fragmentation; it is about joining up. As the hon. Lady will know, we have various teams on the ground across our railways, some looking after the track and some looking after the trains. Sometimes they work together well, but sometimes they do not. By creating a structure that shapes teams on the ground, which involves decentralisation within Network Rail of the kind recommended by Nicola Shaw and the sort of partnerships that Sir Roy McNulty recommended, we will reach a place, about which the hon. Lady has talked in the past, where we have a more joined-up railway that does a better job for the customer.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on taking an initiative that could and should have been taken about 20 years ago. I am delighted that my constituents travelling from east Kent will be among the first to benefit from better co-operation between Network Rail and the train operating company. Will he indicate whether funding will be available for the Kent coast line to be brought at least into the 20th century and preferably into the 21st century?

Chris Grayling: Following the new Southeastern franchise bids, I hope and expect to see the kind of benefit that we have seen on the East Anglian rail network, where every single train is due to be replaced as part of the new franchise. That is the sort of progress that makes a real difference to passengers, and I want to see that kind of improvement across the network, including on Southeastern. As the two sides of the railway work closer together, the ability to deliver small, incremental improvements quickly becomes better and more readily available, and we can then improve services.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): This is a Minister who has a bit of form. In a previous job, he wrecked the prison system. He now has the job at Transport and is about to cause havoc there as well.

Chris Grayling: Let me surprise the hon. Gentleman by saying that I am the Minister who decided not to privatise the Prison Service, a decision which was described in my office by the Prison Officers Association as a victory. I hate to disabuse him, but I am not an inveterate privatiser; I am an inveterate improver of services.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his encouraging response to the urgent question. A number of operators work with Network Rail in both our constituencies and not only has the number of complaints dropped dramatically but, more importantly, there has been a positive response to requests for service changes from the constituents.

Chris Grayling: That is right. Two rail routes run through my constituency. One is run by South West Trains and one by Southern. We understand the issues on the Southern network, but I recently went to a public meeting on the edge of my constituency about the service provided by South West Trains and found an

[*Chris Grayling*]

audience broadly full of praise for the operator. There have been a bumpy few weeks this autumn and some things have gone wrong with the infrastructure on the network, but there are many decent people on our railways who have been there for a long time, working hard for passengers, and we must always recognise that.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): Some of the main causes of delays and problems on the network include failures of signals, points and trains. Will the Secretary of State explain in specifics what will be different under his proposals from what currently happens?

Chris Grayling: Let me give the hon. Gentleman a specific example. About 10 days ago, there was a quite bad signal failure at lunchtime on the South West Trains network. I caught the train home during the evening peak, by which time the service was pretty much back to normal. It is a joined-up route that has the nearest thing to an alliance on the network, and the two sides work hard together to deliver improvements quickly when something goes wrong. That is an example of the benefits of joined-up working, as opposed to having to wait several hours for the two teams to decide how to do things together.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): I welcome the move towards greater integration with operating teams. Does the Secretary of State share my hope that that might stop the buck-passing between train operating companies and Network Rail, which many of my constituents north of the river on the Thameslink line have suffered daily and to which I drew his attention yesterday?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. I make no pretence: there are some genuine problems on our railways at the moment. Those are mostly problems of intensive use and dramatic increases in passenger numbers, beyond anything envisaged even 10 years ago. So we have to deliver change and improvement, which comes partly through capacity improvements—a lot of money is being spent on the Thameslink route. It also comes through better performance on a day-to-day basis. I will never be afraid to hold rail companies' feet to the fire if they do not deliver, but we also need to recognise that many of the problems arise on the infrastructure, and getting the two to work together to deliver real solutions to those problems has to be the right way forward.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Secretary of State has said that he wants less contracting complexity and more localised decision making, but giving more power over infrastructure to private train operating companies will create a new and uneven layer of contracting in the industry. How can he be confident that this will not lead to a return of the subcontracting culture, which was a major factor in the avoidable rail tragedies at Hatfield and Potters Bar?

Chris Grayling: I do not think the hon. Lady has been listening to me. I am not talking about creating complex new contracting structures; I am talking about teamwork on the ground. Where we have started this—the hon.

Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) made the point about the situation in Scotland—it has made a difference. We need to deepen and strengthen these alliances, and create much stronger teamwork on the front line. That is what will make a difference.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I, too, welcome this announcement, including the proposal to involve Kent County Council more in the renewal of the Southeastern franchise. Day in, day out, rail commuters in my constituency have to cope with delays, to the extent that one constituent has even asked the managing director of Southeastern to write to his boss to explain why he is late each day. Will the Secretary of State therefore say more about how his proposals will enable my constituents to get to work on time?

Chris Grayling: I know that there has been disruption in the Kent area in the past couple of years because of the improvements at London Bridge, and there are lessons to be learned from the way they have been carried out to make sure that we minimise disruption in the future. We need big investments that will create extra capacity, but they have to be done in a way that causes as little damage as possible to ongoing services. I want the new franchise to deliver the best possible improvements to services in Kent and London, which is one reason why I reached the view that the design of the franchise has to be a three-way partnership between my Department, Transport for London and Kent, because this multifaceted franchise has to work for everyone.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): In east Yorkshire did we not have a plan for joined-up thinking, using a train operator called First Hull Trains to improve services for local people by electrifying the line to Hull? Was not that joined-up thinking abandoned by the Government just a few weeks ago?

Chris Grayling: What actually happened was that before the point of being able to take a decision on electrification on the Hull line, Hull Trains and TransPennine ordered bi-mode trains that deliver the service improvements without any additional investment in unnecessary infrastructure. That means we can spend more money around the network to improve services. People in Hull should be pleased, because they are about to get smart new trains that will really improve services.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): We would all welcome more integrated teams working on behalf of passengers on our railways. Will the Secretary of State explain how this will work for my local passengers on the trans-Pennine route, bearing in mind that the Northern franchise runs out in 2025 and the TransPennine Express franchise runs out in 2023?

Chris Grayling: The central focus is likely to be the Northern franchise, and indeed that was Nicola Shaw's recommendation. A large part of the rail network is relatively easy to deliver in this way, but in some parts where there are multiple operators we need to look carefully at how best to do it. The integrity and the spread of the Northern franchise is probably the foundation for the strongest alliance in that area.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Secretary of State has mentioned South West Trains and how some of this integration is already in place in our network. So either we are talking about that, in which case this is not really a change, or this is the predecessor to a privatisation which will go badly—which is it?

Chris Grayling: It could just be that we have had some tentative steps in this direction that have shown early signs of promise and that we think we should pursue much more seriously—it could just be that.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Commuters on the Braintree to Liverpool Street line suffer cancellations and delays far too regularly. I welcome the commitment to new rolling stock under the new franchise, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the bringing together of the TOCs and Network Rail will mean that there can be no excuses, be they about rolling stock, signalling or points, to further delay the commuters in my constituency?

Chris Grayling: I agree; what the public want is to know that someone is in charge. The aim of all this is to ensure that someone is in charge. Things will go wrong and there will be problems—that is unavoidable in a congested rail system—but we all want to know that there is a joined-up team trying to solve them. Of course, I hope that the new trains on my hon. Friend's network, once they arrive and have bedded in, will deliver much better reliability than the existing ones.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Will this new arrangement have any impact on future investment decisions? I note that the east midlands franchise is to be one of the first considered for this new arrangement, so how does that impact on possible electrification there? A scheme was committed to and then paused, and then unpaused and recommitted to. Now it appears to be neither paused nor committed to. Will the Secretary of State explain the impact on that of these arrangements?

Chris Grayling: There is no impact; as I have said in the House before, we are proceeding with the next stage of electrification to Corby. We are looking at how we deliver service improvements to Sheffield by 2020, with improved journey times, faster tracks and the remodelling of key places such as Derby station, and I am looking actively at how we provide the best train fleet for the future.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I have been campaigning for the reopening of the east-west rail line for many years, so may I thank my right hon. Friend for this early Christmas present? Will he assure me that the new body will work closely with the National Infrastructure Commission on unlocking the economic potential of the Oxford to Cambridge corridor through Milton Keynes? Do we have an updated likely date for the opening of the line?

Chris Grayling: We will work with the National Infrastructure Commission, and we will also work closely with the local authorities that have been involved in helping to develop the project. I will not give my hon. Friend a date, but I would say that one reason for doing this is that I want to accelerate the process. I look at the pipeline of projects that Network Rail has, and I do not

want this project to disappear into the middle of the next decade; I want us to start real improvement works quickly. We have money from the autumn statement to start some of that work around the intersection with HS2, but I just want to make this project happen quickly. We have to demonstrate sometimes in this country that we can get on with things.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): My constituency and the north Wales line are covered by two major franchises, Wales and borders, and west coast; by two Governments, the Welsh Government and the UK Government; and by Network Rail. In future, under the Secretary of State's plans, who would be responsible for safety? Has he spoken to the Welsh Government about that?

Chris Grayling: Today's announcement is predominantly about England, because, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the Welsh Government are taking the lead in designing the franchise. I know that they have sympathy with this view, because they are pathfinders at the moment in securing bids from integrated consortiums for the proposed Cardiff metro service, but I will discuss this with the Welsh Government, as I have regular conversations with them. I hope that they may want to build on some of the things we are seeking to do in England.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Secretary of State's decision to reintegrate train and track, where appropriate, is sensible. Does he accept, however, that my constituents will regard his failure to remove the London metro services from the wholly discredited Southeastern franchise as a complete cop-out and failure, and that it makes sense at all, as far as rail users in my constituency or I am concerned?

Chris Grayling: I know that my hon. Friend feels passionately about this, but I do not agree with him. We will have the opportunity, between London, my Department and Kent, to design an improved franchise for the future. What I had to decide was whether the benefits set out in the Mayor's business plan, which did not involve increases in capacity on my hon. Friend's local routes into London, and the incremental improvements that Transport for London claimed it might be able to deliver were really worth putting his railway line through the biggest restructuring since the 1920s. My judgment is that we can achieve the benefits that TfL is arguing for through partnership, rather than through massive reorganisation, and that is my aim.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): What evaluation has there been of the time and cost benefits of doing the Oxford to Cambridge line in the way that the Secretary of State proposes, as opposed to having Network Rail do it? Does he envisage other projects being run in this way? If this is about looking for different ways of doing things, will he consider allowing the public sector to bid for train franchises?

Chris Grayling: As the right hon. Gentleman will be aware from the autumn statement, the Oxford-Cambridge corridor is a much broader project than just a railway line. It is seen as a key development corridor by the Treasury and the National Infrastructure Commission. We also need to look at the construction of improved

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road links between the two, so it is much more complicated than simply saying, “It’s a railway line.” However, we need to build a model that secures developer contributions on the route. It is good for our rail sector to have a bit of contestability. The assumption that Network Rail should always do everything does not give us any benchmarks to judge whether someone else can do it better. I want to use this as an opportunity, in a way that does not affect the rest of the network, to test the way that we are doing things, and to see whether we can do them quicker and better.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Passengers in my constituency just want a better service—one that matches the train timetable—and this is something that I have raised with the Secretary of State on a number of occasions. I agree that both track and train teams need to work together to focus on delivering a better service, especially on the Upfield line. What improvements will my constituents see with this new initiative?

Chris Grayling: One thing I asked Chris Gibb to do around the Southern route was to start to create the kind of partnership that I have described today. My early experience on this route—and the early experience of the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard)—was that Network Rail and the train operator were not working closely together and not addressing problems together. Sadly, the real challenge in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) is the ongoing industrial action, which is utterly pointless. No one is losing their job, and no one is losing any money; this is all about adopting new technologies and ways of working that are already custom and practice on the same routes. The action is a tragedy, and it is unacceptable. I again call on the unions to go back to work.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): When Transport for London took over London Overground, it went from being the worst performing rail line in the country to the best performing rail line. That was why the Government signed an agreement with TfL and the London government in March for TfL to take over Southeastern when the franchise expires in 2018. What exactly has happened to make the Government break their promise to Londoners?

Chris Grayling: I looked very carefully at this matter. The hon. Lady needs to understand the difference between London Overground and the rest of the suburban routes. London Overground has provided a good service, which is run by Arriva—part of the German railways—and was co-run initially by MTR, the Hong Kong metro system. It is a franchise operator, like the rest. Having read the Mayor’s business case carefully, and having considered the level of change required to split the franchise in half—it would be the biggest operating change on this railway since the 1920s—and the potential disruption to passengers over a period of time, I thought, rightly or wrongly, that we could deliver the service improvement that TfL was talking about by forging a partnership. Crucially, we would involve Kent, because this is not a London issue; as this railway runs from

London to the south coast, we cannot think of the railway system just in terms of London. Very many passengers and representatives in this House from further afield would take a very different view from her on what will work for the railway line.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): May I welcome the Secretary of State’s pragmatic approach to this problem? We on the Conservative Benches believe in devolution and in providing different solutions depending on the circumstances. The west coast main line is working at almost 100% capacity. Will he explain to my constituents how London Midland, Virgin and Network Rail on the west coast main line will work better together through his proposals?

Chris Grayling: There are two issues here. Clearly, there is logic, for the midlands and the north, in having a really joined-up relationship between Network Rail and the local train operator. Of course there will be services, such as Virgin’s west coast main line and the CrossCountry service, that cross boundaries. We must preserve the existing regulatory framework so that those services are not affected by this. My hon. Friend talked about devolution; what I am talking about for London is exactly the same model that we have adopted for transport in the north and the midlands of partnership and of shaping franchises. Local designer franchises have played a big part in the north in delivering what is genuinely thought to be a great new franchise structure that will bring real improvements for people across the north of England.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Just a couple of weeks after the autumn statement, which was supposed to herald new investment in infrastructure, the new Secretary of State has given the game away with today’s announcement that the new rail line between Oxford and Cambridge will be built with private investment, so his true colours are shining through. Let me take him back to his comments about the success of ScotRail Alliance and ask him this: if it is working so well now, would it not work even better if we removed more interfaces and fully devolved Network Rail in Scotland to the Scottish Government?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman talks about investment and true colours. My view is this: the public sector is already putting a vast amount of investment into the railways. I support that, and I will get as much investment as I possibly can for our transport system, but there is no harm in also trying to do more by supplementing that with private finance. That may be an ideological division between us, but I cannot see how our transport system loses by having some private finance alongside the huge amounts of public finance already going into the sector.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): Network Rail recently carried out upgrades worth £3 million on the line running through Fareham in my constituency. Does the Secretary of State agree that this announcement will mean a greater focus on passengers? There are still so many commuters from Fareham who struggle because of the troubles with Southern rail. A more joined-up

and co-ordinated approach will be a step in the right direction towards ensuring that commuters have better journeys to work.

Chris Grayling: Three things need to happen to deal with the issues on Southern. The first is that we need much more joined-up working. Secondly, we will have to put more money into the Southern infrastructure, which is clearly under great stress. It is a very intensively used railway, and not enough has been spent on it over the years. Above all, we just need to get the workforce back to work. The bizarre thing is that the 10-coach train that I often take to Victoria in the morning has a driver and no guard, and it has been like that for years. Why on earth are the drivers and the guards on Southern putting the passengers through such enormous distress when no one is in danger of losing their job? It is shocking. I would like to hear one word of condemnation from the Labour party. Do we ever hear any condemnation of its union paymasters? The answer is no, not for a moment.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): When Zac Goldsmith was standing as the Conservative candidate for Mayor of London, the Department for Transport was all for the idea of devolving responsibility for letting Southeastern's franchise to TfL, but now that he has gone, the promise seems to have gone as well. Why are the Government jettisoning the practical improvements that could have been associated with devolution in favour of this political experiment?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady talks about political experiments; a political experiment would be implementing a business plan that I did not judge delivered substantial improvements to passengers, and that involved the biggest shake-up of the railways in the south-east since the 1920s. That is a risk that we do not need to take. We can deliver improvements through partnership, but we must remember that that partnership is not just about London; it is about Kent. It is a partnership that involves passengers on different parts of the routes. We need to design a franchise structure that delivers improvements for everyone.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Passengers on the diesel-operated East Midlands Trains franchise from London to Kettering, who already experience some of the most expensive fares per mile in the country, often have delays to their service, not because of anything that East Midlands Trains has done, but because of Network Rail problems with the overhead lines coming out of St Pancras for the Thameslink service. That often happens at Luton and Bedford as well. Will the Secretary of State ensure that East Midlands Trains, Thameslink trains and Network Rail are among the first to set up these joint operating arrangements, because that would be greatly welcomed by my Kettering constituents?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that will be the case; that is one of the franchises that is coming up to be let. Big improvements are needed on that route. One of the other things that is unsatisfactory about the service for his constituents in Kettering is that in the mornings, they have to pile on to crammed inter-city trains from much further north in the east midlands. What we aim to deliver by 2020 is a

better inter-city service and, for the first time, a proper dedicated commuter service to people from Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and further south.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): From what I can gather, integration is at the heart of what the Secretary of State is endeavouring to achieve. With that in mind, now that the UK Government are devolving responsibilities for the Welsh franchise to Wales, is it not logical to devolve responsibility for the Welsh network?

Chris Grayling: I need to correct the hon. Gentleman on that: we are not devolving responsibility for the whole Welsh franchise as he describes; we are doing so in part. I have said to the Welsh Government that I am happy with their taking control of the Welsh valleys lines, with a view to developing the metro system that they hope to put into service, but the Welsh franchise is not purely Welsh; it runs through large parts of England as well. We cannot have a situation where we, the Government in Westminster, give up control over services in England to the Welsh Government without checks and balances. That is not going to happen.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement today of greater alignment between track and train operators. It seems that in the past fortnight or so Southern and Thameslink passengers have suffered a lot of broken rail reports—almost more reports in that period than in the last year. How can the new model help to address that situation?

Chris Grayling: The incidence of broken rails is a worrying coincidence, to put it mildly. I am concerned about the number of infrastructure breakdowns in recent weeks. Passengers blame the train company, but often—recently, more often than not—it is an infrastructure problem. That route is suffering intensely from low-level industrial action on non-strike days, and effectively a work to rule has been in force on different parts of that railway for months, which is adding to the intense pressure. I wish the unions would just accept that their members are not losing as a result of the change. They have more job security and better pay than a lot of people in the south-east, and they should get back to work and do the job they need to do for their passengers.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The travelling public support devolution, as do a number of Conservative MPs, council leaders and Assembly Members, and indeed as the Conservative Government did when they signed the joint prospectus with the previous Mayor of London. Is it not just a narrow, petty, political point that the right hon. Gentleman does not want to devolve to a Labour Mayor, who would provide more frequent trains, fewer delays and cancellations, more staff at stations and frozen fares?

Chris Grayling: This is the problem with the proposition. The hon. Gentleman says that more frequent trains would be provided, but the Mayor's business plan did not provide more frequent trains. It provided no extra capacity in peak hours into the stations that serve the Southeastern route, and it would have involved the biggest reorganisation of those routes since the 1920s. My judgment is that, as it does not deliver the more

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frequent trains the hon. Gentleman describes, we should design the franchise through partnership, rather than upheaval.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): As the Secretary of State is well aware, there are appalling problems on Southern rail, which have been going on for a significant period and made worse by the apparent inability of Network Rail and Govia Thameslink Railway to work together. May I welcome his work with Chris Gibb and his pragmatic approach both to that and to the unions?

Chris Grayling: I appreciate my hon. Friend's comments. One of the breakdowns last week was caused by a piece of equipment being left behind from engineering work being done to sort out the problems in the Balcombe tunnel, which contribute to the unreliability on that network. Some of the money I announced in September is now being spent operationally on the ground. It is frustrating when it has an unfortunate accidental wrong effect.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State tell us when the electrification work between Cardiff and Swansea will be finished?

Chris Grayling: As I have said to the hon. Gentleman before, I make no bones about my unhappiness with the progress of Great Western electrification, which has not been anything like what I had hoped for. My policy right now is to deliver for him the new trains and improved journey times that will result from where we have got to so far, and where we hope we will get to soon in the electrification programme. He knows that what will make the biggest difference to Swansea is fast new trains to London.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): What are the implications of the proposed partnership on the east midlands franchise for smaller capital schemes such as the one for level access at Alfreton station, which was scandalously delayed by Network Rail last week?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend will know that where more enlightened train operators have invested and made improvements, it has paid dividends for them—Chiltern Railways is the obvious example. I hope that with more autonomy for the Network Rail team on the ground and autonomy for the private sector operators, they will look together at small schemes that will make a real difference to passengers and can be afforded within local budgets.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Proposals to devolve rail services in London were championed by the Secretary of State's predecessor,

were underpinned by a solid business case, had cross-party support inside and outside London and, most important, were incredibly popular among passengers in London and Kent, who suffer daily at the hands of Southeastern and its unreliable and overcrowded services. Does the Secretary of State accept that his decision to take the proposal off the table today will be seen by those passengers as a betrayal of the hopes and expectations that were raised earlier this year by the Government?

Chris Grayling: No, I do not accept that. As I keep saying, the business plan submitted by the Mayor did not deliver extra capacity. I have invited Transport for London and Kent County Council to work alongside us on designing a franchise that maximises performance, takes advantage of any best practice we can learn from, and works for London and for Kent. Both are important.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): People in Corby and east Northamptonshire are delighted with the Government's commitment to electrification of the midland main line and pleased with the track upgrades in recent weeks. As part of the reletting of the franchise, they would like more trains running northbound and southbound through Corby. What benefit does my right hon. Friend envisage this greater co-operation having, in terms of responding most effectively to local concern and demand?

Chris Grayling: We know that often on the railways, as on the roads, it is the small things that make a real difference. I hope that with decentralisation of Network Rail into a route-based structure, the autonomous local managing directors who have their own budgets will be much better placed to apply small amounts of money to small schemes that make a material difference to passengers. I believe that the approach we propose will make that more likely. There is a real opportunity for the east midlands to be early beneficiaries of this approach.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): The prize for patience and perseverance goes to Ian Lucas.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Transport for London and Merseyrail are successful vertically integrated train companies. Why, if we want more integration, do we not apply their successful model, which attracts public and private investment, to the rest of our railway network?

Chris Grayling: I hate to disabuse the hon. Gentleman, but Merseyrail is not a vertically integrated train operator. Indeed, I have discussed with Merseyrail whether it wants to take control of its tracks, and so far it has been indicated to me, at least by the Mayor of Liverpool, that he does not particularly want to. I would be happy if Merseyrail took control of its tracks. It has long had the opportunity to become an integrated train operator, but right now, it is not.

Casey Report

1.17 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will make a statement on the Government's initial reaction to the recommendations in the Casey report and indicate what process the Government will now adopt for detailed consideration of its proposals and their implementation.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): In July 2015, the Government asked Dame Louise Casey to conduct an independent review of opportunity and integration in the UK. Her report was published yesterday. Once again, I thank Dame Louise for her thorough and diligent work over the past 18 months. Many of her findings ring true to me personally. I have seen for myself the enormous contribution that immigrants and their families make to British life, all without giving up their unique cultural identities, but I have also seen with my own eyes the other side of the equation. For too long, too many people in this country have been living parallel lives, refusing to integrate and failing to embrace the shared values that make Britain great; and for too long, too many politicians in this country have refused to deal with the problem, ducking the issue for fear of being called a racist and failing the very people they are supposed to help. I will not allow that to continue.

We in public life have a moral responsibility to deal with the situation, and Dame Louise's report is a crucial step in that process. I am studying her findings closely. The report touches on the work of a number of Departments, so I will discuss it with colleagues across Government more widely. In spring, we will come to the House with our plans for tackling these issues, so that we can continue to build a country that works for everyone.

Mr Betts: I had the pleasure of hosting Louise Casey on a visit to Sheffield, where she identified both the scale and the speed of substantial Slovak Roma migration to the city, which is a significant challenge. She identified that even in Sheffield, which has a history of good community relations, those communities very often live side by side, with very little interaction, let alone any integration. Will the Secretary of State indicate his response to the detailed recommendations of the report, particularly a key recommendation for the creation of a new programme to improve community cohesion, with area-based plans and projects? Does he recognise that such a programme will need targeted funds, rather like the impact funds that the Government abolished?

Does the Secretary of State agree with Louise Casey that speaking English is key to integration? Will he agree to reverse the cuts that have been made to the funds available for courses teaching English as a second language? Does he have a view on the recommendations to promote British values in all communities, especially the values of tolerance and respect for others, which support equality on grounds of sex, sexuality, race and religion?

Given that many of the recommendations are challenging and some may be controversial, will the Secretary of State have a programme to consult elected councils and the different communities in the areas most impacted

by the recommendations? Finally, after discussions with Government colleagues, will the right hon. Gentleman come back to this House with an action plan, and maybe even come to the Communities and Local Government Committee to discuss it with us as well?

Sajid Javid: First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his warm words about the report and his welcome for it. I know that this is an issue in which he has personally taken an interest for many years, and I look forward to speaking to him as the Chair of the Select Committee about the report. He will know that this is an independent report, not a statement of Government policy. Naturally, the Government will want to take the right length of time to look at each of the report's findings and the recommendations that Dame Louise has made.

The hon. Gentleman asked about a number of the recommendations. Let me respond to some of those, without prejudging our response to the report in spring next year. He asked about the area-based plan—a more place-based view. Taking account of local circumstances is just common sense, something the Government already do with their integration and cohesion programmes, but I would like to see how we could make more of that. The hon. Gentleman asked about making resources available. Of course, we will make sure that any recommendation that the Government accept and decide to take forward is suitably resourced.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the importance of English. One of the central recommendations of the report is to make sure that every community in Britain can speak English. I remember, when I was about eight or nine years old, going with my mother when she had to visit the GP and acting as an interpreter for her. Many years later I am pleased to say that she learned English and now speaks it very well. It has transformed her life. It is great news for British society when more and more people who are going to settle here can speak English. I know from personal experience the difference that can make. That is why I am pleased that the Government already spend more than £100 million a year to help people to learn English if it is a foreign language for them. We always have to see what more we can do.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about promoting British values. He is right to stress that, and the report touches on it in a number of areas. He talked particularly about the importance of tolerance and respect, and I am sure he will agree that respect works both ways—respect of all communities for each other, including of immigrant communities for the dominant Christian culture in this country, which is sometimes lacking. We have to make sure that we are promoting British values in every sensible way that we can. We will be looking closely at the report and reporting back on its findings in the spring.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I welcome Louise Casey's review. It echoes a number of the findings in a recent Women and Equalities Committee report on the challenges that many Muslim people face in getting work in this country. In her report she sets out the fact that women in some communities face a double barrier of gender and religion preventing them from accessing even basic rights as British residents. How are the Secretary of State and the Government ensuring that

[Mrs Maria Miller]

every person in this country is afforded the protection of the Equality Act 2010 and of their rights under the law of this country?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend is right to raise the issue. She speaks with great experience and has done a lot to promote equality in this country through her work as a Minister and on the Back Benches. She speaks of the double barrier faced by some women. The report talks about the challenges facing Muslim women in particular. More needs to be done in that regard, not just directly by Government; it is a challenge also to Muslim communities, and particularly to some Muslim men, as to how they treat Muslim women. These findings are extremely important. We should take them seriously and see what more we can do.

Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I thank the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee for asking this important urgent question. For too long as a country we have ignored these complex issues for fear of being seen as racist or as attacking cultural attitudes. Sadly, this approach has left a vacuum that has been exploited by those who exist to promote hatred. It is time that we recognised the problems and opportunities highlighted in the Casey report and addressed them in a realistic and mature way.

One of the issues that was highlighted by the Chair of the Select Committee was the ability to speak English. One of the most concerning aspects of the report is how women in some communities are denied equal rights and opportunities. We are constantly urging people who suffer sexual abuse or violence to speak out, but they cannot speak out if they cannot speak English. If they cannot speak English, they cannot even ring 999. Yet the Casey report found that the Department for Communities and Local Government spent more on promoting the Cornish language between 2011 and 2013 than it did on promoting English. Does the Secretary of State now believe that ESOL classes should not have been scrapped? In the light of this report and of his own experience as a young man, will he commit to reinstating ESOL?

The report highlights the fact that communities have been left behind. It is not acceptable to blame the people living in those communities for that, when many of the projects recommended in the report that would empower marginalised women, promote social mixing and tackle barriers to employment for the most socially isolated groups have been scrapped over the past six years as a result of devastating cuts to local government. Does the Secretary of State recognise that cuts to local government funding have contributed to these problems, and will he push for fairer funding in the coming spending review?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the Muslim Council of Britain that although any initiatives that facilitate better integration of all Britons should be welcomed, taken as a whole the report could be perceived as a missed opportunity to emphasise that integration requires the active participation of all Britons?

The report looked at education, recommending strong safeguards for children not in mainstream education. Will the Secretary of State outline what is being done by his Department and other Departments to make sure that those children are safeguarded?

Sajid Javid: I am pleased that the hon. Lady agrees that many of the issues raised in the report have been ignored for too long by too many politicians on both sides of the House. It is good that there is general agreement on that. By taking the report as an important first step, we can start to deal together with some of the issues.

The hon. Lady asked about English language. I am a little disappointed that having started by saying that we should take a mature approach, she then made the point about the Cornish language. If she had looked more closely, she would have seen that it was an entirely misleading headline. She spoke about spending on languages by my Department, so I will tell her the facts. In the past six years the Department has spent £780,000 on the Cornish language, but in the past five years it has spent £11 million on community-based English language programmes. On top of that, the rest of the Government has spent hundreds of millions of pounds on supporting English. If we are to have a proper debate, the hon. Lady would be well advised to stick to the facts and use them in the debate.

The hon. Lady asked whether there will be fairer funding for local government. She should know that there is currently a local government fairer funding review, which will report early next year. On the Muslim Council of Britain and some of its early comments on the report, it is important to highlight that I certainly want to speak with all groups, including the Muslim Council of Britain and many others, that want to comment on the report and make suggestions on how we can take integration and cohesion forward.

The hon. Lady also asked about safeguarding, particularly of young Muslims who might be vulnerable in some way. She will know that the Prevent programme is exactly that: a safeguarding programme. That is something I hope the whole House can support.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Can sharia be a voluntary choice for women lacking in English in closed communities?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend raises an important issue that came up in the report. It is worth reminding the House that sharia councils are not courts in England and Wales; they cannot legally enforce any decisions and they must, of course, operate within the national law. However, the report has highlighted some legitimate issues. That is why I am pleased that the Government have already started a full, independent review of sharia law in England and Wales, and I look forward to reading its conclusions.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Dame Louise's extensive report comes at an interesting time, with Brexit exacerbating hate crime and Government and tabloid rhetoric ramping up. I am particularly thankful that at least in Scotland we have political leadership at all levels, whether that be the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, who has made welcome those new Scots who have chosen Scotland and given us the tremendous honour of making Scotland their home; Glasgow City Council, which put above its front door a banner proclaiming that refugees are welcome; or the range of community initiatives across the country, such as Refuweege, which fosters integration. The challenges of migration—
[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Why is there so much noise in the Chamber when the hon. Lady is speaking from the Front Bench? She must be listened to.

Alison Thewliss: The challenges of migration are highlighted in the review, but again and again this Tory Government have been found lacking, and in some cases they are the cause. Ending austerity is the best thing this Government could do to tackle social exclusion and promote integration. Will the Secretary of State challenge the toxic rhetoric that pits groups in our society against each another? Will he look to Scotland to see how the strategies that we are implementing are providing opportunities for people to share experiences? Will he reverse the damaging cuts to ESOL, which other Members have mentioned, and will he refuse to accept the offensive suggestion that we require an integration oath?

Sajid Javid: It is a shame that the hon. Lady has to be so party political about this matter. When she can act in a more mature fashion, and when she and the Scottish National party have something useful to say, I will respond.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Has the Secretary of State had the opportunity to listen to two important radio programmes on the Deobandis—they are still available on the internet—that were broadcast by the BBC a year or so ago? They shine an important light on some of the problems that affect us. Will he join me in welcoming the section of the report on the Prevent strategy, and Louise Casey's statement that the public servants delivering it "should be proud and unapologetic about the important work they do to keep us safe"?

Sajid Javid: I have not listened to those radio programmes on the plight of the Deobandis, but I am well aware of the issues faced by that community. My right hon. Friend is right to highlight it in the House. The report is a reminder of all the communities that we can help through Government action. I am pleased to hear of his support for the Prevent programme. He has been a supporter of it for a while, and that is because he knows that it works.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): The Secretary of State has referred to the Prevent strategy. In relation to children who are home schooled, can he please explain how that operates and how success is measured?

Sajid Javid: Home schooling, as the hon. Lady will know, is an important and valuable option that we offer in this country. My hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards is here and has heard her question, and I am sure that he will respond.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I welcome the report, but one of my concerns is that it contains no reflections on the future of faith schools, and therefore the integration of young people across faiths, which I hope we will look at in particular. Can we take urgent action on one of the recommendations, which is that children who are withdrawn from school and educated at home might not receive the sort of education that we would like them to receive? Those children are at risk right now and we need to take urgent action.

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are looking at unregistered settings, and once that review is complete it will help us deal with the kinds of issues he is concerned about. He talked more generally about faith schools, which are a hugely important part of our education system. They provide variety, but so many people choose them because, by and large, they are excellent schools. Many of them do a great job of promoting integration. One of my brothers, as a Muslim, went to a Roman Catholic school, and it taught him a lot about British society and British values. I think that we should find good practice and see what we can do to promote it.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Louise Casey is right to call out misogyny as one of the ways in which women from minority ethnic communities are socially excluded—not an issue that some of us have ever ignored—but will the Secretary of State talk to the Home Secretary about the misogynist practices of the Home Office? First of all, it excludes wives who come from overseas from accessing free ESOL for the first two years they are here. Secondly, what about those women in Britain who have been exploited by husbands cheating their way into Britain on a marriage ticket? The Home Office refuses to tell the wives, who are British citizens, what has happened to their husbands, and it refuses to collaborate with those women in reporting their husbands and removing them when it should do.

Sajid Javid: Unfortunately, I do not recognise much of what the right hon. Lady is talking about. Again, she would do well to stick to the facts. For example, she talks about helping women to learn English when they come to Britain. As hon. Members have mentioned, English is hugely important for integration, which is why the Government have put in place a requirement that anyone wishing to settle permanently in this country must first be able to speak English.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): The report states: "Too many public institutions, national and local, state and non-state, have gone so far to accommodate diversity and freedom of expression that they have ignored or even condoned regressive, divisive and harmful cultural and religious practices, for fear of being branded racist or Islamophobic."

Does the Secretary of State agree that there is now a great opportunity for the Government to take the lead in forging a common, modern British identity that new arrivals must sign up to if integration is really going to work?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. As I said at the start—I am pleased to hear that she agrees—politicians, collectively, have for too long ignored this issue and there has been a fear of being branded racist, and clearly that is unacceptable. This is an excellent opportunity for us to build on.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Integration, of course, is a two-way process, and it can be assisted by central Government but has to be delivered at a local level. May I suggest to the Secretary of State that something he could do to respond to the Casey report would be to give the regional mayors in the west midlands the power to administer the training levy? They are best placed to know what kinds of employment opportunities and integration projects for better training and education should be applied.

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Lady is absolutely right about the importance of having local flexibility and control over many integration programmes. She might be aware of the Near Neighbours programme, which has thousands of projects all run locally, often involving voluntary groups and local authorities, which I think is a good example of that. She has made a suggestion and I have listened carefully.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): The Minister will be aware that the last two Muslims to be murdered in hate crimes were murdered not by Brexit supporters but by other Muslims. Does that not show the importance of implementing this report and demanding that all communities sign up to gay rights, women's rights and the right to interpret religion in any way one wishes?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend highlights the importance of promoting British values and making sure that they are accepted by all communities in Britain. That includes tolerance, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, respect for democracy and so many other things. The more we can do to make sure that every community embraces those, the better off we will all be.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I do not recognise the description of the Muslim community that is painted in this report in respect of my home city of Leicester, where 20% are of Muslim origin and 50% are from the ethnic minority communities. The Secretary of State and I have been to many dinners and other events for the ethnic minority communities, and he will know that what those communities want more than anything else is to belong, to integrate and to be ambitious for their children. In which country of the world can the son of a bus driver be a Secretary of State in the Cabinet and be talked about as a potential Prime Minister? In which country of the world can four Muslim women be sitting in Parliament today representing all their constituents? While accepting what the report says, let us also be positive about the huge contribution that the ethnic minority communities have made, which has made this country great.

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the massive and positive contribution that immigrants through the decades have made to our great country and how they have made our country stronger still. He referred specifically to Muslim communities, including in his own constituency, and I think he will recognise that a lot of the issues and challenges affect a minority of the Muslim community. I think—well, I know, factually—that many members of the Muslim community recognise that there are problems and challenges that are particular to their own community, and they, as much as the right hon. Gentleman, myself and others in the House, want to deal with that.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): In Bradford, we have issues of segregation and integration in our communities. I very much welcome the report and what the Secretary of State has said today. Could I invite him to come along to Bradford sometime next year to see what the Government can do to help local communities with their desire for more community cohesion and integration? In the meantime, can he be very firm with local authorities

to stop them translating documents into lots of different languages and insist that those documents are all in English only?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend highlights some of the challenges, particularly in his own constituency, of segregation and lack of integration, but I know that he will also be one of the first to accept that different communities have helped his constituency in so many ways and brought so much for people to celebrate. I will be more than happy to come to Bradford to look at both issues with him.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): While I second the invitation to Bradford from my colleague, the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), I do not second the other half of his question. How will the Minister address the structural inequalities affecting Muslim communities, and especially Muslim women, which frustrate their aspiration of progressive engagement with society?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady will know that a number of programmes are already in place. Since 2011-12, the Government have spent £60 million on integration and cohesion programmes, including teaching the English language to isolated communities, with many of those involved being women. However, we always have to see what more we can do, and there are some suggestions in this report. It would be wrong of me not to study them carefully and not to look at which ones to take forward and implement, and I look forward to doing that. If the hon. Lady has particular suggestions once she has looked at the report in detail, I would be happy to listen to them.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Sport does so much to break down barriers, bring people together and help promote British values in our society on an organic basis, so although we have a proud record on this in this country, will the Secretary of State see what more can be done, working across Government, to help boost sporting participation, particularly among young people?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. When I was Culture Secretary, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport sponsored a number of programmes, particularly in cricket and football, that involved a number of young Asian men, and that did help with community integration and cohesion. He is right to raise the issue again, and we should be looking across the board to see how every Government Department can help.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I fear that the Secretary of State's fine words mask little-England identity politics. Can he assure me, as a south-east Londoner representing the most Welsh-speaking constituency for Plaid Cymru, that British values do not equate to a British state-imposed identity, and can he commit to bringing forward a strategy addressing poverty, inequality and inter-community respect?

Sajid Javid: I think the hon. Lady knows full well what British values mean, and they mean values for every part of the United Kingdom.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I agree with the Secretary of State that, for too long, we have had a soft-headed attitude towards integration, which has led to segregated communities up and down this country. I know that he has already been asked about faith schools, but could he spend some more time looking at the report, because I share its concern that faith schools further isolate young children? Does he agree that the report deserves a serious and determined response?

Sajid Javid: First, I thank my hon. Friend for the work she has already done to campaign on so many of the issues raised in this report, and I look forward to speaking to her in detail about the report and considering the recommendations. She raised the issue of faith schools, which, as she knows, is mentioned in the report. It is something that we want to look at carefully, and it is certainly something I will be discussing with my colleagues in Government.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Young Muslim women I have met in my constituency at the al-Hikmah centre and at Batley Girls' High School are engaging and whip-smart. They are held back not by lack of integration but by lack of opportunity. Will the Secretary of State therefore look particularly closely at the recommendation to provide additional funding for area-based plans to empower marginalised women and promote social mobility?

Sajid Javid: First, the hon. Lady is right to raise the issue of opportunity—the report is about opportunity and integration. We always have to look across Government to see what more we can do to promote opportunities for all communities, including young Muslim women. The hon. Lady described young Muslim women she has met, who sound absolutely fantastic and model citizens, but I think she will recognise that there are also young Muslim women who are being held back—sometimes by members of their own family or members of their own community. For example, as we have seen in this report, and as I have seen from bitter experience over a long time, women have been held back because they have been asked to go out with chaperones, because they are told to dress in a certain way, or because they are told that they cannot take certain jobs or that they should not go to university or pursue higher education. We want to make sure we tackle those issues as well, and I know the hon. Lady agrees with that.

Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while Britain should always remain a tolerant and diverse nation, it is also important that new communities feel an obligation to integrate and embrace a common British identity, and that we should never use the excuse of multiculturalism to tolerate practices that are clearly not in accordance with British laws, values and customs?

Sajid Javid: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I think we all realise—the report highlights this—that mistakes were made in the past. We could collectively, as politicians, have done a much better job in helping to settle and integrate new arrivals and new communities in Britain, and we should now learn from that. Looking forward, there are some interesting suggestions in the report about how we can do that, and I will be taking them very seriously.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I remember that when language classes were provided for immigrant women in Oxford, the same women went to the same classes year after year without showing any improvement in their ability to speak English. Does the report not point to the fact that it is a question not of throwing money at this, but of making language tuition effective?

Sajid Javid: I agree with my hon. Friend. We must make sure that the money we—the taxpayer—are currently spending on helping people to learn English is spent effectively, which is about making sure the programmes currently in place are effective. We must make sure that any new initiatives that we come up with as we plough through the report are effective in tackling that problem.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The report quite rightly highlights the good work of organisations such as Tell MAMA and the Community Security Trust, and it also draws attention to the upsurge of violence against people from Poland and elsewhere in recent months. Will the Secretary of State have urgent discussions with his Home Office colleagues about how to reduce the impact of the poisonous ideologies that come from other countries and cause tensions and even deaths, as we saw in Glasgow, in this country?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman mentioned two organisations—Tell MAMA and the CST—that are very effective and valuable, and the Government are proud to support them in the work they do. There are many other such organisations. That highlights the fact that dealing with these issues requires lots of groups and stakeholders, including voluntary organisations, to come together.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to meet the Home Secretary. I assure him that I regularly discuss these issues with the Home Secretary; we have a mutual interest in them. He may be interested to know that very recently—just two or three weeks ago—the Home Secretary and I jointly chaired a hate crime action panel, to which we invited a number of groups, including the two he mentioned, to discuss what more we can do.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I have read the Casey review, which considers many important aspects of integration. The Refugee Council has called for a comprehensive refugee integration strategy, and that is echoed in what we on the all-party group on refugees, which I chair, are finding in our public “Refugees Welcome” inquiry. Refugees have told us that they want to learn English, to work and to integrate, so will the Government support the expansion of the Syrian resettlement programme to create a comprehensive refugee integration strategy?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady is right to raise the importance of making sure that refugees are integrated quickly and properly, and of providing the resources for that. She will know that a number of programmes are in place to do just that. If she believes that there is more that can be done, I am happy to learn more from her.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) on securing this very important urgent question, but I think we could sometimes be a little bit more positive

[Mr Peter Bone]

about this. In Wellingborough, we have an integrated multicultural community, and we have had it for a very long time. We have Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Christian—both Labour and Conservative—councillors and candidates, and we have temples, mosques and churches. I wonder whether someone from the Secretary of State's Department might at some point come down to see how this can work well, rather than for us always to concentrate just on where it is going wrong.

Sajid Javid: I think that is a very good idea. Again, my hon. Friend highlights something that we should never forget: we are talking about the challenges and how to deal with them, but so many immigrants who, through the ages, have come to this great country have made a huge contribution to our country and made us so much stronger.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I welcome all efforts to improve integration in the UK—this is not the first study to find problems in this area—but I am concerned that there is no real understanding in the report of the simple truth that integration is a two-way street and should definitely not be used, as it so often is, as a stick with which to beat the minority communities of Britain. Given that, will the Minister consider what work can be done to understand, as Casey does not, the drivers of isolation? Alongside asking our minority communities to do more, how can we encourage our majority community to play their part too, so that integration can be truly a success for our country?

Sajid Javid: I know the hon. Lady feels passionately about these issues. She has thought a lot about them, and I think she will have some good suggestions. I am always very happy to speak to her about this. However, I think it is a bit unfair to Dame Louise Casey to say that she does not recognise that this is a two-way street. Dame Louise has come up with some specific recommendations, and I think we should take them seriously. She recognises—I have discussed this with her in the past, and it is reflected in the report—that there is a role for everyone in all communities to play.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): As Bedford has been home to people of many national origins for many decades, we can see, as the report shows, that some communities follow intergenerational dispersion, with children and grandchildren living away from their grandparents, and that others follow intergenerational proximity, with children and grandchildren living next door to their grandparents. May I draw the Secretary of State's attention to recommendation 10 on the use of housing policy to encourage dispersion, and will he consider the possibility of using planning policy to encourage the dispersion of places of worship?

Sajid Javid: I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said. I know from visiting his constituency with him a number of times that he takes these issues very seriously, and that he is able to look at these issues in his constituency and to suggest certain ideas. I will certainly look carefully at recommendation 10.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): First, I want to echo the remark made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood)

about integration being a two-way process. I want to highlight that the previous Labour Government set up the forced marriage unit and the community cohesion unit—I was involved in establishing both units—which did excellent work in tackling underlying causes, particularly in relation to human rights violations. I urge the Secretary of State to make sure that we provide service providers with the resources to address those issues.

Secondly, on discrimination, ethnic minority graduates are twice as likely as others to be unemployed, as are white working-class graduates. I therefore urge the Secretary of State to prioritise addressing the underlying problems and barriers to equality.

Finally, I want to draw attention to social integration. I have as many challenges in my constituency in encouraging middle-class newcomers to integrate with the settled communities, which are predominately ethnic minority communities, as I do the other way around. We all have a part to play, and if we can connect those communities together through projects, mentoring and engagement, we can genuinely have a two-way process and a practical way to integrate people, rather than stigmatising certain communities—in the case of this report, the Muslim community.

Sajid Javid: Again, I know that the hon. Lady speaks from experience. To take her last point first, I know that she has done a lot when it comes to projects and community work and I have seen first hand how transformative they can be. She is right to raise the issue of work opportunities, and the Government take that seriously. I chair—I did so in my former role of Business Secretary, and I continue to do so—an intergovernmental taskforce on opportunities for black and minority ethnic people, particularly young people. We are looking across Government to see what more can be done.

The hon. Lady also raised the issue of tackling female genital mutilation, forced marriage and other serious crimes of that nature. I think she will agree with me that the Government have taken them seriously. The previous Government did so, and this Government have built on their work. In fact, much of the good work done in recent times was done by the Prime Minister when she was Home Secretary.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): May I tell my right hon. Friend that this is his moment? His personal family experience and his sharp intellect mean that he is the right man in the right place at the right time. Dame Louise Casey tackles head-on the problems faced by thousands of Muslim women in this country, many of whom do not speak English, suffer misogyny and domestic violence at home, are oppressed by sharia law and have had their life chances diminished. Will he assure the House that he will not duck the challenge to seize the recommendations in the report and to restore full human rights to this very large cohort of oppressed women?

Sajid Javid: I can absolutely assure my hon. Friend that I will not duck the issues and the Government will not duck them. As I said at the start of the urgent question, they have been ignored by too many politicians for far too long, and that is not going to happen.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Secretary of State will know about concerns that Prevent is undermining efforts to integrate the Muslim community.

Will he set out what support the Department is giving to community-led initiatives to identify and prevent radicalisation?

Sajid Javid: The Prevent programme plays a valuable role. That is accepted by not only the Government, the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and others, but many local authorities and community leaders. However, I recognise that certain people have a confidence problem with Prevent. We need always to look to see what more we can do to turn that around. Having more people involved in the community locally is one way to do that.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): May I say how much I welcome the presence of the Minister for School Standards on the Front Bench? One of the best examples of community cohesion and togetherness is Moor End Academy, which Ofsted rated excellent. I attended its presentation evening last Thursday. That school has 31 different first languages and it is producing wonderful young people. Will the Secretary of State join me in praising the leadership at the school and, of course, the pupils and parents for everything they do?

Sajid Javid: Moor End Academy sounds fantastic. It sounds like we can learn more from its approach, and I look forward to doing that.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Like other colleagues, I have concerns about integration in my community. That is by no means to say that things are bad, but I have certainly seen things that could get much better, and it is a two-way street. However, I ask the Secretary of State in good faith, where are the resources to do this? Where are the resources to run youth clubs to bring young people together? Where are the resources for the sports projects? Whenever something goes badly wrong, a huge amount of resource is always made available in the aftermath. We need some of that to go in before problems occur.

Sajid Javid: First, the report is independent. That means that, although there are several recommendations, we need to go through them carefully to see which ones we can take forward and build on. When I report back by spring, if extra resource is required, we will certainly ensure that it is available.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Obviously, the review was into opportunity and integration, and the report highlighted the persistent disadvantage of white working-class children on free school meals who underperform at school. When the Government produce their report in the spring, will they address that issue as well?

Sajid Javid: First, the Department for Education is taking several actions to address that problem, which the hon. Lady is right to raise. She will know that the Prime Minister has also launched a race disparity audit, which looks at all public service across government. I am chairing that process alongside the Minister for the Cabinet Office. That work has just begun, but we are also trying to ascertain how public services are provided and what the outcomes are for all communities, including white working-class boys. We are trying to learn from that information how we can improve and what more we can do.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)
rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): The hon. Lady who gets the last word—Chi Onwurah.

Chi Onwurah: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is absolutely right to highlight the important role that we all must play in building strong, resilient, integrated and cohesive communities. It is Newcastle's diverse and united communities that make it such a great city. However, will the Secretary of State also recognise that the toxic combination of scapegoating refugees and migrants for cuts to public services, Muslims for terrorism, minorities for segregation and the white working class for xenophobia builds barriers to integration? Will he take steps to address such attitudes, wherever he may find them?

Sajid Javid: Yes, I will. The hon. Lady is right to highlight Newcastle. It is a fantastic city, and one of the reasons for that is its diverse communities and the contribution that they all make to that great city. She is also right to say that there should be no scapegoating. We should be focused on and driven by the facts. The report is full of that, and I look forward to ploughing through it and seeing what more we can do.

Point of Order

2.5 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am not sure if you can say whether this was properly in order, but I asked the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government four legitimate questions during the urgent question, and he refused to answer any of them until I was—I do not know—more serious, or perhaps in a Unionist party. How might I resolve that issue?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Lady for raising her point of order. Indeed, I heard her ask the questions, and I heard the Secretary of State's reply. I have to say that the Secretary of State is at liberty to give whatever reply he wishes, as long as he does so in an orderly and polite manner, which of course he did. The hon. Lady is also at liberty to ask her questions in other ways—at Question Time, by requesting an Adjournment debate, by tabling other questions to the Secretary of State and by raising her issues again. The answer is not a matter for the Chair; I am satisfied that the right hon. Gentleman was orderly in the way in which he answered the hon. Lady.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) said that she asked the Secretary of State four questions. Could you give advice, because I thought that Members were allowed to ask only one question during an urgent question?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am delighted to give the hon. Gentleman that advice. He is allowed to ask only one question, but the hon. Lady is here this afternoon in her capacity as the spokesman for the Scottish National party. In that capacity, she may ask as many questions as she likes, as long as it takes her only one minute to do so.

Children of Armed Services Personnel (Schools Admission)

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

2.7 pm

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for the children of serving members of the armed forces to have a right of high priority admission to schools outside the normal admission rounds; and for connected purposes.

It is an honour to present my first ten-minute rule Bill, which is on schools admissions for the children of our armed forces personnel, today, on the feast day of St Nicholas, patron saint of children and sailors. I am bringing this Bill to the House on behalf of tens of thousands of military children across our nation whose lives are challenged, year in, year out, by having to change schools as their parents, who are serving the nation in our armed forces, are moved from role to role around the country and abroad.

St Nicholas is the guardian of children, and I hope very much that we in this House, and the Minister listening today, will agree that we have a collective duty to all those children born to military families to do everything in our power to reduce the educational disadvantages that these school moves create, by ensuring that when they do need to take place, often at very short notice, we have done absolutely everything we can to make the transition as stress-free as possible for parents and child.

This issue was first brought to my attention earlier this year, when a serving Army officer contacted me in my capacity as the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on the armed forces covenant. I take the greatest pleasure and responsibility in holding this role, and I am now privy to the anxieties of many, many military families as they try to keep stable family lives for their kids within the uniquely challenging framework that is being a serving soldier, sailor, airman or airwoman. I am honoured to be able to champion their needs and concerns in the House, as they have no voice of their own as a result of their service. My ten-minute rule Bill highlights just one such concern, which I believe we can, and must, sort out for them.

The Army officer I mentioned was being posted some 200 miles from his existing job, with seven weeks' notice. Setting aside the other challenges of finding a suitable house near the new base, thereby gaining a postal address from which to organise all other domestic matters, the family had but a few weeks to research local schools and try to get a place for their child. That child is a little boy; let us call him James. James, at the grand old age of six, has lived in four different houses in totally different parts of England, and has been to three different educational establishments already. That means making new friends three times over by the age of six—no mean feat. With all the family support in the world, and parking for a moment the fact that his dad could be sent on deployment at any time, this little boy is being asked to develop levels of resilience that few of us would expect of our own children.

Not only did James's parents have only a very few weeks to find the right school, fill in the forms and wait for a reply, which happened over the summer holidays,

but they were initially told that their choice—the school closest to their proposed new home, which children from neighbouring houses on the base also attended, thereby giving James understanding and supportive new friends—was not possible. The local authority stated that

“whilst James is a Service child there is no right of entry and an admissions authority is within its rights to refuse admission.”

That struck me not only as extremely stressful for the parents and child, but as going wholly against the armed forces covenant.

On the basis that perhaps a few localised schools were struggling with large numbers of service children arriving all at once, I asked a number of colleagues to ascertain from their local authorities how many of their schools had children in receipt of the service pupil premium, and in what proportions. The results were truly unexpected; they showed, across the board, that there are a very few service children in a very large proportion of any local authority’s schools, regardless of whether they are close to a military base or not. In Northumberland, we have two military bases—RAF Boulmer in my constituency, and Albemarle barracks in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman). In fact, service children are to be found in only very small numbers, often in ones and twos, in 63% of Northumberland’s 174 schools. In another authority that has more military bases than my own county, the proportion of schools with service pupils is 76%, but only six schools have more than 30 such children in their cohort. A single child arriving or leaving at any point during the academic year would therefore clearly not have a major impact on numbers.

Another distressing part of trying to sort out a place for young James at the parents’ new school of choice was that the local authority stated that it would accept him on to the waiting list, but would not inform the family of whether there was a confirmed place until the first day of term, stating that

“all this relies on there being no further applications for a year 1 place from someone who may fulfil criteria on the Admissions policy ahead of James”.

The family were hopeful that a place would be available, but they could not rely on it, or introduce James to other children whom he might end up in a class with, because the authority refused to give them any certainty. That is not what I would call meeting our commitment to serving personnel and their children.

I am pleased to inform the House that young James’s place was eventually confirmed a week before school started, thanks to the intervention and advocacy of the family’s new MP, but not thanks to any admissions code that would commit councils to providing a firm place for each serving family’s child. I have since learned of many children in similar and worse situations. For instance, a family with two children were offered places in different schools, and the parent does not drive. The proposal was that the child going into reception would just have to be late to school and miss an hour at the end of the day, so that the elder child could be collected on foot. Another child having to move at very short notice was offered a place at a failing school. The mother asked me:

“why is it that Army kids have to endure the worst schools, alongside all the others pressures they experience?”

I now know of several service pupils, some with special needs, who had no school place to go to at all in September.

The present school admissions system is structured towards two admissions per academic year, meaning that any child seeking admission outwith that framework must simply hope that the school they prefer has capacity. That is all well and good, but military families do not have the luxury of timing their moves within school admission timetables. By not taking into account military families’ unique and challenging situations, councils are failing to live up to the commitment they pledged to uphold when they signed the community covenant. Some local authorities think about how to apply their commitment in practical terms, and many do so very well, but others have not moved beyond good intentions. In fact, I know of one local authority that informed a military family battling with school admissions that the armed forces covenant does not apply to it.

Our education system is already geared to acknowledge that some children face exceptional and difficult circumstances, and that they will need priority when it comes to admissions to help to offset the difficulties that they have already faced. That is why looked-after children have top priority when it comes to admissions. The Bill seeks to recognise that military children face significant upheaval and educational disadvantages through no fault of their own, and that they too should have high priority for admissions in light of that. The Bill would have the secondary effect of easing the pressure on military families, who are often faced with short-notice moves and must then work out how to transport their children to schools miles from base because they face disadvantage in the schools admissions system.

Too often, it seems that local authorities push back against the armed forces covenant, despite having signed up to it, leaving families frustrated and deeply anxious, and having to fight appeals, which are sometimes lost, as they also try to change location and military role at very short notice. The schools admissions code is not robust enough to ensure that wherever and whenever a military family has to move, they will find the right schools for their children. We are not doing in practice what we talk about when we say we believe in, and are committed to, the covenant.

I never want to have to hear this again from a serving member of our armed forces who is trying to find a school for their child:

“This just shouldn’t be this hard; I can’t bear putting my boy or myself through this stress every 2 years, so I’m going to leave as soon I am able, even though I love my job”.

At a time when we need to retain as many of our highly trained and committed personnel as possible, allowing barriers such as this to make us risk losing them is unacceptable.

My wonderful grandmother used to say to me when I railed at things that seemed wrong with the world that, while it might not be possible to feed 1,000 starving children, it is almost always possible to feed one. We cannot immediately resolve the plight of those children trapped in Mosul. We cannot be sure that we can give a continuing education to every child in a camp who is displaced from their Syrian home, or ensure that every child is protected from malaria, but I am certain that, with a simple change in the law, we can change the code for school admissions, so that every single British military

[*Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan*]

child can be guaranteed a place at the right school for him and his family's unique needs, regardless of the time of year when they apply for a place, or to which school they apply, and in whichever year group they land. Young James and the 40,000 other military children whose parents put their lives on the line for our safety and freedom around the world deserve nothing less.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan, Danny Kinahan, Tom Tugendhat, Ruth Smeeth, Mrs Madeleine Moon, Kit Malthouse, Sir Gerald Howarth, Mrs Flick Drummond, Mr James Gray, Tom Blenkinsop, Wes Streeting and Calum Kerr present the Bill.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January, and to be printed (Bill 109).

Health Service Medical Supplies (Costs) Bill

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF THE ACT ON PRICING,
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, AND INNOVATION

“(1) Within six months of this Act coming into force, the Secretary of State shall commission a review on the impact of the Act on—

(a) the pricing and availability of medicines and other medical supplies,

(b) research and development, and

(c) the NHS's legal duty to promote innovation

and shall lay the report of the review before each House of Parliament.”—(*Justin Madders.*)

This new clause would place a duty upon the Secretary of State to place a report before Parliament on the impact of the Act on the pricing and availability of medicines and other medical supplies, research and development and the NHS's legal duty to promote innovation.

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.18 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (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 consider:

Amendment 8, in clause 1, page 1, line 14, at end insert—

“(2A) In exercising functions in relation to the controls on the costs of health service medicines, the Secretary of State must ensure that any payments made by manufacturers or suppliers to whom the scheme relates calculated by reference to sales or estimated sales of medicines are utilised solely for the purpose of reimbursing the NHS for expenditure on medicines and medical supplies.”

This amendment would confirm that the Secretary of State has a duty to reinvest rebates in improving access to new and innovative medicines and treatments.

Amendment 9, in clause 5, page 4, line 5, at end insert—

“(7) Before making regulations under Clause 5 the Secretary of State must conduct a consultation on the potential effect of this clause on the maintenance of quality of those medical supplies, and seek representations from manufacturers, suppliers and distributors of medical supplies as part of the consultation.”

Government amendments 1 to 6.

Amendment 10, in clause 6, page 7, line 11, at end insert—

“(1A) Information provided by virtue of section 264A must be disclosed by the Secretary of State to persons listed in subsection (1)(a) to (i) at that person's request.”

Government amendment 7.

Justin Madders: I rise to speak to new clause 1, which stands in my name; to amendment 8, which is in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper); and to the other amendments in the group. The Opposition do not oppose the Bill. Our proposals are a constructive attempt to help the Government to achieve their stated aims, and to close the growing gap between the UK's record on developing new drugs and the ability of NHS patients to access them.

New clause 1 would put a duty on the Secretary of State to commission a review within six months of the Act coming into force, focusing on its impact on the pricing and availability of drugs and medical supplies; on research and development; and on the NHS's legal duty to promote innovation. The pharmaceutical industry in this country employs more than 70,000 people, in predominantly high-skilled and well-paid jobs—just the sort of jobs Members on both sides of the House would want to encourage and see more of.

This country's record in the pharmaceutical sector has been one of our great success stories, but we cannot take that success for granted, particularly because investment decisions are often taken by parent companies in other parts of the world. There is considerable unease in the sector about the relatively low take-up of new and innovative medicines by the NHS compared with that in comparable nations, and about the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the future of the European Medicines Agency. A number of major companies have based themselves here because of the EMA, and the worry is that they might wish to follow it if it relocates following Brexit.

The impact assessment for the Bill states, as we might expect, that there will be an impact on the revenue of the pharmaceutical sector, and that it could lead to a reduction in investment in research and development and consequent losses for the UK economy estimated at £1 million per annum.

While we fully agree with what the Government seek to achieve with the Bill, we are mindful of the storm clouds on the horizon. We therefore believe that prudence requires that such a review takes place within a reasonable timeframe to ensure there are no unintended consequences and that we can remain confident that the pharmaceutical sector in this country will continue to be at the forefront. We face competition not only in Europe but from emerging nations such as Brazil and China. We also need to ensure that the NHS does not trail in the take-up of the new drugs. Worryingly, the Office of Health Economics studied 14 high-income countries and found that the UK ranked ninth out of those 14 across all medicines studied.

Successive studies have demonstrated relatively low take-up of new medicines in the UK compared with other countries. That is bad for patients and bad for our pharmaceutical industry. The Bill therefore needs to achieve a balance. We need to ensure the best possible patient access to medication at the fairest price, but we also need to encourage the pharmaceutical industry to invest in research and development.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I am intervening in my capacity as chair of the all-party group on diabetes. The diabetes drugs bill is enormous: it runs into hundreds of millions of pounds. I accept what my hon. Friend says—that we need to ensure that pharmaceutical companies are able to invest in the provision of new drugs for diabetes—but there are other choices, such as those relating to lifestyle. Does he agree that they need to be investigated while we look for new drugs?

Justin Madders: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. Indeed, if I had known he was in the Chamber, I would probably have anticipated it. He is absolutely right to raise the issue of diabetes drugs and the need

for more measures to improve prevention. I attended the launch of the all-party group's report last week, at which there were a number of interesting initiatives. The "diabetes village" is an interesting concept, which in the long term will hopefully reduce the cost of diabetes treatment for the NHS.

The review would look at the impact of the Bill on the pricing and availability of medicines and other medical supplies. We would gently point out to the Minister that two years ago, when the previous voluntary agreement was introduced, the Government said that it would

"provide an unprecedented level of certainty on almost all the NHS branded medicines bill."

Evidently that has not come to pass. The review would enable us to identify any issues at an early stage and take the appropriate action. I know that the Government were not willing to commit to such a review in Committee. The Minister referred us to a clause in the draft regulations, referring to a review one year on from the introduction of the regulations. However, that is simply not the same thing as looking at the impact of the legislation in its totality. The way the regulations are currently drafted means that there is more than a little of the Minister being able to mark his own homework, so to speak. The draft regulations talk about the review in a much narrower sense: enabling the Minister to set out the objectives intended to be achieved by the regulations in the report itself rather than at this point, and only specifically mentioning whether those objectives could be achieved with less regulation.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend find it strange that the regulations that might be made pursuant to the Act—the Government have helpfully given us a draft—talk about a review being carried out? Paragraph 14(2) states that the report must in particular

"set out the objectives intended to be achieved by these Regulations".

Would one not expect those objectives to be set out before the regulations were made? Are the Government not putting the cart before the horse?

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why there is anxiety that we may end up with a self-fulfilling prophecy with these reviews. No doubt the Minister can address that when he replies.

There is nothing to assess the potential impact of the Bill and the regulations on research and development investment, nothing on the potential impact on innovation, and nothing on the availability of medicines and other medical supplies. We believe our anxieties in these areas are well founded, so I hope the Minister will reconsider his stance on this proposal, or at least provide us with some reassurance that these areas of concern will be carefully monitored.

Amendment 8 would to compel the Government to reinvest the rebate from the pharmaceutical sector for the purpose of improving access to new and innovative medicines and treatments. On Second Reading, the Secretary of State confirmed that £1.24 billion had so far been returned to the Department of Health through and it is anticipated that the sum to be received annually will increase when the Bill is enacted.

[Justin Madders]

Although numerous questions have been asked throughout the passage of the Bill, we have still not been able to pin down the Government on exactly where this money has gone, other than into the general pot. It is our fear that this new money, which could have delivered a step-change in access to treatments to the benefit of patients and the life sciences sector, will instead be simply added to the baseline, with every £1 from the pharmaceutical sector meaning £1 less coming from the Treasury. Given the often heated exchanges across the Dispatch Box about the true sums being put into the NHS, it would aid transparency if it were made clear that this money was being put in over and above Government funding and was ring-fenced for a specific use. In Scotland, rebates are already ring-fenced and reinvested to provide new treatments and medicines. Nothing that the Minister has said has dissuaded us from believing that that is the correct approach.

According to James Barrow from the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, using the rebate in this way provides both the access and transparency that are lacking in the rest of the UK. He cites the example of the medicine Kalydeco, which increases the lung capacity of people with cystic fibrosis by up to 10%. It has meant that some patients who were previously housebound are now able to run up to 5 km. Patients in England are unable to access this drug, whereas patients across comparable nations in Europe and in Scotland can benefit from its transformative effect. He points out:

“There is no comparable fund in England. Having the new medicines fund in Scotland provides a much greater chance for patients to be able to access these medicines. We just don’t see a clear pathway in England for how patients can access these medicines.”

There are many other similar examples.

The NHS is our proudest national achievement, but it is to our shame that people in England are deprived of vital drugs and treatments on the basis of financial, rather than clinical, judgments. In Committee, the Minister suggested that the fluctuations in income could have adverse consequences, but we understood the purpose of the Bill was to deliver certainty. In any event, ring-fencing does not preclude additional resourcing if required. For all those reasons, I hope the Government will give serious consideration to this proposal.

Turning finally to the remaining amendments, we welcome the further improvements tabled by the Secretary of State in relation to the devolved Administrations. However, questions perhaps have to be asked about the consultation process if such changes are being introduced by the Government at such a late stage. Perhaps this will be reflected on when it comes to future legislation.

We welcome the amendments to clauses 5 and 6 tabled by the Scottish National party. In particular, we welcome the call for a consultation on the potential impact of controls on other medical supplies. Those provisions were notably lacking from the initial consultation, so there is still considerable anxiety within the sector about how the controls will be used. I understand that this is a matter for future regulations, but it is less than satisfactory for the Government to ask us for powers before telling us how they will be used. We would say this is another reason for us to seriously consider setting out now the kind of review envisaged by new clause 1.

Keith Vaz: I will not detain the House for long. I know that that normally means the start of a very long speech, but I will be very brief. I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party group on diabetes and as a type 2 diabetic.

I welcome the proposals put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) from the Labour Front Bench. I hope the Government accept them. They are reasonable proposals that are designed to look at the impact of the Act and ensure it achieves what it hopes to achieve. That is not always the case with legislation.

There is a lot of agreement on the Bill, and the Minister should be commended for how he has introduced it. The reason for the Bill is the ever-rising cost of drugs to the national health service. We know of the work done by *The Times* in particular. It is always a battle for diabetics, especially when we meet in informal circumstances, as happened last week when the new report of the all-party group was launched by the Secretary of State for Health. I think the Minister was due to come—I may have gone before he arrived. [Interruption.] He is nodding. [Interruption.] No, he didn’t come. I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know you do not like Members tempting sedentary interventions. But certainly the presence of the Secretary of State and departmental officials was very helpful to the all-party group.

2.30 pm

Our concern is the ever-increasing cost of diabetes drugs to the NHS. As the House knows, diabetes complications cost the NHS 10% of its budget—a huge amount of money—while the drugs bill is about £900 million. The problem is the desire of local GPs to prescribe drugs instead of looking for alternatives. That is why I support the duty to promote innovation in subsection (1)(c) of the new clause. This is extremely important as far as diabetes is concerned. Exactly one week ago, at the invitation of the Steno centre in Denmark and the Leicester diabetes centre, one of the foremost diabetes centres in the country—I pay tribute to Professors Heather Daly, Kamlesh Khunti and Melanie Davies—I spoke at a conference in Copenhagen on innovation. The NHS innovating, as proposed in subsection (1)(c), will result in a reduction in the overall cost of the drugs budget.

When I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, the first thing my GP did was put me on metformin. My mother had diabetes before me. There is usually a family history—not always and not in respect of type 1 diabetes, but certainly in respect of families from the south Asian community, though of course diabetes affects all communities. My mother had it, but I was not aware of what it meant, because at the time I was Minister for Europe and flying around better integrating Britain into the EU—unlike 15 years later when all that has changed—and I never had the opportunity to sit down with my mother, who subsequently died, and find out more about what diabetes meant. Unfortunately, most families fail to do that. As a result, my diabetes was caught very late, exactly 10 years ago.

Had I been told by my doctor, “I’m not putting you on tablets. You’re not going on metformin. I’m going to send you off to the gym. I’m going to prescribe gym for an hour, and you’re going to walk for an hour, and you’re going to make these kinds of lifestyle changes,”

I might not have stopped the type 2 diabetes affecting me, but perhaps I could have delayed its onset, and in the long run I would have saved the taxpayer a huge amount of money. That is why innovation is so vital to what is being proposed. Innovation permits so much to be done to reduce the cost to the taxpayer. I know that that is not all the Government aim to do in the Bill, but it is a big chunk of it. If we can reduce the huge amount of taxpayers' money spent on drugs and given to pharmaceutical companies, in the long term it will help the taxpayer.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have to educate people and make them aware of what can happen, particularly given the rising obesity levels?

Keith Vaz: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We both serve on the Administration Committee, and whenever banqueting is raised, we all highlight the need to make sure that the food MPs get, especially in the Tea Room, is compatible with decreasing obesity and calorie levels. You will know, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you have your cup of tea, that on offer are Club biscuits and Victoria sponges and all these other things. I am not saying that all this comes within subsection (1)(c) or that it could be regarded as a question of innovation; I am simply saying that innovation is not just about new technology.

None the less, there is incredible new technology around as far as diabetes is concerned, as I saw for myself last week. People no longer need to do the finger prick test. The HbA1C test can be bought at the local chemist. It costs slightly more than a finger prick test, which is obviously free for diabetics, but it allows us to test our diabetes without having to fast, and it gives a three-month reading. Moreover, there are now machines that clamp to the side of one's arm and which, when a mobile phone is put to them, will give a glucose reading. These incredible innovations show why the new clause is worth accepting. It has been carefully thought out by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston, who is doing an amazingly important job on the Front Bench on these matters.

The new clause would benefit the taxpayer. Innovation is very important as far as an illness such as diabetes is concerned, but, as I said, the solution is not just about the technological revolution; it is also about lifestyle changes. I notice that the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), is here. Scotland is highly advanced in terms of diabetes monitoring. One can get diabetes statistics centrally in Scotland, whereas here we cannot get them even if we write to our local clinical commissioning groups. That is why new legislation of this kind, designed to bring down the cost of drugs to the taxpayer, is very important, and why I support subsection (1)(c) and the review.

Finally, in respect of research and development, as mentioned in subsection (1)(b) of the new clause, pharmaceutical companies make an enormous amount of money—they are some of the biggest companies in the world—and we need to encourage them to plough back a good proportion of their profits into research and development. The Steno centre in Denmark only exists because of money from Novo Nordisk, one of the biggest diabetes drugs companies in the world. A person

can go to the Steno centre, and in the first room they can have their blood taken by a diabetes nurse; in the next room, they can have their feet looked at by a podiatrist who is an expert in diabetes; in the next room, they can have their eyes tested—those of us with diabetes have eye problems; in the next, they can have their consultation with a GP; and if necessary, they can see a consultant. That is what I meant when I talked about the diabetes village. It comes from the concept of the Steno centre. At the moment, as a diabetic I have to go to different centres and hospitals to see my GP and others. In one case, I had to carry my own blood—

Rob Marris: I carry mine all the time.

Keith Vaz: In a little test tube! I carried my own blood to the laboratory, because it was the quickest way I could get a reading. Incidentally, from the look of him, my hon. Friend carries his blood very well. We want this innovation and research and development. The drugs companies should be able to plough back profits within the industry, and in the long run this innovation will make a great deal of difference.

When I went to New York for a meeting on Yemen, I stopped in at the diabetes centre of the Mount Sinai Hospital, and was told about the incredible innovation in diabetes in the US. I also went to see Mayor Bill de Blasio's diabetes team. As Members will know, New York cut the level of sugar in soft drinks, as we are doing now, but the centre of its diabetes initiative is the lifestyle coach, not the GP.

As we look at these provisions, we see every opportunity for a cogent and coherent review that will particularly help—this is my main argument today—those with diabetes, but also others with similar problems connected with their illnesses. I urge the Minister, who I know has been extremely reasonable on this Bill, to look seriously at the new clause. If he cannot accept new clause 1 itself, will he at the very least give an undertaking from the Dispatch Box that the points embodied in it will be reported back to Parliament in a few months' time?

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Like the shadow Health Minister, we will not obstruct the Bill, because we support the basic aim to control prices in order to achieve a good return to the NHS from the drugs that it uses.

We also support in principle new clause 1. Six months might be a little early technically to bring things together, and there should not be just a single report because we will only see change over time. To look at the success of these actions, we need to see a price being controlled, and to spot when prices are sliding out of control. I would therefore suggest looking at the data and information on an annual basis and perhaps laying it before Parliament to show that the Bill's aim is being achieved and that the concerns of the official Opposition are being allayed.

We support amendment 8 because it advocates the same approach that we have in Scotland. While the Cancer Drugs Fund in England is welcome and has clearly helped many patients, it is limited in the sense that if people do not have cancer they cannot access the medicines fund. That means that people with rare diseases are left somewhat abandoned. Frankly, if it were left solely to NHS England, those people would be left in

[Dr Philippa Whitford]

the desert. It is important that significant money will be released, and the provision could gain support from the pharmaceutical industry if it sees that the money it is returning is enabling innovative medicines to come to the NHS earlier. Sometimes when we compare certain illnesses such as cancer, we find that the gap is in relation to people with more advanced diseases struggling to access the newest medicines. If the amendment helps to address that, we would support it.

The Scottish Medicines Consortium was reformed in 2014, and Scotland has now moved up from passing 53% of all applications to 77%, with a further review going ahead at the moment to see how to improve this further. The aim is not to avoid using drugs; the aim is to access them at a decent price. If the pharmaceutical industry is returning money to the NHS, it should enable earlier access.

Amendment 9 was tabled by SNP Members and we put it before the Public Bill Committee. It deals with clause 5, which extends a power that in fact already existed but was never used—to control the price of medical services and medical supplies as well as drugs. I am slightly disappointed that we did not manage to get this amendment adopted, so I raise again the issue of quality control and ask the Government to consult on it.

I know I spoke extensively in Committee about surgical gloves, but they provide a good example in that the range of quality is vast, and if poor quality gloves are used, there is likely to be extra cost to the NHS either when gloves have to be changed two or three times within one operation or more subtly if a surgeon is exposed to blood at the end of an operation from a tiny pinhole that was not visible. The same point applies to gowns and drapes. Taking off a gown that is meant to be protective and discovering that you are soaked to the skin in blood is a pretty unpleasant experience, and it obviously increases the risk to staff. The idea that surgeons are not exposed to diseases such as HIV or hepatitis B and C is naive. I knew colleagues over my career who suffered from those conditions, which they caught from patients. There is clearly a responsibility to staff and to patients to avoid any possibility of cross-contamination. I mentioned in Committee, too, some fairly cheap items such as gauze swabs, because if they are shedding threads, it can lead to intra-abdominal infection—something that we do not want. This amendment is about consultation and looking further at the mechanism.

2.45 pm

In Scotland, we have the national procurement and logistics system, which takes right to the ward level a sort of Amazon-style system whereby the ward will order the medical supplies it needs, and they will be picked from 9,000 items held by national procurement and delivered by national logistics all the way to the ward. The supply chain, as it is called in England, has 600,000 items, which suggests that Professor Carter's proposal to limit what is used and to look more at procurement is not yet happening. We need to ensure that that comes about, and it would probably be the point at which quality could be assessed. Anything going into the supply chain list would be rigorously tested by staff, with feedback, and it would be for a national procurement group to decide whether to stock it.

Finally, our amendment 10 is designed to focus on the sharing of information that is going to be collected by the Secretary of State, ensuring that any such data that relates to the devolved Administrations—essentially, their data—is freely accessible to them. The Minister mentioned the memorandum of understanding, and I would like to hear where we are with that and whether it will mean real-time access to a database that would be given to authorities listed here or whether they would have to put in a request. It is vital to provide data to the devolved Administrations when they request it, and not on some fixed annual date chosen by the Secretary of State. If those Administrations perceive that there is an emerging problem, they can then deal with it. Having been involved in clinical data collection, I know that there is nothing more frustrating for a team than to be doing the work to gather data, but having no option to access the data when it needs to interrogate them. I simply ask the Minister again to clarify where we are with the memorandum of understanding. I would welcome his commitment to this as we go forward.

Rob Marris: As hon. Members know, overall I welcome the Bill, which is broadly a socialist Bill. It reinforces price controls and profit controls on big pharma, when appropriate. I always like to encourage the Conservative party, sadly now in government, to come a little further down the socialist road. They claim to be the workers' party, and that is good.

New clause 1, tabled and moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), is central to what we should be talking about in many spheres of public life—namely, evidence-based policy. All too often in this House—this applies to Governments of both colours—policy appears to be made on a political whim.

I remember in, I think, 2008 the then Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Blackburn, Jack Straw, writing certainly to Labour MPs asking what we wanted in the Queen's Speech that year—[*Interruption.*] We were in government, but perhaps he should have written to the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns). I replied, because I believe in evidence-based policy, that in that year's Queen Speech I wanted not a single piece of legislation. I said that after 10 years of a Labour Government, I wanted Parliament to spend a year on scrutiny, looking at the legislation that we had introduced over that period to see what had worked and what had not worked.

To my astonishment, the Leader of the House did not accept that proposal, as those who were Members then will recall, and we had another full legislative programme. Let me add, as an aside—if you will grant me a small bit of latitude, Madam Deputy Speaker—that by the end of the Labour Government I had stopped voting on crime Bills because we had had so many. Some of them—this may have happened under the previous Conservative Government—repealed parts of earlier crime Bills introduced by a Labour Government which had never been brought into force. That was extraordinary.

I urge the Minister to recognise that evidence-based policy making is encouraged by new clause 1. I hope that, in the context of innovation, which was so eloquently addressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for

Leicester East (Keith Vaz), he will say a little about the way in which the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence operates.

As the Minister may know, there is an issue involving cystic fibrosis and the drug Orkambi, which NICE turned down owing to a lack of sufficient data. I understand that, because it is NICE's job to weigh the evidence, such as it may be. The drug is registered for use in this country, but it is not available on the NHS. Since NICE decided that the cost-benefit analysis did not stack up, some long-term data from the United States, which I understand to be robust, has been made available. I gather, although I may be wrong, that NICE has not yet reviewed its decision on Orkambi, although the evidence from the United States suggests that in certain cases it can be extremely effective in treating cystic fibrosis. I hope that when we are discussing processes, innovation, efficiency and policy-based decision making, the Minister will say a little, not necessarily about Orkambi itself, but about the process whereby NICE might, in the light of new evidence, promptly—I stress the word “promptly”—review its decisions.

Dr Philippa Whitford: There is an additional issue. Drugs or treatments are being passed by NICE but not actually introduced. Either they are rationed and limited to a certain number of patients a month, as is the case with hepatitis C drugs, or the decisions are being left to clinical commissioning groups, which means that we are enshrining postcode prescribing instead of getting rid of it.

Rob Marris: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady, who, as ever, speaks with authority on these issues. I am a bit of a centraliser, because I do not like postcode lotteries. We will already have that in a cross-border sense—between England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—but it is a great deal worse when just some CCGs in England are making a drug available when it has been signed off by NICE as safe for use but it is not mandatorily available, and not every patient for whom it is medically appropriate can obtain it from every CCG. That sort of postcode lottery undermines the “national” part of the national health service, which is regrettable.

Amendment 8, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper), would ring-fence savings made through the provisions of this Bill and earlier legislation so that the money thereby saved, or paid into the pot by a pharmaceutical company, can be retained for expenditure on medicines and medical supplies. I hope the Government will support that. All too often we hear that Governments do not like ring-fencing, and I understand why: it fetters their discretion. Earlier this afternoon, however, I asked the Secretary of State for Justice whether the education budgets devolved to prison governors would be ring-fenced, because I feared that a prison governor who was under other budgetary pressures might not spend the money on education and prison education would not improve as it needs to. I was greeted with a very welcome one-word answer, which was “Yes.” I hope that, in a slightly different context, the Minister can give the same assurance this afternoon, because this is an excellent amendment which clarifies a slight gap in the Bill.

As for amendment 9, about which the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) spoke so eloquently, efficiency is of course important, but so is quality. I do

not know whether the old saying “Penny wise and pound foolish” is used in Scotland—she is nodding—but it certainly is in my part of the west midlands. We have seen that time and time again with privatisations. When services are privatised they go to the lowest bidder, and what do we find? Either the service is not up to scratch, or, all too often—I think this happened when Circle ran Hinchinbrooke hospital—the companies go bust because they find that it is not as easy as they thought it would be to make a profit out of, in this case, the health service. That may happen to other suppliers as well. Quality matters, and the national health service is not a commercial organisation.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman is saying about Hinchinbrooke hospital. Might I suggest, tactfully, that he go and look at that hospital? Patients in Huntingdon would say that the hospital had vastly improved, but because of the conditions, it was not possible to make a financial success of it. The company did not go bust; it decided to withdraw. However, in the view of the patients who used it, the quality of the care provided by what had been a failing hospital had vastly improved. Moreover, the trade unions agreed to the deal that was done to put Circle there.

Rob Marris: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making my point for me. This is about quality; it is not just about price. That company got its price wrong. It said that it could provide a quality for a certain price, and it did provide the quality but not for that price, and it jacked the contract in.

Sir Simon Burns: I think that what the hon. Gentleman said at the beginning of his comments on Hinchinbrooke—we will know for certain when we see the *Official Report* tomorrow—showed that he was using that example inaccurately to make a point about privatisation. He said that privatisation caused quality to go down, but that in this case the company had gone bust. He was wrong on both counts.

Rob Marris: The right hon. Gentleman may well be correct on that specific point, and I fully accept that. There is in privatisations, however, a nexus between quality and price, and very often—although not always—the companies that promise a quality at a certain price are unable to deliver it. They cannot deliver the quality of service, and/or they cannot do so at the price at which they promised to do so. He can correct me on this if he wishes, but we see that time and again when rail franchisees come back to the Government and say, “We promised a certain level of service for a certain price. We cannot do it: we need a bigger bung.”

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I think that the hon. Gentleman may have stumbled into a quagmire in referring to Hinchinbrooke. The Public Accounts Committee, of which, as he may know, I was a member for four and a half years, found that pricing was not the significant issue that led to the end of the franchise of the private provider Circle. The significant issues involved the wider healthcare economy, and the failure of the strategic health authority to discharge its duties in respect of clinical business for the hospital.

Rob Marris: The hon. Gentleman has considerably more knowledge than I have. I have talked about evidence-based policy making, and I am entirely prepared to accept the evidence that he presents. However, the company could not make a go of it, although I accept that that may not have been the company's fault,

Amendments 1 to 5 come as a package. Amendment 3, which is a substantive amendment, refers to a "person who provides primary medical services".

I hope that the Minister can talk us through that, in the light of a trend that is starting in some parts of England and is most advanced—if I may make a value judgment—in Salford, where the GPs who provide primary services are directly employed by the hospital trust. So the hospital trust is no longer just secondary or even tertiary; it is primary. I just wanted to unpick the wording to make sure that that development of service delivery in England has been taken into account and that the amendments do not assume that the existing silos between primary and secondary continue, because that development has now arisen in Wolverhampton, which I represent. There are three GP practices in Wolverhampton that are piloting their staff being employed by the excellent Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust. I say it is excellent because it is one of the 15% of hospital trusts in England that does not have a deficit, and I think part of that is related to the fact that it has only £15 million of private finance initiative. But that is another debate that I will not get into now.

3 pm

The Scottish National party's amendments 9 and 10 reprise amendments proposed in the Bill Committee, on which I had the pleasure to serve, and I hope that the Minister can give us an explanation, particularly in relation to amendment 9. I had understood him, perhaps wrongly, to say in Committee that he liked what the SNP was putting forward in terms of quality, but he did not think the wording was quite right, so he hoped to be able to come back on Report with an amendment relating to quality. I may have misunderstood or misremembered what he said, but if my memory is correct, I hope that he can explain why I cannot see on the amendment paper a Government amendment relating to quality. Perhaps he proposes to table an amendment at a later stage.

I am bemused by amendment 7, which is about the definition of medical supplies, but no doubt the Minister will, in his usual way, be able to elucidate later. I hoped in Committee to be able to persuade the Government to clarify the definition of medical supplies in section 260 of the National Health Service Act 2006. It is my understanding that that definition relates only to England. Amendment 7 relates only to Wales, but the two seem to me to be on all fours.

Section 260(5) of the 2006 Act states:

"medical supplies" includes surgical, dental and optical materials and equipment".

When I look at the part of this Bill that relates to Wales, I see that clause 7 would insert proposed new section 201A into the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006. It says:

"medical supplies" includes surgical, dental and optical materials and equipment".

That is the same wording, this time applying to Wales, as in section 260(5) of the NHS Act 2006, which applies

to England. Amendment 7 amends the Welsh legislation, very understandably, to clarify the definition of medical supplies. In Committee the Government did not see the need to clarify the definition of medical supplies as it applies to England, but today are seeking to clarify the same definition of medical supplies as it applies to Wales. I am therefore bemused.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): My hon. Friend's analysis of medical supplies is very interesting. I would have thought that pharmaceuticals, for example, would be classified as medical supplies, given that they have always been a contentious area of negotiations over costs. I am surprised that they are not included in the definition.

Rob Marris: Medical supplies in this part of the Bill seem to be to do with physical equipment. But, again, what is equipment? We can refer to the definitions, which state:

'medical supplies' includes surgical, dental and optical materials and equipment".

Drugs are dealt with elsewhere in the legislation.

I think the Minister has got the point, but I will repeat it very briefly. He is seeking clarification for the Wales legislation through amendment 7 when I understood him to say that he did not think such clarification was needed for the same definition contained in the legislation pertaining to England. I would like him to explain that apparent anomaly. If it is not an anomaly, perhaps he could tell the House that he is going to clarify the definition as it relates to England in the later stages of this Bill.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): I rise to speak to the new clause, the Government amendments and all other amendments tabled on Report. I want to start by expressing my gratitude to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, who both confirmed their intent to continue in the spirit of constructive dialogue we have had thus far in our consideration of the Bill. I am pleased that they support the Bill's objectives, and I will seek to respond to their amendments.

Hon. Members will recall that we debated at length in Committee the issue raised in new clause 1. I want to take this opportunity to provide some additional reassurance that this is an important issue for the Government. We have already included in the illustrative regulations for both the statutory scheme, in regulation 32, and the information regulations, in regulation 14, an annual review of the regulations and a requirement to publish our report of each review. These annual reviews go further than the specific single review proposed by the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) in new clause 1, the effect of which would require the Government to only undertake a single review within six months of the Act coming into force.

We accept that reporting is an important principle. However, setting out the requirements in primary legislation is too restrictive. We believe that the proposed single review within the first six months of the Act coming into force would provide an insufficient timeframe in which to assess the impact of the provisions, whereas the annual reviews we have set out in the illustrative regulations in effect place a duty on the Government to review both the statutory scheme and the information

regulations to ensure their effectiveness, and to do so every year. Of course these provisions will be subject to consultation as part of the wider consultation on the regulations.

Over time we expect that both the statutory scheme and the information requirements will be amended through their respective regulations to reflect changing circumstances. It is essential that the review and reporting arrangements are able to be similarly flexible so that they remain appropriate to the schemes in operation.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston asked whether objectives should be set out before the regulations come into force. As I have said, the Government will consult on regulations before they come into force. The objectives of the regulations will be explored in the consultation and set out in the Government response to that consultation. I hope that addresses his point.

The illustrative regulations require an annual review to set out the objectives of the scheme, assess the extent to which they have been achieved, and assess whether they remain appropriate. These requirements will be tested through the consultation on the regulations, and we will of course take account of those views.

Rob Marris: First, I say again that I am very grateful to the Government for publishing the illustrative draft regulations to help us debate the Bill. Let us consider the provision of information in connection with the draft health service products regulations 2017. Regulation 14(2)(a) states that the report must in particular “set out the objectives intended to be achieved by these Regulations”, and then regulation 14(2)(b) says it must “assess the extent to which these objectives are achieved.”

It seems a bit odd to say that in one review we are going to set out the objective and then decide whether the objective has been achieved or not. That seems, temporally, to be a bit wrong.

Mr Dunne: As I have indicated, we intend to undertake these reviews every year. It will probably be impossible to assess in the first review whether the objectives have been achieved—there might be some ability to assess it—but in subsequent iterations we will be able to look back and see how well they have been achieved.

I notice that the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) is heading for the exit—[*Interruption.*] He has now resumed his seat. This is not specifically the right point in my speech to pick up on the points he has raised, but I would like to respond to his characteristically constructive contribution on the subject of diabetes. He is the chair of the all-party group on diabetes, and he might recall that I used to be the vice-chair of that group, as I have family members with type 1 and type 2 diabetes. I have considerable sympathy with the points that he made about the importance of adequate advice for individuals who might be unaware that they have diabetes. He also talked about the importance of adopting innovation through NHS treatment of the condition. We share that objective, and nothing in the Bill will do anything other than to continue to encourage innovation. I will be making further remarks, perhaps when the right hon. Gentleman is not with us, on the subject of innovation, but I just wanted him to be aware that I had taken his points on board. He might be disappointed by

my conclusion on the specific amendment, but I shall go on to explain how his point is being addressed in other ways.

Returning to new clause 1 and the question of regulations, I wish to make a further point. Much of the information provided to the Secretary of State will be commercially confidential. We touched on this in Committee. I am sure that suppliers have every confidence that the Government will maintain that confidentiality in anything we publish, but it is important to reinforce the principle. This means that there is a limit to the level of detail we are able to publish, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston will appreciate the commercial sensitivity reasons involved. Any information we do publish will be at a consolidated level, protecting suppliers’ confidentiality but allowing the Secretary of State to be clear on the basis of the conclusions of his review. We will of course be able to use supporting information to evidence our conclusions.

Turning to the detail of the new clause, its requirements reflect the duties placed on the Secretary of State in the Bill, but I must be clear that the content of such a report should not be restricted and must be able to address the key issues arising during the year that may affect the operation of the schemes. The other significant element of the new clause, which I have touched on in response to the right hon. Member for Leicester East, was discussed at length in Committee. This was the question of whether it would be appropriate for such a report to address matters relating to the NHS duty to promote innovation.

The Government’s position is clear that it is not appropriate to link the measures in the Bill, which relate purely to the cost of medicines and medical supplies, to the NHS duty to promote innovation. Promoting innovation is a high priority not only for the Government and the NHS but for many other stakeholders. Promotion of innovation quite properly requires action across many different fronts, and it would not be possible to quantify the contribution of the schemes in the Bill to that endeavour in any meaningful way. The NHS is already doing great work to promote innovation, and I would like to draw hon. Members’ attention to the latest data from the innovation scorecard, a quarterly data publication showing the uptake of innovative drugs and medical technologies following NICE approval in England. This is now a nationally published statistic.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris) asked specifically about this in his remarks. I can tell him that the latest publication, on 12 October this year, shows that the rate of uptake for 85 medicines recommended by NICE is increasing, that 77% of those medicines had positive growth uptake between March 2015 and March 2016, and that 54% of the 85 medicines had a growth uptake greater than 10%. These data are made available on a quarterly basis, and hon. Members can follow their progress through the official national statistics.

The Government are taking broader action to secure the UK’s future as an attractive place for the life sciences sector, particularly in the light of the EU referendum and the consequent Brexit. We are clear in our commitment to the life sciences, and to building a long-term partnership with industry. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West also asked me to address the question of the NICE process and whether this takes evidence into

[Mr Dunne]

account. He also asked about the process for the subsequent review of previous decisions. This is a continuous process. It does not happen for every drug all the time, but there is a routine procedure under which, on the basis of new evidence, NICE will look again at a decision and decide whether to uphold or amend it. That procedure could allow drugs that had previously not been approved to become approved on the basis of new evidence, and NICE will look at evidence from wherever it comes. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

3.15 pm

I should also like to draw Members' attention to the accelerated access review, which made recommendations on the reforms to accelerate access to innovate medicines and medical technologies for NHS patients. The Government and our partners are considering those recommendations, and we will respond in due course. We want to make the UK the best place in the world to design, develop and deploy life science products. We do not believe that the Bill will have any material impact on that effort, other than the minor impact noted in the impact assessment. That belief is backed by independent evidence, which suggests that there is no obvious reason why NHS pricing policy for pharmaceuticals, or the time taken to make decisions on reimbursement, should significantly affect decisions to invest in research and development in pharmaceuticals in the United Kingdom. Instead, the evidence suggests that the most important attraction for companies to invest in research in the UK is the availability of world-class scientific expertise, and this is the focus of the Government's effort to ensure that the UK remains at the forefront of global research and development.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston asks for our reports to be laid before Parliament. We will be publishing them on an annual basis, and I am happy to commit to laying the first one before Parliament. When we see how much interest it attracts, we will be able to decide whether to do that again in subsequent years or simply to publish the reports in the normal way. On that basis, I hope that he will withdraw his new clause.

Amendment 8 aims to require the income from the voluntary scheme and the statutory scheme to be ring-fenced to reimburse the NHS for expenditure on medicines and medical supplies, in order to increase access to new and innovative medicines and treatments. We are committed to ensuring that patients have faster access to new and innovative medicines and treatments. We know that investing in new, innovative medicines and treatments, where they are proven to work and are a clinical priority, and has the potential to transform the care of patients and improve outcomes. However, it is a fundamental principle of the NHS that funding should be allocated according to clinical priorities, based on the judgment of clinical commissioners. That might include new treatments, but it might just as easily include the scaling up of older effective treatments or investing in more staff. We understand the intention behind the amendment, but it is for NHS England and clinical commissioning groups to determine clinical priorities and spend the money on what is clinically most important.

The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) has supported this amendment, and while it is not for me to comment on the policies of the Scottish Government, we know that the NHS in Scotland has raised concerns that the new medicines fund, to which she referred, only funds medicines at the end of life or for rare diseases, meaning that funding for other areas is not getting the same priority.

Dr Philippa Whitford *indicated dissent.*

Mr Dunne: The hon. Lady is shaking her head. That is my information, but if that is not the case, perhaps she would like to enlighten me further.

Dr Whitford: It is a new medicines and rare diseases fund, and it includes orphan, ultra-orphan and end of life, but it is not only about end of life.

Mr Dunne: No, it is not only for end of life, but also for rare diseases. That was my understanding, but I stand corrected. However, my main point is that it should be for clinicians to decide what is spent across the range of activity. If money is ring-fenced into a specific fund for new medicines, that might not always be the right clinical decision.

Dr Whitford: Does the Minister accept that it is a slightly bizarre public relations thing to have a medicines fund that is only for cancer, ruling out people with other life-threatening illnesses? That is the case here in England.

Mr Dunne: The new cancer drugs fund was set up specifically to provide funds to deal with one of the most common causes of mortality in the country, and was a priority of the previous Government; I will not go into the reasons for that.

Returning to amendment 8, it was suggested that what happens to the receipts is not clear, but all income generated by the voluntary and statutory schemes is reinvested in the NHS. Estimates of income from the pharmaceutical payment regulation scheme are part of the baseline used in the Department's spending review model. The model was used to calculate the funding increase that the NHS sought at the time of the 2015 spending review, and it helped to secure the £10 billion of real-terms funding over the course of this Parliament. The income from the voluntary and statutory schemes can and does fluctuate; that is the biggest problem with ring-fencing, which could bring risks in this area. For example, the annual income from the PPRS has varied between £310 million and £839 million in a full financial year in England, so there is the potential for the income that it generates to vary widely, which could disadvantage patients by making treatment dependent on income from a pricing scheme with unsteady income generation.

Rob Marris: I understand where the Minister is going with that, but I want to caution him. He spoke earlier about flexibility—my word, not his—and his example was that a clinical commissioning group or a medical body might want to spend some of this money on staffing. Owing to the fluctuation to which he refers, however, spending funds on staffing is probably not a good idea.

Mr Dunne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his advice, but I am afraid that I do not think it is relevant to my point about the fluctuation in income coming from the scheme. It is relevant in relation to whether NICE or politicians make such decisions. They need to be made by clinicians.

Dr Philippa Whitford *rose*—

Mr Dunne: I will give way, but then I will make some progress.

Dr Whitford: I thank the Minister for kindly giving way. The cancer drugs fund has a budget of some £350 million, so if he is saying that the money that can be retrieved varies from £300 million to over £800 million, that would allow for the expansion of a new medicines fund.

Mr Dunne: It might if the move was always in the same direction. My concern is that the amount could decline between one year and the next; it may not always go up—certainly not up in a straight line.

Separately from the Bill, the Government are taking action to secure the UK's future as an attractive place for the life sciences sector and to support faster patient access to medical innovations. I have already touched on the recently published accelerated access review, which sets out ways to increase the speed at which 21st-century innovations in medicines, medical technologies and digital products get to NHS patients and their families. The review's recommendations included bringing together organisations from across the system in an accelerated access partnership, and creating a strategic commercial unit within NHS England that can work with industry to develop commercial access arrangements. We are considering those recommendations with partners and will respond in due course.

NHS England and NICE are jointly consulting on several proposed changes to NICE standard technology appraisals and highly specialised technology appraisals, including around speeding up the appraisal process. The Department of Health continues to work closely with NHS England and other stakeholders to improve uptake of new medicines. A key element of that is the innovation scorecard that I have already referenced. With those comments about our concerns about what is proposed in amendment 8, I ask the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) not to press her amendment.

Turning to amendment 9, tabled by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire, the Government recognise that section 260 of the National Health Service Act 2006 does not explicitly state that the Government are obliged to consult industry. However, I am aware that the Act does explicitly state that there is an obligation on the Government to consult when it comes to controlling the cost of medicines. A similar amendment was tabled by the hon. Lady in Committee. I want to reiterate that I am happy to consider with her how we could best introduce a general requirement to consult industry in section 260. Indeed, my officials have been in discussions with her, and I am grateful for her time and constructive comments.

I note the hon. Lady's reference to the effect of any pricing controls for medical supplies on maintaining the quality of those supplies. I assure her that the Government would take into account all relevant factors, including

any concerns raised by industry about the quality of medical supplies, when making and consulting on any price controls for medical supplies. The Government would not however be in favour of putting one of those many factors in the Bill.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency is responsible for the safety, efficacy and quality of medical supplies, and the Bill will not change that. The MHRA has assured me that any use of the price control powers in the Bill would not affect any of the quality or safety requirements that must be met before medical supplies can be placed on the market.

The hon. Lady referred to the procurement system in Scotland; I assure her that the Government are committed to improving procurement across the NHS. She will be well aware of the Carter report, which concluded that there is considerable variation in the value that trusts extract from their expenditure on goods and medical supplies. NHS Supply Chain is working hard to deliver procurement efficiencies, to meet recommendations to increase price transparency, to lower costs, and to reduce the number of products and suppliers used across the NHS to deliver economies of scale. The hon. Lady referred to 600,000 products, but it has had success in reducing the range in the catalogue down to 315,000 to help NHS organisations purchase products more efficiently. It continues to work to reduce that number. I am aware of similar work in Scotland. In England, we are using the Carter review to deliver that.

While I understand the intent behind the hon. Lady's amendment, I am not fully convinced that, as drafted, it would have the desired effect. If she will continue to work with me and my officials, the Government would be happy to consider, while the Bill is in the other place, how we could best introduce the requirement to consult into section 260. On that basis, I invite her not to press her amendment for now.

Rob Marris *rose*—

Mr Dunne: I am afraid that I must press on to cover the Government amendments.

Government amendments 1 to 5 address a possible loophole in the Bill. Clause 6 amends the National Health Service Act 2006 to give the Secretary of State the power to make regulations to obtain information from any UK producer that is not an excepted person. A "UK producer" is defined in the Bill as anyone involved in the manufacture, distribution or supply of health service medicines, medical supplies and other related products required for the purposes of the health services in the United Kingdom. An "excepted person" is defined in the Bill as any person providing pharmacy or GP services for the health services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The purpose of these provisions was to reflect the agreement with the devolved Administrations that, for devolved purposes, they would collect information from pharmacies and GP practices in their nation. However, there may be circumstances in which a company supplies products in the devolved Administrations and also in England, and could claim that the provision, as drafted, would allow it to become an excepted person, because it was operating in the devolved Administrations. That is clearly not the intent of the Bill, so we have proposed these amendments to address this loophole.

[Mr Dunne]

Government amendment 6 is a minor consequential amendment that was unintentionally omitted when the Government tabled amendments in Committee. The amendment relates to clause 6, which provides the Secretary of State with the power to disclose information to the list of bodies set out in proposed new section 264B. The amendment clarifies that the list of people to whom the Secretary of State can disclose information includes those persons providing services to the Regional Business Services Organisation in Northern Ireland; it had previously been omitted. I hope that hon. Members will accept these amendments.

3.30 pm

I have a couple of remarks about amendment 10, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire. New section 264B in clause 6 enables the Secretary of State to disclose the information that is collected to a range of bodies, including NHS England, special health authorities, NHS Digital, other Government Departments and the devolved Administrations. The Government have concerns about this amendment, as we are dealing with confidential and commercially sensitive information that can be used only for specific purposes. We are therefore reluctant to introduce a requirement to disclose information to, for example, any Government Department or NHS England. It is important that the Government can be trusted with the information that they collect, and that there are sufficient safeguards to ensure that it is treated as confidential or commercially sensitive.

Dr Philippa Whitford *rose*—

Mr Dunne: I would like to conclude this point for the hon. Lady, as I hope it will satisfy her. Her concern is about how the Government will behave in response to requests from devolved Administrations; we recognise that we need to give reassurance to the devolved Administrations that, in the light of the constructive conversations we have already had with them, they will have full access to all relevant data that the Government collect. We are quite happy to do that. We have indicated that we will enter into a memorandum of understanding, which will be discussed and agreed with the devolved Administrations. Those discussions will cover whether they have automatic access to this information—in real time, or in some other format—and whether that is done through giving them direct access to the systems, or by forwarding the data that we collect, immediately on request. We need to get into the detail of that in discussion on the memorandum of understanding, rather than committing that to the Bill at this stage. On that basis, I hope that the hon. Lady will not press her amendment to a vote.

Dr Whitford: I welcome the Minister's comments, and I am happy not to press the amendment if we can reach the point of a clear memorandum of understanding. I just point out that all my amendment does is to say that the groups listed by the Bill should be able to ask for data on request; it does not add anyone else. I understand that my attempt at the amendment in

Committee included groups that it should not have, but that has been corrected. This amendment does not spread confidential information any more widely.

Mr Dunne: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that clarification. I think this is best addressed through a memorandum of understanding, rather than in primary legislation, in case we need to adjust the memorandum in subsequent years.

Finally, I wish to address Government amendment 7, which provides a definition of “equipment”. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West took us through the drafting on the definition of “medical supplies”. The amendment gives a definition of “equipment” in the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006 to ensure consistency with the National Health Service Act 2006. “Equipment” is defined as including

“any machinery, apparatus or appliance, whether fixed or not, and any vehicle”.

When taken in tandem with the common definition of “medical supplies”, the definition is broad enough to capture any medical supplies on the market, from bandages to MRI scanners. The point of distinction was not so much the definition of “medical supplies” as the definition of “equipment”, which is a subset of the medical supplies definition. I hope, therefore, that hon. Members will accept the amendment.

I have spoken at length on these amendments. I hope I have made my position clear, that Opposition Members will not press their amendments to a vote, and that the House will accept the Government amendments.

Justin Madders: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 6

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO SECRETARY OF STATE AND DISCLOSURE

Amendments made: 1, page 4, line 12, leave out from “products,” to end of line 13.

This amendment is linked to amendments 2 to 5. It is directly consequential on amendment 4.

Amendment 2, page 4, line 17, at end insert—

“(subject to subsection (6A)).”

This amendment is linked to amendments 1 and 3 to 5. It flags that the provision made by section 264A(2)(a) and (b) of the National Health Service Act 2006 is subject to the provision made by amendment 3.

Amendment 3, page 5, line 47, at end insert—

“(6A) Regulations under this section may not do any of the following—

- (a) require any person who provides primary medical services under Part 4 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006, or any person who provides pharmaceutical services under Part 7 of that Act, to record, keep or provide information relating to any Welsh health service products which are supplied by the person in providing the services in question;
- (b) require any person who provides primary medical services under section 2C(1) of the 1978 Act, or any person who provides pharmaceutical care services under section 2CA(1) of that Act, to record, keep or provide information relating to any Scottish health service products which are supplied by the person in providing the services in question;

- (c) require any person who provides primary medical services or pharmaceutical services under Part 2 or 6 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 (S.I. 1972/1265 (N.I. 14)) to record, keep or provide information relating to Northern Ireland health service products which are supplied by the person in providing the services in question.”

This amendment is linked to amendments 1, 2, 4 and 5. It ensures that regulations under section 264A of the National Health Service Act 2006 may not require the persons specified to record, keep or provide the information specified.

Amendment 4, page 6, leave out lines 3 to 15.

This amendment is linked to amendments 1 to 3 and 5. It is consequential on the new provision made by amendment 3.

Amendment 5, page 6, line 36, leave out “(8)(d)” and insert “(6A)(b)”.

This amendment is linked to amendments 1 to 4. It is a consequential amendment.

Amendment 6, page 7, line 8, leave out “(h)” and insert “(i)”.—(*Mr Dunne.*)

This amendment makes a change which is consequential on the amendments made in Committee. The effect is to allow the Secretary of State to disclose information to a person who provides services to the Regional Business Services Organisation in Northern Ireland.

Clause 7

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO WELSH MINISTERS AND DISCLOSURE

Amendment made: 7, page 9, line 38, at end insert—

“(and for this purpose ‘equipment’ includes any machinery, apparatus or appliance, whether fixed or not, and any vehicle).”—(*Mr Dunne.*)

This amendment provides a definition of “equipment” for the purposes of the definition of “medical supplies” in section 201A(8) of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006.

Third Reading

3.34 pm

Mr Dunne: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Third time.

As we have already discussed today, it has been a pleasure to take this short, albeit technical, Bill through the House with such a wide degree of consensus from all participating parties.

We have had a very constructive debate. Points have been raised by hon. Members from both sides of the House through amendments and in debate, and we have sought to take them on board. We will look to take some of them forward as the Bill moves to the other place.

I thank Opposition Members for their contributions. They include the hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), for Burnley (Julie Cooper), who is just about in her place, and for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who leads for the Scottish National party. We have had some strong contributions from Back Benchers, including the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris), who served on the Committee in his usual diligent fashion, and the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). We have also had contributions from Government Members. In particular, I thank my hon. Friends the Members for

Peterborough (Mr Jackson) and for Torbay (Kevin Foster), who was active in Committee. I also thank my Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), and the Whips on both sides of the House.

More than £15.2 billion has been spent on medicines in the most recent full year—an increase of nearly 20% since 2010-11 and of over 7% since last year. The purpose of the Bill is to close loopholes to ensure that the NHS secures as much value for money as it can from this very significant spending on pharmaceutical and medical products. We are looking to clarify and modernise provisions to control the cost of national health service medicines and to ensure that sales and purchase information can be appropriately collected and disclosed.

Briefly, the Bill puts it beyond doubt that the Secretary of State can require companies in the statutory scheme to make payments to control the cost of NHS medicines. That is expected to save the health service across the UK some £90 million a year.

Secondly, the Bill would enable the Secretary of State to require companies to reduce the price of an unbranded generic medicine, or to impose other controls on that company’s unbranded generic medicine, even if the company is in the voluntary scheme—currently the 2014 pharmaceutical price regulation scheme—for its branded medicines.

Members will recall the examples raised on Second Reading and in Committee of companies charging the NHS unreasonably high prices for unbranded generic medicines. Without competition, companies have raised prices totally unreasonably—in the most extreme case by as much as 12,000%. Companies can do that because we rely on competition to keep prices of unbranded generic medicines down. Although that generally works well, the Government need the tools to be able to address the situation in which a small number of companies are exploiting the NHS, patients and the taxpayer by raising prices when there is no competition.

Thirdly, the Bill enables the Secretary of State to make regulations to obtain information on sales and purchases of health service products from all parts of the supply chain, from manufacturer to pharmacy, for defined purposes. These purposes are reimbursement of community pharmacies and GPs, determining the value for money that the supply chain or products provide, and schemes to control the costs or prices of medicines. By bringing these requirements together, the Bill streamlines and clarifies all the relevant requirements currently in place, providing a statutory footing for them all. This includes the existing statutory requirements already in the NHS Act 2006, and those agreements that currently have a voluntary basis only.

In Committee, the Government tabled a number of important amendments to reflect the views and requests of the devolved Administrations on how they want to apply the information power in their territories. We tabled the amendments following constructive discussions that resulted in agreement that the UK Government will collect information from wholesalers and manufacturers for the whole of the UK. It would not make sense for each nation to collect its own information from wholesalers and manufacturers, which would lead to duplication of effort and unnecessarily increase costs across the system.

[Mr Dunne]

We have also agreed that each nation will collect information from its own pharmacies and GPs. The devolved Administrations will have full access to all the information that the Government collect. I have committed to develop a memorandum of understanding to underpin these arrangements, and my officials are working closely on that with officials in the devolved Administrations.

To ensure that the Bill makes the Government's intentions absolutely clear, we tabled a small number of minor and technical amendments on Report to close a potential loophole that would have enabled some companies not to provide us with any information if they also provided pharmacy or GP services to the devolved health services.

This is a relatively small Bill, technical in nature, which has received considerable support from across the House, for which I am extremely grateful. The Bill will help to secure better value for money for the NHS from its spending on medicines, while ensuring that the decisions made by the Government are based on more accurate and robust information.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for presiding over today's debates. I also thank the members of the Panel of Chairs, especially my hon. Friend and neighbour, the Member for Telford—

Rob Marris: The Wrekin.

Mr Dunne: I stand corrected—my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard), under whose chairmanship I served for the first time. Finally, I thank the parliamentary Clerks and counsel, *Hansard* and the Doorkeepers for helping us to bring the Bill to its conclusion today.

3.41 pm

Justin Madders: As the Minister said, the Bill is designed to enable the NHS better to control the cost of medicines and medical supplies and to close some of the loopholes in the system that have been the subject of blatant abuses in recent years. In seeking to achieve those aims, the Government have our support.

I wish to place on the record our appreciation for the amiable way the Minister dealt with our probing of the Bill. Although he has not accepted our amendments, he has explained why not in a reasonable and constructive manner. I would also like to record my appreciation of the work of the members of the Bill Committee, including my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper), who ably assisted me in tabling and speaking to Opposition amendments, and the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who spoke on behalf of the Scottish National party. Particular thanks go to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris), who has been engaged and informed in equal measure throughout the Bill's passage through this House.

Expenditure on medicines accounts for a significant and growing proportion of the NHS budget, standing at £15.2 billion in England in 2015-16, which is an increase of more than 20% since 2010-11. That reflects the incredible advances that continue to be made in the development of new and innovative medicines, often by our own life sciences industry here in the UK. Although we welcome and celebrate those developments, it is

clear that taxpayers and patients have not always been well served by the market. It is important that we do all we can to secure value for money for the NHS, especially in the current financial context following six years of historic underinvestment by normal standards.

When the most recent five-year pharmaceutical price regulation scheme was agreed in early 2014, the Government said it would provide unprecedented certainty, but as we know and as was reported in February by the then Life Sciences Minister, the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), estimated incomes in the UK from PPRS payments for 2016-17 were £647 million—a considerable reduction on the £800 million received in 2015, particularly at a time when the overall drugs bill has been increasing apace. Those figures and the fact that we are debating this Bill show that the original scheme has not gone entirely to plan.

There is much in the Bill to be welcomed. We certainly want an end to the playing of the system that has been going on. We hope that the Bill will finally put an end to such antics and deliver a mechanism that ensures consistency in appropriate circumstances. We support the rationale behind aligning the statutory and voluntary schemes, which will create a more level playing field between companies and offer a much better chance of delivering greater savings and value for money to the taxpayer.

We support measures to tackle the small number of cases where we have seen companies disgracefully exploiting loopholes in the regulations to hike the price of medicines, sometimes by more than 10,000%. As we know, the investigation undertaken by *The Times* in the summer found that the price of medicines was inflated by £262 million a year as a result of this practice. That continues to impact on patients, often those with rarer conditions.

An example is Keveyis, a drug that has been found to be extremely effective in treating some of the symptoms of muscular dystrophy. Until 2012 it was relatively inexpensive, costing around £100 a box per patient. Unfortunately, it was discontinued by its previous manufacturer. Recently Taro Pharmaceuticals obtained the rights under orphan drug status and is now manufacturing it once again. However, its forecast price in the EU is approximately £35,000 per patient per year, despite the fact that no new research and development costs have been incurred by the company. It is therefore very difficult to see what justification there can be for such a significant price increase. Because of the rise in price, the NHS in England is refusing to provide reimbursement for the drug, which means that patients lose out. It is this deliberate manipulation of the system that we want to see dealt with and we hope that this Bill will once and for all put an end to such scandalous practices.

Although we support the broad aims of the Bill, we have had a number of concerns, some of which we have touched on already, about what is perhaps missing from the Bill and about the Government's policies more widely on access to medicines and treatments. Despite this country's world-leading pharmaceutical sector, which we are all rightly proud of, successive studies have demonstrated how there is a relatively low take-up of new medicines by the UK compared with other high-income countries. Members across the House will no doubt

have received many pieces of correspondence from constituents concerned about the lack of availability of medicines that they or their relatives are trying to obtain. We also see clinical commissioning groups rationing medicines and treatments in ways that would previously have seemed unthinkable.

If we are to create a level playing field for drugs companies, we should be trying to do the same for patients as well. One measure that we have proposed to tackle this issue is to ring-fence future rebates from the sector and invest them in improving access to medicines and treatments. We know that £1.24 billion of new money has been returned through the rebate since it was established. Surely there can be no more logical use for this money than to tackle the gulf between the UK's record on developing new drugs and patients' ability to access them.

We know that the Government were not willing to back our amendments, but I urge the Minister to look again at how a similar measure has worked in Scotland. As we heard in the debate today, there seems to be some difference of opinion about that. The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire spoke strongly in support of it.

We note that a number of amendments tabled by the Government during the passage of the Bill mean that the devolved Administrations are subject to the same arrangements, although it was pointed out in Committee that there appear to be no equivalent arrangements for the devolution of health in Greater Manchester. I recall that when the Minister responded to my questions on this point, he suggested that ring-fencing the appropriate amount of the rebate for Greater Manchester might lead to chaos, as its allocation from NHS England already includes an element of income from the rebate. I think the Minister underestimates his ability to resolve the issue and overestimates the difficulty that would ensue.

The annual health budget negotiated for Greater Manchester is about £6 billion, around half the Scottish budget and around a billion pounds less than the Welsh budget, so the size of the budget is not the issue. What is an issue, though, is transparency and consistency. I do not expect any late change of heart from the Minister, but we will be watching future developments in English devolution and the accompanying budgets with interest.

The other aspect about which we have concerns is how these proposals will impact upon the future of the pharmaceutical industry in the UK, in a climate where there is already considerable anxiety in the sector about the future of the European Medicines Agency as a result of Brexit. Clearly, we will be keeping a close eye on both the operation of the scheme and the general health of the sector, particularly in terms of future investment in research and development.

To conclude, we support the broad aims of this Bill and the Government's aim of better controlling the costs of medicines. However, we should be doing more to tackle the present situation to prevent patients from missing out on innovative treatments, particularly when we compare our record to that of countries with similar wealth. We hope that the scope of the annual review envisaged in the draft regulations is sufficiently broad to enable us to judge the Bill's effectiveness on this issue and on the others that we have raised, and we look

forward to considering the Government's response once the consultation on the draft regulations has been completed.

As the Minister said, this is a small Bill, but the sums at stake are large. We hope to see a positive outcome for the NHS as a whole. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for chairing our proceedings today. I thank the Members who served on the Bill Committee, the Chairs and all the staff and civil servants who successfully led the Bill's passage through the House.

3.50 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford: I will open my remarks with thanks, because this is the first Bill that I have helped to take through the House, and I am therefore very grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Chairs of the Public Bill Committee and all the staff who have worked on this, particularly those in the procedural hub; as a newbie, being able to go and ask them what happens next has been immensely helpful.

Obviously, we welcome the basic premise of the Bill, particularly clauses 1 to 4, which give the Secretary of State the power to control the price of drugs and avoid the excesses we have seen recently, as was highlighted in the article in *The Times*, particularly by those companies that are in the voluntary scheme but also produce generics, and therefore the price of those generics is not controlled. There are also those companies that have picked up drugs that have orphan status—they are no longer produced by anyone else—and basically robbed the NHS by increasing the price by many thousand per cent. That is just unacceptable.

When we accept relatively high prices for new drugs, we often excuse that on the basis of research and development. We need to realise that not all research and development is done by big pharmaceutical companies; they often collect drugs by buying small, spin-out companies from universities. With regard to generic or repurposed off-patent drugs, the R and D is usually done by clinicians within the NHS, or by academics in university departments. Companies have admitted in the past that they do not always price drugs in relation to their R and D costs; they sometimes do so simply by what they think the market will bear. We must not always allow them the excuse that they are spending huge amounts on R and D, because that is simply not always the case.

I tabled two new clauses in Committee. Now that the Secretary of State will have this power, I hope that the two issues raised by my new clauses will be dealt with. One is the issue of specials, which are simply hand-made preparations, usually an ointment for dermatological use. I arranged for the briefing from the British Association of Dermatologists, which highlighted companies that had a Scottish price list and an English price list, to be sent to the Minister. I therefore hope that those powers will be used. In Scotland it is done by using an NHS producer who makes the drug and therefore keeps the price down, rather than simply paying a pharmaceutical company or a pharmacy company, because the pharmacy with which the patient is dealing might have a mother or sister company and they are simply taking a very high price from them.

The other issue, which was raised last November, is that of repurposed off-patent drugs. As the shadow Minister explained at the time, an off-patent drug may

[*Dr Philippa Whitford*]

be picked up by a new company and used for its new purpose, such as simvastatin for multiple sclerosis, but with the merest tweak it could be put out as if it is a new drug, and suddenly at a price that people cannot access. That also touches on the hierarchy whereby doctors must prescribe a licensed version before an unlicensed one. If a licensed drug came on the market that was actually just a version of an off-patent drug, doctors would be under pressure to prescribe it.

I understand that work has gone ahead since last year's Bill, but I exhort the Minister, and through him the Secretary of State, to ensure that the powers given by this Bill are used in all these circumstances to ensure that prices are controlled. Otherwise, what happens is not a matter of expenditure to the NHS on its own, but usually that CCGs will not allow these drugs to be accessed, which is what is happening in the case of specials. We now have the powers. We welcome that, but hope that they will be used.

3.54 pm

Rob Marris: I propose, Madam Deputy Speaker, not to take the remaining three hours. Earlier, when the Minister would not take an intervention, he seemed to think there was a rush on time. My reading of the Order Paper is that we have another three hours for the Bill, but I will not take that long.

I want to put the Bill in context, because this is a socialist Bill. It builds on the Labour Government's National Health Service Act 2006, which applied to England. Looking around, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think you and I may be the only Members present who voted for the 2006 Act—that was obviously before you were in your esteemed position. In putting the current Bill in context, it is worth reviewing what it is building on.

The 2006 Act made reference to the voluntary schemes for price control that existed then. The current voluntary scheme, of course, is the 2014 pharmaceutical price regulation scheme—the PPRS. Those voluntary schemes were to do with limiting the profits of pharmaceutical companies. Now, I stress to the House that the Labour party and I are not opposed to pharmaceutical companies *per se*; they do fantastic research, and there are probably millions of people alive now who would not otherwise have been alive, because of the research and development done by pharmaceutical companies—many of them, happily, based, or having major operations, in the United Kingdom. The companies are very welcome here, but they have to play by the rules, and so do those that buy up off-patent drugs, horse around with them and put up their prices by hundreds and hundreds of per cent. Sometimes, it is a minority of private equity companies that are doing that, and they are not welcome here.

Pharmaceutical companies must act responsibly, and they may need statutory encouragement to do so. The 2006 Act started the process of statutory encouragement with a statutory scheme, which enabled Her Majesty's Government, in appropriate cases, to limit prices and the profits of pharmaceutical companies—that is why I say this is a socialist scheme. Before those on the Government Benches get all aerated about this, let me

say that the Labour party and I do not wish to nationalise or control the prices in every corner store in the country—not at all—but there are certain big operations where market intervention is helpful and is needed when there is market failure. It was perceived—rightly—by the Labour Government that there was some market failure, and they needed some stern measures to sort it out.

The Bill builds on that work from 10 years ago because, as adverted to by the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), some medicine supply companies—again, a minority—were, frankly, taking the mickey. They were leaving the voluntary scheme in favour of the statutory scheme because that was more advantageous to them. I understand why they would do that—they wished to maximise their profits—but they must act in a responsible way, and if they will not do so as a result of being urged to show corporate social responsibility, which some of them will not, we need statutory measures, and that is what the Bill puts in place. One of the things the Bill does is to address the issue of companies leaving the voluntary scheme to go into the statutory scheme because it is a better deal. The Bill resets the schemes, as it were, to make sure that a company is not encouraged to do that, because there is not that comparative advantage.

The Bill also makes provision for a new power to enable the Secretary of State for Health to require a company in the voluntary scheme to pay sums due under that scheme. Even though it is a voluntary scheme, the Bill will give the Secretary of State the power to pursue non-payers through the courts. I regard that as progressive legislation. For those companies that are not acting responsibly—that are taking the mickey, as I characterised it—that is a good thing. This Government have come down the socialist path to agree with such market intervention.

The Government have also come down the Labour party path in wanting to marshal information so that we can treat these companies equally and fairly, and so that they treat the society in which they operate—refracted principally through their supply of medicines to the NHS—equitably and fairly. Under the Bill, the Secretary of State will have the power to make regulations for the marshalling of information, building on the work done in the NHS Act 10 years ago.

That is important, but on the context of the Bill, I would like to tempt Health Ministers a little further down the socialist path. The Minister described it in his opening remarks as a technical Bill, which it broadly is. However, it also has an ideological or philosophical aspect, which I have tried to set it out, because it is broadly a socialist Bill. One of the things it seeks to do is to save money for the NHS and to raise money for the NHS through clawbacks on overpriced medicines or medical supplies because the NHS—this is the context of the Bill, which is not purely technical—is in serious financial difficulty. The Minister referred to the extra £10 billion of funding for the NHS over the lifetime of this Parliament, but even the Health Committee does not accept that calculation. It is a sleight of hand.

Part of that sleight of hand relates to what is being done on social care, which is leading to a growing problem of delayed discharges. Social care is not being properly funded in this country, and the precept that councils in England are allowed to charge is in effect a

mandatory charge because the Government calculate the revenue support grant and all such local government things on the assumption that councils will raise the precept. That is having an effect on the NHS because of delayed discharges.

In the context of the crisis in social care, although the extra funding it will provide for the NHS is welcome, the Bill comes nowhere near addressing the underfunding of the NHS. In the financial terms of what it will raise or save for the NHS, the Bill—in relation to what the NHS needs and, coupled to that, what councils in England need for social care—is a drop in the ocean. The Bill will encourage a certain level of efficiency in the production, purchase and procurement of medicines and medical supplies. All of us in the House would sign up to the concept of efficient procurement. We might sometimes have different definitions of what does and does not constitute efficient procurement, but procurement is central to the Bill.

Although the NHS can, like any massive organisation, almost always act more efficiently—I hope the Bill will encourage the NHS to do so—we must bear it in mind that, in international comparisons, the NHS is one of the most efficient organisations in healthcare delivery in the world. If we look at healthcare delivery in the United States of America, for example, we can see that it spends, as a proportion of GDP, as much on public health as the United Kingdom. However, because its public health system is not run efficiently, as it is all fragmented, the USA spends the same proportion of GDP again on private health—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Bill is quite specific and that this is a Third Reading debate? He is venturing into areas that are not specifically in the Bill, and he may wish to come back to what is in the Bill.

Rob Marris: I am grateful to you for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I have said, I am putting the Bill in the context of the NHS and its effect in addressing the much deeper problems of the NHS. I was simply adverting to some of those deeper problems, but I take your guidance.

I repeat to Ministers that the Government have come some way, as the Bill demonstrates, down a socialist

path for the delivery of healthcare, and I encourage them to come back with another Bill, building on this one, to abandon privatisations and let us have a public NHS.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (Electronic Communications and Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 2 November, be approved.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

Question agreed to.

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

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS

That the draft Childcare (Early Years Provision Free of Charge) (Extended Entitlement) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 7 November, be approved.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

Question agreed to.

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

BANKS AND BANKING

That the draft Bank Recovery and Resolution Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 3 November, be approved.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

Question agreed to.

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

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Bank of England Act 1998 (Macro-prudential Measures) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 16 November, be approved.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

Question agreed to.

Rail Services: Southend

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

4.5 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Christmas has come early for me, with our reaching the Adjournment debate earlier than usual. However, I say to my hon. Friend the Minister, with good heart, that there is no point in having an Adjournment debate and exchanging 15 minutes of words each unless there is a positive outcome, which is what I expect. There could be no finer Christmas present for my constituents than improving the very disappointing train service that c2c and Abellio Greater Anglia offer.

There is some irony to the debate because I had an Adjournment debate on the same subject at the beginning of the year and again, the business ended rather earlier than expected. On that occasion, the Minister and I were caught out, but we certainly have not been caught out this time.

My hon. Friend the Minister was elected to the House in 2010, so he has not had the opportunity of listening to me talking about the railway service that my constituents enjoy or suffer. He is dependent on the briefing that his officials give him, and they are dependent on the briefing that the people who run the services give them. That shows how things have changed in this place.

Once upon a time—the violins come out—the democratically elected Member of Parliament raised an issue, the Minister was concerned about all he had heard and he could do something about it. He could actually make a difference. In 2016, it does not feel like that. The way in which power has increasingly seeped away from this place is disappointing. Doubtless the Minister will shock me at the end of the debate and I will leave here happy, with him guaranteeing to have a good word with the deliverers of the two rail services and saying that things will improve.

When I was Member of Parliament for Basildon—the violins come out again—I called for the privatisation of the Fenchurch Street line. I am not an MP who talks about rail services hypothetically. I am a commuter and have been for many years. I was a commuter before I became a Member of Parliament, and my wife and I remember standing on crowded platforms, our hearts in our mouths, as the train stopped, the carriage doors opened and people fell out because there was such a crush. We would think, “Oh crikey, we can’t get on the next train. We’re going to be late for work. What will our bosses think of all this?”

Our train services have improved, and I pay tribute to my predecessor, the late Lord Channon, and the late Lord Parkinson. Both those former colleagues, when they were Secretaries of State, were responsible for much of the improvement of the tube and railway services that we take for granted. However, if they were alive today, they would be very disappointed to see what has happened to the c2c line.

I do not blame the women and men who work for the two train companies. They do a wonderful job under difficult circumstances. However, I blame the management and the senior management, particularly of National

Express. They tried to shut me up earlier this year because I was trying to get an improvement in the services. I absolutely blame them and will not stop raising these matters in the House of Commons until there is a dramatic improvement in services.

All those years ago, when the things we did in the House were reported, I had an argument on live TV with the then chairman of British Rail. I can remember coming back from the broadcast and being applauded by colleagues in the Division Lobby because they thought it was good that a local MP had taken the national rail service to task. Everything changed. We used to be called the misery line. The line was privatised and we became the happy line. It was completely transformed and the constituents I represented at the time were pleased with the improved services.

Since 1997, I have been the Member of Parliament for Southend West but I use the same railway line. The stations that serve the area I represent are Westcliff, Chalkwell, Leigh-on-Sea and Prittlewell, which is served by Abellio Greater Anglia. I am very pleased to see in their places my hon. Friends the Members for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) and for Fylde (Mark Menzies)—it is always good to have his support. I could go on to mention other colleagues. My right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) is not in his place but would also support me.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I am here in my capacity as a member of the Transport Committee. My hon. Friend has raised this matter on many occasions, and I want to share what he says in this Adjournment debate with members of the Committee and see whether we can look at it and help him.

Sir David Amess: I am flattered and honoured. I had forgotten that my hon. Friend is a member of the Transport Committee. It is very good news that he might raise this matter with the Chair and the Committee.

This time last year I was looking forward to Christmas. The gentleman running the line contacted me and my colleagues to say that, although there would be some changes, it was all good news, and that the wonderful service would be even better. On 13 December 2015, the timetable changed. We were told that, as a result, there would be improved passenger experiences, which is definitely not the case judging by my inbox, and increased reliability, but a constituent has said that it is “rarer to have a day without issues than a day with”.

We were promised quicker commutes and more seat availability, but another constituent has written to say that people are already standing by the time the train arrives at Westcliff. I am not criticising the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East who get on at Thorpe Bay and the other stations—they are more than entitled to do so—but by the time the trains reach Westcliff where I get on, they are already packed.

We were also told that, if the changed timetable failed, we would more than likely return to the old one, but that has obviously not happened. Within days of those initial changes in December 2015, my mailbox and inbox were piling up with complaints, so I did not have as happy a Christmas as I had anticipated.

Constituents showed the extent of their upset by protesting at a famous, or infamous, rally. People do not often have rallies on platforms, but we had one on the platform at Fenchurch Street station on 14 January 2016.

In April 2016, following the public rally in the railway station, the wonderful Essex radio broadcaster Dave Monk interviewed Mr Drury, the gentleman responsible for running the line. Mr Drury said that he was

“Going to reduce the number of trains and use those carriages to lengthen the other trains, so we’ve got longer trains.”

The logic of how that would please my constituents is a little confusing, but that is what he said. In response to people saying that they did not want four-coach trains, he said that there were going to be longer trains, but there were not going to be so many. But they did not want fewer trains! He was told that he was not meeting an increased demand if he increased the length of trains but decreased the number of trains running. Daily correspondence has continued. The misery line has returned, at least for my constituents.

There was then an exchange between me and the then chairman of the Conservative party. I received a letter from the then chairman in which it was suggested that he had received a complaint from the chairman of National Express, the gentleman in overall charge of c2c. He had written to the party chairman, asking him whether he was aware that one of his colleagues was making life difficult, in a rather disagreeable fashion, by complaining about the c2c service. Now, that is not acceptable. It is gutless. If anyone has a beef, let them meet the MP eyeball to eyeball. Do not go behind their back. Did the chap think that the chairman of the Conservative party was going to tell me off? If he had, he would have got it all guns blazing! That well and truly backfired, and I am never, ever going to forget what that gentleman did. It undermined my role, and the role of all MPs, in representing constituents’ views.

I will now read out a selection of letters I have received about the service:

“They appear to have cancellations, delays and faults virtually every day now, which is extremely frustrating given their previous excellent performance.”

The next one is a letter to c2c:

“I have written to you before, expressing unhappiness about when things go wrong. Passengers are pretty much left to fend for themselves. There seems to be no information at Barking and it is exhausting to keep swapping platforms”—

it is quite a journey to get to the other platform—

“for services that then do not run or have left by the time you get there. You apologised for the inconvenience and stated that this would be looked into and improved—this clearly has not happened.”

Even today, I received an email alerting me to the fact that there was disruption on the line. The next letter states:

“I am also starting to tire of all the apologies made to the travelling public. Like many others, I would prefer to see real change and proper information given to customers, rather than the current mantra which seems to imply ‘we can do as we like as long as we say sorry’. My feeling is this is not acceptable given my fare is now well over £3,000 per annum, my second largest bill only to my mortgage.”

It is a lot of money. Here is another one:

“This morning, I checked their website at 6.45am to see if the service was ok. It was. The 7.02 am fast train from Chalkwell was on time. I walked to the station to discover the 7.02 was cancelled.

No reason given. I asked c2c on Twitter what happened. Was told it was under investigation. Despite repeated requests for an answer via Twitter, I’ve been ignored and have not received an answer. I will not accept being ignored by them.”

Jolly good show.

The next one reads:

“I shouldn’t have to leave home earlier and get on a slower train but pay more money for the benefit.”

I absolutely agree. Another constituent said that her fare was over £3,000 a year, which again is a lot of money for a poor service. The next one reads:

“The only thing we get from c2c is: don’t worry, more carriages are coming. Carriages are not the answer. The problem is the shambolic timetable.”

The problem is indeed the timetable, which I was told would be good news for constituents. The next one reads:

“I now refuse to take my kids to London on the trains because of the poor state (especially toilets if they are working), but more because I am worried for their safety in such awful conditions.”

The final one reads:

“Still major problems, no end in sight even with new carriages. When will C2C put passengers before the profits of cramming people in to hop between barking and West Ham?”

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, with the briefing from his wonderful officials, is not going to say, “It will all be fixed because we are going to have new all-singing, all-dancing carriages and more trains”, because that will not fix the problems. Indeed, the design of the new carriages is totally unacceptable. It can only have been done by somebody who does not commute.

There are some very interesting statistics on the performance of the line. From autumn 2015 to January 2016, according to the c2c website, there was a 20% increase in the number of passengers departing from Fenchurch Street in the evening. Surely this is largely due to people using the train as a replacement for the tube between Barking and West Ham. In the same period, there was a 5% increase in the morning at the busiest point. In January 2017, c2c will introduce 24 new carriages along with the new timetable, which promises four more fast services each morning and evening, which will cut journey times by up to six minutes, and a 6% increase in the number of seats.

Nevertheless, the new timetable—yet another new timetable—starting on 9 January 2017 still has most of the trains stopping at Barking and West Ham, which is where a lot of the severe overcrowding occurs, particularly at evening peak time. This is because people can use the c2c line as opposed to the tube to get between Barking and West Ham, which is rather unfair because they are paying the Transport for London tube prices, not the price that c2c customers have to pay. Does c2c receive a financial incentive from TfL to stop at east London stations?

The following figures are calculated on the basis of all trains arriving at Fenchurch Street between 7 o’clock and 9 o’clock and do not count trains that go via “the loop”, which is the wonderful little journey through the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock. It is not that my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East do not want to go via Tilbury or Stanford-le-Hope, and all these other places; it is just that it delays the journey quite a bit.

[Sir David Amess]

In 2015, leaving Westcliff between those hours, there were 16 trains and a total of 144 carriages. Under the 2017 timetable—this is the crunch—Westcliff will be served by 13 trains with a total of 136 carriages. That is eight fewer carriages. We are being fed absolute rubbish, and it is insulting to my intelligence and that of my constituents. The figures are exactly the same for Chalkwell. Those with the longest commute—the first six stations on the line—are the worst off. There is an increase in the number of carriages at Leigh—144 in 2015 compared with 152 in 2017—which is great for the residents getting off at Leigh, but reducing the earlier stations will only lead to a bottleneck for commuters. On Friday, c2c also announced a fare increase. That is not its fault—it is in line with Government policy—but still it has rather upset my constituents.

Turning to the Abellio Greater Anglia service, a station that serves commuters from my constituency was upgraded, which is well and good, but my goodness, the line is dire beyond belief. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend was the Minister when the franchise was renewed, but there was a £150 million investment to upgrade the network, which was good. I understand that an agreement was reached with c2c for ticket acceptance between the two lines for 2017 during relevant engineering works, the details of which will be published on the website shortly. Abellio is in negotiations with c2c about ticket acceptance over the festive period, too. However, a constituent wrote to me complaining that

“The trains are out of date”—

they certainly are—and “overpriced”, compared with other services. She said:

“I am shocked that this franchise has been given the contract again to run this shocking service.”

I have met the management of Abellio Greater Anglia, and given the others bidding for the line, Abellio was probably the best of those offering to run it. Given that it had also been given money to upgrade services, I thought, “Let’s go with it,” but my constituent says:

“The impact this is having on my personal life is so detrimental that I have put my house on the market, so that I can move to another address...after commuting on the Southend Victoria train line for 20 years, I realise how terrible the service is and I cannot contemplate having to endure this nightmare commute anymore!”

That takes me back all those years to before I became an MP, when my wife and I would stand there, hearts in our mouths, when the doors opened, and could not get on the train. It is still a dreadful service.

My constituent goes on to say:

“Nearly every day there is an issue and at weekends no trains at all. Now we understand that although there is no service over the Christmas period they will not allow season tickets to be used on c2c line”.

That certainly needs to be sorted out. She asks:

“Why would commuters want to take trains to Billericay, buses to Newbury Park”—

both nice places—

“and tube to London, this surely cannot be classed as an alternative service?...The fares on our line are much higher”

than on other services. She says:

“the rolling stock is ridiculously out of date yet they are again given the contract for our region. I am hoping that my complaint

is one of many that you are receiving and that something will happen to improve the misery commuters pay over £3,000 a year to face every day.”

Jamie Burles, the excellent managing director of Abellio Greater Anglia, said at the press launch last month, on the subject of corporate responsibility, that

“it is a mark of a good business of how quickly we put things right”.

On proposed maintenance work that will cause disruption on the Southend Victoria to London Liverpool Street line, he admitted that there would be

“a tiny bit of pain for a very long gain”,

and that there would be “step change service improvement” to the line, which will have multimillion-pound investment. Judging by some of the complaints that I have received, however, if this “tiny bit of pain” means changes to the timetabling, frequency and capacity of trains, just as we experienced on c2c, Abellio will be held accountable for its reputation by me and my colleagues.

I hope that this railway company will get behind Southend becoming the alternative city of culture next year. If it wants to curry favour with local residents and local MPs, it might consider that it would be wonderful if, when we start our celebrations as the alternative city of culture on 1 January, it sponsored and helped with a few events.

I hope that I will not have to seek another Adjournment debate to raise the same subject next year. I fully understand that the Minister may still be reading his way into the brief, and I am not sure how familiar he is with this line, so I do not expect him to wave a magic wand. However, if he is not able to cover all the points that I have raised, perhaps I, and others, could have a meeting with him and his officials in the new year.

In spite of everything, I wish the staff of c2c, Abellio Greater Anglia, and everyone else, a very happy Christmas and a great new year.

4.30 pm

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I am sure that constituents reading the report of this debate will not fully appreciate the fact that most junior Members of Parliament have only half an hour in which to debate issues of constituency interest. It is a great testament to my parliamentary neighbour that he has secured a three-and-a-half-hour debate, not just once, but twice.

It is also good to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) is present. I recall that when I was a Whip, one of the most frustrating things was not being able to ask questions or make speeches. I know that my hon. Friend will be making a beeline for the Minister afterwards and delivering her speech to him in person, bending his ear on all things Thurrock in respect of the c2c service. If I were to give the House a foretaste of that speech in three words, they would be “more rolling stock”—so I think the Minister is forewarned.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) for allowing me to join in the debate. Both c2c and Abellio lines pass through his constituency, but both of them terminate in mine. We certainly do not want to see a return to the misery line. I am slightly more “glass half full” than my hon. Friend, but as he has made clear, our constituency experiences are different.

During the initial timetable consultation I met Julian Drury, and raised concerns from the outset. Once things began to go wrong, I looked back at the letter that I had sent him following our conversation, and was quite shocked by the clarity and strength of my language and how assertive I had been in saying that they would go wrong. I would have wished to be proved wrong myself, but, alas, I was not.

I wanted a reversion to the faster trains that had taken my constituents to London, and I adopted terminology similar to that which had been used by the campaigners for faster trains on the line between Norwich and London. I was asking for all trains from Shoeburyness to London to travel that distance in less than 60 minutes, which I think is a critical point. Train journeys from Shoeburyness can take about an hour and 10 minutes. The company has listened, and some trains manage 59 minutes, but it would be very useful if, over the years, we could reach a point at which they all took less than 59 minutes.

The Department could be helpful in this regard. c2c has some of the highest punctuality rates, but—it may seem rather odd for me to say this—I think that we should give it permission to be less punctual. If on four days out of five we arrived two minutes later than advertised, it would be good if, on the other days, we arrived five minutes earlier than we currently do. That would particularly benefit constituents in Shoeburyness, at the extremity of the line. A friend of mine used to run the line at night from Shoeburyness all the way to Fenchurch Street in only 32 minutes. Admittedly there were no other trains on the line, and admittedly they did not stop at any of the stations, let alone all of them, but his point was that it was possible to pick up time along the line so that the journey would always take less than 59 minutes.

The new timetable precipitated other problems. Everyone was coming back from the Christmas holiday, and the changes in London had clearly not been thought through. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock will point out to the Minister later that Transport for London made a number of representations, with quite a narrow focus, for people travelling between Barking and West Ham, to the disadvantage of our constituents in Southend, Thurrock and Rochford.

Following the problems, a meeting was held in my constituency offices by c2c and Shana Doherty, who had organised a petition, to discuss what could be done to rectify some of the problems. There has been incremental change. I think a full reversion to the old timetable would be wrong; as I have said, I want to speed up some trains, rather than simply revert to the old timetable. Some of the rolling stock will help, although I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West that the design is not perfect. I travelled on one of those trains, not since they have been used during rush hour, but on a special trip with local people to see what they were like, just before they were introduced, and some things were obviously wrong. There were big sections for luggage, as if we were travelling to Heathrow or Gatwick, for instance, whereas it is quite rare to see someone coming down the line with large items of luggage. I made that point and was told that those areas could have been got rid of and an extra two seats put in, but that would have required quite a big change, whereas there were these standard trains that could be bought,

which were new, but had that format. It was easier to get them in quickly. It seems somewhat incongruous to have that sort of luggage space, however.

Some people further down the line have been critical of the removal of the three-seat rows. They see that as a kind of metro-isation of the service, which I oppose. I must admit that as a slightly larger person, I am rather sympathetic to the case for two-seat rows. Some 10 years ago, my doctor said I was borderline obese, which, although actually true, I thought was a little unfair, but I have noticed that even much smaller people prefer to stand than sit three abreast, which is socially uncomfortable. The rules on seat-sizing could be changed further by the Department. However, for my constituents, the configuration of the new rolling stock certainly is a benefit.

I fully appreciate that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West has had many problems with c2c and in his dialogue with it, and finds the correspondence with the chairman slightly troubling and wrong-footed. From my point of view, Julian Drury has actually been quite good, and is one of the better representatives of big business working with the community. I cannot explain the difference in experience; perhaps it is in part due to the fact that my constituents get on the services earlier and do not have quite the same problems. Indeed, I have not had the experience that my hon. Friend has had of the problems in Basildon and the misery line and so on.

The Abellio service was shocking, and on the face of it, it was an incredible surprise that someone running such a shocking service got reappointed. In reality, Abellio's hands were very much tied by the investment it could put in under the old contract, and it was quite clever in making sure that the tendering document required everyone to step up; as a result, we could not get anyone coming in to run the rubbish stock. To be frank, I felt that my suit needed to be dry-cleaned if I sat on the seats, yet the service is more expensive than c2c. That is because, again, there is a legislative problem in the way Departments have handled these things over the past two decades; the misery line, as it was, was cheaper to take into account the fact that it was pretty crap. Now it is the happy line, but fare increases have been proportionate across all tracks. Fares have all gone up at the same rate, and the differential from when it was not the happy line has been coded in.

We can make changes. The announcements in the urgent question earlier today on rail and track reunification will greatly help the rail services in Southend, particularly the c2c line, as 80% of it is used only by c2c. There are other parts of the country where that would be less useful, however.

I want to mention a third train line in my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West looks confused, but he forgets that there is a train on the pier. The pier train line is subject to exactly the same rules and regulations as the other train lines, and it is difficult for the local council to get in the right expertise to run that line. I gently probed Julian Drury and Rob Tinlin, the chief executive of Southend Borough Council, who has done an excellent job over the past 10 years in Southend and, sadly, is due to leave. I asked them whether c2c could take over that 1.3-mile train service, because it has the expertise to do so. Furthermore, I suggested that we introduce through-ticketing, so that people could come from London to Southend Central,

[James Duddridge]

and then, after a short walk, get to the end of the pier. That would encourage them to spend more money there, it would be a nice publicity stunt, and it would bring in the expertise of a professional railway firm—particularly if there was rail and track reunification—and its greater understanding of track issues. It would then be running more pleasure down to the end of Southend pier.

Julian Drury is, in my view, rather better than my hon. Friend thinks he is, and we both agree that Rob Tinlin is fantastic. Having raised this issue with them a few years ago, I rather hoped that it would come back as a council or c2c idea. Sadly, that has not happened, and in this debate I would like to nudge them a little bit further in that direction.

4.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard): It is a pleasure to be called here once again to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), who, in his customary style, has regaled us with tales of what is occurring on rail services to Southend. He invited me to shock him in my response to his speech. Perhaps a “shock and awe” strategy is not precisely what his railway line needs, but I urge him never to stop campaigning on behalf of his constituents. To me, he is the Duracell bunny of Members of Parliament in this regard. Ever since I was elected, he seems to have chaired all my Westminster Hall debates, and he has never been less than enthusiastic every step of the way. So if he chooses to raise an issue, far be it from me say that there is no issue at all.

If I can beg my hon. Friend’s indulgence, I will—if I dare—start by being slightly positive about his railway line. As he might be aware, c2c is actually one of the best performing franchises in the UK, second only to Merseyrail, and it conceded first place only recently. As of 12 November, the percentage of trains arriving at their destination within five minutes of their booked time—also known as their public performance measure—was 95%. As many hon. Members have rightly pointed out, this stands in stark contrast to the late 1990s when the line was known as the misery line. Going back to autumn 2000, passenger satisfaction was as low as 63%, but it now stands at 81%, although that represents a small decline from the high of 89% that it achieved in the previous national rail passenger survey. However, I expect c2c to have improved on that in the autumn national rail passenger survey that will shortly be announced. When I say that I expect that, I mean that I want the outcome to be achieved.

We have come a fair way since those days. The necessary infrastructure work and replacement rolling stock have helped to deliver one of the better performing commuter railways in the UK, with over 24 million passenger journeys a year. As recently as 2015, c2c won the passenger operator of the year award at a prestigious industry awards ceremony. Its customer-interfacing app, c2c Live, won the innovation award for passenger experience at the 2015 Railway Industry Innovation Awards. So we can find some good things to say about c2c’s performance.

However, as my hon. Friend is aware, c2c’s performance has begun to suffer once again, especially in the last couple of months. A significant factor has been an

unprecedented number and length of temporary speed restrictions imposed by Network Rail due to the London clay in the area expanding in response to the change in the weather. This opens up small voids underneath the track and, for safety reasons, trains are therefore required to reduce their speed in those areas. In order to address these and other challenges, c2c has intensified its engagement with Network Rail. The company recognises that other issues, such as fleet reliability, are well within its control, and it is working with its suppliers to address them urgently. Today, for example, a lorry has unfortunately struck a bridge between Southend East and Thorpe Bay, which has meant that c2c will need to make adjustments to its evening timetable while emergency inspections are carried out on the damage to the infrastructure. I, and no doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West, will be keeping a close eye on the progress of that work.

I turn now to the issue in hand and the December 2015 timetable. More and more people are using our railways. Passenger journeys on the rail network have more than doubled since rail privatisation, and the picture is no different for c2c. The number of passengers travelling into London on c2c morning peak services has risen by 15% since 2010. c2c has had to listen to stakeholders up and down the route to understand what they want, which is more services, better connectivity with the three inner-London stations and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) pointed out, faster services. That is why c2c proposed the first significant change to its timetable for nearly a decade. The change was designed to deliver 1,400 more seats and space for 3,000 more passengers into London in the morning peak and 20% more services on the network. Passengers in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West, and along the whole route, have undoubtedly benefited. The number of seats arriving into Fenchurch Street between 8 am and 9 am from Westcliff and from Chalkwell increased by 12% and from Leigh-on-Sea by 53%. The increase in capacity at those stations is more than the increase in morning peak demand.

The attractiveness of the new timetable brought more passengers than forecast to south Essex stations in the morning peak. In other words, it almost became a victim of its own success with an increase of 9.3% when compared with autumn 2015. That inevitably had similar effects during the evening peak of people leaving London to return to south Essex. All that was further exacerbated by the obligation to stop 95% of trains at Limehouse, West Ham and Barking. This greater connectivity for long-distance commuters was welcomed by key stakeholders on the route. However, the new service pattern provided a faster journey than the District line between the stations, and therein lies the rub. That prompted passengers who previously used the tube to use c2c services, especially those requiring Barking. That led to overcrowding, not least in the evening peak. It was a genuine cause for concern, as my hon. Friend rightly identified at the time.

As a consequence of my hon. Friend’s observations and those of other campaigns, c2c took some action to reduce overcrowding. For example, in response to my hon. Friend’s specific concerns, I understand that the 7.18 am from Shoeburyness into Fenchurch Street, which travels fast along the entire route, was lengthened from eight carriages to 12, providing more space for

passengers. c2c also used its excellent, and unique, on-board automatic passenger counting system to fine tune the timetable yet further. Other changes reduced from four to just two the number of services departing with people standing during the morning peak from the three stations serving my hon. Friend's constituency. Those two services are fast, and services either side have seats available. Understandably, my hon. Friend's constituents are choosing to travel on those direct services as a result of the fast journeys into London. c2c also increased the number of seats from Fenchurch Street by 1,000 between 5 pm and 6 pm and removed the Barking stops. As a result, eight services leaving Fenchurch Street in the evening peak do not stop at Barking.

Following the positive changes made to hone the timetable in January, c2c also made use of the timetable change date in May 2016 to further improve services for passengers. Primarily, this involved reducing Barking stops on a further five services in the evening peak, with the effect of reducing the number of services leaving Fenchurch Street in the evening peak with passengers standing from 31 to 24. Clearly, 24 remains too many, but that does demonstrate that progress is being made. This is because the removal of these stops further reduced the attractiveness of the c2c service compared with the District line, thus reducing overcrowding for c2c's evening commuters. c2c plans to make further changes in January 2017. Specifically, it will start a train from Laindon at 7.31 am, as requested by the Laindon user group, and, for the reasons I stated earlier, further stops are to be withdrawn in the evening peak at Barking.

My hon. Friend also mentioned some issues relating to the Abellio franchise and concerns his constituents might have had. I draw to his attention, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East did, the fact that the new Abellio Greater Anglia franchise is one of the most ambitious ever embarked upon by this Department. With £1.4 billion of investment, I am sure that travellers across that network will welcome the fact that we will be replacing every piece of rolling stock on that franchise. That can only be good news for people, not just in East Anglia, but those at Bombardier, in Derby, who will be making the carriages. By 2021, there will be more than 32,000 more seats on services arriving at Liverpool Street in the morning peak. There will be an extra train per hour, in addition to the existing three, between Liverpool Street and Southend Victoria, with two new fast peak journeys in each direction between the two. That comes in addition to the major station enhancement that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West referred to, so there is good news also in the Abellio franchise.

My hon. Friend is, however, right to point out the need to continue to improve rolling stock across the network as a whole. Twenty-four new carriages are being phased into service across the network by the end of December and they will provide 13,000 extra seats at peak times every week. From October 2019, a further 12 carriages will be introduced, meaning that by the end of that year the new franchise will have introduced a total of 36 additional vehicles into service on the route.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East rightly mentioned issues relating to accessibility and departmental rules on rolling stock. We have a looming deadline of 31 December 2019 to ensure that every rail carriage on our network meets the regulations

on persons with reduced mobility. That is an unmovable target and we have to abide by it. I also point out, because this was alluded to, that this is an enclosed network between London and Southend, which makes it ripe for a number of attempts to improve the service, not just in terms of bringing train and track together, as the Secretary of State has announced today, but in terms of investigating whether we can progress with digital signalling on this part of the network. Members will have noted that in the autumn statement it was set out that the Treasury will be investing £450 million to roll out digital signalling across the network in the coming years. All that is good news, and I echo the hope that if c2c can manage to run a railway from London and Shoeburyness, it can offer some practical help on a 1.5 mile stretch down a pier. Our piers are very important to our coastal towns, as I well know, so I hope that c2c will hear this debate and think about the practical support it can offer on that.

Let me go back to being positive about c2c—I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West to forgive me for that—as it is leading the way on compensation. Since February, c2c has provided automatic compensation of 3p per minute for registered smartcard customers when their train is delayed by between two and 29 minutes, which is over and above what we are committed to as a Government nationally under Delay Repay 15. Indeed, the standard delay repay bandwidth of 30 minutes-plus has already been automated and there will be further automation for those with smartcards when we move to Delay Repay 15. My officials are shortly to commence engagement with c2c to agree the timescales for implementation. That is an important way of putting the interests of passengers first. Nobody wants to see delays on the network, but when they do occur, it is important not only that we make that compensation available, but that we make it as easy as possible for passengers to claim.

I noted the concerns that were raised regarding passenger information during disruption. It is a frequent bugbear that I also hear from rail users. They say that, while they are having breakfast at home, they look at their mobile, their iPad or social media to check that their usual train will be leaving on time and that all is going according to plan. Their smartphone tells them that the train is good to go and that it is on time. They arrive at the station only to find that the train was cancelled hours ago. There is a fundamental disconnect between the social media information being put out and the information that is available at stations. It is a matter that Transport Focus, the passenger watchdog, is looking at very closely. I have asked it to accelerate work on that so that all train operating companies, particularly in commuter areas, ensure that, when information is available, it is put out on every channel at the same time and that there is no discrepancy between one source of information and another. In industry parlance, we speak of a single source of truth. That is what customers need as well.

In conclusion, c2c is delivering more seats, more services and an improved journey experience for its passengers. I urge it to continue to engage with key stakeholders, including local Members of Parliament, and to make the necessary changes to address the overcrowding that arises from the fact that its current timetable is attractive to customers. There is an absolute

[Paul Maynard]

commitment on the part of both the operator and the Department to ensure that the passenger is at the forefront of decision making with regard to these changes.

I am more than happy to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West and I extend that invitation to MPs on the entire line of route, most of whom are gathered in the Chamber today. I will if I may invite

Julian Drury along as well. We can then have a very informed debate on how to improve one of our better performing commuter networks to make it perform even better.

Question put and agreed to.

4.57 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 6 December 2016

[MIKE GAPES *in the Chair*]

Household Food Insecurity

9.30 am

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered household food insecurity measurement in the UK.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. Back in 2014, I said in this House:

“People are going hungry, and, with each passing day of this terrible excuse for a Government, more and more are falling into poverty, with little or no chance of escape. There are no second chances in Britain today. Food poverty is a clear consequence of the Government’s ideological assault on the social safety net and the people who rely on it. One hungry person is a complete disgrace, but thousands of hungry people are a national disaster.”—*[Official Report, 12 December 2014; Vol. 589, c. 1500.]*

That was one of many speeches I have made in this House about hunger and food poverty, and I have to say that I am getting increasingly fed up with the Government’s inaction. It is estimated that 8.4 million people in Britain now live in households affected by food insecurity, which means that millions of people in Britain—one of the wealthiest countries in the world—are hungry and malnourished.

The Government need to measure and to begin to tackle household food insecurity. Such action is long overdue. Food-insecure households lack reliable access to a sufficient quantity of food, yet there has been no national measurement of household food insecurity in the UK for more than 10 years.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. Is she aware that the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, of which she is a former member, is currently conducting an inquiry into food waste? It is concentrating not on household waste but on food waste that is discarded by the producer because it does not fit the requirements of either the retailer or the processor. Does she agree that such food waste could help those who are suffering from food poverty?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I am aware of the EFRA Committee’s inquiry, and it would be good for the Government to back the Food Waste (Reduction) Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy).

Although we have national statistics on how much households have spent on food and on individuals’ dietary intake, those data cannot tell us exactly how many households in the UK are unable to feed themselves adequately.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing such a vital debate. Does she agree that the rate of the problem is not constant throughout the year: there are peaks and troughs? Some

families struggle in the run-up to Christmas and during school holidays because their children do not go to breakfast clubs or receive free school meals. If there is no additional support from the Government, the issue of holiday hunger will become more prevalent. Parents have to find the money for an additional 10 meals per week per child to ensure that their children are not malnourished.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: My hon. Friend is correct: holiday hunger is a scourge on this country. In a former life, I was a child protection social worker, and families used to say to me that school time was the only time their children could be guaranteed a healthy meal. They dreaded holidays. My colleagues and I often had to do shops for those families to feed them.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. She started off by giving the Government a very hard time. I am not a spokesman for the Conservatives but, in 1996—20 years ago—the United Nations decided that it would eradicate food insecurity. What has it done since then?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Unfortunately, I am not here to speak on behalf of the United Nations, but all the statistics show that the situation has got worse in the United Kingdom since 2010. Prior to that, we had the odd soup kitchen, and food banks were unheard of. Now, we can hear people in every street in every constituency talking about food banks and people who are going hungry.

Food insecurity has a terrible impact on households. Parents are unable to afford to feed their children nutritionally balanced meals, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) said, which breeds a sense of shame, stress, anxiety and social isolation. Severely food-insecure adults and children go whole days without eating in this day and age, simply because they lack money. People are living on the bread line—in fact, many are living below it. Recent research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that people are going from just being hungry—as if that was not bad enough—to living in destitution. They lack clothing, toiletries and heating, and for many homelessness is becoming a reality.

Recently, a woman called my constituency office in desperate need of help after having problems with her benefits. She had no money for gas or electricity, and no food to feed herself and her four young children, all of whom are under 10 years of age. She was alone and unable to leave her home to get to the nearest food bank, which in any case was closed. Even if she had been able to leave her home, she did not have the necessary funds for public transport. In the end, my staff contacted one of the many food bank volunteers in Shields and managed to get food delivered to her and her children. If they had not been able to pick up and deliver that food, that family would have endured the further pain of starvation.

That is one of the everyday experiences that are being documented in food banks, GP offices, classrooms and charities across the country. I am sure that all my colleagues hear similar stories day in and day out from their constituents. When the all-party group on hunger, of which I am a member, travelled the country in 2014,

[Mrs Lewell-Buck]

we found that the overriding reason why people visited food banks was the Government's punitive welfare regime and incessant use of sanctions. The recent debacle with Concentrix shows that the Government's response to those who are most in need has not changed: they are simply not bothered about them.

All those personal tragedies point to a permanent scarring of life chances. Demonstrable links can be found between food insecurity and educational performance. Children's intellectual and physical development is damaged by each episode of food insecurity that they experience. The physical and mental health impacts of food insecurity affect the entire economy. Evidence from Canada suggests that the healthcare costs of people who have experienced episodes of severe food insecurity are 121% higher. For those reasons, there is growing consensus among not only Members of Parliament but academics and civil society organisations that the Government should initiate a programme of regular and robust monitoring of food insecurity prevalence so that we can establish precisely the magnitude of the problem, identify which groups are at the greatest risk and properly target resources at prevention.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. This is a very important issue. She is right to say that the Government have a responsibility to count the numbers so we can have a strategic response. In the meantime, we have to recognise the wonderful work that food banks do—she mentioned her own, and Slough food bank is brilliant—to plug the gap. Civil society is doing its best; it is time for the Government to step up, too.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I could not agree more.

Ruth Smeeth: An extraordinary feature of the debate is that other countries, which we consider allies, already view this as a state responsibility. In the United States, for example, to tackle holiday hunger, there is a federal programme, which has been federally funded—there has been no research—for more than 50 years. That is part of the country's normal engagement. Feeding one's citizens is definitely regarded as a Government responsibility. Does my hon. Friend agree that our Government need to open their eyes and look at things in the round, because not only people on benefits, but the working poor are struggling to feed their families?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I agree. The very least that any Government can do is to ensure that people in their country are fed and cared for when other parts of the state have let them down.

Our best estimates suggest that 500,000 different people received food assistance from the Trussell Trust, the UK's largest network of emergency food aid providers, in 2014-15. However, many, indeed most food-insecure people choose not to access emergency food aid, and not all food banks are Trussell Trust ones. New preliminary data from Gallup World Poll suggest that 8.4 million people—17 times the number accessing Trussell Trust aid—lived in food-insecure households in 2014. Those data were gathered through the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation food insecurity experience scale, which is an internationally validated tool for measurement of household food insecurity. It showed

that we ranked in the bottom half of European countries for protecting our population from food insecurity and hunger.

Unfortunately, the survey through which those data were collected had a national sample of only 1,000 households and did not collect detailed information on respondents' characteristics. We therefore do not know who is worst affected. What is more, the FAO does not intend to fund that survey beyond 2016. Instead, it will encourage states to produce national measures in their own routine national surveys. That includes us. If we did so, we would be able to track our progress on implementing the global sustainable development goals—to which the UK has said it is committed—intended to end hunger and ensure universal access to safe, nutritious food by 2030.

On 29 November, the Office for National Statistics was due to launch a consultation to establish what metrics should be incorporated into national statistics to track our progress on the goals. The consultation has now been delayed indefinitely. We should, however, move forward swiftly and decisively with such vital monitoring. It would put us in step with other nations, such as the USA and Canada, which regularly monitor prevalence rates, with the data collected playing a game-changing role in creating effective prevention strategies.

Ruth Smeeth: We heard an extraordinary story about food poverty in the run-up to this year's Olympics in Brazil, which has made access to food a human right and, therefore, has provided access to food not only for children and the most vulnerable, but for everyone—from the poorest to the wealthiest. It has done so from an economic position that is nowhere near as positive as our own.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Our country is lagging behind. Our response to the crisis is embarrassing, and things have never been more pressing. Only last week we heard that the number of hospital beds in England alone taken up by patients being treated for malnutrition almost trebled over 10 years. Malnutrition is a complex condition, but food insecurity adds a significant risk. The prevalence of both may well increase if left unchecked in the coming years.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I commend the hon. Lady for securing this important debate. The experience of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Autism Act 2009, for example, is that the core initiative is to ensure an obligation on the state, or parts of the state, to know the numbers and to identify the needs. Essentially, that is what she is calling for in this debate. That has to happen not only at a UK level, but at regional and local level because, in relation to holiday hunger, school holidays vary in length in different parts of the UK.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Later in my speech I will outline to the Minister how easy it is to introduce such a measure and how little it would cost.

The drop in the value of sterling as a result of Brexit uncertainties means that food prices will start to rise—by between 5% and 8% in the coming year, according to the Food and Drink Federation—and that will place even further pressure on households struggling to put

food on the table. On average, healthier food costs two and a half times as much as food high in fat, salt and sugar, and people who experience food insecurity often cut back first on healthy, perishable and more expensive fruit and vegetables.

Proposals for measurement have received a considerable amount of support in the UK. In January 2015, my colleagues and I on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee recommended that the Government should collect statistically robust data on the scale of household food insecurity. The APPG on hunger has recommended measuring and monitoring food insecurity. The Administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are starting work on the development of metrics for each of the devolved nations. A UK-wide picture of the nature of food insecurity, however, could not be formed without applying a standard measurement tool in all four nations.

Securing a commitment to measurement from the Government has, however, proved immensely difficult. That is despite the interventions of the APPG and of the EFRA Committee, debates and questions in the House, and the work of organisations such as the Food Foundation, Sustain and Oxfam, which have consistently brought the data gap to the attention of officials in a variety of Departments.

The data gap could easily be closed through inserting a short list of questions into an existing annual survey instrument, such as the living costs and food survey or the national health surveys. The marginal cost is estimated to be between £50,000 and £75,000 per year. Surely it is worth the Government investing that small sum to address one of the biggest scandals of our time.

The UN food insecurity experience scale, and the United States Department of Agriculture's household food security module from which it was adapted, have been rigorously designed and tested to measure the inability of households to access food. One of those tools could be inserted seamlessly into a UK research programme. Each of the international scales involves asking respondents a series of questions about their ability to access sufficient quality and quantity of food over the preceding 12 months.

I therefore urge this House to move towards annual measurement of food insecurity using an internationally recognised survey tool, beginning in 2017. The Government cannot continue to bury their heads in the sand when this is one of the biggest scandals of the past six years. They should be ashamed that hunger has grown on their watch and they should be doing all they can to stop such a grotesque blight on our society.

We are at grave risk of accepting food poverty and inequality as a normal part of society. Due to Government inaction and erosion of the welfare state, the safety net that once existed, which used to aid people who fell through it through no fault of their own when they fell on difficult times, has been stripped away. The gap is being filled by a range of charities and faith groups, and it should embarrass and shame the Minister and all his colleagues that they have sat back and allowed others to deal with this heart-breaking disaster of, at times, their very own creation.

Is that not the crux of the matter? In truth, the longer the Government refuse to measure the problem, the longer they do not have to acknowledge the scale of it

and the longer they do not have to do anything about it. That is a huge dereliction of duty. They are more than happy to allow charities and the likes of the Trussell Trust to do their job for them, which is to care for children, families and vulnerable individuals who are not able to meet the most basic human requirement to feed themselves. It is telling that, when the Trussell Trust first published its shocking statistics about the scale of the problem, some on the Government Benches denounced those figures as distorted, rather than focusing on the shocking fact that food banks exist on such a scale at all.

As I speak, in my constituency, there will be a mother wondering how she is going to feed herself and her toddler today, schoolchildren struggling to focus because their stomachs are rumbling, parents who yet again skipped breakfast to ensure that their children did not have to, families searching their cupboards for what is left and elderly people who are unable to access fresh food. But that is not just the case in my constituency; it is the situation in constituencies and homes across the UK. It really is time that this Government got a grip on this problem. They must start by collating the data that they need to address it. As I have outlined, implementing measurement is not an insurmountable or costly challenge, and this Government owe it to every man, woman and child who woke up hungry this morning and will go to bed hungry tonight, in one of the richest countries in the world, to do so.

9.51 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I commend the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) for setting the scene so well and giving us so much detail about this issue, which we all have an interest in and wish to speak about. It is always nice to see the shadow Minister in her place. I know that the Minister will touch on the issues that we raise, because he is a man of compassion and understands them only too well.

I was speaking to my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) before the debate started, and I cast my mind back to the situation when I was younger—that was not yesterday—and the things that our families had at that time. I was extremely blessed as a child to have parents who worked night and day to put food on the table. We may not have had the choicest cuts of meat, and we may have had lunches that were eggs in a cup and that was it, or dinners of potatoes and veg with no meat, but there was always filling food on the table. Those memories of my early days are particular to me but probably resonate with many others in the Chamber. My biggest insecurity about food was whether my two brothers would steal half a sausage from my plate. That was a fact of life—we challenged one another for what we had. We may not have had much to spare, but we had enough, and that is all anyone needs. We had a lovely upbringing, but we were by no means wealthy.

It breaks my heart to think that there are children in the UK—in my community and in the communities of everyone in the Chamber today—who are living hand to mouth. The hon. Member for South Shields set that scene very well, and it resonates directly with us all. I hate to think of mothers taking less on their plates to ensure that there is enough on their children's plates. That should surely be the stuff of second world war TV

[Jim Shannon]

dramas such as “Home Fires” as opposed to what is happening in the UK today, but there are indicators that it is not a thing of the past. Indeed, recent analysis by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, which my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann referred to, suggests that 8.4 million people in the UK live in food-insecure households. What does that mean? The UN said that it would eradicate food poverty and insecurity by a certain time, but it did not. Words are hollow if they do not lead to actions that ensure change. Notes from a recent meeting in this place say that to be food insecure means to be

“unable to secure enough food of sufficient quality and quantity to stay healthy and participate fully in society.”

I welcome the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee’s inquiry into waste, which the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) and my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann, who are members of that Committee, referred to and another member of that Committee told me about at a function last night. How do we address food waste in homes, businesses and supermarkets? In Strangford—I believe that this is happening in other constituencies too, but hon. Members will confirm whether that is the case—supermarkets have deals with community groups about food that is coming close to being out of date. For instance, Tesco and Asda in Newtownards phone community groups on a Friday or Saturday and say, “This food is going out of date. Can you make use of it?” Those groups can, and they take it directly to the people who need it.

Ms Ritchie: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that labelling—sell-by dates and use-by dates—is not only confusing but an imprecise science? That needs to be reviewed as part of the wider debate about food waste reduction.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. I hope that the Committee’s inquiry will address labelling, which we also talked about last night. We often have products that are near their sell-by dates, and my wife is very strict about them, but I am perhaps not so strict. I feel that the sell-by date may not necessarily mean that the product is not edible, and I therefore challenge myself to eat it. Whether that is right or wrong, it has not affected me in any way. It is not the reason why my hair fell out, and it is not the reason for many other things.

David Simpson: Mr Gapes, I may have the same problem with my hair falling out.

Mike Gapes (in the Chair): Let’s not go there.

David Simpson: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that there needs to be some process whereby when supermarkets reject certain foods, such as vegetables, because they are not the right shape, size or whatever, they are put on the shelves at a reduced price rather than put into anaerobic digesters. I know that some supermarkets are doing that, but more could be done.

Jim Shannon: The knowledge that my hon. Friend brings to this debate is enormous. He has been in business for many years and he knows the system.

Again, those words could be used in the inquiry, which he will be directly involved in as a member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

Supermarket chains are taking steps to enable products that are close to their sell-by dates to be given to community groups and directed to those in need. That is a great idea, which I welcome and I hope is carried out further afield. In the home, we need to be a wee bit more careful about the food we use, how we use it—from freezer to fridge—and its shelf life. Those are all important issues for us to look at. However, there is currently no routine measurement of food insecurity in the United Kingdom, and an absence of regular data collection means that the true magnitude of the problem remains hidden. Perhaps the Minister could give us some idea of how data are gathered, collated and then used to address this issue.

The hon. Member for South Shields referred to food banks. I do a lot of work with my local food bank. When I first began that interaction, I was shocked by the level of need in my constituency and the range of people who were struggling. The first Trussell Trust food bank in Northern Ireland was in my constituency, so I have particular knowledge of food banks. I do not see them as necessarily negative; they have positive effects, in that they bring people, churches and Government bodies together with one focus: to help those who need help now. Food banks have a positive role to play in our society. I always think of the Simon slogan, “One in three of us are just one pay cheque away from homelessness.” The issue is real for a great many of us: there but for the grace of God would any of us be too. It is not enough simply to be thankful that we are not in that scenario. It is up to us to ensure that families in the United Kingdom are safe and secure in knowing where their next week’s food will come from.

Just last Saturday morning, I had the privilege of helping out in Tesco with the food bank team, who handed out lists to people to let them know what many people will need over the Christmas period. I was not surprised by the level of giving, as I know the compassion of the people in my constituency is hard to equal—as indeed is that of many others. I was encouraged by the inherent goodness of the women who rushed around with their children tagging along behind them and still took the time to grab handfuls of items for the food bank. They asked what items the team wanted and put them in their trolleys. There were also men who put items in their trolleys and gave financial contributions. I was also most encouraged by the number of young people who did their best to help out. Children said, “Mum, we need to help—what can we do?”

It is wonderful that the community steps in, and I cannot speak highly enough of the food bank, the Trussell Trust and, in my area, the Thriving Life church, which was behind that initiative, and which has a wonderful compassion centre designed to help others out. The churches across the whole of my constituency, and in Ards in particular, came together to stand in the breach in the truest and best ecumenical sense. We in this place as well have an obligation to assess the need and meet it.

Through the food bank, I have had the ability to give vouchers to people I am helping who have had their benefits stopped. We know clearly what the issues are, and I am reliably informed that the advice centre in Newtownards is one of the first stops for a great many

people whenever they are looking for vouchers to help them because they have literally no money. With the recent tax credits palaver, I have even had staff members—I am blessed with good staff—put their own money on to electricity cards to see people through the weekend. That is my staff, other staff, churches—good people coming together to do their best. However, that should not have to happen. We have a responsibility to ensure that help is at hand for those whose benefits are called into question instead of them being left with nothing to feed their children with. Our churches and people come together in the very best sense.

In my own area of Newtownards, the food bank provided 2,230 three-day emergency crisis food parcels last year. That was in one town. We have many food bank outreaches in Comber, Kircubbin, Ballynahinch and Saintfield, and churches and individual bodies are stepping outside what they normally do to help directly. I see a community full of compassion that is moved to help those who are less well off. That has got to be great news.

Especially at this time of year, as we approach Christmas, many families will again be on the breadline. Some of the major companies in my area will make contributions—I have a local butcher who gives turkeys. We do our best to come together through the Trussell Trust food bank and the Thriving Life church in Newtownards. In 2015-16, the Trussell Trust food bank network provided—these are incredible figures—1,109,309 three-day emergency food supplies and support to UK people in crisis. Those enormous figures give us an idea of the magnitude of what it does. Of those, more than 400,000 went to children. Again, I underline the clear need of children in poverty. We are here today to make a plea for those people.

There is food insecurity in the UK—that much is clear. What we are doing to address it is not so clear. I look to the Minister, who I am confident will give us the answers we need, to outline the steps that will be urgently taken to ensure that we fulfil our obligations and responsibilities not only to our constituents but to all constituents across this great nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

10.3 am

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) particularly on her perseverance in securing the debate, which she has sought for more than six months. It is unfortunate that she is not too well today, but no one can say that she has not made an excellent case. We need to thank her for all the work she has done herself and as part of the APPG on hunger, which has also done a lot of work. If the Government had accepted some of the recommendations of the APPG's detailed report, "Feeding Britain", produced under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), there may have been a little less need for the debate. There were 72 recommendations in that report and now, two years on, it is perhaps an indictment of the Government that none of those recommendations has been heeded.

In raising this issue today, my hon. Friend has made the case for the Government to start measuring food insecurity across the whole of the UK. Her request was eloquently illustrated and reinforced in interventions

from my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), my right hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), the hon. Members for South Down (Ms Ritchie), for Foyle (Mark Durkan) and for Upper Bann (David Simpson) and in the speech by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who pointed out how, in the face of adversity, communities have come together and worked with groups such as the Trussell Trust to help people, showing that, when the worst things happen to fellow human beings across the UK, it brings out the best in others.

I am glad to hear that the EFRA Committee is looking at food waste. Only last night, we had FareShare in Westminster. It is making a huge contribution by using 10,000 tonnes of the 270,000 tonnes a year of food waste and producing 65 million meals. That is wonderful, but, again, so much more could be done.

We need look only at *Hansard* to see that hunger and food insecurity have been raised time and again with various Departments. We also know that, in response to questions, Ministers have, time and again, found an excuse not to introduce any kind of measurement. The fact remains, as has already been said, that food insecurity has not been measured in this country since 2003. It is totally unacceptable that, in the UK—I will say this again; it has been said twice before—more than 8 million people lived in households reporting having insufficient food. That was back in 2014, and we know that that number must now be far larger. The statistics are nothing but shocking, and it is totally unacceptable that here, in the sixth largest economy in the world, in the 21st century, so many people are going hungry and, perhaps we should say, are starving.

I congratulate all the organisations that have been mentioned that are working hard to combat the effects of food insecurity. I agree with the Food Foundation that the Government must conduct research to find out more about why certain groups are affected and how food insecurity affects food choices and people's health so that they can put in place policies that can start to tackle the problem laid out by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields. As we have heard, the devolved Administrations are taking steps individually to measure food inequality, but each is using a different method. What is really needed is a standard measure for food insecurity across the whole of our nation.

It is nearly two years since the EFRA Committee, in its report, recommended that the Government "collect objective and statistically robust data on the scale of household food insecurity".

The coalition Government responded by saying that the issue was complex, and they did not agree that the living costs and food survey was suitable for collecting data on food insecurity.

As has been said, we know the use of food banks has ballooned to more than 1 million in the past year, but we cannot use the figures collected by the Trussell Trust on the use of food banks because they are not regarded as an appropriate measure. Recent data from Gallup World Poll indicated that, in 2014, 17 times more people lived in food insecure households than used a food bank.

The Government are signed up to the United Nations sustainable development goals, the second of which is:

"End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture".

[Mary Glindon]

Does the Minister agree that it is time for the Government to be proactive, and not only to contribute to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation but to listen to the advice of the University of Oxford, the Food Foundation and Sustain, which all suggest, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields has said, that standard questions on food insecurity, as used in the UN FAO food insecurity experience scale, should be added to existing UK surveys such as the one suggested by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee two years ago?

It has already been pointed out that the cost of adding those pertinent questions, which so far have been tried out only in a survey of 1,000 people, would be £50,000 to £75,000 a year. They would provide accurate nationwide data about how severe the problem of food insecurity is. The scale is used in other countries and has proved successful. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North has said, if Brazil can do it, so can we. The consultation by the ONS on how to track the sustainable development goals, which was due to be launched at the end of November, has been put back indefinitely. What can the Minister do to bring it forward and to ensure that the consultation begins?

With the reduction in sterling since the referendum on the EU, the prices of products that we import from Europe such as fresh fruit, which is a basic and important ingredient of a healthy diet, will increase. I must reiterate that supermarket prices will increase by at least 5%. Can something be done to stop more pressure being put on the food purchasing power of those who are deemed to be just about managing, and those who are deemed not to be managing adequately, so that food insecurity will be made less, not more, likely for them?

We have already noted that people in food insecurity have poor health, and the NHS is at breaking point, unable to take the added strain that is put on it when people's health is at risk simply because they are malnourished. How can we allow the blighting of the future of young people who go to school hungry and, because they are not fed, cannot learn properly? The only answer to those questions is that the Government must commit to the adoption of a routine method of measuring food insecurity in the UK, so that policy and resources can be targeted and we can reach the point at which no one in this country goes hungry.

10.13 am

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) on securing the debate. I know that as she outlined in her speech, she has been engaged with the issue for several years. Although I disagree with some of her analysis, we can all agree that the food banks in all our constituencies do fantastic work. I want to pay tribute in particular to the one in my constituency of Camborne and Redruth, which is run by a wonderful volunteer called Don Gardner and supported by many local churches. I have visited it regularly over the past few years. When I visited a few weeks ago it had support from National Citizen Service volunteers, who were giving some of their time as part of their project. Last year, because the charity is so valued, it was nominated by students at the

local Camborne Science and International Academy as their charity of the year. I shall visit again in a few weeks as part of the preparations for Christmas, and I am sure that many hon. Members will be doing the same in their constituencies.

The food bank movement has grown in recent years, there is no doubt about that. However, we must recognise that there has always been charitable support and food aid on offer in this country, whether from the Salvation Army or other projects. Food banks were developed first in the United States, and the concept caught on in countries such as France and Germany. More recently, predominantly with the leadership of church groups, they have grown in the UK as well. We should recognise their value and contribution to civil society. Many food banks, including the one in my constituency, are beginning to move on from offering just crisis aid and food support to helping people with other problems—with housing, getting a job, or other problems and issues in their lives that contribute to their need to rely on food banks. Indeed, in my constituency other agencies are brought on board, to come to the food bank. My constituency caseworker will go to the Camborne food bank this afternoon. We have an agreement that our caseworker will attend once a month, or more often if there is a need, to help people to resolve other issues in their life, such as housing and benefits. The Government have also made it clear that job coaches from local jobcentres can go to food banks to help to support people in getting a job.

I want to talk about aspects of the analysis that the hon. Member for South Shields gave with which I disagree slightly, beginning with food prices, which I think are the nub of the debate. Food prices, and commodity prices generally, are predominantly governed by changes in weather events, energy prices and exchange rates. The truth is that the biggest spike in food prices in recent times took place in 2008, during the financial crisis. Prices continued to rise gradually until the beginning of 2014, but they have been falling ever since, for almost three years now. In fact, food prices are now down by more than 7% since that peak at the beginning of 2014. I accept that with sterling depreciating against the euro and other currencies recently, and because currencies and exchange rates are a major driver of food prices, that may change, but it is important to acknowledge how things have changed in the past three years, with food prices going down substantially.

The long-standing measure of household food security that we have is the annual living costs and food survey. We look in particular at the percentage of household income spent on food by the poorest 20% of families. The reality of that consistent measure of household food security and affordability, which we have had for many years, is that it has been remarkably stable in the past decade at about 16% to 16.5%. Indeed, at one point last year I think the percentage spent by that lowest-income 20% of households was lower than it was in 2008-09. So there is clear evidence that there is some stability, if we look specifically at household spending.

Mary Glindon: Is it true that people suffering food insecurity do not buy the best food that they could—the food they need to have a nutritious meal? Do they not often buy food that is calorie-laden, cheap and filling, as opposed to good-quality, nutritious food?

George Eustice: Given that food prices go up and down but household expenditure on food seems to remain remarkably consistent, it suggests, as the hon. Lady points out, that people change their choices and preferences. The hon. Member for South Shields made the point that people abandon fruit and veg because they regard it as too expensive. In my view, veg is actually relatively cheap at a supermarket or any other market. It tends to be other things—ready meals and meats, in particular—that are more expensive and add to the cost of food. Fruit and veg, which are the healthiest option of all, are still relatively cheap.

Mary Glendon: One of the reasons for that given by people who are in food insecurity is the relatively short life of some fruit and veg. Fruit and veg is perhaps beyond the tight budgets of those who cannot afford to buy fresh food every day.

George Eustice: I buy fresh fruit and veg, as I am sure do many other Members. Somebody made a point earlier about sell-by dates. The truth is that veg will actually last quite a long time if it is refrigerated, in my view. Of course, there is also frozen fruit and veg, which is also relatively cheap.

Jim Shannon: The Minister is being most generous to all of us in giving way. I am sure he recognises the importance of home economics classes for children at every level of school, including primary and, particularly, secondary schools. Those classes are and should be very much part of pupils' lives. They give them the opportunity to produce a meal at a reasonable price, and it is good for a child or young person to do that and take that meal home. Does the Minister value home economics education in schools and how it teaches people to prepare meals in later life, as I do?

George Eustice: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman. He will be aware that the Department for Education launched the school food plan two or three years ago. Hardwired into that, as well as giving schools quite specific criteria about the type of healthy and nutritious food they should have as part of their school meals, was the idea that all schoolchildren should visit a farm, so that they can see how their food is produced and understand the connection with that food production. There was also the idea that primary school children should be taught to prepare a basic food dish, so that they get used to managing and handling food. That means that they know where their food comes from and how to handle it. I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is an important point.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has recently consulted on all of its statistical surveys. For each Office for National Statistics survey, including the living costs and food survey, there is a steering group that also includes representation from the devolved Administrations.

As we all know, the best route out of poverty is to have a job or to find employment. It is important to note that employment is now at a record high, at more than 74.5%, and that the number of people in work has actually gone up by 461,000 this year, to record levels. I recognise that in many constituencies, including my own, the issue is not so much worklessness as low pay.

That is why the Government are increasing the national living wage to £7.50 from April 2017—and we have made clear that we intend to increase it further. We need to tackle low income, and we have outlined our plans to do so.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Will the Government actually check and enforce that the national living wage is being paid? Their record on that is woeful; a lot of places do not pay the national living wage and the Government are just not interested.

George Eustice: It is not a DEFRA role to enforce that particular area, but I am sure that the Low Pay Commission and other parts of Government will look seriously at the points the hon. Lady raises. Payment of the national living wage is a legal requirement, and it is enforced.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is generous of the Minister to give way. Does he accept that under-25s are not entitled to the higher rate of the minimum wage and are not going to get any kind of discount when they go to the shops for their messages? The Government should make sure that the living wage is a real living wage, as set by the Living Wage Foundation, and is accessible to people of all ages. Everyone needs access to food that they can afford.

George Eustice: The hon. Lady points out that the national living wage applies to those over the age of 25, but the national minimum wage applies to people of all ages, including those under 25.

Alison Thewliss: Not the higher rate.

George Eustice: The hon. Lady is right that it is not that at the same rate as the national living wage, but we have made great progress in recent years in tackling youth unemployment and helping people to get their first job in life. I actually think there is a distinction between those over the age of 25, who have been in work for some time, and those who may be trying their first job.

Not everybody is in work, and it is often said that late benefit payments or sanctions are a contributing factor in increased food bank use. It is worth noting that even the Trussell Trust's report suggested that, based on its assessments, sanctions accounted for about 5% to 10% of the increased use of food banks. They do not account for all of it on their own.

When it comes to late payments, 90% of jobseeker's allowance claims are now paid on time and within the 10-day limit, while nearly 89% of employment and support allowance claims are also paid within that timeframe, which is considerably better than in 2009-10. Indeed, the timeliness of payments has improved by about 23%. The Government have also responded to concerns over occasions when people have their payments delayed by introducing short-term benefit advances. Those are now being quite actively publicised in jobcentres, and they can be paid to people the very next day.

It is important to note that the use of sanctions has fallen sharply. Indeed, they are down by half for both JSA and ESA claimants in the year to March 2016. The Government have introduced the concept of mandatory

[George Eustice]

considerations on sanctions so that we can deal with disputes more quickly. The truth is that we need some kind of sanctions in the benefit system for it to be fair and equitable. Staff at my local jobcentre are clear that they use sanctions as only a last resort. Even when they believe sanctions are justified, they have to be cleared by somebody up the line completely unconnected to the case in question. Often, the recommendation that there should be a sanction is not upheld. Huge progress has been made on sanctions. We have responded to some of the points that people have made, and, as I said, their use has halved in recent years.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I am listening carefully to what the Minister is saying about sanctions. The head of the National Audit Office recently said that “there is more to do in...reducing them further”.

Does the Minister disagree?

George Eustice: I have not seen that particular report, but I make the point to the hon. Lady that the number of sanctions halving in one year is, I believe, a dramatic change to what has gone previously. As I said, I believe that having some sort of sanctions is crucial if we are to have a fair benefits system. We cannot have a fair system if there is no kind of penalty or sanctions for those who do not abide by their obligation to seek work.

A number of hon. Members mentioned food waste, which is an important issue. There is always going to be some surplus food in any food chain. We have the Waste and Resources Action Programme and the Courtauld commitments, which aim to reduce food waste. WRAP's research from 2015 showed that 47,000 tonnes of food—the equivalent of 90 million meals—was redistributed to help feed people. In the hierarchy of recycling, making sure that food does not go to waste in the first place, and is used to feed people, is our key aim. I commend and applaud the great work that organisations such as FareShare and FoodCycle do to help unwanted food from places such as supermarkets go towards helping local communities.

We have had an interesting debate, and again I commend the food banks in our constituencies for all their good work. We have a lot of statistical measures of poverty, and when it comes to the affordability of food, the long-standing metric of household expenditure on food is the most reliable and consistent indicator we have. I am therefore not persuaded at the moment that we need an additional set of questions along the lines that hon. Members have outlined. I take issue with those who say that we have ignored some of these issues. Indeed, huge progress has been made on sanctions, getting people into work, raising wage levels and ensuring that good food is recycled to those who need it.

10.30 am

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. It is always good to hear from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon), who spoke from the Front Bench today.

It is no surprise that the Minister disagrees with my analysis, but would it not have made a nice, refreshing change if he and his Government had held their hands up and admitted that their experiment with the welfare state has left an enduring and growing scar on this country? Food banks moving on to helping people with housing and all the other issues that have been referred to is yet another example of agencies and charities filling a gap left by his Government. They should not be doing that work—those are the basic tenets of government.

The nub of the debate is not food prices, as the Minister said. It is the fact that his Government's policies have led to hunger and poverty on a massive scale and that they are refusing to measure it, despite there having been no national measurement for 10 years. He referred briefly to benefit sanctions and said he was not aware of the NAO report I mentioned. To be clear, 400,000 sanctions were imposed last year, despite there being limited evidence of their being justified, leading to “hardship, hunger and depression”. I suggest he goes and reads that report carefully.

George Eustice: It may be that we should exchange notes after the debate, but in the year to March 2016, there were 219,000 JSA sanctions, which was down from 497,000 in the same period in the previous year.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: The figures I am quoting are from November this year, when the report came out, so perhaps we should share notes.

It is a real shame that the Minister is out of step with everybody else on this. He is out of step with the cross-party APPG, the cross-party Select Committee, the Food Foundation, Sustain and Oxfam, which have all worked tirelessly on this issue. It is a real shame that he has not got the guts to press his Government to introduce a national measurement of household food insecurity. It would cost only up to £75,000 a year. That is considerably less than his annual salary and a little less than the salaries of most people in this House. I will not detain the House any longer, because I am getting angry, and I am upset.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered household food insecurity measurement in the UK.

10.33 am

Sitting suspended.

Smart Meter Roll-out

11 am

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD):
I beg to move,

That this House has considered smart meter rollout across the UK.

It is a pleasure to have secured this debate and to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes.

I think—or at least I hope—that the subject of the debate this morning would not be described as a matter of political controversy; it is a matter on which there is broad agreement. Essentially, I approach the debate on the basis that the Government are doing a good thing in the smart meter roll-out and, as a parliamentarian, I think it is our duty to explore whether they are doing it as well as might be possible. In the early days, we estimated that the smart meter roll-out could save the UK economy as a whole something between £17 billion and £40 billion between now and 2050. Obviously, there are a tremendous number of variables in an estimate of that range and over that period of time; I am one of those people who thinks that the upper end of that estimate could be conservative.

Before the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change was dissolved, I had the pleasure of serving on it. Our last report on the energy revolution looked at what is being done in other parts of the world and, in particular, on the west coast of America in California and Seattle. It is apparent that many technologies that will assist consumers in the demand-side management of their energy use are not that far over the horizon. The foundations that we could lay through the smart meter roll-out could be built on in a significant way, both from the point of view of consumer flexibility and choice and in contributing to some of the wider issues about fuel poverty and climate change.

The Government have a target of 100% smart meter roll-out by 2020. What I want to explore this morning is whether that target is likely to be met, and whether it may be sensible at this point to reappraise the desirability of meeting that target. Given the history of the project to date, sticking to that 2020 deadline may bring some unexpected consequences. Energy UK has told me that so far its members have installed in excess of 3 million smart meters. That is significant progress, but when it is measured against the fact that we have in the region of 27 million households, and there may be in the region of 53 million energy meters to be installed, we see the scale of the challenge that the Government now face.

My first question for the Minister, when he addresses this issue, is: what is the likelihood that we are going to get to the 100% target by 2020? At this stage, are the Government looking at the possibility of reviewing it? What conversations are they having with Ofgem and what dialogue do they have with the suppliers in the industry? From the various energy companies and consumer groups that I speak to, such as Citizens Advice and Which?, there is growing consensus that the target will not be met but that, with a determined adherence to it, we could bring a range of unintended consequences.

This is a good time to look at these things again, when there is not a great deal of political heat surrounding the subject—no pun intended. However, if we get to the point where we have to review the target in two or three

years' time, at that point, politics will come into it. I am no better than anybody else; I will be there in two or three years' time with the *Hansard* of today's debate saying, "You were told at the time that you needed to do something. Why didn't you?"

In many areas of the country, the key to the roll-out comes down to connectivity, which has indeed been problematic for the project and the concept as a whole. This ties into other areas of Government policy encouraging connectivity, especially for the more remote and rural areas. We know the commitments that the mobile phone operators have made in terms of expanding their coverage and getting 3G and 4G coverage across the whole country. They are now looking at the Airwave infrastructure that has been put in place for the emergency services, seeing the competitive edge that has been given to EE, which is the company rolling that out, and saying, "Surely we should be allowed to use these masts as well." This is an area where public money is being put into infrastructure for one purpose, when it could have a benefit for another purpose. Surely, given that it is all the taxpayers' pound, someone within Government should be joining up the dots to ensure that that does happen.

The issue is the limitations of what is available through the connectivity available to our constituents. It does not meet the expectation and the promises. The danger is that something that is a thoroughly desirable proposal in concept, could be undermined by poor consumer experience.

I suspect that, if we drew a Venn diagram of areas with poor connectivity and areas where we have a high number of households living in fuel poverty, we would find a substantial overlap. That is particularly acute in my own constituency. In the Northern Isles we have poor housing stock; long, dark, cold winters, because of our geography; and an ageing demographic. The Scottish Government's most recent figures put levels of fuel poverty at 63% of households in Orkney and 53% of households in Shetland—the Western Isles were also up there at 62%—measured against a Scottish average of 35%. In pensioner households, in Orkney the figure is 85%, for the Western Isles it is 75% and in Shetland it is 44%.

Smart metering is obviously not going to be the panacea that cures fuel poverty, but it is important as part of the suite of options available to us. It is ironic that those who stand to benefit most and have the greatest need are, again, being left behind in the roll-out process. A bit of political direction, understanding that this is not going to succeed if it is just left in the major conurbations and urban areas, and that when we say 100% across the whole of the UK, it needs to mean exactly that, would be of enormous assistance. What is being done by the Minister and his Department to ensure that those of us in what would be termed as hard-to-reach areas are not left behind?

One of the major recent challenges, which is related to the connectivity issue, has been the performance of the Data Communications Company. That is the central resource needed to support smart meters. Just before the last election, the then Secretary of State signed off a replan of the DCC timetable. That left us with an aim to deliver the first operational services from 2016, with a central planning assumption of August 2016 as opposed to the original one of December 2015. The DCC, which is managed by Capita, has since drawn down all its

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

available contingency and will have delivered all its final releases beyond the “maximum” agreed contingency, but we still have no confirmed date for the final release. Inevitably, given that we are now in December 2016, there will be slippage into 2017. Even if we take the optimistic view that we may have operational roll-out of DCC-enabled services by April 2017, that still leaves us with, at best, three years and eight months to deliver the remainder of the target. That is how tight things are.

The delays in the DCC have other consequences. The meters that have been rolled out are, for the most part, the first version of the smart metering equipment technical specifications—SMETS1, as the jargon has it—and a range of problems comes with that. SMETS1 has been rolled out because that is the only thing available at present, but SMETS1 was only ever intended to be a low-volume learning experience. The lessons have been learned and the limitations have been seen.

Suppliers know the issues that come from SMETS1 meters and want to go on to SMETS2 meters. It is frustrating for them not to be able to. Again, we risk damaging the concept by continuing to roll out something that we know to be suboptimal. SMETS1 meters do not have the flexibility of SMETS2 technology and, in particular, do not allow the switching of suppliers, which consumers regularly hear messages about from Government. Because of that technical issue, something in the region of 130,000 of the 3 million-plus smart meters that have been rolled out are currently operating dumb as a consequence of changing suppliers.

There have also been issues about pre-payment customers—people have lost credit and payment card functionality has been lost—and we know that there will be other technical issues. There is still no industry-wide solution for what they call multi-dwelling units—what to you and I, Mr Gapes, would be a block of flats. There is a lack of dual-band communication hubs, which use a frequency of 868 MHz and which are important for thick-walled properties and for reaching over long distances.

The challenges of the DCC timetable have led suppliers to whom I have talked to conclude that they are unlikely to meet the technical challenges until probably mid-2018. With pressure, they may be able to pull that forward but, again, it all takes us closer to the 2020 deadline and makes it all the more difficult to meet that. The insistence on the 2020 deadline will bring a range of other issues for suppliers, such as equipment and training of installers. Something that can take up to 26 weeks and cost the supplier in the region of £21,000 will become an even greater pressure on them if they are working to bring in a greater number of installers to meet that somewhat artificially imposed deadline.

Essentially, as I said at the start, the roll-out is a good thing, which the Government should be doing. We should not, however, pursue a timetable that will be counter-productive to achieving what we all know and agree is a good thing. To take a step back, I suspect that, since May 2015, there has been a lot of churn in Government energy policy, with a lot of changes, particularly in relation to subsidies for renewables and other areas. A lot of high-level political decisions have had to be taken, and the Department of Energy and Climate Change has been folded into its current home. The programme looks as though it might have slipped

through the cracks of Government. It needs somebody to take it up, to give it direction and to ensure that, at the end of the day, we have something that merits and is deserving of the original vision we had when we embarked on the programme. It needs a political hero, and I can think of no finer a political hero than the Minister.

11.15 am

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I will not speak for long, so that the Minister will be able to reply to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), with whom I had the pleasure of serving on the Energy and Climate Change Committee for 18 months. I rise to endorse all that he has said. He identified a lot of issues with the smart meter roll-out, and it would be good to know that the Government are aware of them. From all my conversations with Ministers, I am confident that they see the problems and are seeking to tackle them, but the timeline that was set, which the previous Secretary of State and the previous Minister of State in DECC both told our Committee they were fully confident of achieving, does not seem quite as achievable as the Committee was told it might be.

I hope that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will embrace the importance of digitising the energy system and the role of smart meters within that. Digitising the energy system is key to delivering a decentralised generation system and to being able to load-shift, and therefore being able to flatten supply and demand curves and achieve greater energy security through less demand. It is also key to achieving greater efficiency in how we use energy, which, of course, will lead to lower prices. Smart meters in homes and businesses are the linchpin of achieving that.

However, I also absolutely agree that there has to be a user experience. A mysterious grey box of tricks that gets put in underneath somebody's stairs, and if it does not have the connectivity that it should, so that it does not work, the perception is immediately that it does not do anything and is a bit useless. We need to ensure that smart meters work from the get-go. They also need to be accessible. The in-home displays are great, but there is an odd thing whereby people can only start with a certain screen. Many consumers have said that it would be better if the default screen showed the financial usage, so changing that would be helpful.

We need to make sure that the energy market is set up to allow smart meters to deliver real savings through half-hourly settlement. At the moment, all that people can really do is go round their house like the Ghostbusters, with their in-hand displays, seeking the thing that is using energy at any one time. The savings are not insignificant, but they are a fraction of the savings that could be unlocked if we properly digitised people's home and business energy by putting smart meters in and ensuring that they worked and that the market was set up to take advantage of that digitisation.

The arrival of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is actually a huge opportunity within the smart meter roll-out, because under one roof there is now responsibility for not only energy policy and the energy market but consumers, tech and innovation.

Seeing all those things as part of the roll-out is helpful, instead of the Department of Energy and Climate Change potentially seeing it as an energy policy issue and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills as a consumer issue.

My final plea is that the Department seizes the opportunity to make sure that smart meters are future-proofed, so that the internet of things can be operated through and around them and the home experience really works. My sense is that people will see the benefits of having a smart meter in an IoT-enabled home not purely from an energy perspective, but in terms of the wider consumer experience, and that they will be very grateful for the energy savings that come with it.

11.19 am

The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Mr Nick Hurd): It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing a debate on an issue that will touch and affect every home in the UK. It has drawn quite a crowd of visitors, whom we should welcome. I also welcome the new hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) to her place. I thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland for the constructive way in which he framed the debate, which is exactly what I would expect given his record in the House. I acknowledge the valuable contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heapey), who, as I have said on Twitter, is one of the more thoughtful Members of Parliament on the subject of energy. He is always interesting on the topic.

As the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said, the roll-out is a good thing and a long overdue upgrade of an outdated system. I am talking about not just meters—the technology for which is basically 100 years old—but how smart meters fit into a broader and more ambitious strategy to upgrade our energy system, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wells alluded to. Liberal Democrat Secretaries of State in the coalition Government, in which both the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland and I served, wrestled with the trilemma of security, affordability and increasingly clean sources of energy. We are also dealing with the matter of how to make the system smarter and more flexible so that it delivers a better experience for our constituents—perhaps by doing away with the nonsense of estimated bills now that we are in 2016, and with calls to call centres. We desire to give our constituents a greater sense of control and, of course, the opportunity to save money.

The roll-out is not the silver bullet for fuel poverty—that is entirely right—but the data suggest that the people with the first wave of smart meters are saving about 3%, according to British Gas surveys. Those are not insignificant sums of money. For our constituents on prepayment schemes, smart meters are a better system for the ability to top up and to read balances quickly. We see smart meters as the foundation of the smart, flexible energy system that we are working towards and to which we are committed. The Secretary of State recently launched the consultation with Ofgem. That is the direction of travel, and we are extremely committed to it because there will be significant benefits to the country—not just to our constituents, but to the people we rely on to supply energy.

There is a smarter future ahead, and that is what we are working towards. The roll-out is unequivocally a good thing, but the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland was right to identify some big challenges, none bigger than meeting the roll-out target. However, I associate him with being someone of optimism and ambition—he is a Liberal Democrat, after all—so I say to him that we should not give up on our ambition at this stage. There is no basis on which to do so. It is a challenging target but, as he will know as an experienced politician, if we take our foot off the accelerator, people will read the wrong signals. We want to send a strong signal of our commitment to ensuring that every household and small business is offered a smart meter by the end of 2020. We will follow the evidence and see what it tells us about the feasibility of the target in a few years' time. The right hon. Gentleman may be in a position to say, "I told you so"—he has teed that up nicely—but I hope not. Now is the wrong time to send a signal of slipped ambition.

There are other challenges, including making the early smart meters interoperable. The right hon. Gentleman is entirely right about that. We should not want our constituents to trade off the opportunity to get a better tariff against the opportunity to retain smart functionality. I assure him that the DCC has begun a project to enrol the early SMETS1 smart meters from 2018 in order to make them usable by all energy suppliers, rather than just the one that initially installed them. It is an issue, but one that will go away.

Another challenge that the right hon. Gentleman rightly highlighted is reaching all consumers, including those at risk of being left behind. That requires both a wide area network and a home area network. The DCC is contracted to provide wide area coverage to 99.25% of meter points in Great Britain from 2020, which is, incidentally, greater than for current television and mobile services. There are big challenges, but it is wrong to slip back on our ambition, not least because we can point to good progress being made.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned a figure of about 3 million smart and advanced meters being in operation. Actually, as of June 2016—these are slightly out-of-date data—the official number is that there are more than 4.2 million smart and advanced meters operating under the programme. Again, we now have some data from the quite large British Gas survey, which show what cost savings the roll-out is delivering for our constituents. The current run rate is about 3%, which is slightly higher than expected. We now have a sense of how popular the smart meters are, with eight out of 10 people recommending them and high levels of customer satisfaction. We have also updated the latest cost-benefit analysis.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: I completely accept what the Minister says about the signals that can be sent by taking the foot off the gas, to use his analogy, but there are technical issues coming down the tracks. The suppliers are all telling us that the roll-out could take them into the middle of 2018. What is the Minister doing to engage with the suppliers to bring that date forward?

Mr Hurd: We are not naive about this. We have set a demanding challenge, so the ongoing conversation with suppliers to talk through some of the practical differences

[Mr Hurd]

is an essential, fundamental part of the Government's responsibilities and Ofgem's responsibilities. I am keen to mention that we have recently published the latest cost-benefit analysis of this ambitious programme, which suggests that we are looking at a significant net benefit of about £5.7 billion for the roll-out—including through supplier cost savings, system benefits and energy efficiency for our consumers. That all leads me to reassert the fundamental point that we remain committed to the programme. The right hon. Gentleman suggested that ambition might have slipped a bit and that the scheme might have been a ball dropped by a busy new Department. That is absolutely not the case. The fact that the Secretary of State recently announced an ambitious consultation about the direction of travel towards a smarter, more flexible system places the roll-out in that context. It is a top priority for the Department.

I want to give the right hon. Gentleman some reassurance about his constituency. He spoke powerfully about the levels of fuel poverty there, and the data are striking. He was candid about the fact that this agenda is not the whole solution to that challenge, but his desire to ensure that no communities are left behind in the process is laudable, and is an aim that is absolutely shared by the Government.

In response to the questions on whether remote rural areas of Scotland be excluded from the roll-out and what the planned communications coverage will be, I would like to place on the record that Arqiva is contracted to provide network coverage to at least 99.5% of Great Britain's premises in the north region, which covers Scotland, by the end of 2020. That level of coverage compares favourably with other technologies such as mobile and broadband networks. Arqiva is on track to deliver its contractual coverage commitments, having already achieved coverage of more than 80% of premises in the region. Building the smart metering wide area network in Scotland has led to considerable progress and, subject to detailed planning, the DCC is confident that the right hon. Gentleman's constituency will have a high level of premises coverage. There is a licence obligation on the DCC to strive—best efforts—for 100% coverage.

I hope that I have given the right hon. Gentleman some reassurance regarding his constituency and the fact that, despite some slippage in timetable—a matter of a few months, which, in the scheme of things and against the backdrop to which he alluded, is not the end of the world—the Government and the new Department attach the right level of priority and importance to the roll-out, which we sincerely believe will deliver a much better experience for our constituents in interacting with the energy systems on which they depend. The roll-out is the foundation for a much smarter energy system as we move to upgrade the energy infrastructure of the country after so many years of dithering and delay. It is absolutely at the core of that strategy.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Tidal Lagoons and UK Energy Strategy

[IAN PAISLEY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered tidal lagoons and UK energy strategy.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. This is a timely moment for the House to return to the subject of tidal lagoons as a future energy source, and specifically the projects of Tidal Lagoon Power Ltd, starting in Swansea bay, for which it has already received a development consent order.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), my constituency neighbour, led the previous Westminster Hall debate on Swansea tidal lagoon on 8 March 2016, which underlines the keen interest in this project from people in west Wales. It is encouraging to see colleagues here from across the United Kingdom, which demonstrates that what we are discussing is of strategic importance to the whole UK's energy policy, economic policy and industrial policy.

The previous debate was essentially held under a different Government, when energy and climate change belonged in a stand-alone Department under a different team of Ministers led overall by a different Prime Minister. I welcome the new ministerial team at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The team is experienced and well equipped to take on the challenges before us. I also welcome what the new Business Secretary said to the Institute of Directors on 27 September in his speech on industrial strategy:

“Many of the policies and decisions that form our industrial strategy will not be about particular industries or sectors, but will be cross-cutting.”

I welcome the departmental integration of industry with energy to make that happen, and tidal lagoons are a good example of the kind of opportunity that such integration is intended to foster.

The last general election feels like ancient history, but it is worth reminding ourselves that Conservative colleagues stood on a manifesto that:

“All parts of the UK will soon be helping to deliver secure, affordable and low-carbon energy, from the Hinkley Point nuclear power station, to offshore wind turbine manufacturing at the new Green Port in Hull, the next generation of pipelines West of Shetland and the Swansea tidal lagoon.”

I am proud of that manifesto commitment, and I would like to see it delivered.

Ten months ago the Government announced an independent review of the feasibility and practicality of tidal lagoon energy in the UK, recognising that tidal lagoons have the potential to provide the country with clean and secure energy but saying that more work needs to be done to determine whether it provides value for money. The Government therefore commissioned a review of the technology to improve our understanding of how tidal lagoons could contribute to the UK's future energy mix in the most cost-effective way. The purpose of the review, led by the widely respected former Energy Minister Charles Hendry, was to help to

establish an evidence base to ensure that all decisions on tidal lagoon energy are in the UK's best interest, to better understand whether tidal lagoons can be cost-effective and to consider the impact on consumer bills both today and in the longer term.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree—perhaps the Minister will reflect on this too—that, given that 75% of identified fossil fuels cannot be exploited if we are to fulfil our Paris and COP 22 climate change obligations, the spot price of oil, which is often deflated by Saudi excess production to attack frackers, should not be the point at which we identify value for money? We should get sustainable green power at the lowest cost possible, even if the cost of oil is down.

Stephen Crabb: The hon. Gentleman makes his point well. The purpose of the Hendry review is to help to provide clarity so that the Government can determine the role that tidal lagoons could have as part of a long-term strategy to provide secure, clean and affordable energy for families and businesses across the country. The review is now complete and will be presented to the Government this afternoon. I, and I suspect the Minister, have no idea what the review says and what it concludes, but given the strength of support for a tidal lagoon industry across such a wide spread of business and political opinion, I imagine that Mr Hendry has heard some powerful and compelling arguments that cannot be dismissed lightly.

It would be absurd to ask the Minister to address his remarks this afternoon to the contents of the review—he will rightly need time to digest and assess it—but my one request is that he commits today that a decision will be made, along with a full response to the review, in as short a timeframe as possible. Even as I say “as short a timeframe as possible,” I sense the scope that that allows for foot dragging, so I seek assurance that the Government will respond in a timely and purposeful way, with no foot dragging. This cannot become another third runway decision, where industry makes repeated calls for a Government decision only for it to be kicked further down the road. There is too much at stake.

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for securing this important and timely debate in the light of the Hendry review. Does he share my hope that the Minister will outline when he will share the Hendry review with Parliament? The review will provide great context for our future debates.

Stephen Crabb: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I look forward to the Minister addressing that point later this afternoon.

A key feature of UK energy policy, whatever else might be said, is that it is not neutral. It does not rely solely on market choices to drive new investment. To that extent, we have an activist energy policy that demands big, difficult and timely choices from Ministers. A core objective of recent UK energy strategy, as the last Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), said last year, is to ensure

“enough electricity generation to power the nation.”

As ageing and dirty power plants are retired from use, delivering on that objective becomes more challenging. National Grid now projects that, without emergency measures, the UK's winter electricity margin stands at just 0.1%.

The vision we are discussing today speaks directly to that energy challenge. How do we harness the phenomenal tidal range that surrounds our country to replace many of the ageing power plants that are being decommissioned?

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): It is encouraging that the right hon. Gentleman is a former Secretary of State for Wales and for Work and Pensions, and he has support from the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Craig Williams), a Treasury Parliamentary Private Secretary, which gives me hope that perhaps there is something in the wind to suggest that we might get the early decision for which he is calling—we would support such a decision. Will he support me in asking the Minister to give us a decision before the end of this year?

Stephen Crabb: It would be fabulous to have a sense of the timeframe in which the Minister will be making his decision, but it might be unfair to ask him to provide one today, given that he probably has not yet seen the contents of the review. I do not even know the length of the report, and it might take a bit of time to digest. The key point raised by the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) is essential: we need a timely decision in the shortest possible timeframe.

The vision of harnessing tidal energy is exactly why Tidal Lagoon Power was started five years ago with the aim of providing home-grown, secure power from a fleet of tidal lagoons around the British coast that could provide low-cost, zero-carbon power for the next five generations, thereby building a new British industry of turbines, generators and turbine housing, with all the manufacturing and engineering jobs, skills and investment that comes with it. That is a compelling and exciting vision of energy and industrial policy coming together in the national interest.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend, and hopefully the Minister, agree that the key point about this and other projects is that they represent long-term investment? The strike price that this project will achieve underlines that this is a cost-effective way of producing energy.

Stephen Crabb: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I will address that point later. It is with a long-term view and an appropriate framework of support for the right projects that the prospect of a new UK tidal energy industry is within reach, and with it a source capable of providing 10% or more of the UK's total electricity requirements.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman is making a fine speech. The strike price over 90 years is £96.50, which compares with the Hinkley Point strike price of £92.50 over 30 years, both at 2012 prices. Of course, it is often forgotten that nuclear has had 60 years of support, and 44% of the budget of the former Department of Energy and Climate Change was spent on addressing the legacy

[Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil]

of old nuclear. Putting all that together, Swansea bay and other tidal lagoons represent very good value for money.

Stephen Crabb: The point about comparability is well made. Although the purpose of this debate is not to do down any other energy source, I recognise that drawing such comparisons is right and proper in this context.

A tidal lagoon industry would mean multi-billion-pound infrastructure investments in two areas of the United Kingdom with ideal conditions for tidal lagoon infrastructure: the Severn estuary and the Liverpool bay and Irish sea area. I understand that about a dozen viable sites have been flagged to Charles Hendry as part of his investigations, and that Tidal Lagoon Power is working on specific projects for five of those sites, starting with a pathfinder project in Swansea bay and moving shortly afterward to the first full-scale lagoon in Cardiff.

New manufacturing facilities to serve the various lagoon sites across England and Wales will be served by a UK-wide supply chain. Original manufacturing will be spread throughout the UK; particularly important components will come from a number of regional centres of excellence, mirroring the UK's historic manufacturing heartlands, including South Yorkshire, south and west Wales, the west midlands, western Scotland, Tyneside and Teesside.

A UK tidal lagoon industry would represent a world first. The wide body of bespoke maintenance and engineering expertise it would build up could lead to the export of skills, knowledge and human resource to projects in the first phase of international tidal lagoon deployment, potentially securing up to 80% of global market value in that space. That is absolutely what UK industrial strategy should be all about: renewing and enlarging world-class manufacturing and engineering skills right across the United Kingdom.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend have any views, or evidence of any views, about how the cost per unit, or per bay created, might drop as the industry gets under way? I am thinking of the solar photovoltaic industry, where the cost per unit has decreased dramatically over many years. It is important that we have some sense of how much cheaper tidal lagoon energy might become, because the costs will ultimately be borne by consumers through their energy bills. Many people are struggling for cash these days, and we are trying to drive up the productivity of the UK economy, so lower long-term cost to the consumer if we can make it work will be an important prize to gain.

Stephen Crabb: That question goes absolutely to the heart of the matter, and I will address it in a bit more detail later. The figures that I have seen from Tidal Lagoon Power demonstrate that as we move from the pathfinder project in Swansea to the larger full-scale fleet of lagoons starting in Cardiff, the costs of energy generation decrease markedly. That does not even assume any of what economists call project learnings, which help to drive efficiencies in future projects.

Neil Carmichael: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way a second time. The key point here is that one project will help to start the next project, and therefore another and another. That is the central reason why this project as a whole is important: it will create more opportunities still.

Stephen Crabb: Again, my hon. Friend demonstrates his knowledge of the potential industry that we are discussing. His point is well made.

It is envisaged that the machining and pre-assembly of the turbines will take place at a new purpose-built facility in the Swansea bay city region. Heavy fabrication of steel components will take place at a new purpose-built facility, also in the region. Final full assembly of the turbines will take place on site in the turbine housing itself. The turbines' control systems and generators, which connect to the turbines and generate renewable electricity, will be manufactured in Rugby, also from a majority of British-made parts. Meanwhile, a Stafford facility will provide high-voltage switch gear and control and protection systems, all of which demonstrates the UK-wide potential for the supply chain to serve a new tidal lagoon industry.

Quite simply, the development of a fleet of tidal lagoons, starting with Swansea, would provide an enormous boost to UK civil and electrical engineering, our manufacturing sector and our domestic steel industry. According to Graham Honeyman, chief executive of Sheffield Forgemasters:

"Being part of the Tidal Lagoon project would be an important win for this business. The prospect of working on a new power generation concept is an exciting one and is inspiring to our team. The possibilities for this concept, which could play a huge part in addressing the global power deficit, are vast. For such a project to be delivered through British designs and implementation would also be a great boost to the UK economy."

Mr MacNeil: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again; he is making a fine speech. What he and other Government Members have been talking about is first mover advantage. We could make a strong case for first mover advantage. I hope that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is listening to that point. It should not be seen in any way as a cost to consumers. The previous Department was obsessed with snapshots of the cost to consumers in the present, whereas we should be looking towards long-term savings to consumers that will eventually be achieved through this work and the first mover advantage.

Stephen Crabb: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. If we are serious about rebalancing the economy, revitalising our industrial sector and creating new high-quality manufacturing jobs and apprenticeships, we need real and substantial projects to enable that to happen. The proposals for a tidal lagoon industry comprising five or more lagoon projects around the UK represent exactly the kind of new thinking that we need for our industrial strategy.

Tidal lagoons would mean new jobs, requiring new skills for a new industry. To give one example, there is currently no UK facility of sufficient size to serve the tidal lagoon sector with caissons, the large watertight chambers in which construction work may be carried out underwater. Tidal Lagoon Power and its partners have identified a number of potential sites for such a

purpose-built facility around the Welsh and Scottish coastlines. The construction of such a facility would further enhance the UK's civil engineering capability and upskill our industrial workforce.

In a report to Tidal Lagoon Power extending its earlier work for the Welsh Government, Miller Research and SEMTA found that the development of four tidal lagoons in Welsh waters would support 22,000 jobs in manufacturing and assembling the main component parts of the turbines, generators and sluices, which equates to 15% of the total number of people working in manufacturing in Wales in 2014.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman and I agree on the importance of low-carbon technology, particularly to port communities in west Wales such as the ones that he and I represent. They have natural deep water and the facilities and skills from previous industries. Rather than reinventing the purposes of those ports, we should continue their excellent record of serving the energy sector.

Stephen Crabb: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point that is well understood in Government. The Government recognise the particular importance of ports as linchpins in their local economies.

If Ministers choose to harness our abundant natural resources and, in doing so, launch a new industry here in Britain, just as the Danes did with wind, we will secure a considerable competitive advantage over new market entrants from day one. Britain's first post-Brexit industry will not only underwrite a strong domestic order book but help to put us at the front of the queue in future technology export markets. If we seize the moment now, wherever a new tidal power project is commissioned in future—from Garorim bay in South Korea to the Gulf of Kutch in India—there is every chance that the people, the parts and the components that build it will contain the words “Made in Britain”.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): The Hendry report is good news for the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, after five years spent raising £48 million. The right hon. Gentleman is making a valid point about the jobs that it would create, but it would also create apprenticeships, which we in Wales need at the moment. What are his views on that?

Stephen Crabb: Perhaps we need another occasion to talk more fully about the role that apprenticeships play in rebalancing the economy, but the hon. Lady makes a vital point. If we are to have a new tidal lagoon industry, there is a lot of training to be done. A lot of new skills need to be brought into the workforce, so one can readily see that apprenticeships will play a key role.

I will draw my remarks to a close by drawing attention to the elephant in the room, which a number of hon. Members have already mentioned: money and affordability. I was discussing the Swansea tidal lagoon project with one Minister recently who described it to me as “eye-wateringly expensive”. When I pressed him on that, it became embarrassingly clear that he did not understand the project at all and was merely repeating what he had heard someone else say about it. A myth of unaffordability has grown up around the vision of tidal lagoons as it has developed over the last five years.

Let us be clear: the projected investment costs should not deter us. We know that investors are ready to support the Swansea bay project, whose overall project cost is about £1 billion to achieve construction and connection to the national grid. Tidal Lagoon Power has already spent around £50 million on the development work, and another tranche of money is ready to be used to bring the project to financial close, as long as the Government give the green light. Of the total capital investment of around £1.3 billion, we know that around 84p of every £1 will be spent here in the UK, and at least 50% of that will be spent in Wales. For the Welsh economy, a project of that scale would certainly help to move the dial in terms of gross value added.

We have still have not addressed the crucial point on which this whole thing hangs: value for money. I am interested to see what the Hendry review says about it, but after seeing the figures that crossed my desk when I was a Minister, and again more recently, I have been greatly encouraged that the project does represent value for money. By taking a long-term view of the asset—for that is what it is: a long-term source of power generation—and using established modelling that will be familiar to Treasury officials, the current net value of subsidy for Swansea could amount to a contract for difference equivalent of £89.90 per megawatt-hour. We would be talking about a 90-year contract with a diminishing subsidy each year for 35 years—because it is de-linked from inflation—which then starts to pay money back to the Government for the rest of the life of the contract. That compares favourably with Hinkley C, which locks in an escalating strike price with a contract for difference of £92.50 per megawatt-hour.

The point is that it is affordable: Swansea bay tidal lagoon would put an additional 18p on to household bills, and would require only 0.41% of the 2020-21 levy control framework budget in its first year. By its 35th year, Swansea bay would require just 0.15%—effectively a rounding error—of the levy control framework budget. To put that into context, Hinkley C will add around £12 to household bills.

Geraint Davies: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that because the value of the pound plummeted by something like 20% after the news of Brexit—I think it is now down by around 14%—the lagoon will be much greater value for money, because it obviously costs more to import oil and energy if sterling has a low value?

Stephen Crabb: I genuinely do not know about that. We are discussing the long-term view. I do not know what oil and gas prices, or the value of sterling, will be in six months, let alone in 35 years.

The Swansea bay project does have strong credentials as a stand-alone project, but think about a Cardiff tidal lagoon as the first full-scale project. That would see the cost of electricity drop markedly, with a potential contract that could, I am told, take around £5 off the average household electricity bill. That is why it is so important to talk about a tidal lagoon industry, not just about doing Swansea as a one-off. It is the fleet of full-scale lagoons that will unlock the full energy opportunity for the UK. If we get it right, the country will win with low-cost, reliable and clean power and the emergence of a new globally significant industry here in the UK.

[Stephen Crabb]

Tidal power is reliable, as well as clean, and it is not subject to the vagaries of the weather. It is predictable—we know exactly when every high tide will be for years ahead—and tidal lagoon systems will be built to last for at least 120 years, making them all the more worthy of investment.

We have a unique and historic industrial opportunity before us, and we absolutely should seize it. We have the natural resource on our coastline, and we need new sources of low-carbon power. We have a rich industrial heritage that has bequeathed us the skills, the capabilities and the ambition to take on the challenge. After five years and expenditure of more than £50 million, the pathfinder project at Swansea bay is almost ready to start construction. The project has planning consent, strong funders, strong industrial partners, political and public support, and a delivery team and supply chain ready to kick into action. It has also proved to the international marketplace that the successful commercial development of tidal lagoon infrastructure can be achieved.

I urge the Minister not to delay in his consideration of the Hendry review. I urge him to seize the moment, to give the go-ahead to Swansea bay, and to launch this affordable, sustainable, first new post-Brexit British industry, which will serve our energy needs into the 22nd century.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Order. Because of the extensive interest in this subject, I have a list of at least nine Back Benchers to call to speak, so I am going to impose a four-minute limit on speeches. The Minister and shadow Minister have indicated that they have a considerable amount to say. With that in mind, we will move straightaway to Liz Saville Roberts.

2.54 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Gadeirydd. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) on securing this debate, which I hope we can use to build the cross-party consensus that we need to get moving on tidal lagoons, as well as many other much needed Welsh infrastructure projects. The Government seem to be rather caught in the headlights of Brexit.

I shall make my case for increased investment and urgency in the development of tidal lagoons in three parts. First, and most appropriately, I will outline the benefits of tidal lagoons for meeting current and future energy capacity requirements. I will then briefly touch on how they can contribute to our environmental targets, before finally outlining the economic benefits. Those Members who are familiar with energy policy will recognise my speech as an expanded response to what is known as the energy trilemma. I will conclude by highlighting the deficiencies in the Wales Bill and how it continues to hamper Wales's ability to make use of its natural resources.

Eighteen major power stations, totalling 17,767 MW of capacity, have closed since 2012. By 2020, the amount of lost power is expected to rise to over 38,000 MW, representing more than a third of our current capacity. According to Tidal Lagoon Power, that means that, having put everything else into the mix, we will end up with a 32 GW deficit.

The 350 MW Swansea bay tidal lagoon will pave the way for projects between Cardiff and Newport, which are planned at equal capacity to Hinkley Point C. The projects will generate the lowest-cost electricity of all new power stations, and can be online in the mid-2020s. A 3,000-plus MW lagoon on the north Wales coast is planned for completion shortly afterwards, with two other projects in the pipeline for development slightly further down the line. As a fleet, the five scoped projects can generate secure, clean energy for 30% of UK homes for 120 years.

We face a clear and present risk when it comes to our long-term energy security. The highly predictable and secure energy created by tidal lagoons means that they face few of the uncertainties or dangers of other carbon-neutral technologies. A home-grown industry, producing power on our shores—what is more secure than that? What is there to like more than that?

I turn briefly to the role of tidal lagoons in meeting environmental targets, which is the second aspect of the energy trilemma. Whatever the impact of Brexit on the UK's energy and environmental policy, under the Climate Change Act 2008, we are committed to reducing carbon emissions by 57% by 2030, on 1990 levels. As recognised by the Committee on Climate Change, it is likely that new technologies, including tidal lagoons, need to be implemented to meet that target.

In Wales, our abundant resources, particularly tidal energy, give us huge potential to become a world leader in carbon-neutral energy generation. However, Westminster is the dog in the manger when it comes to Wales's abundant natural resources. For centuries we have been reined back from cultivating and benefiting from our own resources because of arbitrary restrictions from Westminster.

The third aspect of the trilemma is often referred to as energy equity—that is, the affordability of energy for consumers—but I shall also touch on the broader economic implications of tidal lagoons. As the first of its kind, Swansea bay tidal lagoon is undoubtedly more expensive than some of the rival technologies. However, as the project is small, its impact on household electricity bills will be small as well. For consumers, Swansea bay's real benefits lie in its ability to act as a catalyst for an industry of cost-effective renewable energy in the form of future tidal lagoons.

That said, at a local level, during construction, Swansea alone will employ 2,323 workers, and 181 during operation. It will add around £316 million of gross value added throughout construction, and £76 million annually thereafter. We must also remember the possibilities for exporting the technology. At a time when exports are crucial to the future of the economy, why are the Government dragging their heels on the issue of getting shovels into the ground at Swansea? We can demonstrate to the world that we can lead the way on innovative technological solutions to our energy needs.

I conclude by highlighting the vicissitudes that Wales endures from Westminster. Despite Wales having a natural treasure trove of renewable resources, particularly tidal energy, Westminster refuses to let Welsh people benefit from their own environment.

Unlike under any other devolution settlement, under the current Wales Bill, there will be an arbitrary 350 MW cap on what our National Assembly can develop. That means

that the lagoon in Swansea, which has already received planning permission, would have been a project decided on by Cardiff Bay, but any of the other larger projects would remain the preserve of Westminster.

My final plea to the Minister is this: allow the people of Wales to control their own natural resources, so they can make the best use—

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Lady will resume her seat.

2.59 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I am very grateful to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) has painted the golden uplands of tidal power, but while it is of strategic importance the cost is eye-watering. Although 50% of the benefit may go to Wales, it is the poorest consumers who will end up paying the subsidy on this project. I therefore urge the Minister to exercise caution in relation to the project. There are undoubted benefits, should the predictions come true about Swansea bay tidal lagoon power, but there is no guarantee that subsequent projects will be delivered, or that they will secure licensing consents from Natural Resources Wales. Past experience of energy projects at Milford Haven docks shows that there can be substantial delays in obtaining consents from NRW.

It is clear that the pricing for the tidal lagoon is far more expensive than Hinkley Point. It runs over a 90-year contract, whereas the Hinkley Point contract runs only for 35 years. The difference in the contract for difference is that decommissioning costs are included in the Hinkley Point contract. That makes tidal power—or this particular project—look very expensive. When one considers that the initial bid was £168 per megawatt-hour, one can see why a degree of caution needs to be exercised and why there has been movement away from the project. Would unique intellectual property be generated in the UK that would benefit the UK? Clearly, there would be skills advantages. I accept my right hon. Friend's arguments about the skills benefits that could be gained and the engineering benefits that could come to the UK. However, those are not unique skills. They are very transferable. They can be taken anywhere and there would be no guarantee of their subsequently returning. We would be the first adopter, but there is no guarantee that we would retain the benefits, because of the lack of IP that would accrue to what amounted, in effect, to more than £2 billion-worth of subsidy from the British taxpayer.

I therefore urge the Minister to be cautious. I look forward to reading the Hendry review and seeing the evidence base, which I know has been looked into in great detail. The project has potential, but not at the strike price that is proposed.

3.3 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) on securing this important debate. I am here this afternoon to put on record my support for the proposed tidal lagoon developments, particularly the one in west Cumbria, which would be situated on the Solway firth at Maryport in my constituency.

Hon. Members may know that, in west Cumbria, we market ourselves under the name of “Britain’s Energy Coast”. We started with Calder Hall, which is now part of Sellafield. We were home to the world’s first commercial nuclear power station and we now have the proposed nuclear new build at Moorside, which we hope will be given the go-ahead soon, following the welcome announcement about Hinkley Point C.

It has been reported that the west Cumbria tidal lagoon, with its 90 turbines set in the breakwater, could have a generating capacity of 2 GW. If that capacity is added to the 3.4 GW of capacity that would be produced by Moorside, west Cumbria alone would produce around 10% of the UK’s electricity needs.

The Tidal Lagoon Power group states on its website:

“In addition to helping the UK transition to a low carbon future—providing secure and affordable low carbon energy—we believe that a West Cumbrian lagoon could be uniquely positioned to deliver a range of economic, social and environmental benefits which are strongly aligned with local priorities for economic growth, tourism and leisure, flood risk management”—

flood risk management is very important for my constituency—

“coastal erosion, infrastructure improvement and social inclusion.”

Maryport is a beautiful coastal town, but it badly needs a boost and a west Cumbrian tidal lagoon could bring huge economic benefits—thousands of jobs during the construction period, as well as regeneration and investment in the local community. It has also been suggested that there could be a factory to build the turbines near the port of Workington, which would give that area, and the port, a big boost.

The lagoon company has been consulting local people closely, but it is important that it listens to the local fishermen, who have expressed concerns to me. Their livelihood comes from the waters of the Solway. I am glad that the Tidal Lagoon Power group has said that it is setting up a fisheries peer review group to advise on the effects on fish. The group must do everything in its power not to disadvantage the fishermen.

I have been really impressed by Tidal Lagoon Power’s comprehensive strategy for the wider community in Swansea bay. As the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire said, it is seeking to invest in recreation, tourism, sport and the arts, which is exactly what we need in west Cumbria. The Solway firth is beautiful; it is a hidden gem. More people need to know about it, to visit our attractions and to taste our local food, particularly the seafood, so that they know that there is so much more to Cumbria than just the Lake district. If hon. Members have a few moments this afternoon, we are having a Cumbria day in the Attlee suite. I urge them to come along and taste some of the delicacies on offer.

In conclusion, I absolutely support the pathfinder tidal lagoon project in Swansea bay. I am pleased to hear that Charles Hendry’s report appears to be imminent and I urge the Minister to let us know when it will be published, so that we can all take a look at it. If we can get this first project off the ground, areas such as the one I represent will be able to benefit greatly from this huge investment in our future, which will also help to bridge the national energy gap and ensure that we meet our international climate change commitments.

3.6 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Paisley, for calling me to speak. It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) on securing the debate.

My constituency of Aberavon, along with that of my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), a neighbouring constituency, would be the home of the Swansea bay tidal lagoon project, which would be the first such project in the world. Tidal lagoon power is an idea whose time has come. The Swansea bay tidal lagoon would produce enough energy to power 150,000 Welsh homes for 120 years, meeting 11% of Welsh energy needs with clean, green, reliable and sustainable energy, saving almost a quarter of a million tonnes of carbon during each year of operations. It would directly sustain over 2,000 construction and manufacturing jobs in Wales, and support as many as 311 UK industrial and manufacturing businesses along the supply chain. Crucially for my Aberavon constituency, the project will require more than 100,000 tonnes of steel, much of which will come through the Port Talbot steelworks. Tidal Lagoon Power has committed to procuring as much steel as possible from UK suppliers and it should be commended for making that pledge and held to it.

As the project will be the first of its kind in the world, it is estimated that, in its first year, 200,000 people will visit the lagoon to see the national boating centre and other facilities. That will mean £8 million in tourism revenue, including £2 million from the oyster-shaped visitor centre, £500,000 from the national boating centre and almost £1 million from the elite performance sports centre. The project has the support of almost 90% of local stakeholders and it was included in the manifesto upon which every major party stood at the last general election. In sum, the Government are fast running out of excuses for delaying a positive decision.

A final decision will, of course, be made following consideration of the Hendry review. That was supposed to have been received before the autumn statement, but we understand that the Government asked for the report to be delayed, in the light of the possible ramifications of other announcements. Can the Minister please inform us what impact, if any, the autumn statement has had on the review?

We now understand that the review is expected to be submitted to the Secretary of State this afternoon. Can the Minister please inform the House whether the review has already been submitted? If not, when will it be submitted? Will he commit to his Department publishing the Hendry review publicly?

Members of this House, our constituents and local businesses should see the review and the case presented by Hendry either for or against tidal lagoon power. There are live investment decisions that need to be made or at least planned imminently. For the decisions to go forward, investors need at the very least a clear sense of the decision-making and implementation process. Will the Minister please make clear what the formal decision-making process will be and when we can expect a public decision? Will we have to wait until the Budget? Will the Secretary of State make a statement in the coming months either as a separate stand alone statement

or as part of his national industrial strategy statement? Will the Government also make it clear what the timescale and process will be for implementation of any decision following the Hendry review? Investors, business and our communities need an end to the uncertainty. All major parties made clear manifesto commitments to tidal lagoons and in particular to the Swansea bay tidal lagoon. It is about time we fulfilled those commitments and delivered jobs, energy and opportunity to the Swansea bay region.

3.10 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Paisley. It is good to have a colleague in the Chair. I also thank the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) for presenting such a good case.

Strangford lough in my constituency is one of the most beautiful loughs in the whole world. I defy any Member of this House to come and have a coffee and a delicious scone in Harrisons of Greyabbey, sit on the veranda looking over the lough and argue that the view could be beaten. I would argue that the view could never, ever be beaten. Not only is Strangford lough the most beautiful, but it has the potential for so much energy production. Indeed, we were proud to trial the world's first tidal current energy turbine, the SeaGen. Tidal power is an important part of any renewable energy plan as it is a guaranteed source of power and, unlike wind power, can be relied on every day. Generating electricity from two massive underwater propellers, the SeaGen was lowered into place in 2008 and bolted to the seabed in one of the world's fastest tidal currents.

Strangford lough is one of Europe's most protected areas, providing unique habitats for marine and bird life. It is a Ramsar area and also an area of special scientific interest. The location was chosen for the turbine project because it offered sheltered waters close to shore, but still exposed the generating device to the full rigours of the tides. The pull of the waters of the Narrows in Portaferry and Strangford is significant and in the early stages some of the blades were damaged. SeaGen generated 1.2 MW: enough power for around 1,500 homes.

There were of course environmental aspects and questions. A study of the environmental impact of SeaGen will, I hope, open the door for other such projects. There had been fears that large marine mammals such as seals would be hit by the propellers. We have a good colony of seals in Strangford lough. The environmental monitoring report that gave the all-clear stated:

"There have been no changes in abundance of either seals or porpoises detected which can be attributed to SeaGen; seals and porpoises are continuing to swim past SeaGen, demonstrating a lack of any concern or hindrance."

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend agree that, as the United Kingdom prepares to leave the European Union, it is essential that we get the energy strategy correct across the whole of the United Kingdom, so that we can offer companies a competitive spirit for business?

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. As a businessman, he focuses on the issues that we want the debate to focus on. The Minister will, I hope, respond to that.

The SeaGen project ended and was dismantled in January this year. The years of operation have opened the door for other such tests. There has been consideration of similar projects on a larger scale in other coastal areas, so the SeaGen project in Strangford lough has given the necessary information to the Department to use for further projects. Perhaps the Minister will give us some idea of how the SeaGen project can be used for the furtherment of other projects.

My opinion is clear: the less dependent we are on crude oil and its supply from other countries, and the more we can get from our own renewable resources, the better. I support such projects for that reason.

The levy control framework, established by the former Department of Energy and Climate Change and Her Majesty's Treasury, set a cap for the forecast costs of certain policies funded through levies on energy companies and ultimately to be paid for by consumers. Since November 2012, the framework has covered three schemes to support investment in low-carbon energy generation: the renewables obligation, feed-in tariffs and contracts for difference. It sets annual caps on costs for each year to 2020-21, with a cap of £7.6 billion in 2020-21, in 2011-12 prices. According to the latest forecast, the schemes are expected to exceed the cap and will cost £8.7 billion by 2020-21. That is equivalent to £110—around 11%—on the typical household fuel energy bill in 2020. That is £17 more than if the schemes stayed within the cap.

I will conclude shortly. I understand other Members want to speak, so I will not take extra time. We need to do more, and projects such as SeaGen at Strangford lough are possibly the way to go as they also seek to address the environmental impact duty that we must stick by. The environmental reasons for renewable energy are clear and compelling. Although I am not someone who would ban the use of fossil fuel or nuclear reactors as needed, I do feel we should make the most of the great resources that we have in our tidal energy provision. I am anxious to see how we can develop that in Strangford lough and throughout the Province—indeed, across this great nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—so that we rely less on fossil fuels and other energy sources that are not on our doorstep.

3.15 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): It is great to have you in the Chair, Mr Paisley. I have been a supporter of tidal lagoons since I was elected in 2010. At that time, I asked searching questions about flood mismanagement, possible contamination and suchlike. Those have been looked at and, essentially, this project is good for jobs, for the environment and for the economy, so we should go forward. The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) shakes her head. I should mention what she said about nuclear power.

Nuclear power is good, but if we look at global uranium supplies, at the current rate of consumption, which is 2.5% of global consumption, we will run out in 50 years. If that goes up to 12.5%, we will run out within 10 years. So we need a diverse portfolio that does not exclusively rely on nuclear.

As I mentioned earlier, 75% of fossil fuels cannot be exploited, so we need to look carefully at the tidal lagoon project. There is no excuse for further delay.

The previous Chancellor came to Swansea with the former Prime Minister and in the autumn statement of 2013 mentioned the Swansea bay lagoon, but we are still waiting. We now have the Hendry review, which has found that the project is technically sound, is value for money and will deliver economies of scale and falling marginal costs as the portfolio is spread around. So, as hon. Members have said, let us get on with it and let us have a target date. Let us say by June next year. I do not think by Christmas is realistic, but let us have a target date and let us get on with it.

The only thing that has dragged on is the issue of cost. As I have mentioned already, the oil cost is not a proper indicator, because we cannot exploit all the oil and, also, we cannot really go down the road of fracking. People may have read the recent Council of Europe report on hydraulic fracturing. It concluded that, given that methane is 86 times worse for global warming than carbon dioxide and fracking has fugitive emissions of 5%, fracking is twice as bad as coal for global warming, so we need to have very tight controls on fracking. Perhaps the Minister will respond to that. Will he undertake to ensure that fugitive emissions are below 1% for the whole process and below 0.1% at the well head? If we can get that out of the way, it opens the door for Swansea bay lagoon and other lagoons like it as pathfinders. We should not mess around when we know that strategically other options are not open to us.

It looks as though we will be heading towards the disaster called "Brexit". Let us assume for a moment that the Government do not delay triggering article 50 beyond the French and German elections and do not give the people a final say on the deal, in which case they would reject it. Let us assume we go for Brexit. Obviously, fuel prices will be much higher because sterling will be devalued owing to a lack of confidence in the economy outside the European market, with tariffs. That makes the Swansea bay lagoon better value for money. In the short term, of course, some of the component parts to build it will increase in price. However, overall, it is a great project. We have been waiting long enough. Let us get on with it. In the interests of the environment, of the economy and of Britain, let us do it.

3.19 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. The lagoon is located in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock). Since I was elected the people of Swansea East have made it abundantly clear that the tidal lagoon is one of the issues that matters most to them. It matters for jobs, for investment, for business and for industry.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The hon. Lady is talking about investment in jobs, and there will be an impact in my constituency, where GE will build the 16 generators, involving £18 million of investment in the plant at Rugby and the creation of 100 additional skilled design, installation, service and maintenance roles. Is not that a compelling reason to proceed?

Carolyn Harris: That was very clever of the hon. Gentleman, and yes, it is a compelling reason.

[Carolyn Harris]

Most of all, the project matters for the sake of hope, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman's constituents will now have. It was, and remains, a beacon of hope for a region in transition. Swansea knows a thing or two about making the most of its natural assets, but our once great industries are now in decline and our city has suffered as a result. When the lagoon plan emerged—a modern plan for a new low-carbon era that would once again place Swansea's natural resources at its core and redeploy a skilled and committed workforce built up over decades—we questioned, probed and challenged. When we were satisfied with the answers we received, we backed it to the hilt. Let me make it abundantly clear: Swansea supports the tidal lagoon, but more importantly, it needs it. It is the foundation stone for our city deal. It is important for the regeneration of our waterfront; for our plans to get people back into work; for retaining the next generation of talent; and for showcasing to the UK and the world a city that I am proud to call home.

I was sceptical about the need for an independent review, but I am delighted to report that those of us who saw the review in action were impressed by its engagement and endeavour. However, it is now finished, and I hope that the Minister will explain what we can expect next. We have heard this afternoon that the review may be lodged today, so we need to know what the next steps are. We have seen the views of the 40-strong all-party group and the more than 100 Back-Bench MPs from across the House who signed a letter to the Government to support the project. Now is the time for the Government to put their money where their mouth is. Now the deed is done, and we need to know where we go from here. We need to know that Swansea will get the tidal lagoon it deserves.

3.22 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I too congratulate the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) on obtaining this timely debate. He mentioned that the Hendry review is with the Government this afternoon, and I share the desire to hear about it from Ministers as soon as possible. The debate is a demonstration of how much cross-party support there is in this place, as my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) said, for the development of tidal lagoons. That support is pretty unique, and indeed there is also cross-party support in the Welsh Assembly and elsewhere. I should also mention that my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), who are upstairs in a Bill Committee, want their support for the project to be stated.

We all hope that the Minister will have something to say this afternoon about when he will share the Hendry report with the House, as it was not mentioned in the autumn statement. The delay is frustrating, because we want the Swansea bay tidal lagoon to go ahead—and, as others have said, not just as a one-off or a stand-alone project, but as a pathfinder for yet more tidal lagoons across Wales and beyond, including in Newport, as set out in Tidal Lagoon Power's plans. A couple of streets away from my home there are the most beautiful views of the expanse of the Severn estuary. From my constituency

office on the banks of the Usk we can watch the dramatic rise and fall of the second highest tidal range in the world every day. It is an amazing natural resource on our doorstep, and we are just not using it. At a time when we desperately need clean, secure energy, year-round, entirely predictable energy, tidal lagoon technology is the key to delivering a low-carbon energy future in Wales. We have to grasp that opportunity.

The benefits for Wales and elsewhere have been clearly spelled out in this debate. They include the chance for Wales to be a global leader in the technology, starting in Swansea. More than 2,000 direct jobs would be created in the manufacturing and construction process, and many more would be created in tourism and the supply chain. There would be a huge boost to the Welsh economy. There would also be the potential for long-term cost reduction as more lagoon technology was built, and, importantly, for exporting the technology. A Newport lagoon further down the line would bring construction jobs and the chance to use Welsh steel, which my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) mentioned—it has been an incredibly difficult time for that industry. The Liberty House Group in my constituency supports the project; a lagoon in Newport would be less than a mile from its steel plant, which I visited recently.

The project is not only a matter of renewable energy generation and playing our part in meeting climate change targets. There is also a chance for coastal regeneration and a boost to recreation and tourism. The leader of Newport City Council, Debbie Wilcox, has given it her backing and said it is a “marvellous opportunity for Newport”. There is huge added value in the project—not least from up to 33,000 jobs at the four lagoons in Wales, were they to go ahead. It is an amazing opportunity that we should grasp for Swansea, yes—but also for Newport. I urge the Government to make a timely decision.

3.25 pm

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. It has been a good debate and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) on securing it and on the manner in which he made his case. It is notable that with the honourable exception of the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) everyone who has spoken so far in the debate has been in favour of the project; there were speakers from all the nations and several regions of the UK, and all bar one were in support. Debates such as this bring me out in a bit of a cold sweat, because I may have to brutalise some constituency names that I do not know how to pronounce. I thank all those who mentioned the constituency of the right hon. Gentleman and saved me from pronouncing it as if it might normally follow the word “Elvis”—that is how I would have read it. Such debates are an educational process for many of us, and this one has certainly been educational for me with respect to learning to pronounce the names of parts of the beautiful country of Wales.

The speech of the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire touched many key points, and these were replicated by many Members who spoke. The project is potentially a key part of the Government's industrial strategy, and the cross-party support that it enjoys is balanced by its cross-cutting benefits. It is not

just an energy project; we have heard that it will boost tourism and support the steel industry. It also ticks a number of the boxes on which the Government are trying to deliver with their nascent industrial strategy. It links business with energy; it provides a low-carbon technology; it has the potential to spread the economic benefit and boost economic growth outwith London and the south-east of England; and it has the potential to develop a sizeable and exportable technology. Those are all things that, I think, we would like.

There may be issues as to the cost, as the hon. Member for Eddisbury said. However, as I often do when we discuss technology of this kind, I remind the House that we must ask not only the cost of doing something, but the cost of not doing it. It may be difficult to account for that, and it will be interesting to see whether the Hendry review touches on it. However, the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire said that we should aim to emulate the Danes in their development of onshore wind. They have developed an industry and have world-leading technology and exports coming from that. I sought to intervene on the right hon. Gentleman, but my attempt was somewhat lost in the debate. As well as emulating the Danes, we need to make sure we do not emulate ourselves as to what we did in relation to onshore wind technology. The original leaders in that technology were here, and the lead was ceded to the Danes who picked it up and ran with it, and are now in an enviable position. Let us not repeat our mistake over onshore wind with tidal technologies.

Tidal lagoons and technologies are an important aspect of the matter, but not the only one. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is no longer in his place, mentioned the potential of the tidal scheme—SeaGen—in Strangford lough; and in the Pentland firth between Scotland and the Isles of Orkney there have been world firsts in the deployment of tidal turbines in an area renowned for its tides. That has potential, and I would like to question the Minister about the contracts for difference that were announced last month. We know that they have excluded technologies that are cheaper than offshore wind—onshore wind and solar will not be allowed to bid in—but technologies that are more expensive have also, effectively, been excluded. Essentially, we will have a competitive option process that only one technology will be able to win. That does not seem like fair competition to me—it would mean a broken promise to the tidal industry—and I hope that the Minister can address the matter. That promise of a *de minimis* amount of electricity through the contract for difference process has seen the development of several stages of proposals that would look to bid in—in particular, MeyGen in the Pentland firth. That could be part of a compelling story of a UK tidal industry, with the tidal lagoons and turbines as compatible—sister—technologies in which we could be a world leader. I wholeheartedly support the deployment of offshore wind, but not its being the only show in town. Because of the Government's decision—their fixation, it would seem, on that technology—we risk losing one aspect of that story. I really hope that the Government will reconsider their decision and engage with those looking to pursue the schemes to see what can be done to develop them.

I will not take up my full amount of time, but I want to return to tidal lagoons. The scheme ticks many boxes and its development has support across the Chamber

and, I think, Parliament as a whole. The lagoon will be a pathfinder in Swansea, the first of its kind. We have a history of developing energy technologies in which numerous firsts of a kind have turned into ones of a kind. I hope that Swansea goes ahead but, if it does, it must be a pathfinder. It must be a scheme that leads to the development of a technology. There is no point in our paying a large amount of money to do this once, then not learning from it, not reaping benefits for future development and, most importantly, not having the technology to export. I fully support the scheme, as does my party.

3.32 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): We have had an excellent debate, with contributions from Members on both sides of the Chamber indicating almost unanimous support for the Swansea bay tidal lagoon. That outcome—the clash of ideas in the white-hot heat of full agreement—should be impressed on the Minister. Even though there was what might be regarded as one dissenting view from the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), I think that she supports the idea. She made some important points about value of money and about how careful one needs to be to get that right.

We can, I think, say that there is agreement, more or less, about the principle of the Swansea bay tidal lagoon and full agreement, at least by the Opposition, about the practice. Indeed, Opposition turnout and the first-rate contributions made by my hon. Friends the Members for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnoch), Swansea West (Geraint Davies), Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), Newport East (Jessica Morden) and Workington (Sue Hayman), and by the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig), indicate just how full the support is on this side of the House, not just from south Wales Members but across the country. I think that is because we need to make it clear that support for Swansea needs to be based, as Members have emphasised, not just on whether we build that tidal lagoon but on what it means for tidal lagoon technology for the UK's future and what it means also for the series of lagoons that can come about as a result of the Swansea proving lagoon.

That series of tidal lagoons is not a concept based on thin air; it is not about harnessing an as yet untried technology that might come from the middle of nowhere and save us as far as low-carbon power is concerned. Essentially, it works on a simple principle of proven, well-known technology, of water entering the lagoon subject to its flow through a turbine, both when it is coming in and on its release when the lagoon is full, that allows for the generation of some 14 hours of utterly predictable power. We know that the principle works well because, as the Rance barrage in France has shown, the technology is reliable over many years and, as has been mentioned, it is a power source with a lifetime far in excess of those estimated for wind, gas and even nuclear. It is likely also that the outage time over a long period will be relatively low.

Swansea is not a large lagoon in terms of what is possible. It will have an installed capacity of 350 MW, which is approximately a tenth of the most worked-up second lagoon, in Cardiff bay, which comes in at a capacity close to that of Hinkley Point C power station. However, it is the possibility of Swansea being the

[*Dr Alan Whitehead*]

proving ground for a number of tidal lagoons that will not only be cheaper to construct and operate than Swansea but will open up the prospect of a large contribution—perhaps 10%—of our electrical power needs that ought to be a condition for supporting it. What we should be investing in as a country is not Swansea, but Swansea and the prospect of all the others as a major component of our future energy make-up.

As Members have mentioned, as far as our country's overall energy make-up is concerned, power plant is going offline at an alarming rate, with 23 GW of conventional thermal plant being closed or mothballed since 2010, and a further 24 GW—mostly of coal and nuclear—to be closed by 2025. It is unlikely that nuclear will even begin to make up that gap. Hinkley is delayed by longer than seven years and will probably not be on line until 2026-27 and, according to the latest consultation, coal is due to come offline by 2025.

We need replacements for the lost capacity, and a lot of that will come from the aggregation of renewables, but at present the only plan appears to be that gas-fired power stations will be built out at some pace between now and the late 2020s. We know that gas power stations are not, at present, getting built and, indeed, the Government are pursuing expensive capacity market operations—with an auction today or thereabouts possibly costing us £2.5 billion—for capacity over the next period. That is the last chance saloon, one might say, for gas plant procurement under the present arrangements. Swansea, and other lagoons, would certainly serve as a substantial alternative to some of that build, which, if procured, would cost substantial amounts—something that needs to be taken into account where value for money is concerned. All energy, at the moment, is expensive to build. All energy, at the moment, is being subsidised in its build. It is not about considering just what Swansea might cost but about what the alternatives might cost as well. Under those circumstances, Swansea performs, in the long term, very well.

Within a few years, perhaps, a number of those replacement power stations will need replacing anyway. Meanwhile, Swansea and other lagoons would have sailed through the period, producing reliable ultra-low-carbon electricity. By the way, in terms of a larger lagoon strategy, they will be able to supply reliable and known amounts of power pretty much round the clock, for the simple reason that the time of high tide varies considerably along the UK coast. I always like to try to introduce a not very well known fact into my contributions and today it is that, right this minute—this very minute—it is high tide in Morecambe bay. That means that if there were to be a lagoon in Morecambe bay it would produce power for seven hours either side of its high tide.

It is not high tide in Swansea. High tide was at 10.20 am. Power could be produced seven hours either side of that high tide, which would overlap almost exactly with the power produced in Morecambe bay on its high tide. With a series of lagoons, there would be round-the-clock, reliable, known, predictable power that was just as predictable and round-the-clock as any nuclear power station or gas-fired power station that we might care to build in this country.

The benefits of developing Swansea and subsequent lagoons are manifest from a low-carbon energy point of view. As Members have alluded to, there would be

considerable other benefits, too. Jobs and supply chains would be created, mostly in the UK. It is estimated that 65% of the pathfinder project spend will go on UK content, which is close to the figure achieved by the North sea oil and gas industry. There would be 200 jobs in Swansea and perhaps 11,000 jobs in Cardiff during construction, and several thousand jobs during operation. Developing Swansea is important for what UK plc should be doing to secure the exportable potential of those technologies in which we are world leaders. We certainly are leading in tidal, tidal stream and wave.

As the hon. Member for Aberdeen South said, we only have to look back a little to see how close we came to securing exportable UK industry in wind before we lost our lead and most of our manufacturing and expertise to others, most notably Denmark, because we did not back the development of our world lead through industrial strategy. Yes, I have mentioned the words “industrial strategy”. It appears in the title of the new Department—the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—but there is still an absence of anything that looks like an actual industrial strategy from the Government. We were promised a Green Paper on industrial strategy would appear shortly. With lagoons, we have an industrial strategy in the round already, with jobs, a supply chain and exportability. It is running up to us, metaphorically asking us to bite its hand off, and at the moment we are not responding in a positive way.

In all of this, we have to consider the question of value for money, which the hon. Member for Eddisbury mentioned. Comparatively, lagoons provide value for money. Undoubtedly even Swansea will come in as better value for money for electricity-generating purposes than the deal we have concluded with Hinkley C. Comparatively it is in the same league as offshore wind. A series of lagoons would certainly be much better value overall, although we need to cast our minds towards the longer term in thinking about value. Swansea is asking for a CfD for 60 years. That is half the operating life of the lagoon, with payments reducing substantially over that period. Swansea is not asking for a block CfD degressing through future projects; it is asking for a CfD degressing within the project's lifetime.

I know the Government have not been idle in all this, although on the surface not much has happened since general support for the idea of the Swansea bay lagoon was included in the Conservative party's 2015 election manifesto. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon said, it was also in the manifestos of all the other major parties. I hoped we would hear something positive about Swansea in the autumn statement, but nothing was announced. We will have to wait until the Hendry review has been examined. That review is headed by an estimable former Energy Minister, the right hon. Charles Hendry. I am confident he will have a positive look at value for money and the bigger picture I have described of the lagoon, but we do not know where that review is. We think it is on its way to Government as we speak, but we have not yet had any confirmation that it has been received, or whether there is a timetable for looking at that review or for action after it has been considered. I join my hon. Friends in calling for early publication of the review so that we can all have sight of what it is about. We also call for an early Government response to that review, even if a final decision about proceeding with the Swansea tidal lagoon has not been made.

I conclude by emphasising that timing is important. We have a worked-up, permitted, committed plan that cannot stand in suspended animation while people spend so long making up their mind. Swansea bay, in case anyone needs reminding, is not an interesting concept that we can cogitate on at our leisure, but a real project that needs to be developed within a reasonable timescale. Otherwise all the money invested in it—£50 million—will start to go stale and the project may fail, possibly never to be revived. We need to get on with it, not just for Swansea's sake, but for the sake of a real solution that could be producing power by the very early 2020s if it is given the go-ahead now. It would be a solution for our mounting energy gap in the early part of the next decade.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): If the Minister can take about 12 minutes, that will give Mr Crabb a minute and a half to wind-up at the end.

3.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman): Thank you very much, Mr Paisley. Members have already widely noted the honour it is to serve under your chairmanship, and I add my support to that sentiment. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) on securing this important debate. It is testimony to him and the importance of the issue that he has generated such cross-party support and so many interesting speeches. The sentiment in the room has been so evident.

My right hon. Friend has long been a proponent of the economic benefits that tidal lagoons could bring to his constituency and to south Wales as a whole. Naturally, he and other Members here today are keen to understand better how the development of a tidal lagoon at Swansea specifically and a fleet of tidal lagoons around the UK coastline—were they to go ahead—would benefit their local economies. However, as he acknowledged, this is a difficult and complex question. The technology is new and untried, and the development warrants due care and consideration before decisions are taken. That is why in May the Government commissioned Charles Hendry to undertake an independent review of the strategic value of tidal lagoons in the UK. Among other things, the review was intended to consider whether and in what circumstances tidal lagoons could play a cost-effective role as part of the UK energy mix, to examine the potential scale of the opportunity, including in the supply chain, and to consider different sizes of projects as the first of a kind.

Contrary to what some Members have said, building a tidal lagoon in Swansea is not a manifesto commitment of the Conservative party, but it is mentioned in the manifesto. There is a commitment to explore the lagoon as a source of affordable energy, and that is exactly what Charles Hendry is being asked to do in his review. We are expecting him to deliver his report to Government very shortly. Colleagues may know better than me how shortly, but whenever that is, this debate is a timely opportunity to discuss the issues. Apparently, drafts have been sent to or discussed with officials—certainly in one case—but it is important to note that the review is not about Swansea as such. Rather, it is a general review of the costs and benefits of tidal energy. As it has not reported, it is irrelevant that the autumn statement

has occurred, contrary to what some colleagues have tried to insist. It would be wrong for Government to announce anything while a review we had commissioned was under way. We look forward to receiving it and reading it with great interest.

The question has been raised as to whether, as my right hon. Friend said, there will be a timely and purposeful decision. Members asked when the Hendry review would be published and whether there would be a decision before the end of the year. Colleagues will understand that any decision before the end of the year would be unrealistic at this late stage, and my right hon. Friend acknowledged that. We will give this matter thorough and careful consideration. There will be no dragging of heels.

Geraint Davies: Is the Minister willing to set a target deadline that he will not go past? Will he say, "By June next year, we will try to do better," or will he set no deadline at all?

Jesse Norman: The fairest thing to do is to see what the report says before we come to a view about an appropriate timetable. It would be quite wrong to prejudge the report and its conclusions.

For all the enthusiasm of my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire for tidal lagoons, I note that he has taken a measured approach, respecting the complex issues that are being raised, for which I thank him. As he said to the House when he was Secretary of State for Wales,

"The Swansea tidal lagoon proposition is very exciting and commands wide support across the business community in Wales, but we also need to recognise that the project is asking for a very significant level of public subsidy and intervention. It is absolutely right that"

the Government

"should conduct very robust due diligence in making sure that such projects will deliver value for the taxpayer."—[*Official Report*, 13 January 2016; Vol. 604, c. 842.]

That is precisely what we will do. We will take the time necessary to look at the review's findings in relation to tidal lagoons, particularly in the context of a wider assessment of the nature of the UK's future energy mix and our plans to reduce carbon emissions.

Last month, the Secretary of State set out his vision for how the energy sector should develop, in the context of our new UK industrial strategy. He recognises that the Government's role must be to create the right framework for growth, harnessing both existing and new technologies, to deliver more secure, cleaner energy at a lower cost. That is our goal: a reliable, clean and inexpensive energy system.

Of course, new technologies such as tidal lagoons may have a role to play, but not at any cost. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) rightly raised several issues, and we look to the energy review and other discussions to resolve them. She raised not merely the issue of cost, but her concerns about the lack of intellectual property, planning uncertainty and delays. The Government should properly consider those issues as part of a wider decision-making process.

As colleagues know, the contract for difference allocation round, which we announced last month, is under way. Overall, our energy policies and priorities have not changed. It is worth saying, in relation to the remarks of the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig),

[Jesse Norman]

that it is not true that CfDs do not include tidal stream technologies, although it is true that there is no ring-fenced allocation for them within the auction. That is because our responsibility is to bill payers. Tidal stream, which is not a technology that we are specifically discussing in the context of tidal lagoons—it is a different technology—has a strike price about three times higher than that of offshore wind. Until those prices fall, it may be difficult for it to compete. When they do, it will come within the policy horizon.

Callum McCaig: In fairness to myself, I do not believe that I said it was excluded; I said it is effectively excluded, which the Minister may have touched upon himself. Ignoring the potential first mover advantage for tidal stream technology, how does he expect its price to come down if it does not have the support to deploy and develop a downward price trajectory?

Jesse Norman: That is a perfectly reasonable question. Historically, the expectation has always been that technologies have to demonstrate that they are capable of benefiting from support. Given that the distance in the range of cost is so high, a judgment has been made that that technology has not done so at the moment, but other technologies have succeeded in doing so.

Other colleagues raised issues such as the rate at which costs might fall with other lagoons, the degree to which different projects could inspire different learning, and the first mover advantages, all of which should be resolved and discussed in the context of the Hendry review.

Jim Shannon: In my contribution, I mentioned the SeaGen project in Strangford lough in Northern Ireland—a pilot scheme sponsored by the Government to get results in relation to the environment. Perhaps the Minister is going to tell us what the results of that pilot scheme are so that we have some idea of what we are doing now.

Jesse Norman: I am sorry to have given up time for that intervention, because I was coming to that point. SeaGen, as the hon. Gentleman recognises, was a research test bed, and it is being decommissioned now. It received a £10 million grant from the Department, and those conclusions are being carefully assessed. It is a project in which there has already been public investment.¹

It is clear that we cannot allocate subsidies to every technology that asks for them. We have said that our focus will be on key technologies that have the potential to scale and deliver long-term cost savings, in which the UK has a comparative advantage and whose costs to consumers are acceptable.

Geraint Davies: Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: I am very short of time. I am so sorry. I have taken an awful lot of interventions, and I want to make progress.

I note the enthusiasm of my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire for the proposed Swansea bay project, but it is the Government's job to consider the advantages and disadvantages and to scrutinise the evidence to ensure that decisions are taken in the longer-term interests of the UK and consumers. It is worth focusing on the significant uncertainties associated

with the project—in particular, the use of a new and untried technology in a marine environment, the length of time over which the commitment would be made, and the planning issues, which have already been mentioned.

Since the debate on the economic impact of tidal lagoons in March, the Department has continued to have discussions with the developer of the Swansea bay lagoon. I cannot comment on those discussions, given their commercial nature, but the most recent proposal put forward by the developer would be a very significant deviation from current Government policy. It would not be impossible, but it would require careful consideration. We have always been clear that we will consider the findings of the independent review of tidal lagoons and all other relevant factors in deciding whether to proceed with negotiating a CfD on this project. The developer is aware of that.

The issue of value for money quite properly remains at the forefront. I mentioned the concerns about consents and leases, decommissioning and the supply chain. I note that the China Harbour Engineering Company is no longer working with the developer. There is also an issue of state aid approval. The point is that, even under ideal circumstances, it will take some time to resolve those issues, and the Government will need to take our time to consider the review and make a judgment in a proper and effective way.

As this important debate draws to a close, let me say that I expect a copy of the review's report to be on my desk and those of colleagues very soon, and we will give it careful consideration. I assure hon. Members that the Government will strike the right balance between responding in a swift and timely way and taking the time required to consider this complex issue in the detail it deserves.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Mr Crabb, given that the Minister has been generous in giving up a bit of time, you have the opportunity to accept a bouquet and take a bow, but not much more, before I put the Question.

3.58 pm

Stephen Crabb: I will do that. First, thank you for your excellent chairmanship, Mr Paisley, which has facilitated this very good debate about not just the Swansea project—it was never about just the Swansea project—but the potential for a tidal lagoon industry for the whole of the United Kingdom. The sheer number of colleagues who participated from all parts of United Kingdom and all parties demonstrates the overwhelming support for the Government to take forward a new tidal lagoon industry. I am reassured by the fact that the Minister said there will be no dragging of heels. He said that the Government will not support this project at any cost, but nobody was asking for them to support it at any cost. We have discussed some very reasonable figures and comparisons between different energy types.

This debate will carry on in other forums over the coming months. I hope we get a full, positive response and a decision from the Government, if not by the end of the year—perhaps it would be unreasonable to expect that—then certainly by the spring or summer.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered tidal lagoons and UK energy strategy.

1. [Official Report, 14 December 2016, Vol. 618, c. 6MC.]

Flood Re Insurance Scheme

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Flood Re insurance scheme.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Hollobone. I am delighted to have the opportunity to move the motion.

Back in 2005, Carlisle was badly affected by floods, following which substantial investment was made in flood defences. By December 2015, the view was that Carlisle was probably safe from further floods and would not be affected. Exactly one year ago today, however, Storm Desmond struck the United Kingdom and in particular Cumbria. It was an extraordinary weather event, and the floods had a profound effect on our city.

For the record, the emergency services were absolutely brilliant. We must also recognise the contribution of individuals—friends, families, strangers—and communities. They all did a terrific job. I acknowledge, too, the contribution of Government. Central Government and local government rose equally to the challenge of the times, giving great support, manpower and assistance to the community.

To give one small example, the week after the floods I asked the then Chancellor at Prime Minister's questions if he would support the Cumbria Community Foundation. He indicated that he would match any funding raised. The foundation subsequently raised £5 million, which meant that, with the matched funding from central Government, £10 million was available, helping people enormously throughout Cumbria to recover from the floods. Work by the Environment Agency and the Cumbria Community Foundation is still going on, and people are gradually getting back into their homes. For the future, the Government have also committed a further £25 million to flood defences, which I am sure the EA will invest in and around Carlisle over the next few years.

What of the impact of Storm Desmond? From a Carlisle perspective—not even Cumbria, just Carlisle—more than 2,000 individual homes were directly affected. The knock-on impact on families, friends and the wider city was considerable. Furthermore, hundreds of businesses were affected, ranging from small, one or two-employee businesses to large factories such as McVitie's, which has more than 800 staff—I am delighted that it is back up in production now.

Nor should we forget the side effects of the floods on sporting facilities. Carlisle lost its tennis, rugby, squash, football, cricket, bowls and athletics facilities. The impact of that on the wider community is quite extraordinary. Furthermore, many people do not appreciate that three secondary schools were also affected. One of them has closed at its original site and is looking to move to a different location. The impact on Carlisle, its community, individuals, families, businesses, schools and social clubs, can therefore be appreciated. The effect was dramatic and is still ongoing.

It is important to set the scene for the Minister and explain what happened in Carlisle as a result of the floods then and subsequently. However, the purpose of

today's debate is to address one particular aspect of flooding, namely Flood Re, which I will talk about from my perspective. A number of my colleagues are present today, and they will have their own views and issues to do with their own local communities, including the impact that Flood Re may or may not have had on individual households and the wider community.

For the record, Flood Re was an excellent bit of thinking by the Government and the insurance industry. Overall, it has been a great success. It took a number of years to get there; nevertheless, it was an inspired bit of thinking by the industry and Government, which reached a sensible compromise that has been hugely beneficial to many people up and down the country. The statistics are starting to tell the story about the number of people who managed to get insurance under the Flood Re regime.

An important thing from the Carlisle perspective was that the 2015 floods came, in many respects, unexpectedly—given what had happened in 2005 and the subsequent work on flood defences. At the time the community was badly affected and morale was low, but the one thing that gave people a little confidence was that through the Flood Re scheme they knew they could get insurance. That was vital for individuals and householders. I congratulate the Government and the insurance industry on Flood Re, because it is a job well done.

Therefore I am not here to be negative; I am here to be constructive. As with any new idea or piece of legislation passed by the House, however, sometimes issues can be overlooked, particular circumstances not taken into consideration, or judgment calls by the Government or the industry might need some adjustment or further thought. Perhaps the Government need to review the Flood Re regime and make some adjustment to it for the future.

I will concentrate on the specific issue of long leaseholders, although I accept that there are other issues with regards to leaseholds and so on. For example, there is what I call the accidental landlord—someone who for whatever reason, perhaps a job, might have to move to a different part of the country. Such people might not be able to sell their house, or they do not want to because they intend to move back to the area, so they lease the property out while purchasing or living elsewhere. That is clearly an issue, because they would not be able to get Flood Re insurance for the house they have vacated. That is a side issue for me, today in particular, but it is worth the Government looking at it.

I will concentrate on the long leaseholder. The purpose of Flood Re, as I understand it, is to help owner-occupiers—those who own their own principal private residence—not commercial owners. I fully understand the thinking about commercial owners, and in many respects I accept that.

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate. He is always a great champion of Carlisle and the north-west. May I make a point about non-commercial, community assets? On Boxing Day in my constituency, the village of Croston was badly flooded by Storm Eva, but Croston community centre is not eligible for assistance under the Flood Re scheme and it has been quoted excess of £35,000. The future of the centre, which of course was a hub of

[Seema Kennedy]

activity in the floods, is now unviable. I know my hon. Friend is concentrating on long leaseholders, but does he have anything to say about that?

John Stevenson: I have some sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. In Carlisle, the sporting facilities were badly affected and they have ongoing issues with their insurance. She has raised a similar issue, which the Minister might wish to address when she sums up.

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): My constituency, including several thousand homes and several thousand businesses, was also badly hit. Last weekend I met some residents of a block of 10 leasehold flats, next door to seven bungalows. The bungalows are eligible for Flood Re, but the 10 leasehold flats are not—one resident had bought a flat because they could not afford a bungalow. Does my hon. Friend agree that the £50,000 excess that each flat individually is being charged for flood insurance is excessive? Does he agree that Flood Re should be relooked at for that area of private residents?

John Stevenson: My hon. Friend is in many respects raising the very issue that I am about to deal with, so I obviously have a great deal of sympathy. Again, it will be interesting to hear what the Minister says about that point.

The real issue concerns long leaseholders who live in a property that is in effect their principal private residence—it is where they live, have their family and community, and so on. To all intents and purposes they are homeowners, but for a variety of legal and technical reasons they do not own the freehold—they are long leaseholders, but they do not own the freehold.

A group of long leaseholders will have a lessor, which is usually a management company. The management company owns the freehold and individuals take a lease on the property. Often the management company is in fact owned by the leaseholders. Leases may be for 999 years, and the freeholder is the management company, which would control it from there. They would be responsible for the communal areas, which could include grass cutting and roads, and may be responsible for parts of the fabric of the property, depending on the nature of the leasehold interests—whether it is a tenement flat going upwards or a group of properties next to each other. There will be variations, depending on the structure of the agreement at the outset. Interestingly enough, the landlord will be invariably responsible for ensuring that covenants between leaseholders are enforced to ensure that they comply with certain requirements under the terms of the leases.

It is interesting that the Flood Re legislation already allows for that set-up to a certain extent. It is allowed for properties of three flats, and three only. We could therefore have a situation where a landlord occupied one of the three properties—admittedly, they would have to live in one of them—and had another two on leasehold that are covered by Flood Re.

I will read from a letter from someone in the circumstances that I have raised. The freehold area is known as Willowbank, and he says:

“Willowbank is owned by a company, but that company is owned by the 29 leaseholders. The company has no income and no reserves. It makes no profit and pays no dividend. The two directors are paid neither a salary nor expenses.”

In many respects, Flood Re was there to help people like that. They are principal private occupiers who own their properties that are effectively freehold, but for whatever technical reason they are called leasehold and not covered by the legislation.

The legislation is meant to cover the whole of the United Kingdom, which includes Scotland, and in Scotland they have tenement blocks. As I understand it, the set-up under Scottish legislation is similar, but the tenement blocks, which are similar to the scenario I have set out, are covered by Flood Re legislation. I genuinely believe that it was not the intention of the legislation or of Parliament to exclude those I have described from Flood Re. I think the goal was to help secure the insurance requirements for people in those circumstances.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I want to come in on the positive aspects of Flood Re. Having grown up in Carlisle, I would also like to say that it was horrific and heartbreaking to see so much of the city knee deep or worse in water. I hope that most people have fully recovered.

More positively, Flood Re has made a real difference to many in my constituency, who have seen reduced premiums, reduced excesses and insurance made available when it was not before. Notwithstanding my hon. Friend's reservations, will he commend the Government on taking such positive action and remind them that many businesses are still worried and in need of help?

John Stevenson: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. Flood Re has been a success. I have seen that in my constituency, where people now have confidence that their house will be insured. What I am trying to get at is a small group of people. In the setting I mentioned earlier, 29 houses were involved and in another scheme in Carlisle there are, I think, 68, but there will not be many other than those. I suspect that there will not be too many in such circumstances in the flood areas up and down the country, so most people will be able to get the appropriate cover, which, as she rightly says, is a positive.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is being generous in giving way. I, too, congratulate him on this important debate, which will be welcomed by his constituents and by everybody who has been seriously affected by flooding. Has he examined the proposal recently launched by the British Insurance Brokers Association that is intended for commercial properties and which I understand will also cover long lets? Is there not a danger, though, that because premiums are calculated on specifically targeted risk, they might end up as unaffordable for people in long-lease properties?

John Stevenson: The right hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. I am aware of the proposal with regards to commercial properties, which may be a way forward for them. I have concentrated on a narrow point with regards to the circumstances surrounding Flood Re.

To conclude, will the Minister bring forward a constructive review of Flood Re? Will she consult Flood Re and the insurance industry? Will she listen to the concerns of homeowners in my constituency who genuinely feel that they are being let down by the legislation and are unable to get that security and insurance for flood? It is an ongoing concern for them that if we get another

Storm Desmond, they will not necessarily have the money to refurbish their properties. I do not think that is the intention of the legislation. I hope the Minister will take on board the arguments that I have set out about the legislation and will acknowledge that there was an oversight, or that something was missed when it was considered, and that it would be appropriate to bring forward primary or secondary legislation to expand Flood Re to cover that small group. That would assist a small group of people in my constituency, but it would be hugely beneficial and give them confidence for the future.

4.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) for raising the issue of access to affordable flood insurance and the Flood Re scheme. For those at high flood risk, whether households or businesses, or indeed community leaders and their surrounding communities, this matter is a central one.

I would also like to thank other hon. Members for their interventions. I hope to address them all during my response. The anniversary of Storm Desmond—we had Storm Angus last week—is a timely reminder that the potential for flooding, and the devastating impact it can have, is never far away. It is worth reflecting on the purpose and value of Flood Re, which replaced the statement of principles—a series of agreements made by the Government and the insurance industry since the 1960s on the provision of insurance to those at flood risk.

However, the statement of principles had limitations. Under the statement, members of the Association of British Insurers agreed to make insurance available to domestic and small business properties in areas that were not at a significant risk of flooding. For properties in significant flood risk areas, the statement of principles provided an offer of cover only to existing customers, provided that plans were in place to reduce the risk within five years. There was no availability of cover for those most at risk if they had not historically had flood insurance or the risk was not being reduced. Importantly, the statement of principles did not provide for the affordability of flood insurance.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Dr Coffey: I would like to make some progress and then I will happily hear from my hon. Friend.

In the insurance industry, traditionally there has been an informal cross-subsidisation of the costs of flood risk, which is a common approach to managing risk in the insurance sector. However, commercial pressures and the availability of more sophisticated flood risk models have given rise to a trend towards insurers increasingly assessing local flood risk and imposing risk-reflective terms. Without Flood Re and with an immediate transition to fully risk-reflective prices in a free market, many households at high flood risk in the UK would probably experience a significant increase in their insurance premiums in the coming years. I therefore welcome the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant).

Tom Tugendhat: I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) elucidated, the Flood Re scheme has gone some way towards supporting communities, individuals and housing that is vulnerable to flood risk, but it is clear from the original legislation that it does not work in isolation. It works alongside flood defences not simply as a repair product but as part of a structure to build confidence in housing and industry in flood-affected areas. Will the Minister say a little about the flood protection the Government are introducing and how that will defend communities, particularly in areas such as the Medway?

Dr Coffey: I certainly hope to come on to that. To return to the genesis of Flood Re, the Government, working with the insurance industry, established the scheme to help householders at the highest flood risk who were blighted by not being able to access affordable insurance. It is expected to help about 350,000 households. Flood Re not only limits the price of flood insurance according to council tax band but limits the excess to £250. It ensures that all home insurers in the UK are part of the solution. It is a complex scheme, but it is a world-first and it is the fifth biggest reinsurance scheme globally and the second largest in Europe. There is much international interest in what we are doing.

Flood Re is providing relief for thousands of householders at flood risk and brings real practical and emotional comfort to many, as has been said. Fifty insurance companies, representing more than 90% of the market, now offer access and in its first six months of operation 53,000 households have benefited. This portfolio will build as the market matures, with Flood Re policies expected to grow in number over the next three years. I encourage hon. Members to advertise that to their constituents. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasising that a number of factors beyond flood risk determine any insurance quotation and it remains important for householders to shop around for the best deal.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): I agree with the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) that the Flood Re scheme is a good one and has been successful, but does the Minister accept that there is more to do for businesses, particularly small businesses, in flooded areas such as York and Carlisle? When flooding hits, it has a huge impact on small businesses. Will she consider extending the scheme to cover businesses?

Dr Coffey: I intend to address that issue towards the end of my contribution. If I do not manage to do so in sufficient detail for my hon. Friend, I will be happy to have further discussions.

I stress that Flood Re is a transitional measure. It was designed with a 25-year lifetime to help householders at high flood risk to adapt to risk-reflective pricing. That sets the challenge of how collectively as a country we can bring down the risk and impact of flooding over the next 23 years. The Government are spending record amounts on flood defences, with a £2.5 billion six-year capital floods programme, which will provide better protection for at least 300,000 homes. My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) will be aware of some of the protections, and I know that he is pressing for more for his constituents.

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

There is a growing understanding that, regardless of our significant investment in flood defences, a residual risk of flooding remains. Flood defences are not always appropriate, and where they are we have seen that they can be overtopped in extreme events, as happened a year ago. We need to work across the whole catchment area to slow the flow of water through natural flood management and to prepare for any flooding that does occur. As well as ensuring we have a first-class emergency response to flood events, there is much we can do to adapt our homes and businesses to become more resilient.

Only last week, I visited Warrington and saw at first hand a new flood defence scheme at Victoria park where work is still in progress. Back in 2013 and within two weeks of the first phase being built, the scheme prevented 200 properties from being flooded. That was fantastic for the residents, but reminds me of the need to help people to understand the residual flood risk that inevitably remains. It is important to take measures to try to stop water entering a property and to speed recovery. Returning home is increasingly important and relatively simple steps can make a big difference—for example, flood resistant air-bricks; raising sockets; and using tiles instead of carpet. Property-level resilience can play a significant role in making people and their property less vulnerable to the physical and mental impacts of flooding.

A few months ago, we published the Bonfield property flood resilience action plan in collaboration with the commercial sector. It explores how collectively business and Government can best enable and encourage better uptake of such measures for properties, including businesses, at high flood risk.

Turning to leaseholds, particularly long leaseholds, I have commissioned my officials to look at the nature and extent of the problems that my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle described, as we need to look at them in more detail. He will be aware of the wider issue of small leasehold property, to which he referred. The insurance industry regularly informs us that for, the most part, affordable commercial insurance and contents insurance for individual leaseholders is available through Flood Re, but there are examples of individuals and leasehold properties with more than three residential units struggling to access affordable business insurance. Likewise, there are examples of residential buy-to-let properties not being covered and owners finding it difficult to obtain insurance.

Evidence is building and the challenge is not easy. Much consideration was given during the creation of Flood Re to whether to include leasehold properties. From a practical perspective, insurers determine whether an individual property is at high flood risk on a household-by-household basis and can allocate the cost using a simple domestic insurance model. For leasehold properties, buildings insurance will often cover numerous dwellings, which may well have different levels of flood risk. It would be difficult to establish a consistently fair approach to how lessees should cover that risk.

There are also considerations of principle. With Flood Re, when the insurer has a direct relationship with the homeowner, the competitive market gives us confidence that the benefits provided by the scheme will reach the

households for which it is intended. It is not clear that a similar scheme for leasehold properties would achieve this.

I have been saying for some time that there is good news. I am very pleased that yesterday the British Insurance Brokers Association announced the launch of a new commercial product designed to help small businesses at high flood risk to access affordable insurance. The scheme will also be open to leasehold properties. It will no doubt help some, and I hope it will help the vast majority of those who are struggling. On tenement housing in Scotland I was not aware of the difference in application, and I will certainly ask my officials to add to that. Should there prove to be a need for additional action, I remain open to exploring what can and should be done.

I have great sympathy with what my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) said and I am happy to explore it further. There is a similar challenge, in that that is not quite as straightforward as individuals' domestic dwellings, but let us look at it and see.

Flood Re is not a panacea. There is no evidence of a systemic problem, but I recognise that there is a real problem for the individuals, businesses and communities involved. I am particularly concerned about smaller businesses that cannot easily move premises. I hope that using granular postcode data and recognising the benefit of property level resilience measures, the new products from insurers—as of next week, I believe—will enable more small businesses to obtain affordable insurance.

In parallel, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is working to understand the nature and extent of the problem. I thank the hon. Members who have shared examples with me and encourage businesses to work with us to help the Government to have a more comprehensive picture of the challenges that they face. Where there is a clear need for further action, the solutions are varied. Extending Flood Re to cover businesses is not possible, because the scheme is predicated on a domestic rather than commercial insurance model. Equally significant is the question of who pays to subsidise profit-making businesses, which are often more able to move premises than households.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle asked about Flood Re and the ongoing concern. Flood Re will be reviewed every five years. It needs to be given time to work, but there are separate policy questions that we need to look at with regard to scope. Flood Re will continue to interpret legislation and I assure hon. Members that we are in regular contact on it.

People should be aware that Flood Re does not extend to properties built during or after 2009. Planning law means that properties built in a high flood-risk area should already be resilient to flooding. Extending Flood Re to cover these properties would only incentivise unsuitable development. That is why we have not done that.

Mr Andrew Smith: Will the Minister, as part of her ongoing review, review the level of premiums that are charged under the British Insurance Brokers Association scheme in relation both to leasehold properties and to those of small businesses? The danger of a finely targeted, granular approach is that some may find the risk premium unaffordable.

Dr Coffey: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the principle of using taxation to support citizens is well established. The principle of forcing businesses to subsidise one another is not established and would be a significant difference.

The product is coming out formally next week and we need to see how it works. There are other models that will be encouraged and this might help the community centre to which my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle referred to think about adding extra insurance against the excess, if that excess is deemed to be too high to manage without additional protection.

I urge hon. Members to make sure that their constituents are aware of the Flood Re scheme and the benefits it can bring. I encourage hon. Members to make sure their constituents are flood aware and prepared for flood events. That could be signing up to the flood alert service and making properties more resilient. Touch wood, Mr Hollobone, I hope that we do not have an incident similar to Storm Desmond last year. However, we are not relying just on touching wood. I praise the Environment Agency for all its work in the last year, working alongside councils to make sure we are better prepared for this winter. I assure the House that this Government are committed to continuing to protect hundreds of thousands more homes in the coming years.

Question put and agreed to.

Road Traffic Accident Prevention

4.30 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Will all those who are inexplicably not staying for the next debate please leave quickly and quietly, because we now have an hour-long debate on the very important subject of road traffic accident prevention?

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered road traffic accident prevention.

It is a pleasure to introduce my debate under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. We are long-term colleagues and often compete for Mr Speaker's eye, but always on a very good and familiar basis, so I am looking forward to this debate.

Some hon. Members will know that road traffic accident prevention is a long-term interest of mine. As a very young man, a very long time ago, I came into the House after having seen the deaths of two young people who were thrown from their car and who died by the side of the road. That image never left me or my imagination—it haunted me—and when I got into the House, we had tried 13 times to introduce compulsory seatbelts, and 13 times that had been defeated. On an all-party basis, a number of us organised and formed a group to campaign. As you might know, Mr Hollobone, the 14th time, the night before a royal wedding, we kept our troops here on an amendment tabled by Lord Nugent of Guildford, a Conservative peer. It bounced back to the House of Commons. We kept our troops here and the others did not. Remember that in those days Mrs Thatcher, Michael Foot and both Chief Whips were against seatbelts. We held our nerve, kept our troops here and, by a majority of 72, seatbelt legislation was introduced. How many lives have we saved since then? It was a really good fight and victory.

These days, we could all be in a nice cosy bubble, thinking, "Isn't it wonderful? The UK, the British, are leading on road safety. We are an exemplar to the rest of the world. We sometimes vie a little bit with Sweden, but we are pretty darn good." Well, I have to tell you, Mr Hollobone, that 1,730 people died on British roads last year. For 1,730 families, there was a knock on the door to tell them that their loved one was dead. And these are preventable accidents. This is not like a disease; it is not like getting something ghastly and wasting away. This is something that happens for all sorts of reasons, but it means that those families are devastated. If I may say a little on the financial side, it of course costs the country a great deal. Every road death costs an enormous amount of money, and that is in addition to the human tragedy.

When we organised the seatbelt legislation, a group of MPs set up something called the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety. Today, most people call it PACTS, and it has become one of the most influential transport safety groups in the world. We are an exemplar to many Parliaments throughout the world, and we spend a lot of time persuading other Parliaments to follow our path.

Also, after 10 years, we got together with a group of the Dutch, Germans, Belgians and Swedes to form the European Transport Safety Council, which has become

[Mr Barry Sheerman]

the most influential group across Europe. We are very proud of that. Sometime afterwards, I had the honour of being asked to form, with the backing of the World Bank, the Global Road Safety Partnership, which operated and still operates right across the world, trying to save—this is a desperate number—the 1.3 million people in the world who die every year on the roads. Yes, some countries have much less regulation than we do. In India and China particularly, the situation is tragic, as it is in South Africa. There are dreadful accidents, deaths and serious injuries in other countries, but today I want to concentrate on the UK.

As I have said, 1,730 people died on our roads last year. I think that we are becoming a little cosy and complacent about that number of deaths. I am not saying that we are becoming too complacent. I am looking at the Minister, who is a good friend of mine. He is a very good Minister, but I will nudge him today in a kindly way. Five people are killed every day in our country. That is five families destroyed. Ahead of today's debate, I was inundated with emails and tweets, many of which were from bereaved families who had been torn apart by the actions of drunk, drugged or distracted drivers. That is the truth of the matter: the deaths are preventable.

All the time in this Parliament we are trying to get more Members engaged in reducing the casualties on their patch, bringing the figures down home. Every year, PACTS issues to every Member of Parliament—I hope that everyone can pick this up online or through PACTS—a dashboard showing what happens in their constituency, but it does not only show that: it shows how many deaths and how many serious accidents there have been, and we rate the constituency against other similar constituencies. That is a very useful tool. Someone cannot say, “I happen to live in a very dense urban area and the roads are terrible,” or “I live near a motorway.” All that is accounted for, so if someone's constituency is well above the norm in this regard, they as the Member of Parliament should be out there campaigning with a coalition or partnership.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): On the subject of the dashboard and distracted drivers, has PACTS come to a view on the modern phenomenon of new cars having significant IT and entertainment systems—something a bit like an iPad—incorporated in the dashboard and what effect that innovation has had on the number of accidents?

Mr Sheerman: That is a brilliant intervention, because it is in the later part of my speech! It is true that the very sophisticated dashboard that some models of car now have, showing drivers not only how to park—self-parking—but all the hazards and all the different information that they can log into, is becoming an area of great concern, but the reason I have kept to a good, true and relatively sane path in transport safety is that I was converted by some of the best scientists in our universities and in the Transport Research Laboratory and other places to always remember: do not go for hearts and flowers; go for good science, good evidence, and what works in countries such as ours. I have always stuck to that, and it has guided me and my colleagues very well.

Understandably, there is an uprising of feeling when something dreadful happens, and recently we have seen some dreadful things—families being killed, mothers with children being killed, by distracted drivers. We know about that, but we have to bear it in mind that, overall, good science, good evidence, should be the watchword. I look at my friend the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry)—he is a friend on these matters particularly—and I say, “Let's do the science. Let's do the evaluation of the level of distraction caused by every innovation, including the new design of car interiors.” I think that that should be ongoing. I have not seen the results of research on that, but I know that it is a worrying area.

In Europe, 26,300 people died last year, and there was a slightly rising curve in our own country. I want now to mention the Twitter involvement in this debate. May I commend it, Mr Hollobone? What a wonderful innovation it is that now, when there is to be a Westminster Hall debate, we can involve the broader public by asking what they think about the debate we are to have on the following day. We had one for an hour yesterday. There was a lot of involvement and there were excellent ideas.

One of the top concerns for people was driver education. There is no doubt that young people are very vulnerable in the early years after they first learn to drive, when there are many accidents. There is evidence of young people not driving in the proper way and of that leading to pretty horrific casualties—the deaths and serious injuries of young people in their teens and early twenties.

My wife knows me extremely well—we have been married a very long time and have four children and 10 grandchildren; I do not know if that is a record among those in the Chamber, but I would not mind putting a bet on it—and always thought I had something of the Italian in my driving style, but I once amazed her by passing the test for the advanced driving certificate. I took the advanced drivers' course possibly because I thought I was not a very good driver. A lot of evidence shows that good driving behaviour comes from good learning and good education early in a young person's career. I talked to a chief constable in one of the coastal towns in which we used to have party conferences three or four years ago, and he said, “I am not so worried these days about young people having accidents; I am worried about elderly people who share with younger children a diminishing ability to judge distance and speed, and who drive very badly as they get older. There is no one in the family with the guts to say, ‘Mum, Dad—it's time you stopped driving.’” We therefore need good training at the early age and at the later age, and to ensure that the Government do all that they can so that young people and older people are well educated on this life-and-death issue.

More than 200 tweets yesterday wanted distractions to be given a top priority. One of the largest distractions that people are talking about these days is mobile phones, and I absolutely agree that there should be that level of public interest. Yesterday there was the interest in the issue of drink and drugs, and we have had steady improvement. The Minister knows that I am concerned that there is still not an effective roadside test for alcohol, so that people do not have to take up so much police time by going to the police station for testing,

and so on. We have roadside testing for drugs but not for alcohol at the moment. However, there is no doubt that the real priority for the public is the distraction caused by mobile phones.

We see high-profile cases in which people who are distracted by their mobile phones cause dreadful accidents. I do not want to go into all the recent tragic cases, but many in this Chamber will know of the family killed by the lorry driver who was scrolling through songs on his phone. That was a terrible thing to have happened, and I can see why anyone who loses their lovely family, or members of their family, wants the strongest possible sentence available for that sort of behaviour. I have a lot of respect for that view, although it does sometimes lead people to look for a silver-bullet solution for the problems that we face. There is no silver bullet, but there is the evaluation of all accidents backed up by good evidence. Although I have sympathy with the idea of having stiff penalties for people who use their mobile phones or who drink or take drugs and drive, it will not save all those lives. It is more complicated than that.

There is also less public knowledge about the risk of drivers with poor eyesight. Road crashes due to poor driver vision are estimated to cause 2,900 casualties in the UK every year. I am not advertising Vision Express—my glasses are not from Vision Express, by the way—but its interesting survey found that 94% of people are unaware that vision can deteriorate by up to 40% before the driver starts to notice. Leaving drivers to self-report poor eyesight seems to Vision Express—I share this view—not to be a good idea. I certainly noticed as I got older that my vision, especially at dusk and when driving at night, was not as good as it should be. I recommend that we have tighter control on tests of good vision for drivers, certainly as they get older.

Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con): I want to intervene before the hon. Gentleman gives my entire speech. Does he agree that too few people really understand about the loss of eyesight and the fact that they lose their eyesight in the way that they do? We need to do more as a nation to publicise it and get people to recognise it.

Mr Sheerman: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. I will not detain the Chamber for long with the rest of my speech, but I add that the UK is one of only five EU countries that does not legally require drivers to be tested by a medical or optical professional as part of their driving test, so she is absolutely right.

Another issue that is becoming increasingly evident—with this I will upset the Minister—is the lack of police officers making sure that our roads are safe. The number of road traffic officers is down 23% from 2010. I raised this issue on Monday in Home Office questions, which you were there for, Mr Hollobone. The night before, I was coming back from Cambridge, with my wife driving, and on the M11 an enormous rescue van—a lorry—with another lorry on top was proceeding at over 65 mph where there was a 50 mph limit. The size and weight of that in an accident would have killed a lot of people. Road traffic technology is able to detect such drivers. There are those who drive—I said “like maniacs”, but perhaps that was a bit harsh—in a very dangerous fashion with no fear that there will be a flashing blue light and that they will be pulled over, and I have to say there is a relationship between proper policing on the

roads and good detection. I go to many conferences on transport safety and have spoken at a number of big conferences this summer. I see wonderful technology there, but that will not replace the police—in cars and on motorbikes—on our roads. That point will probably upset the Minister most; he and I usually get on quite well.

The Government have said that they are serious about making our roads safer, but I will ask the Minister about another thing that will upset him—that is, targets. For some reason, both the coalition and the present Governments believed that targets are not the sort of thing that they should have. They do not like them, and there is a kind of ideological resistance to them. However, all the research across the world—he knows I believe in research—shows that if we do not have targets for road casualty reduction, we do not get the reduction. We have to have a road casualty reduction programme. That is a very important point. I do not know of any leading expert, in or out of the Government, who honestly disagrees with that view. We need targets in order to get a reduction.

I was taken by the people who got involved with us on Twitter yesterday and said that we need to have that wonderful, but perhaps unrealistic, target of zero casualties and zero deaths on our roads. That is visionary and optimistic, but we know that targets work. We all know that we do not get casualty reduction in any country, or any part of a country, without a partnership and a team that have passion and leadership and care about this useless waste of life.

Mr Hollobone, you know that I am passionate about this issue. I know that not enough of our colleagues in the House of Commons are still interested enough in transport safety. It is a bit unfashionable and not sexy enough for some, but it is vital to the people that we represent.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I thought that my hon. Friend might be perorating towards a conclusion. [*Interruption.*] No, there is much more to come. I commend him for his passion and all his work over the years on this important subject. Will he say something about cyclists' safety in particular? I am sure that a number of the tweets he mentioned would have referred to that. Does he agree that we all have an obligation, whether as cyclists or as motorists, to promote cycling safety? He referred to the Netherlands: do we not have a lot to learn from the success of its dedicated provision for cyclists in the interests of safety?

Mr Sheerman: My right hon. Friend makes a very fair point. I made a decision that I would not cover everything in this discussion but, yes, increasingly there are vulnerable road users including cyclists and pedestrians, both children and adults. There is also an increasing concern—I am sure the Minister is listening—about the number of really horrid, terrible, tragic accidents involving heavy goods vehicles. All the conferences and presentations I saw this summer mentioned the increasing relationship between horrible accidents in places such as London and HGVs. But, to be honest, I have to say—I am not a London MP, but a Yorkshire one—there has actually been more improvement in road safety standards and casualty reduction in London than in many places outside. We can get carried away by the passion and enthusiasm, but my message is that these are avoidable

[*Mr Sheerman*]

deaths, and we should use good science, good evidence and practical work done in other places to learn and improve.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The debate finishes at no later than 5.30 pm. The guideline speech limits for the three Front Benchers are five minutes for the Scottish National party, five minutes for Her Majesty's Opposition and 10 minutes for the Minister. That means that I need to call the Front Benchers no later than seven minutes past 5. It is now nine minutes to 5, which means that we basically have 15 minutes, and there are four people who want to speak. If hon. Members limit themselves voluntarily to four minutes, I will not have to impose a time limit. If you go over four minutes, somebody is not going to be able to speak. Rebecca Harris will show us how she can make all the points she wants to within four minutes.

4.51 pm

Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con): Thank you very much for calling me in this important debate, Mr Hollobone. As the Minister is well aware, I have been campaigning for a long time to raise awareness of the issue of drivers being medically fit to drive, particularly focusing on drivers having regular eye tests to prevent unnecessary casualties on our roads. I have been doing so ever since I met one of my constituents, Rev. Brenda Gutberlet, who told me the tragic story of her niece, Natalie, who, at the age of 28 and using a pedestrian crossing properly, was knocked down by a driver who knew he was unfit to drive because his eyes were too poor. He killed Natalie and she died on Valentine's day 2006. Her death was entirely preventable and the family have been campaigning tirelessly ever since to try to make improvements.

There have been improvements—in particular, the introduction in 2013 of Cassie's law, giving the police the power immediately to ban from driving anyone who fails a roadside test. The law was particularly welcome and I have seen it in action myself. I went out with my road safety reduction partnership in Essex, led by the superb Adam Pipe. I was in a car with a road safety traffic officer who pulled over a gentleman driving at 20 mph on a dual carriageway. When tested at the roadside, he failed the number plate test at five metres. He was a very nice elderly gentleman who did not realise how bad his eyesight was and reported to us that he had not had his eyes tested since he was in the Army. We were able to take his licence off him, get him home and refer him to get a prescription.

The nub of the matter is that there are people out there who do not appreciate how much their eyesight has deteriorated because the brain adjusts and they get used to it. They start saying, "Well, it's a bit blurry, but I can kind of see and I am only doing local journeys." We really need to get the message across to people who knowingly drive with poor eyesight and to those who, frankly, do not realise that they are driving with insufficient eyesight to be safely behind the wheel of a car.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) mentioned the statistics in recent research by Vision Express. It thinks that about 3,000 casualties a year are caused by poor eyesight, but it is hard to know because

they are not all recorded and it is not always obvious that they were due to poor eyesight, so there could be many more. We need statistics, but we also need to ensure that drivers understand their responsibility, particularly when they get to about 40 and their sight problems start to fall off the edge of a cliff. An awful lot of people simply have not had their eyes tested since they took their driving test, which was, on average, 15 or so years ago, and for many a great deal longer.

To be honest, I am not calling for compulsory sight testing. I do not think we necessarily need to legislate, but we could do things such as using electronic motorway displays to remind people of the need to take tests, as Brake and Vision Express have been calling for. They would like to see gantry signs saying, "Eye tests save lives." Perhaps we could also do something like asking people, when they renew their licence, not just, "Are you fit to drive?"—that is easy to tick and say yes to—but, "Have you had an eye test within the last couple of years?" It is much harder for someone to prove that they have had an eye test.

We take our cars for an MOT every year to ensure they are roadworthy. Why should we not do the same thing for our eyes, which are equally important when it comes to driving? Many opticians offer free tests and many groups are eligible for them. Even if people are not eligible for a free test, the cost of an eye test is considerably less than the cost of a full tank of petrol. The cost of even the most expensive prescription is a fraction of what it costs for the privilege of staying on the road. I call for more awareness of the need for eye testing. I would very much like to ensure that it is a necessity for people's sight to be sufficient for them to be fit to be behind the wheel, and for driving with poor eyesight to be as socially unacceptable as drink and drug-driving is today.

4.55 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) on introducing this important subject and speaking so passionately about it more than 35 years down the road, for want of a pun.

It is amazing that the number of road accident fatalities today is roughly a quarter of the number in the 1920s and 1930s when there were far fewer cars on the road. That is testament to the improvements in vehicle design, road engineering and driver behaviour, including attitudes towards drink-driving and wearing seatbelts. I commend the hon. Member for Huddersfield for outlining the passionate campaign and the hard work that went into making seatbelts compulsory. It is amazing to think that that was resisted so much within Parliament as it is accepted as normal behaviour now.

It is welcome that the UK has the third lowest accident fatality rate among OECD member states, and there has been a recent decrease in the number of fatalities compared with 2014 but, as we have heard, 1,730 deaths still mean 1,730 families getting a tap at the door. To that end, I was happy to serve today on a Delegated Legislation Committee that agreed to double the penalty points for the use of mobile phones when driving, but I was a bit disappointed by the response from the Minister when I challenged him on the drink-driving limits over which the UK Government preside. He reverted to the

standard Tory argument of not targeting those who have a glass of wine on a Sunday. For me, as I have said, that is nonsense.

In the Scottish Parliament, Tory MSPs were particularly vexed about a wee granny having a gin and tonic, but it is a simple fact that alcohol impairs judgment and reaction time, and the UK Government are out of step with the rest of Europe. In Scotland, a lower drink-driving level has been introduced—50 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood—and there has been an 8% decrease in the number of people with drink-driving convictions. That is proof that it is further changing driver behaviour. Given that incremental changes make a difference to the number of road deaths, may I suggest that is one way we can go forward?

It will come as no surprise to Members that, as a Scottish MP, I think Scotland is leading the way on the reduction in deaths. If we look at the PACTS map and statistics, to which the hon. Member for Huddersfield referred, almost all constituencies in Scotland have low or very low indices. My constituency ranks 611 out of 650, which is very welcome—well within the top 10%. I was a local councillor before I became an MP, so I know full well the local investment by the council in junction redesigns, the roll-out of 20 mph zones and speed bumps. Another welcome change in behaviour that I have noticed is that people now actually request speed bumps, whereas there seemed to be a bit of resistance when they were first introduced.

The SNP has also invested massively in motorway upgrades and other infrastructure that helps to take people off the road, which is another way of reducing the risk of road accidents. The SNP Government have invested in rail infrastructure with the new borders railway and, as was touched on in an intervention, are investing heavily in segregation lanes for cyclists, which is to be welcomed. The SNP Government are spending £1 billion on public and sustainable transport, which is reflected in the record number of people who went to work by public or active transport in 2015. So much is being done, which is welcome. The UK Government have been undertaking similar schemes, but I urge the Minister to think again on drink-driving limits.

4.59 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) for his passionate speech and for all his work over the years, which is good to see.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate as a follow-up to national road safety week a couple of weeks ago. The debate is also timely, with the announcement of a consultation on sentencing for those who cause death or serious injury. Those are issues of vital concern to my constituents, because there is a worrying number of injuries each year in Portsmouth. The trend is downwards, but for one group in particular—cyclists—we have one of the worst records in the country. Portsmouth is a compact, flat city, and it should be a cyclist's dream, but our congested roads, poor driving and, it must be said, bad cycling habits make it a much more dangerous place to ride in than it should be. The latest reported figures show that Portsmouth has by far the worst cyclist casualty rate outside London at almost 90 per 100,000 of population. The rate for the south-east region is just 36 per 100,000 of population.

I hope the Government's progress on the cycling and walking strategy will continue, but it must be backed up by investment if my constituents are to feel safe on the streets. I am concerned that there may be some drift on the strategy as financial pressures change, and I look forward to hearing confirmation that cycling safety is still a Government priority.

I welcome the consultation on sentencing for dangerous and careless driving, because one of the biggest causes of public concern is that drivers can kill, wrecking the lives of victims and their families, but end up with sentences that feel like neither a punishment nor a deterrent. Although the number of deaths in accidents has fallen dramatically, we should recognise that that is largely down to the improved safety features built into modern vehicles and that driver behaviour has not necessarily improved at quite the same rate.

Far too often, we hear of people being killed or seriously injured by drivers distracted by mobile devices. Our always-online society can tempt drivers to fiddle with gadgets while they drive but, as we have seen recently, the consequences can be lethal. Although we have not recently had a fatality in Portsmouth because of such distractions, the risk is apparent to anyone standing on a busy road. It is not good enough for drivers to argue that they are stationary in a jam or in slow-moving traffic in a city centre. If they are not concentrating on what is happening around them, they are a danger to everyone.

The action that has been taken legally and socially against drink-driving has gradually driven down the incidence of such offences. In 1979, 1,600 people were killed in drink-driving accidents; by 2014, the figure had been reduced to 240. That is still 240 too many, but it is a good example of what can be done with determined enforcement and social pressure. We need to make it just as socially unacceptable to use a mobile phone while driving as it is to drink and drive.

In the long term, I would like us all to move to more sustainable modes of transport, because that is the best way to improve road safety. In modern cities, the use of diesel and petrol vehicles to get around is becoming unsustainable because of the hazards it imposes, the threat of pollution, the difficulty of parking and the gridlock caused by the sheer weight of traffic. Those are all particular threats in Portsmouth, a densely populated area with poor road access and public transport that is in serious need of investment—I am not shy about lobbying Ministers on that. In an urban environment, a change in travelling behaviour will get people from A to B quicker than sitting in a car.

Road safety is everyone's business and, as we have seen in our efforts to address the drink-drive menace, it is important that social pressure against bad habits is constant and backed up by Government action.

5.3 pm

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) on securing this hugely important debate.

There are 2.7 million horse riders in this country—I am occasionally one of them—and 1.3 million ride regularly on our roads. Back in 2010, the British Horse Society launched a website so that horse riders who regularly use the roads can record accidents. Since the website was launched just six years ago, there have been

[Jake Berry]

2,374 reported incidents involving horses coming into contact with cars on the road. Thirty-eight riders have been killed, and well over 200 horses have been killed by vehicles or euthanised at the roadside.

Riders coming into contact with other road users, particularly those driving cars, is an issue because there is no proper education system to teach learner drivers how to pass horses. The British Horse Society launched its “dead slow” campaign earlier this year, and it is about educating drivers so they know not to pass a horse, either with a rider or drawing a vehicle, at more than 15 miles an hour and to give at least one car’s width. In this debate on preventing road traffic accidents, I hope the Government will consider what they can do to educate learner drivers and other road users on the dangers of passing a horse.

Horses are flight animals, so when they panic, such as when a vehicle passes too close, their first reaction is to run away. They then often come into contact with such vehicles, doing a lot of damage to the vehicle, to the horse rider and to the horse. As we have heard, 200 horses and 38 riders have been lost. This issue was brought to my attention by a constituent, Joanne Heys, who fell off her horse in November 2015 and suffered severe injuries—the horse suffered injuries, too—on a stretch of road between Bolton and Blackburn. The road is a bit of a hotspot for horse riders because it links two of our main bridle paths. We have run a campaign in Tockholes to ensure that local road users in east Lancashire are aware of our huge network of bridleways, many of which intersect with main roads. Horse riders do not want to go on the roads—they want to be on bridleways—but they often come into contact with lorries, heavy goods vehicles and other road users. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity in his summation to say a bit more about what the Government can do to consider further protections and education for horse riders.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield said that this debate is no longer sexy. Well, those of us who remember that wonderful film “Notting Hill” will remember that the sexy Hugh Grant claimed to work for *Horse & Hound* as he interviewed the beautiful actress with whom he was trying to start a relationship, so I thought I would quote my own appearance in *Horse & Hound*, which may be regarded as sexy, but not as sexy as Hugh Grant. This is from 18 November, and I am sure copies are available in the Library:

“I want people to have horse safety in their mind when they get in their car in East Lancashire.”

And, for that matter, in every other part of our country.

5.7 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) on securing this important debate. My only regret is that we do not have more time to discuss these issues today—obviously that is no fault of anyone here. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the human tragedy and the fact that we must work towards no lives being lost—a zero target. No one would disagree with his comprehensive review of what needs to be undertaken.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) mentioned the importance of eye tests. When people go for an eye test, they get a subsequent reminder. Everyone should get involved so that they can keep their eyesight up to scratch for driving. The hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) spoke about how horses can go into flight and the additional damage that this can cause. These are all important issues, and we all agree that road safety should concern us all, regardless of party colour or of where we live, work and do our business.

The Scottish Government are committed to addressing the public health issue of road traffic accidents, and they go further than the UK Government on measures to curb drink-driving and to promote safe cycling and active transport. The SNP Scottish Government have taken a wide range of actions to reduce traffic accidents in Scotland, including cutting the blood alcohol limit. We welcome figures showing a decrease in road accident injuries in 2015 in Scotland. My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) mentioned that in December 2014 the Scottish Government cut the limit from 80 mg per 100 ml to 50 mg per 100 ml, which is lower than the rest of the UK. There has been a reduction in drink-driving compared with the previous year. England, Wales and Northern Ireland still have the 80 mg limit, which is the joint highest in Europe. We are disappointed that the UK Government are not following suit. I look forward to hearing how the Minister will proceed.

My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) mentioned mobile phone use at the wheel. The SNP has backed the UK Government in doubling fines for drivers who use mobiles while driving, and we call on the UK Government to take further action to prevent accidents. We welcome figures in Scotland showing a decrease in road accident injuries in 2015. More than £250 million is spent annually in Scotland on the maintenance and safe operation of the trunk road network. In 2014, road death figures were 31% lower than the 2004 to 2008 baseline, but, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield said, we know that one fatality is too many. We are pleased that casualties in Scotland have fallen to their lowest number since records began. Car casualties fell by 1.1%, pedestrian casualties by 3.4%, motorcycle casualties by 11.4% and cyclist casualties by 11.1%.

We are investing in public and sustainable transport, because we know that it can be effective in reducing road traffic accidents. As the hon. Member for Portsmouth South mentioned, it is an important subject. On 2 November 2016, the Scottish Transport Minister, Humza Yousaf, announced plans for a cycling taskforce whose main aim will be to drive forward ambitious cycling infrastructure, such as segregated cycle paths and Community Links Plus. By the end of this financial year, the Scottish Government will have spent more than £8.2 billion to improve safety on Scotland’s motorway and trunk road network, including the £3 billion upgrade of the notorious A9 in my constituency to dual carriageway status. Safety cameras, which have been deployed for the past couple of years, have reduced deaths and serious accidents dramatically from previous figures. There are lessons to be learned, and I hope that the Minister will take that into account.

Finally, on safety, many people are unaware that they are committing an offence by driving with expired MOT certificates. There is currently no automatic reminder for MOTs like the one for tax discs, for example. As a result, people drive vehicles that they may be unaware are unsafe, and they may also be committing a road traffic offence. The onus should always be on them, but I am pleased to see that an idea I put to the motor insurance industry has been picked up by Aviva insurance, which I am told will issue reminders about MOT expiry dates to its customers as of next year.

5.12 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) on securing this debate. I pay tribute to the several decades that he has committed to the campaign. While he was doing so in this place, I was on the outside looking after the families of those who had been bereaved and injured. We share that passion. This debate is particularly apposite given that we have just had road safety week.

As we have heard, the UK has a proud record of some of the safest roads in the world—I pay tribute to the work of RoadPeace, Brake and other charities committed to the cause—but of late, we have hit a standstill. Sadly, over the past three years, the number of deaths on our roads has increased; the Department for Transport estimates that there were 710,000 road casualties last year alone. The Government say that road safety is a top priority, but so far their legacy has been one of disappointment and frustration. In the last Parliament, they scrapped the road targets introduced by Labour, which successfully reduced by one third the number of those killed or seriously injured. Some argue that targets do not achieve anything, but I disagree; they focus minds and attention and hold the Government accountable.

Sadly, the Government are also failing on enforcement. A majority of police forces have recorded year-on-year falls in full-time road policing officers. There were 1,437 fewer designated officers outside London in 2015 than there were in 2010. I am sure that the Minister will take heed of this year's road safety week campaign, which centred on the important six-point pledge that everyone here will have signed, as I did. The pledge committed both drivers and other road users to the importance of slower, sober, secure, silent, sharp and sustainable driving. We need the Government to act in all those areas.

Serious questions remain about drink and drug driving. Since 2010, progress has ground to a halt, with no reduction in the number of road traffic collisions involving drink-driving. Each year, it causes around 240 deaths. Over half of those are not the drunk drivers but passengers or other road users in the wrong place at the wrong time. We welcome the Christmas advertising campaign, but what else is being done? What discussions has the Minister had with police and crime commissioners about existing limits and enforcement?

Alan Brown: What is the hon. Gentleman's position on the call to reduce the drink-driving limit?

Andy McDonald: We take seriously the success in Scotland, and we want that evidence base to inform us. That is exactly the right direction to be going in, but let

us see the evidence rolled out. I am sure that the Minister will wish to comment on that as well. Sadly, the Government seem oblivious to the impact of their substantial cuts to road police numbers. It is worrying that a majority of forces have recorded year-on-year falls in the number of full-time road policing officers.

Many of us will have seen the consequences of mobile phone use by drivers, such as the terrible crash that killed Tracy Houghton and her children. Department for Transport figures show that in 2015, drivers impaired or distracted by their phones were a contributory factor in 440 road accidents in Britain. Although we welcome this morning's statutory instrument increasing the number of points on a driving licence for mobile phone use, once again it is not possible to police the issue if there are no police present to enforce the law. We cannot leave that work to tabloid newspaper photographers whose campaigning we have seen in recent weeks. The Government must take the initiative and invest in roadside policing, not cut it, so that accidents can be prevented and lives saved.

When accidents do occur on our roads, it is crucial that the vehicles involved have been designed to be as safe as possible. Given that 90% of road accidents are caused by human error, the introduction of autonomous vehicles on our roads in the not-too-distant future could be an opportunity to transform road safety.

In closing, I note that the Government stated in their manifesto that they would reduce the number of cyclists and other road users killed on our roads every year. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to the genuine concerns about police numbers, enforcement, penalties and awareness. Without action, it is projected that a third of a million people will be killed or seriously injured on the roads in Britain over the two decades ending in 2030.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): If the Minister can bring his remarks to a conclusion no later than 5.27 pm, he will give time for Mr Sheerman to respond.

5.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): I will have to go at quite some pace to respond to all the points made. I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), whose long and distinguished record of campaigning on this issue speaks for itself. It is impressive. This issue is a priority for all of us here; it is certainly a priority for me and the Government. We have a good record by international standards, but that does not mean that we should not work harder to go further. He mentioned the devastation that a knock on the door can bring to a family, as it was brought to 1,770 families last year. I never forget that behind each statistic is a shattered family. It spurs me on, as I am sure it spurs on all of us.

To make improvements, we need to draw on the best evidence and analysis available so that our efforts can be targeted where we can make the biggest impact in reducing road deaths and injuries. I welcome and strongly support the excellent work being done by Highways England, which is leading the way in adopting and championing a safe systems approach. It is absolutely essential that our strategic road network is as safe as possible, given that it carries such an astonishing amount

[*Andrew Jones*]

of traffic. Equally important is improving safety standards for the rest of our road network. In the last few days we have published an assessment of local authorities' most improved roads, and I congratulate all those who have made the biggest improvements.

Since I took responsibility for the road safety brief last May, one statistic has struck me vividly: 60% of road deaths take place on country roads. That proportion rises to 80% for young drivers, so it is crucial that we do more to improve the safety of our country roads. In October, we relaunched the THINK! country roads campaign, which is aimed at getting motorists, particularly younger males, to slow down, be more vigilant and brake before reaching bends rather than at them. Last year's campaign was successful in changing behaviour and raising awareness of the unexpected hazards that can be found in rural areas.

I am pleased to be supporting the Road Safety Foundation and the Royal Automobile Club Foundation in their forthcoming work with local authorities to identify safety problems through the star rating approach, and to identify cost-effective solutions for the most high-risk roads. I hope that work can provide a model for wider adoption by local authorities.

I want to go further in investigating what more my Department can do to offer tangible support to those areas with the most dangerous roads. In the autumn statement on 23 November, more investment in roads was announced, including £1.3 billion to help to support infrastructure projects, with £1.1 billion for the local road network and £220 million for the strategic road network. Of that £1.1 billion for the local network, £175 million will be spent on upgrading the 50 highest-risk local roads. That targeted intervention will go on the engineering side. We know that there is human error, but if we can use the engineering of a road network to ensure that an accident or crash is less significant, that will be a great bit of progress.

We published our road safety statement in December last year, and I would like to update the House on the hard work we are doing to carry out its priorities. Drug-driving has been a growing problem. We have provided £1 million to police forces in England and Wales to support drug-driving enforcement. As a result, nearly 5,000 drug-drivers were convicted in the first eight months of this year, compared with just 879 in the whole of 2014. In March, we launched a THINK! campaign to educate people on the dangers of drug-driving and to send a clear message that it is unacceptable and that the consequences of doing it are very serious. Figures show that a fifth of convicted drug-drivers have previously been banned for drink-driving, so just last month I announced the launch of a new pilot impairment course, with drug-driving education being added to the existing drink-drive offenders courses in England and Wales. Around 1,000 drink-drive offenders will participate in the pilot courses and we will consult on the results next year.

Lots of colleagues mentioned mobile phones. We have consulted on increasing the penalties for those who drive while using a handheld mobile phone. In line with the view of the majority of the more than 4,000 people who responded to the consultation, we are going further than the original proposals. Only this morning an order

was approved for higher penalties for people using their mobile phones while driving, whether they are texting, calling or using an app. In future, motorists will receive a fixed penalty notice of six penalty points plus a £200 fine. That is a significant change that will make a difference. Once Parliament has approved the order—it has to go to the upper House next—we expect the new regime to take effect on 1 March next year.

Handheld mobile phone use was a contributory factor in 22 fatal crashes in 2015, each one of which was a needless tragedy. We must bring that number down. One of the most challenging parts of my role is meeting some of the devastated families whose loved one has been killed by someone using a mobile phone while driving. Such families are obviously incredibly upset and angry—there is a sense of frustration, which leads to anger that they have lost a loved one because of something that could have been prevented so easily. Drivers of large goods vehicles and passenger service vehicles who commit the offence will continue to face the traffic commissioners, who regulate their conduct and have the power to review and suspend their vocational licence entitlement to drive such vehicles. Given the damage that can be done, that is proportionate; we are all aware of cases that have made the news.

When the law changes, we will be supporting it with a THINK! campaign to leave people in no doubt at all of the seriousness of the issue. It is appropriate to view this as going in the same social direction as we have managed to go in with drink-driving. We want it to be as socially unacceptable to use a mobile phone while driving as it is to drink and drive.

Several colleagues have mentioned some of the things we can do to ensure that new drivers can take the freedoms of the road equipped with the skills and knowledge to be safe. We are piloting a new driving test to reflect today's driving conditions. It will include longer periods of independent driving, more realistic manoeuvres and a requirement for the driver to follow directions from a sat-nav. It is basically about improving the driver's road awareness when they get the freedom ticket that a driving licence can provide.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) asked whether cycling safety was still a priority. Yes, it is. The Bikeability scheme is secure, and we will be training 1 million children through it. My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) asked about horse awareness. We have supported the British Horse Society's campaign and look forward to working with it more in future because I do recognise the problem. I held a meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) and her constituent on the issue she raised, as a result of which the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency amended the licence renewal form to encourage older drivers to get their eyesight checked.

There are currently no plans to change the drink-drive limit. The key priority for us is to target those who are causing drink-driving problems, and they are not in the 50 mg to 80 mg per 100 ml category; they are in the 140 mg to 150 mg category, because that is the average blood alcohol content of people arrested for drink-driving. It is no good targeting a small group but missing the elephant in the room, which is what would happen if the legislation was changed. We have no reason to

introduce targets; I do not need a target to tell me that this issue is a priority and to feel spurred on to take more action.

We want to make our roads as safe as we can. We are building on the good work of campaigners throughout the country over many years and on the work delivered by Governments of all colours. We have a good record and plans to improve on that further. It is through targeted interventions in the most difficult areas that we will make the progress we need.

5.27 pm

Mr Sheerman: Thank you so much, Mr Hollobone, for letting me sum up the debate. I shall say only a few things. I have the greatest respect for the Minister and will continue to nudge him on targets, because the Scots have it right on alcohol. There is a worrying upward trend in women drink-drivers that we should all be aware of.

I want to finish with a bit more passion. The research into transport safety has declined over the years. Internationally, university research is not as strong as it used to be, so we have to be careful about the quality of research available worldwide. Local councils also now have much less money for road safety matters. There are some really great individuals, such as Michael Woodford, who are very interested in road safety, as is the UN now.

There is increasing interest in the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association helping us to educate other parliamentarians about what can be achieved in places like China and India. We should be making the CPA and IPU into something useful. They should not be about just going there and shaking hands and smiling at people—I have been on those trips. Let us make them more positive. We should be corresponding with those parliamentarians and saying, “This is what we’ve done in the UK. Can we help you to do something similar?”

The fact is that if someone does not have a passion for this rather unusual subject, they should not be in Parliament, because it is about our constituents and families. Let us get more people involved in pacts and in the campaign, and let us make sure that Britain is a safer place to ride on horses, on bicycles, on motorcycles and in cars. Most of all, let us make sure it is safer for families enjoying themselves and for those getting to work.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered road traffic accident prevention.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 6 December 2016

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Post-competitiveness Council

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson): The Competitiveness Council met recently in Brussels. Baroness Neville-Rolfe represented the UK at the Council on 28 November (internal market) and I represented the UK on 29 November (research).

Day One

The Council on day one had a full agenda with key decisions concluded on geo-blocking, the single market strategy and the unified patent court.

The internal market day of the Council began with the approval of legislative and non-legislative A items. On the approval of the EU annual budget the UK abstained.

The first agenda item was a discussion on geo-blocking introduced by Commission Vice-President Andrus Ansip. Following a discussion, member states, including the UK, accepted the text of the proposed regulation and the Council agreed a general approach.

The next item was a debate on the single market strategy and start-up initiative introduced by the Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs Elzbieta Bienkowska. The UK intervened to strongly support the single market strategy and welcomed, alongside a number of member states, an Irish-sponsored like-minded letter calling for greater ambition on services—which we had also signed. A number of member states welcomed the Commission's work on start-up and scale-up, highlighting in particular problems around access to finance.

In a change to the order of proceedings the Council then took two further items before lunch. Firstly, Commissioner Bienkowska presented the annual report on the work of the SME envoy network. She reported the work had been particularly useful in preparing for the Commission's start-up and scale-up initiative published the previous week. The Council took note of the report.

The presidency then highlighted the outcome of a conference on the collaborative economy following the debate on the collaborative economy at the previous Competitiveness Council in September. Commissioner Bienkowska said the Commission was now considering various issues where national law might conflict with its recent guidance and might issue a series of pilot letters in the near future.

Over lunch, Ministers were joined by the President of the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA), Dieter Zetsche. Commissioners Bienkowska and Oettinger led a wide-ranging discussion on the future of the automotive industry. The UK highlighted the work being undertaken in the UK by the centre for connected and autonomous vehicles, and outlined the planned investment of £100 million which was announced by the Chancellor in the autumn statement.

The next agenda item concerned a discussion of the significance of industrial policy in the Commission's work programme in 2017. Several member states called

on the Commission to demonstrate support for European industry by producing a communication on an EU industrial strategy in 2017. The UK highlighted the importance of delivering the actions in the single market and digital single market strategies, and set out the approach being taken to deliver the UK's own industrial strategy.

The Commission then introduced CPST check-up on skills. Member states largely agreed with the Commission on the challenges, in particular on digital skills.

The next item was a discussion on the unitary patent and unified patent court (UPC). The UK confirmed its intent to proceed with ratification, and anticipated this being completed according to the existing preparatory timetable. The UK was clear that this decision did not pre-empt our objectives in the forthcoming negotiations and is without prejudice to the UK's future position on the jurisdiction of the CJEU once we have left the EU. This news was welcomed by Commissioner Bienkowska and several member states, who all emphasised the importance of having the UK in the UPC and bringing the court into force as soon as possible in the first half of 2017.

The presidency then presented the state of play of the proposal to improve the type approval and market surveillance of motor vehicles. Commissioner Bienkowska said that further progress had not been made, despite the political commitments following the controversies around Volkswagen last year. The UK intervened to support the Commission and to push for a greater level of ambition from the Council.

The next item was a discussion on proposed regulation of consumer protection laws. The presidency highlighted the substantial work that had been undertaken on this file, and reiterated its aim to reach a negotiating mandate as soon as possible. The Commissioner for Justice Consumers and Gender equality Vera Jourová supported the presidency in seeking to reach a mandate. The UK intervened to stress that this was an important and complex file which needed to return to Competitiveness Council under the Maltese presidency for a political discussion.

The next item was a presentation of the Commission's notice on the biotechnological directive introduced by Commissioner Bienkowska. The notice aimed to clarify the relationship between patents and plant breeders' rights. The UK did not intervene.

Commissioner Oettinger opened a discussion of the Commission's proposals for reforming EU copyright laws. The Commissioner explained the need to provide a modernised copyright framework for the digital age, reflecting the changes to storage, distribution and consumption of content in recent years. The UK welcomes efforts to modernise the EU copyright framework and is consulting with interested stakeholders.

The Hungarian delegation then presented information on the competitiveness aspects of the European pillar of social rights. The Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility Marianne Thyssen noted that balanced economic growth was necessary for social progress. Some member states intervened to emphasise that the pillar should not be legally binding on member states.

The Council concluded with a presentation by the Maltese on priorities for their upcoming presidency. In relation to the Competitiveness Council, these priorities primarily concern the deepening of the single market and making progress on the digital single market.

Day Two

Day two began with a debate on the Commission's recently published space strategy for Europe. The Commission is aiming for this to be broad and inclusive, reaffirming Europe's place as a global space power. All member states welcomed the EU's strategy. It is a good fit to UK priorities for growing the space sector.

A number of space issues were raised in the discussion. The Ariane 6 programme was highlighted as important, with some member states reminding the Commission of the need for cost-effectiveness to avoid unreasonable cost increases. It was felt important that the EU-ESA relationship takes advantage of their respective competences. There was also a call to assist those member states who currently have limited engagement with the sector.

The UK intervened to welcome the space strategy, recognising that EU systems could be used for defence and security objectives, but they had to remain civil systems under civilian control. The UK also highlighted the opportunities to our commercial sectors, and that space weather and the security of space systems were risk areas that needed to be properly understood.

Council conclusions on early-stage researchers were adopted without amendment.

The last substantive agenda item was the Commission's report on the implementation of the strategy for international co-operation in research and innovation. The discussion highlighted examples of the benefits of international co-operation. The UK stressed three key points—the need for EU research funding to remain focused on excellence and open to the world; that the UK would continue to collaborate with the Commission on science diplomacy in countries where relations were strained; and third, called for the Commission to ensure that the rules were updated to address problems which had led to a reduction in third country participation—eg liability clauses. This message was echoed by several member states.

A number of member states were supportive of PRIMA, a €400 million programme that seeks to promote food security and water supply in the Mediterranean and is a priority for the incoming Maltese presidency. Bonus 2, a programme on marine research, was also raised as a positive example of potential multilateral collaboration over shared challenges.

For AOB items, the Commission discussed the launch of an open science policy platform, which will look at best practice, develop EU-wide guidelines for open science delivery and promote open science. This work may inform how the “open science” agenda is implemented in the FP9 programme—The successor to Horizon 2020. Many member states were supportive.

Next, the Commission gave an overview of their proposed €1 billion funding programme for quantum technologies. This was followed by an announcement that the “Accelerating Clean Energy” communication will be published on 1 December.

The presidency then gave a read out from a conference focused on the European bio-economy that took place in October in Bratislava.

Finally, the Commission welcomed the Portuguese delegation's presentation on developing an infrastructure to promote north-south Atlantic research collaboration.

The meeting concluded with a presentation from the upcoming Maltese presidency on its priorities in research—including the PRIMA initiative.

[HCWS321]

TREASURY

ECOFIN: 6 December 2016

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):

A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) will be held in Brussels on 6 December 2016. EU Finance Ministers will discuss the following items:

Early morning session

Ministers will be briefed on the outcomes of the 5 December meeting of the Eurogroup and the Commission will present an update on the current economic situation.

Investment plan for Europe

Ministers will discuss proposals for the investment plan for Europe and be asked to reach a general approach on the Commission's proposal to amend the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) legislation as part of the planned extension beyond its original 2015-18 lifetime. Ministers will also discuss draft Council conclusions on measures to tackle bottlenecks to investment identified under the third pillar of the investment plan for Europe.

Anti-tax avoidance directive 2

Ministers will be asked to agree a general approach to the EU Commission's proposals on the anti-tax avoidance directive (ATAD2).

Enhanced co-operation in the area of financial transaction tax

Ministers will receive an update on the proposal for a council directive implementing enhanced co-operation in the area of financial transaction tax.

Banking union: risk reduction measures

The Council presidency will present its new proposals, published on November 23, to revise the capital and resolution frameworks for banks and large investment firms, which will be followed by an exchange of views.

Anti-money laundering directive

The Council presidency will provide an update on the discussions for proposal for a directive on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing.

Current financial service legislative proposals

The Council presidency will provide an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

VAT digital package

The Commission will present on the digital single market VAT package.

Deepening the economic and monetary union: follow-up on the 5 Presidents' report

The Commission will provide information on the 5 Presidents' report.

Improving the predictability and transparency of the stability and growth pact

Minister will endorse draft Council conclusions on improving the predictability and transparency of the stability and growth pact.

Report on strategic issues in the area of customs by the high level group of customs directors general

Ministers will be informed about the outcome of the pilot meeting of the high level group of directors general for customs policy, taxation and customs co-operation on 25 October 2016.

European semester 2017

The Commission will present to Ministers on the publication of the 2017 annual growth survey (AGS) and alert mechanism report (AMR), followed by an exchange of views.

Implementation of the banking union

Ministers discussed the current state of play regarding implementation of banking union within the eurozone.

Fight against the financing of terrorism

The Commission will give a presentation on the fight against the financing of terrorism.

Capital markets union

The Commission will provide information on the capital markets union.

[HCWS325]

DEFENCE

Chemical Weapons Convention: Protective Programme

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mike Penning):

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State in the House of Lords (Earl Howe) has made the following written statement:

The UK's chemical protection programme is designed to protect against the use of chemical weapons. Such a programme is permitted by the chemical weapons convention, with which the United Kingdom is fully compliant. Under the terms of the convention, we are required to provide information annually to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. In accordance with the Government's commitment to openness, a copy of the summary that has been provided to the organisation outlining the UK's chemical protection programme in 2015 has been placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS323]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Security Situation: Northern Ireland

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (James Brokenshire): This is the 10th statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland and my first statement to Parliament as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It covers the threat from Northern Ireland-related terrorism, rather than from international terrorism, which Members will be aware is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, who updates the House separately.

In the six months since my predecessor's last statement, the same small number of dissident republican terrorist groupings have continued their campaign of violence. Their support remains limited, despite their attempts to seek legitimacy in a wider society which continues to reject their use of violence. Dissident republican terrorists reject the peace process and the progress and benefits which it has brought to Northern Ireland.

The terrorist threat level in Northern Ireland from Northern Ireland-related terrorism remains unchanged at severe (an attack is highly likely). Most people are not affected by this threat, but where terrorism, paramilitary-style attacks and community attacks endure, so too will our efforts to tackle them. There will be no let-up in our efforts to ensure that terrorism never succeeds.

In Northern Ireland, these terrorists have targeted the brave people who serve the community day in, day out, including the police, prison officers and the military. Dissident republicans are relatively small, disparate and factional groupings, but they are also determined and have lethal intent. The last statement to this House highlighted the tragic death of prison officer Adrian Ismay, who was attacked and killed by dissident republicans. These attacks often also have potential to injure members of the public who live and work alongside the intended victims. There have been three further attempted attacks on security personnel since then in which, thankfully, no one was seriously injured.

Our strategic response

PSNI and MI5 are unstinting in their work to counter the threat of violence. Numerous dissident republican attacks have been prevented, often through vital support provided by members of the community. Since my predecessor last reported, PSNI has recovered a large amount of terrorist matériel in Northern Ireland including firearms, high explosives, chemicals and a range of improvised explosive devices. Continued close working with security partners in Ireland has resulted in further significant disruptions and I pay tribute to An Garda Síochána who have diligently pursued terrorists in Ireland with impressive effect. We are all safer for their efforts and because of the strong cross-border working relationship that exists on all security matters.

Similar joint working between PSNI and police in Great Britain led to the arrest and charge of an individual, living in Great Britain, with offences connected to dissident republican terrorism. This enabled the recovery of a significant amount of terrorist matériel in England linked to Northern Ireland-related terrorism. Legal proceedings are now under way. So far in Northern Ireland this year, there have been 103 arrests, 17 individuals charged under the Terrorism Act and five recent convictions linked to terrorist activity. There have been four national security attacks in comparison to 16 attacks in 2015 and 40 in 2010. Although there has been a reduction in the overall number of national security incidents so far this year, terrorist attack planning continues with lethal intent and capability as the murder of Adrian Ismay underlines. Vigilance in the face of this continuing threat remains essential.

This Government's commitment to tackling Northern Ireland-related terrorism remains a high priority. This is supported through the provision of £160 million in this Parliament, of additional security funding to the Police Service of Northern Ireland to tackle the severe and

enduring threat. On top of this, cross-Government spending on counter-terrorism will increase by 30% in real terms over this Parliament.

Great Britain threat level

The threat level to Great Britain from Northern Ireland-related terrorism was raised in May to substantial (an attack is a strong possibility). Although dissident republicans are overwhelmingly focused on carrying out attacks in Northern Ireland, there remains a need to be alert, aware and vigilant.

Paramilitary activity

Paramilitary activity continues to undermine communities in Northern Ireland. Both republican and loyalist paramilitary organisations carry out violent criminal attacks against people in their own communities. So far this year there have been six paramilitary-related deaths, 17 casualties of paramilitary-style shootings and 57 casualties of paramilitary-style assaults. These acts are cowardly, unjustified and damage communities. It is this Government's clear view that paramilitary activity was never justified in the past and cannot be justified today.

Tackling paramilitary activity

This Government are strongly supporting efforts to tackle paramilitarism and organised crime in Northern Ireland. PSNI invests significant resources into both the prevention and investigation of paramilitary activity and we have pledged £25 million of funding through the Fresh Start agreement to help ensure that the relevant agencies are appropriately resourced to fulfil that commitment. Tackling paramilitary activity is an important step in terms of delivering Fresh Start agreement commitments and provides an opportunity to make a real difference to people's lives.

The Northern Ireland Executive published an action plan on tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime in July 2016. This follows the paramilitary panel's recommendations which provide for a strategic approach to the disbandment of paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland, including improving criminal justice outcomes in terrorist cases. The Government are working closely with the Northern Ireland Executive to promote progress towards ending paramilitary activity through a range of measures and securing faster and more effective outcomes in terrorism cases.

A joint agency taskforce, established under the Fresh Start agreement to enhance law enforcement co-operation, aimed at tackling organised crime and criminality including that linked to paramilitarism, brings together the expertise of law enforcement agencies involved in tackling organised crime gangs who seek to exploit the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. UK and Irish Governments' Ministers have recently held positive talks to discuss co-operation between the An Garda Síochána and the PSNI in relation to the progress made by the joint agency taskforce.

The Independent Reporting Commission will be charged with reporting on progress towards ending paramilitary activity, including on implementation of measures taken by the UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government. The treaty between the UK Government and the Irish Government, formally establishing the IRC, was signed on 13 September 2016. We aim to have the IRC established by early 2017.

Conclusion

The severe level of threat from violent dissident republicans remains. Good progress has been made but there are still those who wish to attack police, prison and military officers, and some of Northern Ireland's communities live under the constant threat of paramilitarism. Through the excellent work of PSNI, MI5 and security partners including An Garda Síochána, we will continue to bring those who would damage our society to justice, and protect our infrastructure and people from harm. I would like to thank them for their service to the people of Northern Ireland. There never has been, and there never will be any place for terrorism or paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland. We must all play our part in ensuring that Northern Ireland continues to flourish, free of any such pernicious activity.

[HCWS324]

TRANSPORT

Rail Update

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):

Britain's railways are crucial to our economic future, and we have seen significant growth in passenger numbers in the 20 years since privatisation. This growth brings challenges, and the impact of disruption can be immediate, significant and wide-ranging.

Our railways need to adapt and change in order to be able to cope with the growth that they have already experienced, and that which lies ahead. We are spending huge amounts trying to tackle the challenge—with new and longer trains and more capacity being introduced across the country. The Shaw report made a series of recommendations for change, including that Network Rail devolve responsibility to the route level. I support the principles of the Shaw report, and I support Network Rail's reform programme, but there is much more to do.

I intend to press ahead with a recommendation put to the Department five years ago by Sir Roy McNulty, when he reported to Philip Hammond on how to make the railways run better and more cost-effectively. I will do this initially at an operational level. In order for all those involved to be incentivised to deliver the best possible service for the passenger, I expect the new franchises—starting with South Eastern and East Midlands—to have integrated operating teams between train services and infrastructure. I will also be inviting Transport for London (TfL) to be more closely involved in developing the next South Eastern franchise, through seconding a TfL representative to the franchise specification team.

We will continue to develop the model for greater alignment of track and train as further franchises are renewed—including the option of joint ventures. In the meantime, my Department is also publishing an update to the rail franchising schedule which I am placing in the Libraries of both Houses.

I also want to bring new skills into the challenge of upgrading our railways. I will begin by looking at the reopening of the link from Oxford to Cambridge, to support a range of opportunities including housing, science, technology and innovation. I am going to establish East West Rail as a new and separate organisation, to accelerate the permissions needed to reopen the route,

and to secure private sector involvement to design, build and operate the route as an integrated organisation. This East West Rail organisation will be established early in the new year and chaired by the former Chief Executive of Chiltern Rail, Rob Brighouse.

Along with reform of the investment planning process to take better account of the needs of passengers and freight shippers, and extensive work across the industry

to improve skills and diversity, these reforms will set the railway on a firmer footing for the future. We can and we will make sure our rail network plays its part in making this a country that works for everyone. I will bring forward a new strategy for rail in due course which will provide greater detail on our plans.

[HCWS322]

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