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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 16 January 2017**

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# House of Commons

*Monday 16 January 2017*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## ROYAL ASSENT

**Mr Speaker:** I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Act 2017

Savings (Government Contributions) Act 2017.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Local Authorities: Business Rate Retention

1. **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What discussions he has had with local authorities on 100% business rate retention. [908140]

4. **Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): What progress he has made on enabling local authorities to retain 100% of business rates. [908143]

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** Councils have long campaigned for 100% business rate retention. Last week, we introduced the Local Government Finance Bill, which will establish the framework for the reform system. We will continue to work closely with local government during the passage of the legislation to shape the detail of the reforms.

**Steve Double:** I welcome the decision that Cornwall will be a pilot area for the retention of business rates. However, business rates in Cornwall are low, particularly when compared with urban areas. Will the Secretary of State reassure the people of Cornwall that Cornwall Council will not lose out on any funding as a result of the changes?

**Sajid Javid:** I am pleased that Cornwall will be one of the areas to pilot some elements of the new 100% business rate retention system. The pilot will help us to develop the system and make it work for all local authorities, including rural authorities. We have been clear in setting up the system that we will ensure

redistribution between councils, so that areas do not lose out just because they collect less in local business rates.

**Mr Baker:** As you know, Mr Speaker, Buckinghamshire is the entrepreneurial heart of England. What assurances can the Secretary of State give the people of Wycombe that the needs-based review and the new business rate system will result in rebalanced service funding to reflect better economic growth in entrepreneurial areas such as ours?

**Sajid Javid:** I have visited the area with my hon. Friend several times, and he is right to call it entrepreneurial. Under the new business rates retention system, the redistribution of resources will continue, with baselines set through the fair funding review, so that all authorities are treated fairly.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government was supportive in principle of the Government's proposals when it considered this issue, but it wants a lot of details. A major question of detail that needs resolution is this: future demand for adult social care is likely to grow far more quickly than the growth in business rates, so does he recognise that, in addition to retaining 100% of business rates, local authorities will need additional funding for adult social care? Will he agree to a review to consider that?

**Sajid Javid:** I am sure that the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee welcomes last month's announcement of additional resources for adult social care, but he quite rightly points to the need for longer-term reform—something that the Government are taking seriously.

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): The Government's plans to devolve attendance allowance as part of business rates retention has caused great distress to the over 1 million elderly people who rely on it to maintain independence and remain in their own homes. Will the Secretary of State reassure them today that the reform will not in any way strip them of that vital allowance?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady highlights the fact that councils will have an additional £12.5 billion a year when the 100% retention reform takes place. More responsibilities need to be pushed down to councils as a result. She asks what might make up those responsibilities. We have not yet made a decision, but we will do so in due course.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): In two-tier local government, it is the district council that allocates land for important commercial development. Will the Secretary of State ensure that districts are appropriately awarded for taking often difficult decisions?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend makes a good point about districts and their role in promoting business and development. We introduced the Local Government Finance Bill last week. I am sure that he will welcome the fact that councils outside London can also promote business development districts.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): The Government's autumn statement showed an increase in business rates income to the Treasury of £2.4 billion in 2017-18, but that remains unallocated. Will the Secretary of State protect local people from massive council tax increases by investing that money in social care and ending the precept, as suggested in October by Unison, the largest trade union supporting careworkers?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady will be fully aware that this country had a huge budget deficit back in 2010, thanks to the previous Labour Government. All areas of Government have had to make a contribution to dealing with that, including local government. I am sure that she will welcome the changes to adult social care that were announced last month.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Does the new system allow local authorities any discretion with regard to business rates levied on hospitals that, like Southampton general hospital, face a rather large increase in business rates following a revaluation?

**Sajid Javid:** I can tell my right hon. Friend that the new system does allow some discretion to councils, but I do not think it will apply to hospitals. It will apply to businesses, and only in one direction, but as he has made the point, I will take a further look.

**Mr Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), when the Government committed to letting local authorities keep 100% of business rate income, they promised, alongside that, commensurate further cuts to their funding from Whitehall. Given that the Local Government Association estimates that councils are already underfunded for their legal responsibilities, including social care, to the tune of almost £6 billion, when will the Secretary of State tell the House what further cuts in funding the people of England can expect their local services to suffer?

**Sajid Javid:** As we have publicly announced the numbers, the hon. Gentleman should be aware that 97% of councils have accepted the four-year budget deal and have come forward with efficiency offerings. In return, the Government have guaranteed the funding. That does not mask the fact that, of course, so many councils find it challenging to deal with their settlement, but many councils are able to deal with it. He should look at that carefully.

### Social Care: Funding

2. **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of funding for adult social care. [908141]

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** Our actions through the spending review in 2015 and the provisional local government finance settlement have brought the total dedicated funding for adult social care to £7.6 billion over the four years from 2016 to 2020. How much a local council spends on adult social care is rightly a matter for local councillors, who know these pressures best.

**Bridget Phillipson:** The Local Government Association has been clear that the money raised through increasing the social care precept will not be nearly enough to address the £2.6 billion gap facing adult social care by 2020. Instead of exacerbating the postcode lottery, will the Secretary of State not commit to additional ring-fenced resources for social care to tackle this crisis?

**Sajid Javid:** In the last spending review, the Government allocated an additional £3.5 billion a year by 2020 to adult social care. Just a few weeks ago, I announced £900 million of additional help over the next two years. Local councils do have to play a role in this, and I note that in Sunderland the average council tax bill is down in real terms since 2010. If a local council in Sunderland chooses to allocate more, it can do that.

**Mr Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): For many of my constituents the fundamental problem in all too many cases is that we still separate healthcare funding and social care provision. That makes no sense to my constituents and increasingly little sense to me. I therefore urge the Secretary of State to speed up the integration of health and social care provision, so that we can actually deal with patients' needs in the round and put them, rather than budgetary arguments, first.

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point, which is that adult social care is not all about money. Of course, money and resources have a huge role to play, but it is also about how those services are delivered. The many councils that are able to approach integration in a better way have seen significant efficiencies, and we can all learn from that.

**Mr Speaker:** I appeal to the Secretary of State to face the House, so that we can all benefit from his mellifluous tones.

19. [908161] **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Between 2010 and 2020, around £40 million will have been taken out of the adult social care budget in Hull. The effect could be seen this weekend in what is happening in our local NHS hospitals. Will the Secretary of State think again and make sure that the problems that local authorities such as Hull are facing are addressed by central Government ring-fenced money?

**Sajid Javid:** I am sure that the hon. Lady will welcome the announcement made a few weeks ago that tried to recognise the pressures that she identifies: there will be £900 million of additional funding over the next two years, on top of the £3.5 billion by 2020. She rightly highlights that we need to keep looking at this situation to see what more can be done.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I could not agree more with my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk). Most Members have had somebody come to their constituency surgery who desperately needs help, with local government and the health service agreeing that they need help with social care, but with both blaming each other, and it becoming a complete mess. Would it not be a good idea, on a cross-party basis, to look at a new model for social care?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend is right to point that out, and I have seen many situations such as he describes in my constituency. He also highlights the need for all of us to talk about this issue to see what we can do, working together.

20. [908162] **Robert Ffello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): According to Stoke-on-Trent's clinical commissioning group, there is, on average, a 26-day delay between someone being ready to leave Royal Stoke University hospital and getting social care in place, and that despite a £6 million subsidy from the CCG. Is that the fault of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, or is it because of the Government's lack of funding?

**Sajid Javid:** Again, the hon. Gentleman highlights the fact that for many areas, delivering adult social care is challenging, which is why I know he would welcome our recent announcement of additional funding on top of the funding settlement announced in the spending review in 2015. But the Government also recognise that there needs to be a long-term, sustainable solution, and I know that is the reform he would welcome.

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I spent a day with carers just before Christmas, seeing the amazing work they do across Rossendale. They, like me, feel frustrated that they are constantly under financial pressure, so will the Minister look at what can be done about increasing funding for social care, in addition to what we have already done, and making sure that the funding has a cast-iron ring fence to make sure that the money goes where it is needed most?

**Sajid Javid:** I can assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to look at the resources applied to adult social care, from both local councils and central Government, to make sure that they are adequate. We will also continue to push the case for reform to ensure that all councils realise that more can be done, besides just getting more funding.

**Kate Hollern** (Blackburn) (Lab): What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that local authorities are able to move patients in need of social care from hospitals to a more appropriate facility in a timely manner, thus preventing bed-blocking?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady will know that both my Department, working with local authorities, and the Department of Health have a role to play in doing just that; they are working together closely on integration plans with all local councils. Part of the funding—£1.5 billion a year by 2020, in the improved better care fund—is designed to do just what the hon. Lady suggests; it is money that goes towards trying to promote just such integration.

**Kate Hollern:** Library figures show that between November 2013 and November 2016, instances of bed-blocking for which social care needs were solely responsible increased by 89%. In the 12 months to November 2016 alone, bed-blocking has increased by 39%. Does the Minister recognise that the precept package brought forward by the Government in December is insufficient to solve the crisis in our social care system, and is putting further pressure on our already stretched NHS?

**Sajid Javid:** What the Minister recognises is that the additional funding announced in December will make a big difference: £240 million of additional money is coming in from the new homes bonus repurposing; and an additional almost £600—[*Interruption.*] It is new money. An additional almost £600 million is coming in from the precept changes. When it comes to using that money, we all want to see a reduction in delayed transfers of care. The hon. Lady will be aware of big differences between local councils on delayed transfers of care, and some councils can certainly learn from others.

### Local Authorities: Long-term Funding

3. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What discussions he has had with local authorities on long-term funding certainty. [908142]

15. **Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): What discussions he has had with local authorities on long-term funding certainty. [908156]

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** Ninety-seven per cent. of councils have accepted our historic offer of four-year funding certainty, and the Local Government Finance Bill will ensure that councils keep 100% of locally collected taxes by the end of this Parliament.

**Nigel Huddleston:** The Secretary of State will be particularly aware that Worcestershire is a very attractive place to live, work and visit, and a particularly attractive place to retire to, which is why we have a disproportionately large elderly population. How is the Department factoring into its long-term funding plans the additional needs of areas with a more elderly population?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. As a Worcestershire MP, I wholeheartedly agree with his opinion of our great county: it is a great place for anyone to visit, live and holiday in. I recognise that demographic pressures are affecting different areas in different ways, which is why we are undertaking a fair funding review to introduce a more up-to-date, transparent and fairer needs assessment formula—something that I know my hon. Friend will welcome.

**Mrs Gillan:** Mr Speaker, as you will know, the Secretary of State has received a proposal from Buckinghamshire County Council to create a new unitary authority to serve the whole county. He is also meeting the district councils, which are submitting to him a proposal for two unitary authorities. Will he confirm that he will give both those proposals equal and full consideration, including by consulting local residents, as happened in Dorset? Can he assure me that unitary status will not lead to any reduction in funding for Buckinghamshire residents?

**Sajid Javid:** I can give my right hon. Friend the assurance she seeks. Of course, I will give careful consideration to all proposals from local authorities, such as those in Buckinghamshire, including any financial implications. We need to ensure that any reform is right for local people and can deliver better services and strong local leadership.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): I should declare that I am an elected member of the council of the London Borough of Redbridge. Local authorities such as mine face a double whammy of pressures from an ageing population and a high birth rate, which lead to funding pressures on our local authority. Does the Secretary of State accept that even if local authorities like mine divert resources from other council services into adult social care and charge the maximum social care precept available, they will still face a shortfall in funding for vital services for older people? What is he going to do about that?

**Sajid Javid:** The measures we announced in December will help the hon. Gentleman's local authority; they will help every local authority in the land to deliver more adult social care services. Nevertheless, as I have said, as well as more money, we need reform. Some councils need to learn from others.

**Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): A 2015 Public Accounts Committee report outlined a 37% reduction in central Government support for local authorities between 2010 and 2016. What does the Secretary of State have to say to my Bristol South constituents, who are concerned about how the £64-million cuts announced by Bristol City Council last week will affect them?

**Sajid Javid:** I say to the hon. Lady's Bristol South constituents, "Don't forget where a Labour Government gets you." The deepest deficit of any developed country, the biggest recession in almost 100 years and the largest banking bail-out—all that has meant that this Government have had to make some difficult decisions, and every part of local government has had to contribute to that.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the long-term financial stability of local government is a function of not only funding from Government but good management in local authorities? What does he think we can do to attract people with business experience to running good local government?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. This is also about leadership, which means local authorities having many businesses in their area and promoting them. They need someone with a good track record and experience from which local people would benefit. I can think of someone like that in the west midlands: Andy Street.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows full well that leaving patients in hospital when they are medically fit to be discharged, as has happened to 130 people currently at Aintree hospital, is a very expensive way of looking after people. Why is he not shouting from the rooftops for the £4.6 billion that was cut from social care to be reinvested, so that councils can address the problem now and in the long term?

**Sajid Javid:** Helping with adult social care is about resources, which is why I know the hon. Gentleman would have welcomed the announcement a few weeks ago of an additional £900 million over the next two years. I am sure he will agree that it is also about reform,

and that he will have noticed the big difference in delayed transfers of care between one authority and another.

### Social Care: Funding

5. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): What plans he has to increase funding for social care. [908144]

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** The Government have listened to calls from local government and to representations from right hon. and hon. Members across the House. New changes outlined in the provisional local government finance settlement in December provide access to an additional £900 million over the next two years.

**Tom Brake:** The social care precept in Sutton would raise about £2.5 million, but Sutton is losing £8 million in revenue support grant. A one-off social care grant will give Sutton about £750,000, but Sutton is losing £1.5 million from the new homes bonus changes, which are paying for the one-off grant, resulting in a loss of £800,000. Does the Secretary of State agree that, as long as the Government are robbing Peter to pay Paul, we will see cancer operations cancelled and patients left in distress because of bed-blocking?

**Sajid Javid:** As a result of the spending review announcement of £3.5 billion extra to be paid into adult social care by 2020—£3.5 billion a year—and the announcement that I made a few weeks ago of £900 million over the next two years, all councils, including Sutton, will have more resources to deal with adult social care challenges.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I know that the Secretary of State will agree that the progress made with Torbay's integrated care organisation was very welcome, but does he also agree that it was concerning to see that very strict financial rules from NHS England are now prompting a renegotiation in terms of a risk agreement even though no extra money will be spent? Will he agree to work with the council, the trust and colleagues in the Health Department to see whether we can resolve this?

**Sajid Javid:** I am happy to work with my hon. Friend to see what can be done and to listen to the concerns that he raises. Torbay is a good example of how integration can work and how it can really help local people.

### Homelessness

6. **Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): What recent steps his Department has taken to help rough sleepers and homeless people. [908146]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** The Government are committed to tackling homelessness. We have launched a £50 million homelessness prevention package and are backing the most ambitious legislative reforms in decades through the Homelessness Reduction Bill. I am delighted that Chelmsford will be one of the country's first homelessness prevention trailblazer areas announced by the Prime Minister last month.

**Sir Simon Burns:** I am very grateful to the Minister for his reply. Does he agree that in the 21st century rough sleeping is totally unacceptable? Will he tell me more about what is being done not only in England as a whole but in Chelmsford to end this stain on our society?

**Mr Jones:** The whole House will agree that rough sleeping is totally unacceptable and that we should do all we can to end it. Our £20 million rough sleeping grant will fund 54 projects working to provide rapid response support for rough sleepers across England. It will help to prevent people from spending a night on the streets in the first place. I am delighted to tell my right hon. Friend that Chelmsford will receive almost £900,000 funding for preventing homelessness in partnership with neighbouring local authorities.

17. [908159] **Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): The inspirational ladies football player, Fara Williams, was homeless at 17, but went on to play 157 times for England, including as captain, and is now at Arsenal. Fara supports Centrepoint's appeal for funds to set up the first national freephone helpline for 16 to 25-year-olds who are homeless and at risk of living a life on the streets, as she was. Does the Minister agree that that is a tremendous, long overdue initiative and that it should be funded by the Government?

**Mr Jones:** The hon. Lady is right to bring that prime example to our attention. The fact that somebody is rough sleeping does not mean that they do not have the ability to reach their full potential, but we need to encourage them to do that. The Government currently pay for a service called StreetLink, which people can ring, or use an app, to report those who are sleeping rough. The details are then brought to the attention of the local housing department.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I declare my interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council.

Will the Minister congratulate Kettering Borough Council and its inspirational housing director, John Conway, on the measures they have taken during the recent cold weather to get all rough sleepers off the streets in Kettering and give them the appropriate housing advice they need?

**Mr Jones:** I thank my hon. Friend for giving that very important and heartening example. Some local authorities across the country are doing excellent work to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, and the type of initiative he mentions should be followed by other local authorities.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): On Wednesday, Glasgow City Council will consider a report that shows the devastating impact the universal credit roll-out is having on homelessness services in the city. So far, it has resulted in 73 homeless individuals racking up debts to the council of £144,000, an average of £1,971 per person. That is completely unsustainable both for the individuals and the council. What impact is the UC roll-out having on local authorities across the UK?

**Mr Jones:** The Government have increased discretionary housing payments to £870 million across this Parliament to mitigate some of the short-term challenges people

face from the welfare changes. As for the local housing allowance rate, 30% of the savings from that policy will be repurposed to help people in the highest value areas with the challenges in affordability.

**Alison Thewliss:** I am afraid that is completely inadequate. Since 2011-12, welfare reform has meant that homelessness services in Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, have seen cuts of more than £6 million to their temporary accommodation budgets. Does the Minister not accept that really to help rough sleepers and people who are homeless there must be co-ordinated work across all Government Departments? We cannot have one Department undermining the services of another.

**Mr Jones:** The hon. Lady makes a good point and I assure her that we are working extremely hard across Government through a cross-governmental working group, which I chair. She mentions the fact that temporary accommodation and the temporary accommodation management fee, which originates from Department for Work and Pensions policy, is being devolved to local authorities and to the Scottish Government.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Rather than patting themselves on the back, should not the Government be apologising for allowing rough sleeping to double since 2010? This is not an insoluble problem; it merely requires action such as that taken by the previous Labour Government, which cut street homelessness by three quarters. Will the Minister adopt the initiative announced last month by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) and commit to an extra 4,000 homes to end rough sleeping altogether?

**Mr Jones:** It will not be lost on the hon. Gentleman that under the Labour Government, in 2003, homelessness was at its peak. This Government are absolutely committed to making sure that we eradicate rough sleeping and we are working extremely hard, with a £20 million fund for local authorities, as I mentioned earlier, and £10 million for social impact bonds to get our most entrenched rough sleepers off the street.

### High Street Store Vacancies

7. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What estimate his Department has made of the number of high street store vacancies. [908148]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Percy):** We have taken significant action to help high streets adapt to changing shopping habits and to thrive. Shop vacancy rates are well down from their peak in 2012 and figures from Savills estate agents show that investment in high street retail property last year was up 17% from the year before.

**Justin Madders:** High streets in my constituency continue to struggle, as they do up and down the country. My local authority does what it can, but the support it can give is limited. It needs Government intervention and support to make the necessary transformation. Will the Minister agree to meet me and other interested colleagues to see what can be done?

**Andrew Percy:** I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman. The business rate revaluation will have a positive impact for his constituents, and I discussed the issue of high street regeneration with the chair of his local enterprise partnership, Christine Gaskell, just before Christmas, but I am more than happy to meet him to discuss that. We are also looking at proposals that we are working up with Revo on how we can share best practice, because this is very much a varied picture across the country.

14. [908155] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Our small market towns are being stripped of their banks: there is no bank now in Caistor, and Market Rasen is down to one. What is the Minister's policy to try to encourage more competition in the retail banking sector so that we can try to encourage banking in our rural towns?

**Andrew Percy:** This is an important point—the issue has affected my constituency—and one that I am happy to discuss further with the Treasury. The business rate revaluation will have a positive impact on retail property in my hon. Friend's constituency, as it will across many parts of the north and midlands.

#### Social Care: Funding

8. **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that adult social care is adequately funded. [908149]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** We recognise the pressures faced by the social care system. On top of the funding that we announced in 2015, which will deliver nearly £3.5 billion a year by 2019-20, we are providing an additional £900 million over the next two years for social care.

**Helen Goodman:** Unfortunately, Durham has already had to make £55 million-worth of cuts. The precept will bring in £4 million, but another £40 million of cuts are in the pipeline. Some villages will face private contractors being unable to afford to provide any social care whatsoever. May I suggest that the Minister go back to the Treasury and ask for another announcement on 8 March?

**Mr Jones:** The hon. Lady will know that Durham will benefit from the additional £900 million to which the Government are giving local authorities access over the next two years. It will also significantly benefit from the improved better care fund, which is £105 million this year, £825 million the following year and £1.5 billion in the last year of this Parliament.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Given that so much of the funding for adult social care goes towards care homes, and given that so many care homes are failing their Care Quality Commission inspections, will the ministerial team consider wrapping care home reform into the adult social care reform that has been announced? In particular, will they consider requiring local authorities to build new care homes, just as they have to build schools and GP surgeries?

**Mr Jones:** I thank my hon. Friend for his constructive suggestions—we are always willing to listen to those. As he might be aware, the Department of Health is looking carefully at how care homes are provided, and particularly at regulation and the role of the CQC.

**Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): Funding per head of population in Westminster and in Kensington and Chelsea is almost double that received by Enfield, and Enfield is facing spending pressures of £5.9 million in adult social care in 2017-18 alone. Can the Minister confirm not only that will he look at the ring-fencing issue, but that he is serious about properly reflecting the assessed needs of our communities in the future local government funding formula?

**Mr Jones:** I met the chief finance officer of Enfield Council last week, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), as part of the local government finance settlement consultation. The right hon. Lady will be aware that local authorities across the country will benefit from the £900 million that they will have access to over the next two years, and from the improved better care fund, which is ramping up quickly over the next three years.

#### Neighbourhood Plans

9. **Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): What plans he has to enhance and extend neighbourhood plans. [908150]

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell):** The Neighbourhood Planning Bill and my recent written ministerial statement will further strengthen neighbourhood planning, ensuring that communities have the ability to shape the development of their area, not speculative development.

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank the Minister for that welcome answer. It has been encouraging to watch local communities develop their neighbourhood plans over the past few years. Will the Minister clarify how much time councils and communities will have to update their neighbourhood and local plans once data on new housing numbers have been published, and will he ensure that neighbourhood and local plans carry full weight for that period?

**Gavin Barwell:** I can reassure my right hon. Friend on that point. The Government's expectation is that plans should be reviewed every five years, but when new data come to light it does not mean that existing plans are automatically out of date.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister ensure that when we have neighbourhood plans we involve local and national businesses more in the planning procedure? So many of the global and national chains suck the money out of our communities, and many of them put little investment back. What incentives can he introduce?

**Gavin Barwell:** First, there is the possibility of having neighbourhood plans purely for business district areas, which the hon. Gentleman might want to look at in his constituency. There is also the wider issue of ensuring that we capture the uplift in value when businesses

apply for planning permission, and there is a review of the community infrastructure levy and section 106 on my desk at the moment.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to the hundreds of people in Mid Sussex who have devoted a great deal of time to putting together neighbourhood plans, and will he assure us that in his White Paper steps will be taken to secure the integrity of the plans?

**Gavin Barwell**: I pay tribute not only to the people my right hon. Friend mentions but to him, because he has been a huge champion of neighbourhood planning in Mid Sussex and has spoken about it repeatedly. I hope that my written ministerial statement has helped address some of his concerns, but there will certainly be further action in the housing White Paper.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Pressure on local authority budgets is leading local authorities to encourage the building of high-cost homes to boost the council tax take. That completely misses the point regarding the local need for starter homes and affordable family homes. What can be done to encourage and, indeed, perhaps to incentivise local authorities to ensure that housing need is matched by housing provision?

**Gavin Barwell**: The national planning policy framework is very clear on that point. When local authorities conduct their assessments of housing need, they should not just look at the total number of homes required, but the right mix of housing to cater for the demographic profile including, for example, the number of elderly people who might need specialist housing. The hon. Lady is quite right to draw attention to that issue.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I very much welcome the increase in housing starts, the number of which has doubled since the first quarter of 2009. To get to the level we need, we need a resurgence of small and medium-sized house builders. Does the Minister agree that we need local authorities and local communities to allocate more small sites in their local plans and neighbourhood plans?

**Gavin Barwell**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are far too dependent, at this point in time, on a small number of large developers. Therefore, we need to ensure that the land that has attracted small developers is released and that those developers have access to finance.

### House Building

10. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What steps he is taking to promote the building of more homes. [908151]

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell)**: Since July, we have announced: a £3 billion fund to support small and medium-sized enterprises; an additional £1.4 billion for affordable housing; a £2 billion accelerated construction programme; a £2.3 billion infrastructure fund; funding for starter homes; and support for 17 garden towns and villages. The White Paper will contain further measures.

**Oliver Colvile**: As my hon. Friend knows, the all-party parliamentary group for excellence in the built environment, of which I am the chairman, published its findings into the quality of new build housing. Would he be willing to meet the all-party group to discuss our findings and our suggestions of inclusions in the forthcoming White Paper?

**Gavin Barwell**: I would be delighted. I have attended a meeting of the all-party parliamentary group for the private rented sector, which my hon. Friend also chairs; he is a busy man. He is quite right to say that, as we address the fundamental challenge of getting the country to build the homes we desperately need, we must not lose sight of quality as well as quantity.

**Mr Speaker**: The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) is very busy. He has many commitments and an extremely full diary. I do not think that anybody doubted the point.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): Is Westminster City Council right to expect other local authorities across the south-east and as far as the midlands to take on the responsibility of housing as well as providing education and social care for London's people in housing need?

**Gavin Barwell**: I would think that London MPs, Westminster councillors and, indeed, everybody would expect that, as much as possible, local authorities should meet the need to house in their area those who are homeless in their area. Our guidance is clear about that. The fact that some local authorities have to place people outside their areas is an indictment of the failure of the country, over 30 or 40 years, to build enough homes. We are going to put that right.

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): Local authorities and communities are incentivised to deliver vital new homes through the new homes bonus. However, very few residents are aware of the new homes bonus, so do not see the gain of development. Does the Minister agree that local authorities should set out how they spend their new homes bonus in the annual council tax bill statement?

**Gavin Barwell**: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which I am happy to look into. There is a wider issue of ensuring that communities see the benefit of new housing. With the community infrastructure levy and section 106 payments, we must ensure that communities know the benefits that they are getting in return for accepting housing.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): Dudley would be able to do much more in the area if its budgets were not being cut by 20% compared with just 1% in Surrey and 2% in Buckinghamshire. That has put pressure on a whole range of council services, not just housing. For instance, libraries are closing and social services are under pressure. Over Christmas, hard-working, low-paid staff in Dudley had to take three days unpaid leave—effectively a pay cut of 1%—because of this Government's cuts. How can Ministers sit there and tell me that the cuts they have imposed on Dudley are in any way fair?

**Gavin Barwell:** The hon. Gentleman is certainly creative. The question was actually about building more homes. I point out to him that, over the course of this Parliament, the Government are doubling the housing capital budget, which will enable more homes to be built in his area.

### Business Rates

11. **John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): What progress has been made in the review of business rates. [908152]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** The Government concluded the business rates review in March 2016. Following the review, the Government announced a £6.7 billion cut in business rates over the next five years and a permanent doubling of small business rate relief. As a result, 600,000 small businesses will pay no business rates at all.

**John Pugh:** I thank the Minister, but has he done any serious analysis of the process in order to give any comfort to the hard-pressed average high street currently competing against the internet and trading in very, very difficult circumstances?

**Mr Jones:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. There is no doubt that many external factors do challenge our high streets, but there is a significant package of £6.7 billion. He may want to encourage some of the business owners on his high street to check the revaluation of their business rate following the 2017 business rate revaluation, which is now online.

### Homelessness

12. **Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): What assessment he has made of trends in the number of homeless people sleeping rough between 2010 and 2015. [908153]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** No one should ever have to sleep rough. Our £20 million grant fund will help those new to the streets. The £10 million for eight social impact bonds covering 48 areas will build on the success of the world's first social impact bond, which we funded in London. This has helped over 400 entrenched rough sleepers to get back on to their feet and into accommodation.

**Holly Lynch:** I appreciate that response, yet Calderdale Council tells me that the number of non-statutory rough sleepers in our district has never been higher. While local charities are doing everything they can to tackle homelessness, the council's supporting people budget has been slashed by 50%. Does the Minister agree that unless we support and empower our local authorities to do this work properly, we stand no chance of reducing the numbers sleeping rough on our streets?

**Mr Jones:** As the hon. Lady will know, this Government are backing the Homelessness Reduction Bill, currently going through the House, which will put a number of obligations on local authorities to help people earlier so that they do not become homeless. The announcement on funding for that Bill will be made very shortly.

We are also, as she has heard, providing £50 million to start that work at this point so that we do not waste time waiting for the legislation to come into effect.

**Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): In Derby city we are currently looking at alternative ways of giving to homeless people, such as vouchers, an app, or through a website. Will the Minister consider looking at these alternative giving methods to see whether it is possible to take them forward?

**Mr Jones:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is generally for members of the public to consider the way in which they might want to give to homeless people. As I have said a number of times today, the Government are absolutely focused on helping rough sleepers. The £10 million being put into the social impact bond will help to get some of the most entrenched rough sleepers off the street, and I am sure that is what we all want to see.

### Pub Closures: Permitted Development Rights

13. **Mr Gavin Shuker** (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the effect of permitted development rights on pub closures. [908154]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Percy):** Pubs are at the heart of community life. That is why we have made provision for assets of community value to be placed on the register by communities that value their pub. That takes away the permitted development rights automatically.

**Mr Shuker:** The co-operative pub model is saving valuable locals right across the country, but the asset of community value designation process that the Minister mentions, which enables this in the first place, can often be far too clunky and lengthy. Would not a better approach be to remove permitted development rights and protect all pubs by default?

**Andrew Percy:** There are now already in excess of 1,750 pubs listed as assets of community value. The moment a nomination goes in, the permitted development rights are removed. Moreover, local authorities are free, if they wish, to apply for an article 4 direction to remove those rights across a whole area.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): As the hon. Gentleman now knows, the Minister for Housing and Planning was misled by the British Beer and Pub Association about the fact that removing permitted development rights would not have any effect on improvements to pubs, so will the Department now confirm that it would simply change the use class order?

**Andrew Percy:** As I have made clear, this is an area where we have to balance competing interests. I am keen to continue looking at it as I continue in this role. We want to support community pubs. That is why today I can announce to the House that we are providing £50,000 of funding to Pub is The Hub, which will help more pubs to be transformed and to be valued by their

communities. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), who has lobbied me quite hard on this.

### Private Rented Housing

16. **Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to raise standards in the private rented sector. [908158]

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell):** We are in the process of introducing banning orders for serious offenders, civil penalties of up to £30,000, a database of rogue landlords, and mandatory licensing for smaller houses in multiple occupation; and we are banning letting agency fees.

**Mike Kane:** Manchester is doing some very innovative work on cracking down on rogue landlords, but there are issues with the geographical scope of the licensing scheme. Will the Minister meet me, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the Residential Landlords Association to see how we can raise standards together?

**Gavin Barwell:** We have in the past provided £100,000 of funding to Manchester for this work. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman. This is a critical area, and we need to drive out the rogue landlords so that decent landlords do not face unfair competition.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): Peterborough City Council is just about to commence a selective licensing scheme to crack down on rapacious slum landlords and protect vulnerable tenants under the Housing Act 2004. Will the Minister keep under review the bureaucratic burden that falls on local authorities? The whole process, from start to finish, is not timely and takes far too long.

**Gavin Barwell:** I am very happy to give that undertaking, and to meet my hon. Friend if he wishes to discuss these matters in more detail.

### Midlands Engine for Growth

18. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the midlands engine for growth. [908160]

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** As announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor at the autumn statement, we will shortly publish a midlands engine strategy. This will include £392 million for our local growth fund for the midlands engine local enterprise partnerships.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** I thank my right hon. Friend, and I was delighted to see that he led the first ever midlands engine trade mission last year. Will he update the House on progress on that?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend has also done a lot to champion business and economic growth in the midlands. That first mission—the trade mission to north America—went well. It went so well that we went ahead with a second mission—to China—for the midlands region. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that we are

working with the Department for International Trade and other Departments across Government, and we will shortly publish a midlands engine strategy, reaffirming our commitment to the area.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908180] **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** At DCLG, we are starting 2017 as we mean to go on. The housing White Paper is nearing completion. The Local Government Finance Bill was published last week and, as we have heard, it creates the framework for business rate retention. It also features what my briefing refers to as discretionary relief on public toilets, which is, I am sorry to say, not quite what the name suggests.

**Mr Betts:** I will try not to follow the Secretary of State's joke.

I thank the Minister responsible for the northern powerhouse for his helpful comments in support of the Sheffield city region in the last few days. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether the Government want the city region deal to go ahead as agreed and that they do not support this vague concept of a mayor for Yorkshire, which will not deliver better local services or improve economic growth and which is, arguably, outwith the legal framework for mayoral combined authorities contained in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016?

**Sajid Javid:** It is very good of the hon. Gentleman, the Chair of the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government, to thank the Minister responsible for the northern powerhouse. We remain strongly committed to the devolution deal for the Sheffield city region. We will continue to work with local leaders, who have proposed a mayoral election for May 2018. We will also continue to discuss with local partners proposals for a devolution deal elsewhere in Yorkshire, including Leeds.

T4. [908183] **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to creating a housing market that works for everyone. In my own local authority area of North West Leicestershire, new housing starts are now 273% higher than they were in the year ending September 2010. May I give the Secretary of State a challenge as he sets out his new housing White Paper: can we do even better?

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell):** I hope we can rise to the challenge. If every local authority was building at the rate that my hon. Friend's local authority is building, we would be building 370,000 homes a year. That is a sign that it is possible to build the homes that this country needs; it just requires the political will to do it.

**John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): My question is for the Secretary of State: where is his housing White Paper? We were promised it in the autumn. We were then promised it alongside the autumn statement, then before the end of the year, and then first thing in

the new year. We were told that it was in the Government's grid for publication today. It has been delayed more times than a trip on Southern rail. I say to the Secretary of State: what is the problem?

**Sajid Javid:** The right hon. Gentleman will not have to wait long for the housing White Paper. When he sees it, he will see that it does a lot more than happened under the previous Labour Government. When he was the Housing Minister, I understand house building fell to its lowest level since the 1920s.

**John Healey:** The right hon. Gentleman has shown us exactly what the problem is: the huge gap between the Government's rhetoric on housing and their record. Under Labour, we saw 2 million new homes, 1 million more homeowners and the largest investment programme in social housing for a generation. For seven years under Tory Ministers, we have seen failure on all fronts—higher homelessness, fewer homeowners and less affordable housing. Even the Housing Minister has said that affordable housing is “unacceptably low” and “feeble”. Does the Secretary of State agree, and what is he going to do in his White Paper to deal with this crisis?

**Sajid Javid:** Under Labour, we saw housing affordability, measured by median income compared with the average house price, double—going up from three and a half times to seven times. We saw the number of first-time buyers fall by 55%, and the number of units available for social rent decline by 421,000. That is Labour's record on housing.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Short questions and answers, please, because there is a lot of interest. A single sentence will do.

T5. [908184] **Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils are preparing a new local plan, and have consulted on the options for meeting development need using the green belt. Does the Secretary of State agree with me that green-belt land is vital to preserving the character of places such as Chesham and Amersham and the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty, and should not be developed other than in truly exceptional circumstances?

**Sajid Javid:** I agree with my right hon. Friend. The purposes of the green belt are very clear. It should preserve the setting and the special character of historic towns—for example, those in her constituency. Where councils look at the green belt, they should always make sure that the national planning policy framework rules are met: the circumstances must be exceptional, and brownfield land should always be prioritised.

T2. [908181] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): The recent publication of the voluntary right-to-buy pilot schemes for housing association tenants shows that very few completions were achieved in return for the enormous time and effort expended. New affordable housing is a key element in Cambridgeshire's devolution deal. Will the Minister promise no distraction from the opportunity this gives us to build the supply of homes needed in our area?

**Gavin Barwell:** Voluntary right to buy provides replacement affordable housing. The hon. Gentleman should be supporting it, because it helps people who could not otherwise own their home to do so and provides new affordable housing.

T8. [908187] **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Earlier this year, the Secretary of State announced an extra £7 billion fund to expand the Government's affordable housing programme. I welcome this, and it will help my constituents. However, there is also a concern that the need for new homes will outweigh the need to protect our greenfield land, so will the Minister assure my constituents that he remains committed to it?

**Gavin Barwell:** I absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. I congratulate her on championing brownfield land. The new brownfield registers that we are introducing will help to ensure that development is, rightly, focused on brownfield first.

T3. [908182] **Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree that available housing provision is the key to reducing homelessness and that his Government should look to the Welsh Labour Government's legislative pledges of £5.6 million in 2015 and £3 million in following years to fund affordable homes to rent as well as to buy?

**Gavin Barwell:** The hon. Lady will have heard, in the autumn statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer adding £1.4 billion to the affordable housing budget. We are doubling the housing capital budget over this Parliament. That is not rhetoric, but proof of our commitment to delivering the housing that is needed.

T9. [908188] **Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): Together with the starter home land fund, the new locally led Welborne garden village in Fareham will deliver new homes and support first-time buyers. Will my hon. Friend explain how the Government are working with local authorities to deliver the new garden villages, and will he agree to visit Fareham to see how the local community will benefit from this new scheme?

**Gavin Barwell:** It was a pleasure to announce support for 14 new garden villages, which will between them provide 48,000 new homes, and it would be a pleasure to visit my hon. Friend's constituency and see the progress being made.

T6. [908185] **Robert Ffello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Stoke-on-Trent City Council is proposing to cut children's centres. Does the Secretary of State think that is acceptable?

**Sajid Javid:** Every council needs to provide certain statutory services, including children's services. We want to make sure that every council is properly funded. Stoke-on-Trent council, like many others, has accepted the four-year settlement, and that is good news.

T10. [908189] **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): Labour city councillors in Lincoln are determined to build homes on the Swanpool floodplain in the heart of our city, even though a private developer decided that the site was unsuitable. What message will my right hon. Friend want to give Labour councillors such as ours who act in such a reckless manner?

**Sajid Javid:** I hope my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot comment on a specific planning case, but we have strict, clear rules that say that councils must consider strict tests under the national planning policy framework that protect people and property from flooding. Where those tests are not met, that development should not go ahead.

T7. [908186] **Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): A year ago, local authorities were hit with a £200 million in-year cut in public health support. The Select Committee on Health described it as a “false economy” that will add to future health costs. What impact does the Minister believe those cuts will have on health inequalities, and will he meet me and representatives from Hounslow so that they can raise their concerns about the impact on children and others in the community?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** As 25% of Government expenditure takes place through local government, there will always be situations where funding has to be reduced. As the hon. Lady knows, the health budget is being increased by £10 billion across this Parliament. In terms of public health, I think the cuts she mentioned equate to about 1% to 2%, which was not ideal. I am sure that local government is more than able to meet the challenge.

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): While it may be true that Ministers have been in touch with councils directly hosting proposed new garden villages, they have not necessarily been in touch with neighbouring councils, which may be more affected by the proposals than those hosting the development. May I suggest that Ministers spread their nets a little wider when deciding which schemes to promote and, in my case, contact Basildon and Thurrock Councils as a matter of urgency?

**Gavin Barwell:** My hon. Friend has raised this issue with me outside the Chamber, and I will make sure that both he and the council have the information. The scheme has not yet gone through the planning systems; there will be every opportunity to address concerns.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): In 2009-10, there were 40,000 building starts for social rented homes. Last year that was down to 1,000. Why is that?

**Sajid Javid:** The number of socially rented homes declined by 421,000 during Labour’s time in office. Since the change of Government in 2010, we have invested billions in socially rented homes, including the additional £1.4 billion that was announced in the autumn statement.

**Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): Last week, Bath received £259,000 of funding as part of the rough sleeping grant. Will the Minister join me in endorsing the great work of the council and charities such as Julian House, the Genesis Trust and Developing Health and Independence, as they put together those plans to ensure that no one else ends up with a winter on the streets?

**Mr Marcus Jones:** I certainly endorse my hon. Friend’s comments. That was exactly what we wanted to achieve with the funding that we provided: local authorities

working with charitable and third sector organisations to deliver the support that we need and all want for people who are rough sleeping and homeless.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Today is Martin Luther King Day, which we have just celebrated in your state rooms, Mr Speaker, by launching Freedom City 2017, the year-long festival that commemorates the 50th anniversary of Dr King’s visit to Newcastle to receive an honorary doctorate from the university. The Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), the shadow Minister for diversity, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), the sadly outgoing US ambassador Matthew Barzun and you, Mr Speaker, all spoke to King’s great work and the challenges he highlighted of race, poverty and war. Mr Speaker, you emphasised the need to champion those values exemplified by King in our House and also our communities. Does the Minister agree that Freedom City 2017 provides an excellent opportunity to do just that?

**Sajid Javid:** I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Lady. She is quite right to point out the importance of Martin Luther King on this day, which is a celebration of his life and work. We would all do well to remember what he taught us, and one thing that he said is that we must live together as brothers or we all perish as fools. We can all learn from that, no matter who we are, whether in the US or the UK.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Will the housing White Paper envisage a greater role for the public sector?

**Gavin Barwell:** I can reassure my right hon. Friend that this Government want to see everybody get involved in building more homes, so if he is referring to local councils and their role, then absolutely: the more people who can get involved in building the homes we need, the better.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Councils across the country are highlighting the enormous gap between what the social care precept raises and the increased costs of social care as a consequence of the increase in the minimum wage and increasing needs among the population, as well as the cuts that they—the councils—are already having to make. Does the Secretary of State accept that his approach to social care funding is simply not credible, and will he commit to taking a different approach to ensure that people across the country get the care that they need?

**Sajid Javid:** We have taken the pressures on our social care very seriously. The hon. Lady will know from the announcement of just a few weeks ago about an additional £900 million for the next two years, which will make a difference. We also accept that there is more to do.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I want to hear the conscience of Christchurch. I call Mr Christopher Chope.

**Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): Last summer, the nine Dorset councils submitted a proposal to my right hon. Friend to establish a combined authority. Will he ensure that the order establishing that authority is brought forward in sufficient time to enable the authorities to be set up on 1 April this year?

**Sajid Javid:** <sup>1</sup>We have only just received the proposal to which my hon. Friend refers. We want to make sure that we take the right amount of time to consider it carefully. Whatever the result, we will make sure that enough time is allowed for this House to do its business.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I welcome the fact that Bristol has been named as one of the trailblazers for homelessness prevention and is getting additional money for it. Does the Minister share my concern, however, that in some cases it is far more attractive for landlords and developers to move into providing houses in multiple occupation or emergency accommodation rather than providing decent, proper family homes?

**Mr Marcus Jones:** Yes, I certainly understand the hon. Lady's point when it comes to the practice of flipping temporary accommodation for the uses that she mentions. We hope that the devolution of the temporary accommodation management fee will make it far more attractive for people to be able to maintain temporary accommodation in the way we want it to be provided.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): The new garden village at Deenethorpe will bring thousands more new homes to East Northamptonshire. Will the Minister reassure

my constituents that new infrastructure to support those new homes will be at the forefront of his mind as this project progresses?

**Gavin Barwell:** I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance, given that it is part of the concept of garden villages. More generally, if we want communities to accept more housing, we have to make sure that we get the infrastructure in place at the same time. That is why the Chancellor's announcement of a £2.3 billion housing infrastructure fund was so welcome.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I am sorry that we have run out of time. I shall, however, take one more question. I call Imran Hussain.

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): Last month, I asked the Health Secretary how many local authority leaders he had met to discuss social care. The answer was not very positive, so I ask this Secretary of State how many cash-strapped local authority leaders he is willing to meet to discuss the real crisis in social care.

**Mr Marcus Jones:** I have met a number of local authority leaders in the last few weeks, as a result of local government finance settlement consultations. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has done the same, and we will continue to meet local authority leaders and chief executives to understand the challenges that they face.

## Points of Order

3.37 pm

**Hon. Members:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I would like to save up the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin)—he is a specialist delicacy.

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will have seen reports at the weekend that the Prime Minister is now blaming family doctors for the NHS crisis. It is not the fault of GPs that social care has been cut or that general practice is underfunded. Has the Prime Minister or the Health Secretary given you notice that they are going to come to the House to make a statement, or should we assume that they want to avoid scrutiny for their floundering response to this NHS crisis?

**Mr Speaker:** The answer is that I have received no indication of an intention for a Government Minister to make a statement on that matter. I have received notification of other intended statements for the coming days, but that is not among their number.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last Tuesday at Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions, the Foreign Secretary was asked whether the UK would be participating in yesterday's summit in Paris on the Israeli-Palestine peace situation. He told us that we would be participating and would "reinforce our message", yet we read in press reports today that, alone among the western nations, the UK had no Minister present, and only a civil servant was sent to observe without the authority to sign the final communiqué. Have you been given notice that the Foreign Secretary intends to make a statement on the summit, and if not, what can Members do to compel the Foreign Secretary to divulge the full intentions of his Department when answering questions?

**Mr Speaker:** In the short time—approximately 20 months, I think—for which I have known the hon. Gentleman, I have come to realise what a persistent fellow he is. In response to the last part of his observations—about what can be done, and what facilities or recourses are open to him—let me say that the hon. Gentleman is familiar with the concept of the written question and, I think, with the location of the Table Office, in which he can submit such questions. Knowing the hon. Gentleman, I rather suspect that he will keep raising the matter.

I am, of course, grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his intention to raise this matter. He has registered it with force, and what he has said will have been heard on the Treasury Bench. If the Foreign Secretary feels that inadvertently the House has been misled—it is not immediately clear to me that the words were inaccurate; it may be that there has been a change

of mind, which is not without precedent in our proceedings—no doubt he will take steps to correct the record. Meanwhile, the hon. Gentleman can go about his business with an additional glint in his eye and spring in his step in the knowledge that he has put his point forcefully on the record.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am sure that the whole House, but you in particular, will want to join me in paying tribute to the great Professor Anthony King, who was one of our country's foremost political academics, psephologists and commentators, and who made a huge contribution to public life. He helped to educate thousands of young people in Britain, including yourself, Mr Speaker, the Secretary of State for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and, of course, me—although, as I recall, Mr Speaker, you were the only one who got a first. I am sure that you and the whole House will want to pay tribute to the late Professor King.

**Mr Speaker:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, and, more particularly, I rather imagine that Professor Anthony King's widow, Jan, will be especially appreciative when she hears of the noble step that the hon. Gentleman has taken today. Colleagues will doubtless have noted that Professor King died last week, aged 82, after a stellar career and vocation as one of the most distinguished political scientists of this generation. He was a brilliant teacher, he was an outstanding communicator, not least on television when giving his analysis of by-elections, and he was a prodigious and illuminating writer. Personally, I feel every day a sense of gratitude to Tony for what he did for me; and God, I must have been an awkward student to teach 30 years ago—[*Interruption.*] And, indeed, I still am. He stuck with me, and I am hugely grateful.

The hon. Gentleman and I got to know each other at the University of Essex 30 years ago, and I say in affectionate tribute to him that he is as noisy today as he was when he used to heckle me in student union meetings between 1982 and 1985.

Tony King was a great man who did wonders for the study and teaching of political science in the United Kingdom, and we should honour his memory.

## BILL PRESENTED

### ORGAN DONATION (DEEMED CONSENT)

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Paul Flynn, supported by Kelvin Hopkins, Ronnie Cowan, Mark Durkan, Kerry McCarthy, Kate Green, Michael Fabricant, Mike Wood, Yvonne Fovargue, Dr Philippa Whitford and Siobhain McDonagh, presented a Bill to enable persons in England to withhold consent for organ donation and transplantation; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 123).*

## National Citizen Service Bill [*Lords*]

### *Second Reading*

3.43 pm

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The National Citizen Service is a huge success. More than 300,000 young people have taken part, and many of them say that the NCS has changed their lives forever. For those who do not know, the NCS is a summer programme that lasts for up to four weeks, with no cost to parents who cannot afford it. It is open to all 15 to 17-year-olds in England and Northern Ireland. Indeed, the foundational strength of the programme is that it brings together people from all backgrounds. There is a focus on fun, and personal and social development, along with the design and delivery of a social action project. As Michael Lynas, the chief executive of the NCS Trust, has written:

“We build bridges across social divides and ladders to opportunity. We bring young people together in common purpose to change their perspectives and lives for good...Above all we try to show them that life is not a spectator sport.”

I got a sense of how transformational the programme is when I visited Liverpool last summer and met representatives of Everton football club’s NCS project. There was tremendous enthusiasm, and I was told by several people that they had become firm friends with neighbours from the same street whom they had not previously known at all. That is not untypical. An independent Ipsos MORI evaluation found that the vast majority of NCS graduates leave feeling more positive about people from dissimilar backgrounds and about themselves. Expanding the horizons of young people while increasing social cohesion is a massive win-win.

**Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con):** May I take this opportunity to warmly thank NCS East for its superb work in helping young people in Peterborough to develop as good citizens, one of whom, Tapiwa Tandi, is beginning a work experience scheme with me tomorrow?

**Karen Bradley:** I suspect that a theme of this debate will be the experiences that we have all had in our constituencies with NCS graduates, and the enthusiasm and self-belief that doing NCS projects gives them. I commend my hon. Friend on taking his NCS graduate into his office. I look forward to hearing how that work experience goes.

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** I have also been impressed when I have visited NCS in Bradford, but I wonder what the Secretary of State’s response is to the National Audit Office report about the NCS, which says that it has not met its participation targets in six years and that the cost works out at an estimated £1,863 for every youngster who is expected to take part. What is the Government response to that NAO report?

**Karen Bradley:** I welcome the NAO report because it is important, with any programme of this type, that we understand value for money and what is being achieved. I am sure that my hon. Friend will recognise that this

was a very ambitious target. We have had great success in getting towards that target, but there is still more to do. The Bill is important so that more of the young people such as those he has met in his constituency will have the chance to participate in the NCS.

**Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that more than 3,000 people from Lancashire have had the benefit of the NCS, including some 71 from my constituency last year—I saw the figures today? Has she, like me, been struck when she has visited NCS programmes by how well they have reached out to two particular groups: those from lower income families; and, most importantly, disabled constituents, who have been greatly involved in these programmes and have played a vital role in making sure that they are so successful?

**Karen Bradley:** I agree with my hon. Friend. He will know that the NCS has an above-average success rate in reaching those hardest-to-reach young people. We have all seen NCS projects in which there are young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, young people with disabilities and young people from more affluent backgrounds, all working together with the common purpose of achieving their social action project, and in doing so making lifelong friends. That work should be commended. I am very pleased to hear that 71 people from my hon. Friend’s constituency were involved last summer, and I am sure there will be more this summer.

**Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con):** I concur with all the positive things that have been said about the NCS. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking former Prime Minister David Cameron for all that he did to drive the programme forward, Lord Blunkett, who was also a key guiding hand behind the project, and my friend Michael Lynas, who has taken this from a small seed to the great success that we see today?

**Karen Bradley:** I will, of course, join my hon. Friend in so doing. Former Prime Minister David Cameron is now chair of the patrons board of NCS. The work that he achieved in government will have a lasting legacy. My hon. Friend is also right to suggest that the noble Lord Blunkett has been instrumental in this, as has Michael Lynas, the NCS chief executive. They have done great work to get this far. Let us remember that that has been achieved from a standing start, and that 300,000 young people have now gone through the programme. Congratulations are definitely in order.

**Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con):** When I went along to the end-of-project session at Somerset College in Taunton Deane, I was impressed by the confidence of the children who had undertaken the course and the skills that they had gained. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in these days when we are trying to upskill our young people and to make them fit for business—even if it is just by teaching them to be polite and to communicate—we ought to promote this scheme much more widely because it has such a great future?

**Karen Bradley:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is why we want to grow the NCS as quickly as possible, in a way that is sustainable and that continues to be successful.

We have all seen the sense of self-worth and confidence that working in a team can give to young people, and I have seen them achieving some really stretching targets. That is a fantastic testament to the scheme, and we want to see more people taking part in it. The NCS can break down barriers just at the time when they could become entrenched, and 95% of participants said that the NCS had allowed them to get to know people whom they would not normally expect to meet. My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) made that point a moment ago.

Although the programme is for young people, it is not only the young who benefit from it. For example, NCS participants have prepared and distributed care packages to the parents of premature babies in east Durham, raised funds for the Huntington's Disease Association on Merseyside, and built a sensory garden for the residents of a Weymouth care home. Moreover, volunteering can become a lasting habit. The NCS Trust estimates that in the 16 months following the summer programmes, the 2013 and 2014 graduates did an additional 8 million hours of volunteering in their communities. The Government are determined that the NCS should become even more popular and successful, but adventure and inspiration need to be underpinned by nuts and bolts, which is what the Bill puts in place.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Karen Bradley:** I give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove).

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I, too, would like to thank and congratulate everyone involved in delivering the NCS in Corby and east Northamptonshire. My right hon. Friend has said a lot about the benefits of the scheme. Does she also agree that employability is one of its key achievements, as young people learn lots of skills that transfer well into the workplace?

**Karen Bradley:** I absolutely agree. The soft skills that the NCS can bring to young people make them much more employable and much more valuable in the workplace. That is exactly what we want to see from the NCS, among its many other benefits.

**James Heappey** (Wells) (Con): When I visited Somerset's NCS scheme in Exmoor last summer, I was struck by the number of students from previous years who had returned to be leaders and mentors. Is there any way in which the Secretary of State could reward those who go back as leaders and give them recognition for that further service?

**Karen Bradley:** We have announced a long-term review of young people in volunteering. My hon. Friend makes an interesting suggestion about the way in which the NCS can encourage volunteering within the scheme in future years.

**Sir Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the examples that she has set out demonstrate clearly the Government's continuing commitment to the big society and that, in contrast to some of the mischievous reporting in some of the

media, that is wholly compatible with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's welcome promotion of the shared society?

**Karen Bradley:** I agree with my right hon. Friend. This is an aspect of a country and a Government that work for everyone, and of the shared society that we all want to be part of. I shall now give way to my newly knighted hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier).

**Mr Speaker:** A Kentish knight, no less.

**Sir Julian Brazier** (Canterbury) (Con): We did that last week, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Not everyone was here then, so I thought that that the hon. Gentleman would welcome an encore.

**Sir Julian Brazier:** I am most grateful, Mr Speaker.

Speaking as a huge supporter of the NCS, locally as well and nationally, does my right hon. Friend agree that the adventure content is critical? We must be careful about the continuing erosion of adventure in residential centres up and down the country, in terms of both numbers and quality, if the NCS is to continue to deliver success.

**Karen Bradley:** I agree that the adventure side of the programme is incredibly important—it might mean that some young people get to reach the dizzying heights of being a knight of the realm like my hon. Friend—and represents an opportunity for young people to be away from home and to manage in an outward bounds situation. I met some young people from Liverpool who had camped in the Peak district, just outside my constituency, and they were astonished to discover just how hilly some bits of the country are and how cold they can be at times—although very beautiful, of course.

This short Bill is focused on establishing sound, transparent governance arrangements. It works in conjunction with a royal charter, making it clear that the NCS is above partisan politics. A draft of the charter was published as a Command Paper and laid before the House when the Bill was published. I have published an updated version today, which we will lay before both Houses, that reflects commitments that the Government made in the other place and will accompany the Bill as it goes through this House.

The Bill begins by outlining the royal charter and the functions of the NCS Trust, which will be a new body in a new form that is designed to last. However, we do not want to lose the talent and experience of those who work in the current body, which is also called the NCS Trust, who have overseen the fastest-growing youth movement in this country for 100 years. The Bill makes provision for schemes for the transfer of staff, property rights and liabilities from the current body to the new trust, and allows the Government to fund that trust out of money authorised by Parliament. It also allows the trust to charge participation fees at variable rates to maintain the principle that anyone can afford to take part. At present, the maximum fee is £50, but many participants pay no fee at all. The royal charter requires the trust to ensure equality of access to the NCS.

**Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): I visited an NCS scheme in Fareham this summer where 70 youngsters were engaged in a stimulating project that was helping the community. I applaud those who have led the success of this scheme, including Michael Lynas, whose steadfast commitment has been critical. In the light of the Casey review's recommendations and findings about segregation among our young people, does my right hon. Friend agree that that participation fee—or lack of it—has been critical in enabling the breaking down of barriers so that people from different backgrounds, classes, religions and ethnicities can come together to restore civic pride and solidarity in our country?

**Karen Bradley:** I agree with my hon. Friend. It is important to make the point that money should never be a barrier to such social cohesion and integration. We want young people from all backgrounds to have the chance to participate in the NCS. It must never be the case that money is the barrier that prevents them from doing so.

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The NCS represents an impressive cross-party effort. Its precursor came under the previous Labour Government in the form of the “Be Inspired” programme in which Lord Blunkett and Gordon Brown, among others, were involved. How much work will be done on successor programmes for the hundreds of thousands of young people who will be going through the NCS? I must declare an interest here: the UpRising leadership programme works closely with the NCS, and one issue is the need for mentoring to enable people to continue their progress. I will be delighted if the Secretary of State looks into the programme's new initiative to recruit and train 1 million mentors over the next decade and to deploy them to organisations such as the NCS.

**Karen Bradley:** I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson), who has responsibility for civil society, has had discussions with the hon. Lady about precisely that point. We are looking at mentoring programmes and, of course, the #iwill programme is an important part of making sure that there are places for young people to continue developing the work that NCS starts.

It is vital that any expenditure of public money is transparent, accountable and proper, so the bulk of the Bill is a series of measures on that front. The NCS Trust must prepare annual accounts, which the National Audit Office will audit before they are laid before Parliament. At the start of every year, the trust must publish an annual business plan setting out its strategic priorities and annual objectives. At the end of each year, the trust will produce an annual report, which will be laid before Parliament, outlining how the trust has fulfilled its priorities and main functions. Furthermore, the Bill lists specific metrics that that report must assess, including value for money and the extent to which the NCS has mixed people from different backgrounds, which my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) mentioned. The Bill requires the trust to notify the Government in the event that a breach of contract has serious financial consequences, if a provider is in serious financial difficulty, or if a staff member commits fraud, which will allow the Government to take rapid steps to minimise the loss of public money.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am very supportive of the Bill. Will the Secretary of State define how value for money will be gauged?

**Karen Bradley:** My hon. Friend will know that the National Audit Office is responsible for looking at value for money. Of course we will look at the findings of each year's report to make an assessment of value for money.

Following an amendment in the House of Lords, the trust must also notify the Government of any police investigation into an allegation of criminal activity that could have serious consequences for the NCS. The trust will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Records Act 1958. Together, the measures will ensure that the NCS Trust works efficiently, effectively and transparently.

The Bill has one other purpose: to advertise NCS. The Bill allows Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to pass on information about the NCS to the young people, parents and carers whose addresses it holds. Receiving a national insurance number at the age of 16 is a rite of passage, and we want that letter to arrive with an invitation to participate in the NCS, too.

As the Government continue to work to build a shared society that works for every one of our constituents, the NCS has already transformed hundreds of thousands of lives. The Bill can ensure that it transforms millions more.

4.2 pm

**Mr Steve Reed** (Croydon North) (Lab): I suspect that the House will not be subjected to too much of a bunfight this afternoon. Labour is delighted to support the Bill, and its passage through the Lords smoothed over some of the more contentious issues, so it is extremely welcome that the NCS therefore has strong support on both sides of the House. My one small regret is that the Secretary of State referred to a new draft of the royal charter, which was laid before the House only two minutes before this debate began. We have checked with the Vote Office, and it is not yet available in hard copy.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): We just got it. Here it is.

**Mr Reed:** My hon. Friend has just received a hard copy, but I have not had a chance to read it.

**Karen Bradley:** I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. I understand that there has been a problem in the post room, but the document is now available. I apologise if he did not receive it before the debate.

**Mr Reed:** I thank the Secretary of State for that. I look forward to reading it. I am sure she will tell me if any of my points have already been miraculously addressed in the new draft.

Before getting into the detail of the Bill, I will talk briefly about its context. The Secretary of State said that the Prime Minister mentioned the NCS in her speech on the shared society, and we need to make sure that that vision does not end up hollowed out like the previous Prime Minister's big society. The big society

shrank down to little more than an attempt to replace paid professionals with unpaid volunteers, which is a shame because there is an urgent need to reshape politics in this country around people, family, community and shared institutions in a way that strengthens society and gives people more direct power. For all their talk, so far the Government have tended to do the opposite, rather than matching the power of the words they speak in this Chamber.

If we want people to feel they really have a share in society, they need two things: a voice to articulate what they are looking for; and the power to make it heard, be it at work, in their community or about the public services they use. In all that, there is a real big vision about national renewal based on sharing power, reshaping politics and opening up opportunity to everybody. We already see the potential of that in communities that have taken more control through projects such as tenant-led housing organisations, user-directed social care, community land trusts and community energy generation, to name just a few. The NCS can play a significant role in building young people's capacity to participate; but the Government's approach, including what we have heard of the "shared society" so far—I accept that that is not much yet—is still too narrow and too centralised to tear down the barriers that frustrate wider and deeper engagement by citizens. I hope that will change. The NCS will achieve great things, but it could achieve even more if the Government really understood the power and potential of communities freely co-operating for the common good, and allowed that principle to influence and shape the direction of Government policy right across the board.

Let me move on to some of the detail in the Bill, most of which, as I said earlier, is not contentious, unless the changes I have not seen have suddenly inserted a raft of things we are not expecting—I doubt that is the case. One of the most powerful aspects of the NCS is how it brings together young people from a range of different backgrounds. The divisions so starkly exposed by the EU referendum, and, I am sorry to say, widened by the Government's unfair approach to funding cuts since 2010, show just how important it is that we promote better integration right across society.

I had the privilege of meeting some young people in Croydon who were taking part in the NCS, and their passion to make change real was tangible and moving. They had clearly learnt a lot from living, working, eating and facing challenges with other young people from backgrounds that were very different from their own. Let me give an example of why it is so important that we break down barriers. In some parts of urban Britain we see a growing problem with violent gang crime. Mercifully, the problem is still small at national level, but if you live in one of the neighbourhoods most affected, it is disfiguring and destructive in a way that is hard to imagine without having experienced it. In London, I have worked with people living on housing estates where violent, gang-related youth crime is endemic, but right next door there were streets full of better-off people leading completely different lives, with completely different expectations. The two communities live parallel lives that never touch. Young people on one estate that I visited spoke as if the borders of their world ended at the borders of the estate they lived in and the world of opportunity beyond was closed to them.

We have to break these barriers down, and I hope the NCS has a real role to play in that. I would like to hear the views of the Secretary of State or the Minister on strengthening the focus on integration in the Bill. It talks about "cohesion", but not about the process of integration necessary to achieve it. A change along those lines in clause 1 has the support of a number of delivery organisations. We will revisit this in Committee, but I hope that any change can be achieved through cross-party consensus.

It is fundamentally important that the NCS continues to offer opportunities to young people from different backgrounds, so it is a concern that the proportion of participants from poorer backgrounds, as measured by eligibility for free school meals, has fallen since the NCS was created in 2011. Indeed, the National Audit Office states that

"in many...areas a disproportionate number of young people from certain backgrounds participate".

It is of course very important that the NCS is an organisation for every young person in the country, whatever their background.

**Tim Loughton:** It is slightly disappointing to hear the hon. Gentleman making quite a lot of negative comments about a scheme that I thought his party had come to support, after several years of trying on behalf of many of us. Does he not acknowledge that the number of young people going on this programme who qualify for free school meals has been put at 17%, which is more than double the proportion in society as a whole? In that respect, this programme is actually doing rather well.

**Mr Reed:** The points I am making are intended to strengthen and improve the NCS; if we do not make them, it may never change, so I hope the hon. Gentleman will join me in the spirit of seeking to offer constructive criticism to improve what the Government are doing.

Applications in general are below the target set by the Government—they were 13% behind in 2016. That must be addressed, and although the delivery organisations are aware of that, we look to the Government to provide the support that they need to reach more young people. In particular, we encourage the Minister to look again at introducing a specific duty on the NCS to promote the programme to young people from socially excluded backgrounds and explore new ways to reach them.

**Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con):** To proceed in the tone that I thought had been set for the debate, does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the work the Government are doing, through the Bill, to authorise HMRC to work with NCS to reach more people is a key part of ensuring that the NCS reaches a far wider range of eligible young people? Hopefully that will increase participation rates, as well as diversity in the schemes.

**Mr Reed:** That is certainly helpful, but if that is the limit of the hon. Gentleman's ambition for the NCS, he needs to find a little more of it, in the way that Opposition Members do.

A truly shared society requires everyone to have a voice and the power to assert it. There is no single model for achieving that: how we give people more

[*Mr Steve Reed*]

control depends on the circumstances and context in which we operate. When the state sets up new organisations or services, it often fails to give people on the receiving end a real say, despite the fact that organisations benefit from higher levels of input from their users. If the NCS is to remain relevant to young people and in touch with their lives, it is important that they have a real voice in what it does and how it operates, now and in future. That means giving young people a direct role in NCS governance and decision making.

I was involved in setting up one of the biggest community youth trusts in the country, the Young Lambeth Co-operative, which took control of a number of the council's youth services. The intention in setting it up was to give young people a real voice by reserving half the positions on the governing board for them, and ensuring that those young people who were appointed properly represented young people from more deprived backgrounds who had the greatest need of the services on offer.

In the absence of a mutualised structure, which is not being proposed for the NCS, it would still be good to see the NCS take a similar approach to that of the Young Lambeth Co-operative and ensure that young people have a key role at every level. That will be critical to making the NCS credible and attractive to as wide a range of young people as possible, particularly those who are categorised as harder to reach. The governance changes in the version of the draft royal charter that I have seen are important. There is to be a new board of patrons, but the NCS would benefit from more young people, and fewer politicians, at the top.

The NCS has the Opposition's full support. I am raising concerns in the spirit of constructive criticism, with the intention of improving the organisation's operation. We want to see some changes in the Bill that we believe will strengthen the focus on integration, ensure that the NCS reaches as wide a range of young people as possible, and give young people a bigger voice at every level in the organisation. Such changes would help the NCS to meet its laudable objectives, and we hope that they can be achieved through consensus.

We live in a country with a generous and open spirit, full of talented and ambitious young people who want to make a difference to their own lives, their families, and the community around them. But to do more, they need a bigger voice and the power to make it heard. Civil society organisations such as the NCS have an important role to play in making that happen. Ours is already a sharing society in which people instinctively co-operate; it is government that needs to catch up. The measure will be whether the Government make real progress in opening up and sharing their power with people so that they can make, or at least influence, the changes that affect their own lives.

The Bill may be small, but it has some very big ideas behind it: power, opportunity, community and contribution. Given the chance, young people and the NCS have much to teach us, and the Government, about those great national themes. We wish them every success in doing that in future.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It might be helpful to the House if I say that there is no time limit on Back-Bench speeches at this stage, but that an informal limit involving a certain self-denying ordinance might help. An informal limit of 10 minutes per Back-Bench Member seems reasonable and well within the capacities of a Kentish knight. I call Sir Julian Brazier.

4.14 pm

**Sir Julian Brazier** (Canterbury) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. The House must be getting very bored with that reminder, although I was extremely grateful for the much undeserved honour.

I welcome this Bill, as I am a strong supporter of the NCS. I had the opportunity to meet some of the 130 constituents who did their National Citizen Service last year, and I was very impressed. Clearly, they had enjoyed the earlier adventure training phase and were producing some really interesting ideas for working with local charities. That combination of challenging activity and a sense of service will be a very important part of our former Prime Minister's legacy, and I was really delighted to see that he has agreed to be chairman of the patrons.

I will focus my remarks on the first bit of the programme—the adventure training. Although I strongly support what is being delivered and the very strong team headed by Michael Lynas and chairman, Stephen Greene, whom I had the opportunity to meet just before this debate, I am concerned that there are some wider trends that lie outside the strict confines of this Bill. However, knowing how tolerant you are, Mr Speaker, I hope that you will allow me to touch on those trends as they are highly relevant to the supply chain for the NCS.

Adventure training, which every NCS student does for at least one week, and sometimes two, usually at the beginning of the programme, develops team work and confidence. It involves pushing the boundaries and learning how to manage risk in a positive and constructive manner. It is very, very important and also increasingly rare. As far back as 12 years ago, the then Education Committee pointed out that this country, which produced the team that cracked Everest, had actually slipped down the league and was, arguably, below average around the world in our capacity for adventure training.

Five years ago, the English Outdoor Council produced a list of residential centres that deliver good quality adventure training. Of those 180 centres, 30 have since closed. Equally disturbing, a number of others have been taken over by providers, which are giving a good commercial offer in the sense that their insurance premiums are low because their risks are extremely low, but which, according to one expert in the field, typically deliver every meal indoors for the children. In other words, these so-called adventure opportunities involve nothing that lasts for more than two or three hours at a time.

The NCS is firmly aimed at the right end of the market. All the NCS students I have met have had extremely good experiences drawn from good parts of the sector, but we must be clear that that element is shrinking. The reasons for that are twofold: our litigious culture; and the worry about prosecution. Two surveys that have been done—one in 2003 by the Sport and Recreation Alliance and the other in 2006 by the Scouts—

revealed that the blame culture was the No. 1 concern among adult volunteers. We are also in the era of the corporate manslaughter charge, which is a very serious concern for the local authorities that run these providers.

I suggest that we have made some progress in rolling back the litigious culture. After an all-party effort behind a private Member's Bill, which I was privileged to promote, the Labour Government introduced a small measure, called the Compensation Act 2006, with only one substantial clause that reminded the courts that if they make an award against an organisation, they need to take account of the damage to the wider interest in that activity. It had support on both sides of the House, but, interestingly, was opposed by a number of highly articulate lawyers on both sides of the House and in both Chambers.

The threat of prosecution remains serious. There has been a certain amount of banter in the media about stories alleging phony regulations and the Health and Safety Executive—I strongly welcome its new chairman, Martin Temple—has debunked lots of myths. The problem whenever I discuss this with people providing adventure training is never with regulation; no one has ever raised regulation with me as a problem in a serious adventure training context. The problem is the risk of prosecution if something goes wrong.

Perhaps the worst case of this was at a place called Bewerley Park. In 2005, a boy of 14 was drowned in a caving incident at Yorkshire's top adventure training provider. The HSE decided to prosecute the local authority and the case took more than five years to come to court. Finally, in 2010, the local authority was acquitted, but that happened because a critical body called the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority, which considers standards in such organisations, had given the body a clean bill of health and testified in court that the standard of instruction and leadership was extremely high, that the freak and completely unpredicted weather conditions that had led to rapidly rising water could not have been anticipated and that in fact it was a remarkable achievement of the instructors that they got all but one of the children out alive. Had that prosecution gone the other way, we would have lost not only that centre but many others up and down the country would have decided that they were no longer willing to take the risks of continuing.

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** My hon. Friend and I have often discussed these issues. Does he agree that that example shows the importance of ensuring that the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority remains in a condition in which it can take such a stance?

**Sir Julian Brazier:** My right hon. Friend, who is an absolute expert on this matter and did so much in this area in his time as a Minister, not just with the National Citizen Service but in the adventure field more widely, anticipates my next sentence. That is why it is crucial that at a time when we are about to start a public consultation on the future of the AALA, which will be conducted by a panel appointed by the HSE, the licensing authority not only survives but has its brief expanded so that it can ask why such centres have been closing over the past few years and, crucially, ask not just whether the practice is safe in the centres but what the quality is of the adventure that is being delivered. It is very easy to make so-called adventure training safe if it

is not adventurous, so the authority needs to be able to ask what the character-building quality of the activities is.

I am delighted to say that the HSE has taken the decision to include on the panel one outside member, Ian Lewis, the director of the Campaign for Adventure—one of the patrons of which is, I should mention, another former Prime Minister, Tony Blair. I very much hope that when we have a National Citizen Service whose patrons are headed by one former Prime Minister and the Campaign for Adventure is represented on the panel considering the future of the AALA, that panel will come up with a conclusion that will guarantee a future for the AALA that ensures it can continue to speak independently and expands its brief so that we discover why the centres are closing and get the focus back on the high-quality adventure that is so essential to the future of the National Citizen Service.

4.24 pm

**Jon Cruddas** (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab): I very much welcome the Bill. It is a small Bill, and in many ways uncontroversial, its key strategic objective being to establish the effective governance of the National Citizen Service, but my sense is that seeing it in that way hides its true significance. What it really focuses on is how we live together, and there is no more important issue facing our country. How do we create a nation at ease with itself and foster a notion of service to others among our young people? Obviously that is vital, given the divisions in our society—so clearly exposed last year—around class, race, geography and religion, and a general fear that these tensions might continue to escalate. Those divisions suggest a brittle country, so resolving this and healing division will indeed take time, but the Bill will help. So although it is a small Bill, it is significant.

More generally, how do we ensure that our young people are knowledgeable about the country they inhabit in all its complexity, and how do we build an ethic of service among the younger generations? Really the clue is in the name: a programme of national service on behalf of our fellow citizens, the National Citizen Service. It is a simple notion, but an important one in shaping the character of our young people and the future character of our country more generally.

Across my east London constituency, which is one of the fastest changing communities in the UK, and one that has recently experienced issues with extremism and violence, I have seen at first hand the benefits of the programme: increasing the breadth of young people's experiences; mixing with people from other backgrounds; and building links between generations, for example through new volunteer support for the elderly in the community. It is helping to integrate communities such as ours.

Across the country some 275,000 young people have already taken part in the programme, and a couple of the results are worth noting. An Ipsos MORI evaluation found that 82% of people leave the programme feeling more positive about people from different backgrounds and better prepared for the future. The programme is building a legacy of service and volunteering. I was struck by one statistic that the Minister mentioned earlier, which is that in the 16 months following participation in the programme, the cohort that went through in 2013

[Jon Cruddas]

and 2014 contributed a further 8 million hours of service in the community. The ethos of the NCS—social cohesion, social mobility and social engagement in order to build resilient young people—appears to be working.

I think that we can all agree that in order to develop further, the NCS needs to be beyond party politics. The Bill will help to ensure that no one party can lay claim to the NCS. The governance changes will help develop it into an enduring, independent national institution, one beyond party politics, that appeals to everyone. That has to be a good thing. In order to be successful, it cannot be seen as another Government scheme, because that would put people off, and the evidence so far suggests that participants do not see it that way. That is further evidence for why we need to maintain the cross-party support.

The Bill will ensure the transition from a community interest company to an organisation with a royal charter. The NCS Trust will be a new body, and the Bill will ensure the effective transfer of staff and functions to the new trust from the current body. The royal charter requires the trust to ensure equality of access irrespective of background and ensures a flexible fee structure that will not inhibit participation. Much of the Bill is about the accountability of the trust. Accounts audited by the National Audit Office will be laid before Parliament. The trust must publish an annual business plan and at the end of the year it will supply an annual report to be laid before Parliament. That all seems pretty sensible and uncontroversial.

I want to make four points. I hope that they will not be seen as controversial, because they are intended to strengthen the Bill.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the importance of the annual report cannot be overstated? In addition to laying the report before Parliament, should the Minister not consider ensuring that it is debated and discussed?

**Jon Cruddas**: I totally agree. If a stated objective of the Bill is to learn how to live together and all be virtuous citizens, it should not be beyond our collective wit to organise a few debates in Parliament every year so that we can test how successful we are, so I support my hon. Friend's comments.

My four points begin with the question of links with public bodies. The original draft of the Bill included an obligation on public bodies, but that has gone. I can understand that public bodies might see this as a bit of an imposition, particularly as quite a bit is being thrown at local authorities at the moment, so there is no need to enshrine an obligation in the legislation. However, if we are to succeed, surely we must ensure that the programme is a core activity for our public institutions. I raised the matter with my local council and a number of schools, and found that it was not the concern that I thought it might be, not least when I found out that 95% of London schools are already involved in the programme, although I do wonder about the effect on the independent sector. When will the guidance for schools and local authorities on how to better engage with the NCS be published? More generally, I understand that nearly £20 million a year will be earmarked for advertising

over the next four years to increase participation from 100,000 to some 300,000. That is a hugely ambitious task that raises the question of what role schools and colleges will have in the programme's promotion.

Secondly, on questions of integration, I echo the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) earlier. One point made to me from within the sector is whether the language used in the royal charter and the Bill, when laying out the functions and purpose of the trust, is sufficiently focused on the integration aspects of the NCS. Social integration—the act of mixing and forging bonds with those from different backgrounds—is a process and it should not be confused with social cohesion, which is the outcome that we seek to achieve.

At its best, the NCS helps integration through the intensive nature of the programme whereby participants spend almost three weeks together, through the social atmosphere as they cook, live and eat together, and through the levelling effects of the activities in which they are pushed out of their comfort zones as they engage in challenging activities on an equal footing and rotate leadership roles. The setting of shared goals—confronting participants with a shared challenge more easily overcome through teamwork, rather than an individual effort—is a key element of inspiring previously unlikely friendships. So, could we ensure that the integration function is enshrined in legislation? The integration elements are arguably the most important part of the NCS's work. Is there enough about integration, not just cohesion, in the Bill and the royal charter?

Thirdly and briefly is the question of integration and inclusion. For a programme to have integration at its heart, it must include the hardest-to-reach young people. Doing so requires dedicated outreach teams and support workers on the programme. Should not some of the funding that delivery organisations receive be ring-fenced for this purpose to ensure that, in all areas of England and Northern Ireland, the NCS is genuinely a programme for all?

Finally, on the ambitions of the Bill, more than £1 billion over five years is a lot of money for a relatively young programme, especially given the austere times we live in. So is the Bill ambitious enough? For example, how does it link with wider questions of citizenship? Citizenship might well fall off the school curriculum, and that would appear at odds with the driving philosophy of the Bill and the programme. We regularly hear talk of a proposed year of service, advocated, for example, by the excellent City Year UK, although there is no mention of that in the Bill. In contrast, the NCS provides short programmes for 16 and 17-year-olds. It is a clearly defined programme but, if we were to be bolder, we might want to discuss certain issues. For example, City Year UK recruits young people to serve for a year in some of the most challenging communities, but the status of the volunteers is not clear. In other countries, such as the USA and France, full-time volunteering has a clearer legal status, and Governments are active in incentivising participation. Should we not consider a more systematic Government approach to the idea of a year of service including help with university fees and the like? As I understand it, full-time volunteers are currently characterised as NEETs—technically not in full-time education, employment or training. In other

countries, full-time volunteering has a proper legal status. Why should we not move in this direction? Where have the Government got to on the issue?

In conclusion, I admit that I am one of the few people left who does subscribe to the idea of the big society. The NCS is what the previous Prime Minister called

“the Big Society in action”,

of which I am very supportive. I think it a good thing that the recently departed Prime Minister has agreed to chair the NCS patrons.

The Bill, although small and technical, has a big ambition behind it to build virtuous citizens and help us to live together peacefully. It is a little Bill, but one that is hugely significant for the future character of the country we wish to build. Nothing could be more important. If the Bill helps the NCS to achieve and endure, it will have achieved plenty.

4.34 pm

**Sir Alan Haselhurst** (Saffron Walden) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas), whose remarks I received warmly. Having believed that this was a Bill to which it was not possible to make any objection, I thought that the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) had to cast around fairly widely in order to disguise his enthusiasm for it. Four years ago, I had my first encounter with the NCS, and I decided then that it was a good thing. This Bill seems to be designed to make it more of a good thing, and that is why I welcome it so warmly.

I think back over years to when one of the siren calls that one heard from young people was, “There’s nothing to do here”, whether “here” was a town or a village, and so on. In reality, of course, there were things to do, but there was no obvious way of making a positive contribution to the community beyond, perhaps, the Scouts and the Girl Guides. Then from an older generation one would hear the call, “Youngsters these days need discipline: bring back national service”—something that our professional armed forces rather disdained as an idea. People would say, “Well, it did me good, and I’m sure it’s what everybody needs today.” That view began to fade, quite rightly, but talk there was of a civilian equivalent. Yet somehow it never got going. It is to the credit of the former Prime Minister, the then Member for Witney, that he took this up and made a real achievement of it. Many of us always felt that there was scope for it, perhaps because we were enthused by what the late President Kennedy did with the Peace Corps in involving and harnessing the views and enthusiasm of young people. At last, with the National Citizen Service, we have a scheme that has taken root and is flourishing.

My connection with the NCS has simply been that I have tried dutifully to visit a group in my constituency in each of the past four years. I have seen a whole host of things that young people have been engaged in at various stages of the four-week process that they follow. I can certainly attest to the growing confidence I have seen among those young people, the interaction between them, coming as they do from many different backgrounds and never having met each other before, and the enthusiasm that they have. I welcome that. I never heard a voice raised to say that it was a waste of time or a bad thing; it was all about wanting to go back and tell other people

that it was something they should think about when their chance came. I therefore accept the trust’s own findings of greater positivity among people whom it has managed to persuade to come into the scheme. The hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham referred to the Ipsos MORI poll evaluation, which is good evidence that young people themselves feel positive about it.

So what are the concerns? I suppose there is the possibility that the NCS has an effect on recruitment to other organisations, whether it be Voluntary Service Overseas, Médecins Sans Frontières, UN Volunteers, Save the Children, Oxfam, the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme or the Prince’s Trust, but that is not the right way of looking at it. It is more likely that the NCS will be a stepping stone to looking around for other things that people may do in life having had the knowledge and experience of what being part of it was all about. In short, I do not see anything that the NCS can spoil. It is about inculcating a habit and an approach among young people, and that can only be for the good of our society.

Of course it is right that we should be concerned about governance. One or two colleagues have mentioned how we control the scheme, make sure it is offering value for money, and so on. It seems to me that an annual report presented to Parliament offers us all a way of checking that. I support the idea of a debate about it, because we should talk about such things more often. The achievements of young people as they are manifested in the NCS each year should be highlighted in Parliament. Too many people are ready to believe the worst of young people simply on the basis of a story that they read in a newspaper that puts young people in a bad light, while completely ignoring the fact that the vast majority of young people mean well and, indeed, do well in their contribution to society, the local community and so on.

Having had the pleasure and privilege of some involvement with voluntary organisations over the years, I believe that one thing we must be careful about is supposing that we can attach a precise value to the benefits of being involved with the NCS. How can we measure somebody’s contribution—the enthusiasm with which they go out to collect money for a cause that they have become familiar with, and the way in which that becomes an ongoing part of how they want to run their lives? How can we measure that? We cannot. We cannot measure how a person’s outlook on society has improved, to make them a more positive citizen than they might otherwise have been. Although we must be responsible about the amount of money that is spent, we do not want to pretend that we can implement a view that amounts to knowing the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): My right hon. Friend makes a powerful and important point. I have visited schemes throughout my constituency, and three of my children have attended the NCS or been a mentor on the NCS. The benefit is some way down the line, in growing their confidence and their ability to understand where other people come from. One of my daughters is studying at university with a young man whose background, before they were both on the NCS, was somewhat challenging, but everybody equals out in that place. One of the fundamental benefits of the NCS is to level the playing field, both educationally and in ability. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

**Sir Alan Haselhurst:** My hon. Friend's rather lengthy contribution has extended my speech. I absolutely applaud what she says, and I am grateful for her support for the remarks that I have just made.

The Local Government Association has expressed some concern about the idea that the money that will go into the NCS is money that the LGA will not get, or that the LGA might lose some money in the process. I do not think that any of us wants to decry what many local authorities, to their credit, do in providing youth services, and I have always been an advocate for such work. The NCS is a special organisation that in no way negates what local authorities do. We might actually find that more people want to take part in the various other youth services, thus extending the reach of those bodies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier) raised the issue of safety, and of course that is important, but I hope that he did not overdo it. I thought about some of the schemes I have seen, where even the use of a fork in the earth to tidy up a community garden could cause an injury, or where someone on a street corner bravely advertising the fact that they are operating a car wash some little distance away could be knocked down in an accident. All sorts of horrors could befall people in the more ordinary things, not just in the high adventure activities. It is, of course, quite right that we should not assume that anything goes or allow people to be put at risk.

**Sir Julian Brazier:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Sir Alan Haselhurst:** I was not really disagreeing with my hon. Friend, but I will give way to him.

**Sir Julian Brazier:** My right hon. Friend is, of course, absolutely right. My point is that we have to be very careful to make sure that an unhealthy obsession with trying to eliminate all risks does not end up squeezing the opportunities for real adventure out of children's lives.

**Sir Alan Haselhurst:** I do agree with that. Of course, the adventure part of the NCS is distinct from the ordinary activities in which there could be a safety risk.

It seems to me that the real test to which we should apply our minds is whether the core programme is delivering—whether the numbers going through are continuing to rise. What I have found so encouraging is that those who have graduated, if that is the right word, are increasingly ready to take on a further role, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham, and come back as mentors, tutors and so on. I had the pleasure of meeting some of them earlier this afternoon, and it is great that they admit their eyes have been opened and their experience deepened and that they are so willing to pass that on. The best recruiters are those people going back to their schools to talk about it among their acquaintances and encourage further participation. If we keep on raising the numbers wanting to go into the NCS, we will do the quality of our social life in this country a great deal of good.

Schools should be encouraged. I heard what the Secretary of State said about the role of HMRC. Yes, that is good, but we need to get to the schools. If I may

say so, the fact that only about 150 Members of this House have as yet found the opportunity to meet a group on an NCS project is way below what is needed. I encourage all colleagues to find an opportunity to do it, so that they are well informed from their own impression in their own constituency of what a good project and concept the NCS is.

It is absolutely right that we are conferring royal charter status on the NCS, which will give it a higher profile and make it more obviously a proper organisation in the eyes of anybody who might doubt it. Finally, we should build, with enthusiasm on our part, a movement that already seems to have established firm foundations.

4.46 pm

**Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) and other hon. Members. I join them in welcoming the Bill and the provisions it puts in place, because I believe that the National Citizen Service should be a rite of passage for young people across our country. The Bill will embed the NCS as a national institution and make it an important part of our national fabric.

In Yorkshire, I have seen at first hand the great work that the challenge trust and the English Football League Trust do on behalf of the NCS. Last year, Barnsley football club's community sport and education trust oversaw 326 people taking part in the scheme. The fact that this is well over double the number that took part in 2013 gives me confidence that, with the right support, the scheme will become more and more successful.

For many, the NCS is the first step on their youth social action journey, and their involvement in the programme embeds in them the value of service. I am very supportive of the role it plays, because the NCS is a part of the youth social action sector that is going from strength to strength. That fact is very clearly demonstrated by the good work of organisations such as City Year, V Inspired, the Prince's Trust and the Scout Association. I could speak about the achievements of each of these organisations and many others at length, but I want to confine my remarks to the NCS and what makes it so special.

President Obama said in his farewell speech just the other day:

"For too many of us, it's become safer to retreat into our own bubbles...surrounded by people who look like us and share the same political outlook, and never challenge our assumptions."

The NCS consistently pushes our young people out of such bubbles and brings young people together from different backgrounds, across socio-economic and ethnic lines, which must be both applauded and built on. This is a timely moment to be having this debate, because 2016 was a year when the divisions in our country became more apparent than ever. Accordingly, it is hugely important that national institutions such as the NCS exist, where people can come together and meaningfully engage with those from different backgrounds to bridge those divides.

I would like to draw the House's attention, however, to research showing that the number of NCS graduates from hard-to-reach backgrounds has fallen since the introduction of the scheme. The hardest to reach are, by their very nature, hard to reach. Like my hon. Friend

the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed), I would like the Government to consider what more can be done to make the NCS open to those who need and would benefit from it most. I would therefore be grateful if the Minister considered whether the language used in the royal charter laying out the primary functions and purpose of the NCS Trust is sufficiently focused on the integration aspect of the NCS. Social integration—the act of mixing and forging bonds with those from different backgrounds—is a process. Cohesive communities are the outcome.

For many young people, taking part in the NCS is the beginning of creating the diverse social networks they need to flourish. Therefore, we should focus on ensuring that the hardest-to-reach young people can take up the opportunity afforded to them by the NCS. Programme providers such as The Challenge are doing fantastic work to that end, employing dedicated personal coaches to support young people with complex needs prior to and after completing the NCS, to ensure as few barriers to entry as possible for these young people.

**Jo Churchill:** One of the mentors said to me that one of the young people who got the most out of her course was a young carer. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is perhaps a group that should be targeted? They often have a hard job accessing holidays or recreation or are unable to lift themselves out of their current environment in a way that is helpful and meaningful.

**Dan Jarvis:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady. If I might say so, I thought my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North was slightly unfairly chided for seeking to make the most constructive of contributions to this debate, because there is a consensus across the House that this is a great scheme and that young people benefit enormously from it. The challenge that Government and all of us find is that those who would perhaps benefit the most are, as I have said, the hardest to reach. Opposition Members are offering a constructive critique of the scheme—a scheme that we support and believe in—to ensure that it maximises the benefit for all those who we think would benefit from it.

Prior to the hon. Lady's most helpful intervention, I was alluding to the incredibly important work done by The Challenge in dedicating personal coaches to support young people with complex needs and ensuring that they have the same opportunities as participants from more affluent backgrounds. For the programme to have integration at its heart, it must be a programme for all and providers must have adequate resource to focus their attention on this work. Although the NCS plays an important role in enabling social mobility, it should not be seen as a ready-made remedy to the problems caused by cuts to other youth services. It must be part of a sector-wide investment strategy.

My life both outside and inside politics has shown me the value of service and active citizenship. The National Citizen Service is a 21st-century manifestation of those values. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to the Opposition's point—which, I think it is fair to say, was made most constructively—about the NCS's role in facilitating integration and including the hardest-to-reach groups in our society, but most of all I look forward to the programme growing from strength to strength as a result of this Bill and the royal charter.

4.54 pm

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). I speak both as a local Member of Parliament and as chairman of the all-party groups on heritage rail—the link will become clear in a moment—and on democratic participation.

This debate is being watched in the House and outside by those with an active involvement in the NCS, and they might think, “Why isn't there a packed House to celebrate such an important scheme?” However, they should draw some comfort from the fact that that means it is not a contentious scheme, but one that has cross-party support. All right hon. and hon. Members want it to succeed. It is, in a way, a good sign that while there is not that much interest, there is not too much controversy about this Bill.

I welcome the fact that the Bill will place the NCS on a statutory footing and bring it close to being a national institution and a rite of passage for 15 to 17-year-olds. I want to join others in paying tribute to the former Prime Minister and Member for Witney, David Cameron, who was a great champion of the NCS, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), who is now a Minister in another Department but who did so much to get the NCS up and running in the last Parliament. I pay tribute to those working on the NCS at a national level and to those who, as we have heard, participate as volunteers and mentors in all the schemes. Without their great dedication, the schemes would not have been so successful. Finally, I pay tribute to the current Minister and Secretary of State for championing the NCS. It would be fair to say that my family and that of the Secretary of State already know the benefits of outdoor activity, because we often take them on route marches in the summer recesses.

I wish to deal with three issues today: the building of skills that our young people need for life in 21st-century Britain; the community cohesion and integration aspects of NCS; and the specific amendment tabled in the other place, which I also intend to put down, on volunteering for what is considered to be an industrial undertaking.

The NCS is often the first step for young people on their youth social action journey, and it places emphasis on creating more integrated and engaged citizens. The Prime Minister's recent speech unveiling the shared society has already been mentioned. She rightly said that it is time to tackle the culture of individualism that seems to have grown up. The NCS is about ensuring that young people are equipped with the necessary skills to get ahead in life.

I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) talking about character, because I championed character education when I was running the Department for Education, and I set up the character awards and grants. I have had conversations with both local and national providers, and I believe that the NCS will play a hugely important part in building the individual and national character of young people.

The NCS is a vital extracurricular activity, but is also about civic engagement. Recent research shows that participants in the NCS are more likely to vote. Bite the Ballot, partners with the NCS via the Challenge Network from 2014, has provided the tools used to run sessions on political engagement. As a result, 95% of all

[Nicky Morgan]

participants have gone on to register to vote. At a time when we often lament the fact that young people are not much engaged in the political process, that just shows one of the benefits of the NCS.

Through NCS programmes, young people are able to work with local businesses and social leaders to develop their resilience, grit—one of my favourite words—teamwork and leadership skills, and to discover more about their area through delivering local volunteering projects that matter to them. I recently met Education Business Partnership, the regional delivery partner of the NCS, in my own constituency, which has worked with more than 5,000 16 and 17-year-olds in the east midlands since 2011. It has been supported to carry out over 100,000 hours of social action.

In Loughborough, I have worked with a number of organisations that benefit from NCS social action, including Rainbows children's hospice and the Falcon centre, which provides homeless people with accommodation. I suspect that all hon. Members in their places today, in common with my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst), will have met local NCS cohorts. I have met at least three of mine during their residential week in Leicester, at the end of their social action project to renovate the community room at Hind Leys College and the project at Fearon Hall in my constituency. The last one involved the great sacrifice of eating cupcakes on a Saturday morning. It was very difficult, and I was delighted that they had chosen to raise funds in that way.

There is an intensive nature to and seriousness behind the NCS programme. Hon. Members have already spoken about the levelling effects of the activities, and the setting of shared goals that contributes to the development of a common identity between the participants who often come from diverse backgrounds. People have been right to speak about the national importance of the NCS. The result of last year's referendum has meant that discussions about national identity are ever more to the fore, and I believe that the mixing of people from different backgrounds is a vital part of what the NCS offers. I also welcome the fact that the Bill will encourage more young people to take advantage of the programme.

Schools are clearly an important way of reaching young people and informing them of the benefits of participating in the programme. When I was Secretary of State for Education, I had some conversations with the Minister. I was very much of the view that schools should facilitate the giving of information to young people about the benefits of the scheme. It is sometimes tempting to ask our schools to do an awful lot, and I used to say that if we asked schools to do everything that other people asked of them, they would never get round to teaching until about midnight every night. We must have a balance, but there must be a way for schools to facilitate the giving of information about the programme both to future participants and to parents and families, and to allow those who have participated in the scheme to come back and talk to future cohorts about why they should sign up.

I hope to pick up an amendment that was tabled in the other place, and I hope that we may be able at least to debate it. The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that the Bill does not unintentionally prevent young

people from working as volunteers on a heritage railway or tramway as part of a programme provided or arranged by the NCS. A similar amendment was tabled by Lord Faulkner, and has already been debated in the other place. As I have said, I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on heritage rail, and I recognise the considerable contribution that that sector makes to local economies through tourism and employment. Indeed, the Great Central Railway, which is in my constituency, attracts 138,000 visitors per year. In 2015, the value of tourism to Leicestershire grew for the sixth consecutive year, reaching a record high of £1.57 billion and providing employment for more than 20,700 people.

Young people will be vital to the success of the industry, as they provide voluntary maintenance and operational support. In turn, heritage railways and tramways help to engage young people, and provide a platform for them to learn the important new skills that the NCS is instilling. However, it appears that the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act 1920 excludes “children”, defined in section 558 of the Education Act 1996 as

“an individual who has not yet reached 16”,

from working in what is described as an industrial undertaking. It seems, therefore, that it is illegal for young people to volunteer on heritage railways, although the current push towards volunteering did not exist when the 1920 Act came into force. A new clause has been proposed to clarify the Bill and to make it clear that that Act should not prevent young people from volunteering on heritage railways and tramways.

Health and safety have been discussed this afternoon; I should emphasise that the standard health and safety, safeguarding and supervisory requirements would, of course, still apply. We need more young volunteers on our heritage railways, and the all-party parliamentary group will be considering the role of apprenticeships and the development of employability skills that are vital in the 21st century.

Let me end by expressing my wholehearted support for the NCS and the Bill, and my wish to see maximum participation in the NCS in the future. It is a good thing—in fact, a great thing—for the individual young people who participate, but it is also a great thing for this country. I hope to have an opportunity to ask Ministers to think about updating the law in respect of heritage railways and industrial undertakings.

5.3 pm

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** I join colleagues in taking a consensual and comradely approach to the Bill. I am extremely supportive of the National Citizen Service and the brilliant work that it does with young people in my constituency. Redcar's youth unemployment rate is two and a half times the national average. Some 30 or 40 years ago, young people leaving school knew that they would have a guaranteed job at the steelworks, at ICI or on the docks, but those jobs and industries have gone, and young people now face a much more insecure and challenging environment for jobs and opportunities. My greatest fear is that those who are growing up in Redcar do not see that they have a future in the region, and believe that if they are to get on, they must move away. One of the most important functions of the NCS is giving young people a stake in their local

communities and restoring civic pride. That is fundamental to communities such as mine when we are building for the future.

I have seen our NCS regenerate football clubs, paint meeting rooms for young carers and turn concrete roadsides into gardens, and I have seen it raise a huge amount for fantastic local charities, organisations that deal with domestic violence, young carers, and a number of other worthwhile causes. The programme's emphasis on the development of life and work skills, particularly self-esteem and confidence-building, and its encouragement of the next generation to take a stake in their communities are extremely valuable. I was privileged to attend some of the award ceremonies and to see young men and women stand up and address a room containing 200 or 300 people, which they openly admitted that they would never have done a few weeks before they started the programme. The programme gives them fantastic skills such as budgeting, project management and fundraising. Those skills are fundamental to young people's success but, as we have heard, in an increasingly squeezed school curriculum, we do not have time to teach them. I therefore value the NCS highly and welcome the role that the Bill will play in establishing it as a national institution that more young people can access.

I also share the view that many hon. Members have expressed that one of the greatest strengths of the NCS is the way in which it brings together young people from all walks of life, helping to bridge social divides and overcome prejudice. This ensures that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to access the same opportunities as those from wealthier and better-connected families. Social inclusion and social mobility are intrinsic to the principles of the NCS and I strongly believe that these principles must be maintained when it is placed on a statutory footing. It must not be the preserve of young people who are already confident enough to put up their hands or those whose parents have the sharpest elbows.

I know that the NCS is committed to making every effort to reach the most socially excluded young people. The National Audit Office report on the NCS that was published last week noted a higher percentage of participants from minority groups, such as those on free school meals, than in the wider population, which is a positive achievement, but we must make sure that this motive remains a key purpose after the transition of the NCS to a royal charter body—it cannot ever be relegated to something of lower importance. I therefore support the calls made by our Front-Bench spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed), and by The Challenge for the wording of the royal charter specifically to reference social integration as one of the primary functions of the NCS programme. Furthermore, I support the case for funding to be specifically ring-fenced for targeting hard-to-reach groups. Those aims are fundamental to the NCS and it is important that they are formally written into the governance fabric of the new body.

I was also initially concerned that some of the Government's proposals could place unnecessary burdens on schools and local authorities, which are already overstretched. It is a welcome change that no formal duties on either will be included in the Bill.

Ensuring that the programme grows sustainably will be a particular challenge, especially because the NAO has highlighted rising costs and lower than expected

participation rates. One of the most important aspects of the Bill is to learn the lessons of the Kids Company debacle and to ensure that proper reporting and accounting structures are in place for this organisation, which receives a large amount of Government funding.

We should remember that although the NCS is important, it is not the only youth service in town. Other services play a vital role in diverting young people away from crime, supporting young carers and overcoming exclusion. They must not be deprived of the funding that they need to operate.

The Local Government Association survey to which the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) referred found that 90% of English councils had cut services for teenagers. That is a result of huge reductions in central Government funding. Research by UNISON estimates that between April 2010 and April 2016, £387 million was cut from youth service spending across the UK. Youth services of varying kinds play a vital role in our communities, providing real and ongoing benefits for the young people who need them. Crucially, in many cases, they result in savings for the taxpayer because they reduce demand for other public services further down the line. The importance of wider youth services must not be overlooked by the Government.

I am proud to say that I support the principles of the Bill. I am pleased that there is such wide cross-party support of the value of the NCS programme. With a bit of clearer language in the royal charter, its value would be greatly enhanced. Young people on Teesside have great energy, great ideas and an enormous amount to contribute to their local community and their country. I hope that the Bill will help more of them to fulfil their potential.

5.8 pm

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley). I particularly want to highlight her comment that the National Citizen Service should not be the preserve of just those who are confident. Many young people who might lack confidence need encouragement to come forward.

Over the past couple of years, I have been delighted to attend a number of NCS events in Crawley. I have had the opportunity to present certificates to local graduates of the programme on a number of occasions. We often hear people say that our young people simply do not care about their local area and have no interest in getting involved in the community. Given our experiences, I am sure that everyone in the House would contest that assertion.

The National Citizen Service leads to increased community engagement, awareness and social action. I have seen this for myself from NCS participants in my constituency, where the initiative is delivered by the Crawley Town Community Foundation. Cohort after cohort have shown they are extremely committed to helping those less fortunate than themselves, and through the NCS programme, they continue to come up with ways to raise awareness and funds for important local causes. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has previously called for more collaboration between the voluntary sector and the NCS, and such closer working together could lead to an even greater difference.

[Henry Smith]

I am sure that other operators would be able to learn from what I have seen in Crawley. Last year, through their social action projects, NCS participants worked alongside a host of local good causes, including Crawley Open House, the Springboard Project, St Catherine's Hospice, the Olive Tree Cancer Support Centre and Save the Children. I would like to use this opportunity not only to commend Crawley's NCS graduates, but to thank them sincerely for raising more than £7,400 across the three NCS programmes last year, and for volunteering a total of over 7,500 hours of their time to help those local organisations. This consists of more than just fundraising; they have put together packs for the homeless and organised renovation work to help a charity as well.

A little over six months ago, our new Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), took office. Before entering No. 10 for the first time, she stood on the steps of Downing Street and talked about the importance of ensuring greater opportunity for all. The National Citizen Service helps with that opportunity. A key hallmark of the NCS is ensuring that young people are taught skills that they cannot learn in class. More than nine out of 10 participants believe that the NCS provides the opportunity to develop skills that will be useful in the future, and analysis has shown that in the year after participation, the majority of NCS graduates state that they have used those skills already. The programme increases wellbeing and lowers levels of anxiety, with the greatest impact being found among those from the poorest backgrounds.

Financial support is available for the one-off £50 fee. In fact, the National Audit Office states that the average contribution in 2016 was £30 as a result of concessions and bursaries. In contrast, estimates show that in 2016 the cost per participant will exceed £1,800—I am sure Members agree that that is an investment worth making. In 2015, 17% of NCS participants were eligible for free school meals, compared with around 10% of young people among the general population. Analysis of the summer 2014 programme has shown that the NCS is estimated to have delivered social benefits valued at between £70 million and £250 million, giving a benefit-to-cost ratio of between £1.12 and £3.98 for every £1 spent.

Research also shows that fewer than half of 18 to 24-year-olds voted at the last general election. While more continues to be done in this regard, I welcome NCS figures showing that participants are more likely to vote and engage in our democracy after finishing the scheme. Indeed, thousands of young people registered to vote while taking part in the NCS. I am grateful to the Government for their continued enthusiasm for supporting the initiative and, like other right hon. and hon. Members, pay tribute to the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, for establishing the National Citizen Service and his ongoing involvement after leaving public office.

The running of the NCS is not simply a case of a host of local operators doing their own thing, independent of one another and of established charity groups. My own constituency's local provider, the Crawley Town Community Foundation, works not only to help charities in West Sussex, but alongside the Football League Trust, which supports a host of league clubs in delivering the programme. Crawley Town football club has backed

the NCS over the years, including by having the programme's participants hold bucket collections for local good causes on match days and hosting the graduation ceremonies in the stadium suite overlooking the pitch. That commitment will go further with additional events and announcements in the near future. There is also regular exposure on the club's website and in the matchday programme. The impact of the association with the local football club cannot be underestimated.

The Bill will place a duty on schools, colleges, and local and national Government to inform young people and their parents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, of the skills and benefits that can be gained from the National Citizen Service. One of the most powerful ways in which the NCS can be promoted is directly by the very people who have taken part. Just under half of last year's Crawley graduates are still involved in the scheme, which is the highest figure across Kent and Sussex. Will the Minister tell the House what assistance the Department may be able to give to NCS providers to ensure that that rate increases across the country? Will the Department go further to assist the NCS Trust in ensuring best practice?

This month, Crawley celebrates the 70th anniversary of its designation as a new town. It has been a time of reflection on not only the challenges facing us today, but what makes us such a strong community. The National Citizen Service helps and encourages social cohesion, social mobility and social engagement. The young adults who take part in such programmes—let us not forget the staff who help to deliver such schemes and therefore the opportunities—are people of whom we can all be proud. Long may their fine work continue.

5.16 pm

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith). It has been heartening to hear widespread praise for the National Citizen Service and I want to join in that praise—it is an excellent scheme. The Secretary of State mentioned that it operates in England and in Northern Ireland, but I want to put on the record my praise for the excellent volunteering element of the Welsh baccalaureate. One good thing about such programmes is that we are able to share expertise and good ideas, wherever they come from, both within these islands and internationally. That is a great strength and has always been the case with the best volunteering programmes.

The Minister will be familiar with them, but I want to discuss some points made about the Bill by some voluntary sector organisations. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations spoke with some eloquence about the NCS being part of

“a longer journey of social action and volunteering”,

of diversity of participants being more important than numbers, and about how crucial it is that young people are involved in the design of the programme. The Charities Aid Foundation makes a plea in the form of asking for a new article to be inserted into the royal charter to ensure that the scheme is a way of encouraging younger people into other social programmes, such as charity trusteeship. Its point is that while 18 to 24-year-olds make up 12% of this country's population, they make up less than 1% of charity trustees. It is important to develop the scheme and get its participants involved in

being trustees and in other leadership roles. Of course, many of us here who are in middle age will recognise that one does not stay aged 15 to 17 forever. *[Interruption.]* One of my colleagues points out that not everyone here is in middle age.

How do we develop volunteering, and how do we develop a type of volunteering that brings people together? What is the next step for volunteering after this Bill? My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) spoke powerfully about how volunteering does not have any legal status in this country. Indeed, volunteers aged 18 and over, or anyone else, could be designated as not in employment, education or training. For those aged 18-plus who go on volunteering programmes, there is no agreement that that should mean national insurance contributions and the like. We need to develop those ideas as we take forward the National Citizen Service.

Many Members on both sides of the House have spoken passionately today about integration, diversity and bringing people together. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) cited a moving quote by President Obama. This is not all about being in one's own little bubble and talking to people who agree with ourselves; it is about coming together with different people. I remember a television programme from a few years ago—I think it was a “BBC Parliament when we are not here” type of programme—and sitting on a stage were former Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, who were discussing with young people some sort of leadership programme that they had established in the United States. I always remember former President Clinton talking about the idea of bringing together young African-Americans who are active in their community and getting them on the same programmes as young people involved in the Tea Party movement who believe that the world would be a better place if everything operated in their small town. He spoke about bringing together those energies and about how the synergy between them creates something better for society. I am not sure how many of those ideas are at play in the US at the moment, but what a fantastic idea it is to bring together different groups of young people so that they can share their different ideas. Who knows what might come out of that?

When we look at different sorts of schemes, we do not know where they will lead. For instance, I hope that one area we look at is volunteering for former young offenders and for people who have been in prison. That step, which is sometimes very great, can take people out of a life of recidivism in which they offend, go into jail, reoffend, go back into jail, and on and on. Is there a specific role for volunteerism that can bridge that gap between prison and employment? We need to be thinking of that as a next step.

I warmly commend the Bill and the ideas behind it, and I hope the resourcing, the collaboration and the involvement with voluntary groups will be in place. There are so many ideas for us to think about in relation to volunteering and how it creates the sort of society that not everyone might want to see at the moment but that we are certainly going to need.

5.23 pm

**James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): I am proud to be here to support the NCS Bill. The NCS is one of the best things done by the last Government,

led by Prime Minister David Cameron, and I am delighted that it is being put on a statutory footing, safeguarding its future as a national institution. The NCS will give hundreds of thousands of young people the momentum they need for a lifetime commitment to volunteering.

I chaired the debating society at school, and indeed at university, and one motion that we used to debate was whether national service should be reinstated. It was difficult to argue for the motion, both because of the cost and because we did not need a large force prepared for military action, but there is a lot of evidence for the other benefits of national service, which I can see in the National Citizen Service. When I was researching the motion on national service I needed to go no further than my late father, who did national service in the 1950s with the Royal Marines and the Durham Light Infantry. He would always tell me what a great social leveller national service was, because in basic training someone could be in a dorm with people from Eton, stockbrokers and electricians—people from all walks of life and every conceivable background. Any pre-existing airs and graces someone had would quickly be squashed by a diet of exercise, hard work and learning new skills, and having to live, eat, sleep and work—do everything together—as a team. People who had been through national service were better able to adapt to the challenges life threw at them, and to work together and interact better with people from all different walks of life.

Let us wind forward 50 years to the NCS. Although it has none of the military training of national service, it does have those positive features we saw with that: the levelling effects, with individuals from all different walks of life coming together, where people are pushed out of their comfort zone and engaged in challenging activities on an equal footing; and the social atmosphere of people living, eating and cooking together with others from every walk of life. In addition, the NCS has provided 8 million hours of voluntary work in communities in the UK. Graduates of the NCS are likely to contribute six hours more per month of voluntary work than people who have not been through the scheme. Eight out of 10 graduates of the NCS also said that they are more likely to get on with people from different backgrounds whom they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet.

In Kingston upon Thames, in my constituency, I have been to see the NCS in action in both the years I have been an MP. In 2015, I went to see volunteers doing their voluntary week, when they were helping with the Weir Archer Academy's disability sports taster day. Last year, I was one of the dragons at the NCS “Dragons' Den”, where groups bid for extra funding for their social action campaigning projects. On both those occasions, I took time to speak to the young people involved, and two things came up time and again: that the NCS programme had brought them out of their shell, giving them a confidence they had lacked before; and that they had the opportunity to mix with people from the same borough whom they had never met before. These were people who had been to different schools, different types of schools, and were from different backgrounds. In the same way as President John F. Kennedy's Peace Corps and President Lyndon B. Johnson's AmeriCorps did, the NCS brings together young people to go out and do good things in their communities and in the world, and to come back with a mindset to help their local communities.

[James Berry]

The NCS also does a huge amount for social integration, which is why organisations such as The Challenge, which supports many of the NCS projects in urban areas such as London, are calling for social integration to be added to community cohesion as one of the stated aims of the NCS in the draft royal charter. The Prime Minister has spoken of the importance of social integration. In my view, the best way to get social integration right is to start when people are young and to give them opportunities to integrate that do not exist readily in every community. In her report on social integration, Dame Louise Casey noted the role of the NCS in

“improving understanding and relationships between young people from different backgrounds.”

Some 30% of NCS participants are from ethnic minorities, with the figure in Kingston being 65%, and 17% are on free school meals. The low admission fee, which can be waived if parental circumstances require it, is undoubtedly very important in achieving that, which is why the huge financial investment in the NCS for the lifetime of this Parliament is crucial. The NCS can and should become one of the key tools of social integration, so I am delighted it is being expanded and put on a statutory footing today.

Before I conclude, I want to make it clear to other organisations that encourage voluntary service and teach young people life skills that the focus on the NCS in no way denigrates the fantastic work that they do. I include among those organisations Girlguiding; the Scouts; the International Citizen Service in my constituency, which is run by Voluntary Service Overseas; and many other charities, such as Restless Development, formerly Students Partnership Worldwide, with which I spent several months as part of a charity project in Tamil Nadu in south India. All are part of the rich tapestry of volunteering and voluntary services for the youth of today, but, with funding behind it and the statutory footing it is going to receive today, the NCS will lead the way.

The NCS should make sure that, when it puts young people into voluntary placements, it works with local small charities. That is important first, because such charities often have much less by way of human and financial resources than the large national charities, so they could really do with additional man-hours from young, enthusiastic NCS volunteers; and secondly, because if the NCS participant is going to develop a long-term relationship with a charity or voluntary organisation, it is much better that it is a local one in the community where they are based, so that they can continue to serve.

The NCS is the fastest growing youth movement of its kind for a century. I hope that it becomes a rite of passage and a national institution, like the Peace Corps and the AmeriCorps are in the US. I hope that it gives young people from all backgrounds the chance to mix and to learn how to give something back to their community. I hope that it leads to a better society, with more active and responsible citizens, better engaged in their communities.

5.31 pm

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry). I very much agree with the remarks he made about the contribution made by the Scouts and Girlguiding, and by the other organisations. I also agree

with his really good point about how the Peace Corps and the AmeriCorps in America contribute to many of the aims we seek to pursue here in Parliament today. I say to the Minister that all Opposition Members, along with our Front-Bench team, very much welcome the Bill, which we think is an important step forward in achieving the goals we all share.

At a time when Brexit quite rightly dominates the national debate and many of our debates in Parliament, we should say to the media and the public at large that alongside that some hugely significant and important debates take place. The Government make important statements and introduce important Bills, and we respond. Today is one such occasion. The NCS is a hugely important initiative, and the Government are seeking, through the Bill, to develop and build on the progress that has already been made. Other Members have recounted their experiences of going to see the work done in their areas, and I have seen for myself in Nottingham that there is no shortage of brilliance in some of the work that takes place. I have seen the influence of the programme on young people from different backgrounds.

There is a word that I do not think has been used yet, but that is of particular importance. When I went to the graduation ceremony in Nottingham, I saw the self-esteem that it brought to people. If there is one thing that holds back many of our young people—alongside opportunity, background and so on—it is a lack of self-confidence, of self-esteem, and of belief that they have something positive to offer. In many circumstances, the NCS has generated that self-esteem, and the belief that they have worth and something to offer. If that will help them through their lives, it is an enormous step forward.

The other reason why this debate is important is that there are clearly different views—in this House, in the country and, indeed, around the world—on Brexit and its implications and consequences, but there is no division between us about the need to continue to promote people coming together and the universal values of tolerance, self-respect, and respecting others, whatever their ethnic background or religion. The NCS has at its heart the promotion of those universal values. At a time when there is some concern about tolerance and about divisions in our community, surely it is right for us as a Parliament to say, “Look at this as a model for the way that we want our country and our communities to go.” The scheme is hugely important.

I offer this challenge not just to the Government, but to all of us and to this Parliament. According to the National Audit Office report, 96,000 people are participating in the scheme at the present time. It is the Government’s intention, and an intention that we all support, for that to rise to some 360,000 by 2020-21. That requires, as the NAO points out, 40% annual growth. As this Bill goes through Committee, it will be a challenge to look at how we will achieve that and how we will increase those participation rates. We also need to look at the barriers to participation. The NAO report points out a couple of things: the importance of brand awareness and the need to try to ensure that more people are aware of the opportunities available through the NCS; and, importantly and significantly, access to schools and how we promote that. I am sure that much good work is done in schools, but, alongside that, we need to do more. All of us need to understand that we need to promote more effectively the NCS, what it is and what opportunities it offers.

**Jo Churchill:** That 40% is a large growth, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that part of that broadening of numbers will mean that there will need to be a large number of additional volunteering projects from which those children can benefit? That is something that those of us in this Chamber can help with, but I would be interested to know how the Government will fulfil that need so that we get more children helping in those residential homes, playgroups and all the other groups right across the spectrum.

**Vernon Coaker:** That is a very good and well-made point, and the Minister will have heard it.

The challenge for us is to see how we can increase the number of volunteering opportunities, and how we as a Parliament can challenge ourselves to deliver the objectives. It is not a criticism to turn around and say that we have not got the numbers that we would all like; it is a challenge. It is not for us to say that the Government are wicked and the Opposition are terrible. It is for us as a Parliament to say that this is a collective view about what is good for our country and for our young people, and therefore what do we have to do to achieve our objective? That is the big challenge for us. Imaginative and different things need to be considered.

There are 1.5 million 16 and 17-year-olds in our country—my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) looked that up for me—every one of whom would benefit from an NCS-type programme. We are talking about how we increase participation to 360,000—again, I say to the Minister that I am not criticising him—and how that is a massive challenge and yet we all agree that it is something that we would like our young people to experience. How do we deliver that? That is the challenge and the question that we need to ask ourselves.

Finally, this business of integration and of how we bring people together is so important. Members have talked about the need to reach the hard-to-reach groups and about the worrying statistics in the NAO report. Clearly, participation is an issue, whether it is about the hard to reach or other young groups.

Integration is hugely important, whether that is between ethnic groups, social groups, hard-to-reach groups and people who are well off, and so on. I say to the Minister that we should also consider integration between the regional divides that there appear to be in our country, and the divide between urban and rural areas. The divide is not just between white and black and all those other areas in which we would wish to see it overcome—what about the generational divide?

**Tim Loughton:** The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point that I will discuss further if I catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. He talks about bringing people together from different parts of society and also from different parts of the country, and one of the original ambitions, which is yet to be achieved, was about the fact that although people in my constituency in Sussex come from different parts of society, they do not mix with his constituents in Nottinghamshire, and vice versa. We need to extend the scheme so that we can bring people from different parts of the country and different parts of the kingdom together to share that experience.

**Vernon Coaker:** I agree absolutely, and that is the point I am making.

One of the most interesting things—I am sure that we have all done it—is getting young people talking to old people because, with their different perspective, they bring history alive. As a former history teacher, I know that when older people talked to young people about history it brought it alive to them. Those ways of bringing people together and overcoming division, whether it is between social classes, regions or generations, are one of the great strengths of the NCS. We need to be more open in saying that we have a huge ambition for ourselves and our country. We should not be afraid of having that ambition. The challenge is in how we deliver it, and is not something we should shy from.

5.41 pm

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker).

I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. We should recognise all the work that has gone into the NCS programme from those who work on and have developed the scheme. I add my thanks for all the work that David Cameron has done and continues to do with the NCS. Before I came to this place, I was involved in a number of social action projects, as my hon. Friends will probably be aware, both in the UK and overseas. One thing that I took away from that was that although we had some young people and some older people, a social action project can bring together people from all walks of life. They find themselves in a challenging situation, experiencing things that they have never experienced before; there is a lot that we can all learn from social action projects.

In the summer of 2015, just over a year ago, I was invited to join young people who were taking part in an NCS project in my Aldridge-Brownhills constituency at a place called the Hothouse, on the Redhouse estate in Aldridge. I think it is fair to say that I turned up with all my usual enthusiasm for all things social action and, much to the surprise of some of my constituents and to some of the young people, too, was prepared to get stuck in with more than a little bit of painting. What I took away was that these young people, who were from different schools and had been brought together by the NCS programme, were working together as a group. Members of the community came into the Hothouse during the time that they were undertaking the project. The Hothouse is a very special place in the constituency. It is at the heart of the Redhouse estate and the heart of the community, and does a lot of support work. It was a good example of the NCS at the heart of the local community, with people of different ages and from different backgrounds working together, and—this is the important thing—doing so for the mutual benefit of the community. It is a great example of how social interaction and integration really can work. That is what is so special and unique about the NCS. We must hold on to that ability to reach out to a broad base of young people as we move forward.

We know that the NCS already reaches out, but we must do all we can to build on that further. The programme is reaching out to hard-to-reach groups, such as those on free school meals and black and minority ethnic communities—the figures are really good—but I just wonder whether we need to find ways to reach out to other groups, such as the families sometimes described

[Wendy Morton]

as “just about managing” or the young people who might not see the NCS as something for them, perhaps because they lack the confidence to put their name forward. We must do all we can to ensure that those people have that opportunity if the NCS is to be a truly national service—I think that is what it is edging towards, and what it has every potential to become.

The Bill is an important step towards making the NCS a national institution. As we have heard this afternoon, the NCS is often the first step in young people’s participation in social action. As I have seen for myself, it can make a huge contribution to volunteering capacity, social integration and social cohesion within communities. According to the research I have done, a typical programme is 30 hours long. Thirty times 300,000 young people adds up to an awful lot of time spent in the community working on social action and building social capacity—my maths is not good enough to work out quite how many hours that is, but it is safe to say that it makes a massive contribution to our country.

In 2016, 78 young people from Aldridge-Brownhills took part, and across Birmingham and the Black country the total was 5,786. That is terrific, but I want us to see more. I want us to ensure that it will reach out to young people from all walks of life and achieve more. When I was doing my research, I was interested to find out how many schools in my constituency were involved in the project. I was really pleased to learn that all of them had been involved. That is a good example of how the NCS is starting to reach out across all schools and groups of young people in my patch.

We have heard this afternoon about the Casey review into opportunity and integration in the UK. I want to reiterate one of the points it made. It stated that the NCS programme is

“having a positive impact in improving understanding and relationships between young people from different backgrounds.”

That is really important.

However, it is not just about the social action and the doing in the community; it is about so many other things, such as intergenerational integration, social integration and community cohesion. The hon. Member for Gedling spoke at length about the impact of Brexit and the need to bring our country together, and the Prime Minister has spoken about the need to bring communities and the country together. I think that the NCS has an important role to play in that.

As has been said this afternoon, and as I have seen myself, it is also about developing those life skills that are not always taught in school or even at home. They can be taught and developed through the NCS programme. I believe in an environment where people feel safe to develop those skills and learn from one another.

The NCS programme is an excellent opportunity for young people to experience social action in a way that, bit by bit, across communities and across the country, is really making a difference and contributing to social cohesion and integration. As I said earlier, I hope the Bill can build on that. The programme is not just about the young people of today or the young people of tomorrow. It is about the future that we all want: a country that works together and is cohesive. We must not forget that at the heart of the NCS is, and should be,

the fact that young people come together from all walks of life. It does not matter whether they are black or white, working class or middle class; whatever background they come from, they all have the opportunity to take part in the NCS programme.

5.50 pm

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am proud not only to be part of the debate and to see this Bill come of age—and the NCS comes of age with the Bill, just as the NCS is a coming-of-age project—but of the small part I played in its genesis. I was there back in 2005 when it was a germ of an idea from the then Prime Minister. He spoke to a number of youth leaders and tasked Paul Oginsky, who later became David Cameron’s youth adviser and who runs the youth training organisation, Personal Development Point, with developing a programme. I was asked to be part of that and we published, in, I think, 2008, “It’s time to inspire Britain’s teenagers”, which was effectively a White Paper that raised and consulted on the whole subject of what became the NCS.

The scheme was designed on the principles laid out in that unofficial White Paper with the help of people such as Steve Hilton, whom some may remember and who had an even more ambitious idea for the scheme, which was that it should take at least six weeks throughout the summer, be called national service, be much closer to the original scheme of which it has some echoes, and be compulsory. After a great deal of research—I remember spending many weekends with groups of fantastically gobby young people from Leeds, Liverpool and London who had some amazing ideas about how such a scheme should develop—we put together what then became the NCS.

The NCS was intended to be a rites of passage scheme. In this country, we transition into adulthood really badly. In other cultures and other countries, there is a point in a teenager’s life at which they can be said to transition into adulthood and gain the society’s respect as an adult. Here, we do not really do that. Too often, growing up is characterised by negatives. Did a young person become an adult when they had their first fag behind the bike shed, when they became a teenage pregnancy statistic or some other negative? Too often, that is how we judge and gauge the progress of young people. The NCS scheme is all about positives. If young people go through a scheme that is designed to be rigorous and challenging, and make those sacrifices as part of it, they deserve the right to be respected and valued as an adult with a voice in society. That was one of the guiding principles behind the scheme.

The scheme was absolutely about social mixing. For many years, we have had many other good schemes, but none is as successful at social mixing as the NCS has become. Too often, kids from the same school or the same neighbourhood may go out on an outward bound project or be part of some local youth organisation. But not often enough are they mixed up with people they would never come across ordinarily or pass the time of day with in the street—people from the other side of town, the other side of the tracks or the other side of the country. Social mixing was at the heart of all this. It was also about challenging young people and taking them out of their comfort zone. I have been on many NCS challenges over many years and it is not a holiday

camp. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) said that she took up the challenge of painting. I have been forced to go on Jacob's ladders and climbing walls, which is no mean feat, particularly for the young people who have to haul me up part of the Jacob's ladder. The challenge was just as much for me as for them.

I have met kids who had never been out of a city, been out on a moor, or waded through a stream in the Brecon Beacons or the Lake District. These were new, challenging and often frightening experiences, but that was part of the NCS—it took them out of their comfort zone and showed them that there is more to life and that, with the help of their team, they are able to conquer these challenges. I have seen a kid fresh out of a youth justice establishment holding one end of the rope while on the other end, precariously dangling on a climbing wall, is an Etonian, and vice versa. Two people who might never have come together ordinarily are thrown together and absolutely rely on each other in order to get through the challenge. That was one of the guiding principles of the scheme, and that is why it is so successful. It is about sustainably engendering a sense of social responsibility and community cohesion.

It is also, as the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) said, about self-esteem and confidence, as we hear in so much of the feedback from young people who have been through the scheme. When they go to the graduation ceremony and have to perform, speaking up in front of an audience of hundreds, they all say, "I would never been able to do this if it hadn't been for this scheme." Then there are the other challenges that it inspires them and instils them with confidence to do. There is a great saying from the late, great Anita Roddick: "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try going to bed with a mosquito." The whole point of the NCS was to unleash a swarm of mosquitos—young people who on their own might not have much of an effect, but emboldened by being valued in such a scheme, and working together with other like-minded people, had the confidence to go out and make a difference.

The "Positive for Youth" policy that we developed in the Department for Education was another part of the scheme. The NCS should not be seen in isolation. It exists not for its own sake but as part of a bigger jigsaw of how we empower, engage, inspire and instil confidence in young people. It is also about society gaining respect for young people. One of the biggest challenges we still have in our society, as other hon. Members have said, is an intergenerational divide. Too often, older people regard younger people as being a bit reckless and a bunch of hoodlums. Too often, younger people think that older people are too set in their ways, a bit detached, or retrograde—I could go on. The NCS is about young people doing, and being seen to do, something worth while, making sacrifices, and gaining the respect of the rest of society, not least older people. It is about trying to bring the generations together.

My great vision in helping to develop the NCS was that around the country sustainable social action projects would be set up, whether on nature conservation or sexual health—a huge variety. We heard some very good examples from the Secretary of State. There will be a big sign saying, "This project is part of the National Citizen Service, set up by and run by young people". What a fantastic billboard and advert that is for the

constructive stuff that its young people do, while too often being denigrated by the rest of society, particularly the media. Proportionately, young people are much more likely than any other generation to spend their time volunteering, yet they are not given the credit for it. The NCS is one way of making that much more high profile.

When the first pilot started in 2009, 160 young people went through it. I feared at the time was that it would perhaps be used as a cheap summer holiday camp by some of the middle classes. How wrong I was. On that first pilot, 60% of the young people were black girls from inner cities, who did fantastically well. We had to encourage the middle classes and others, saying "Look, you can get involved in this too", and eventually that happened.

Then in 2010 we came into government, and the responsibility for the scheme was shared between the Cabinet Office and the Department for Education. On a very small budget to start with, and certainly with no budget for promoting and publicising it, the scheme really took off. At a difficult time of austerity, a lot of money was put into it. At a time when youth services were being unduly and unfairly hit through local authority cuts in funding, the scheme got off the ground. Six years on, more than 300,000 teenagers have taken part in it, some 93,000 of them in the past calendar year.

The hon. Member for Gedling is right: the cohort is about 720,000, and the scheme should absolutely be available to all of them. To be realistic, we need to make sure that we do not diminish or dilute the quality of what is offered. The only thing holding the programme back is the availability of good-quality, well-trained leaders. I do not want to try to reach an artificial target, when to do so might dilute the value and the quality of the programme. There is a big question mark over the capability of the the NCS to continue to train up leaders within the organisation—and, as we have heard, to ensure that NCS graduates come back as youth leaders—rather than poaching them from other youth groups, which would not be helpful.

To return to the figures for the social and ethnic mix, 30% of the young people doing the scheme at the moment are from BME communities, and 17%—more than double the percentage in the population—qualify for free school meals. Many of us have been to the graduation ceremonies, where young people get up on stage to be given their certificate and, in many cases, to strut their stuff. I went to a ceremony at Wembley stadium for 1,000 young people who had graduated from the various football schemes. Every one of them got up in front of the 1,000 people in the audience and did their bit. It was a hugely uplifting and emotional sight.

Numerous parents come up to me after such ceremonies and say, "This is the best scheme that my son or daughter has ever been on. Why do you keep it such a secret?" That is part of the problem. The scheme is hugely undersold given the outcomes, the achievements and the good that it does. As was envisaged, I want some really good examples of the social action projects that have come about through the NCS to feature in television programmes and in national newspapers and magazines. I want a competition every year, as there was, between the best social action projects in certain categories. We need an equivalent of the Oscars for the

[Tim Loughton]

National Citizen Service to show people what is being achieved by the most inspiring and dedicated young people, and by all those behind them.

I am a big supporter of the NCS and of the Bill, but I have a couple of technical comments about the Bill. Clause 1(2) states that:

“For the purposes of this section... ‘young people’ means 16 and 17 year olds, but may also include other persons who are 15 years old or have attained the age of 18 but are under the age of 25”.

I do not know many 16 or 17-year-olds, or 15 or 18-year-olds, who are not under the age of 25, so I am not quite sure what that clause is doing there. The other point I want to make about subsection (2) is that it talks only about England. We know that the scheme at the moment is confined to England. We have tried to extend it to other parts of the kingdom, but of course it is a devolved matter. Northern Ireland, in particular, showed a lot of interest in the scheme. I hope that the National Citizen Service can become a United Kingdom-wide programme with the buy-in of the Assemblies and Parliaments in the other parts of the United Kingdom, and I hope that we will not need new legislation to make that possible. The Bill, in its terminology, limits the scheme to England.

The clauses about preparing accounts, business plans and annual reports are all standard. To be constructively critical, however—I raised this point with the Secretary of State earlier—this is not just about numbers, the quality of this specific programme or the amount of money we are spending on it; it needs to be seen in the context of the wider youth offer. As was raised in the other place, there needs to be a mechanism that allows us to judge the quality of what the NCS is achieving against other youth programmes, and to compare the value for money we are getting from it against investments in other youth organisations.

The NCS cannot be seen as a stand-alone intervention for young people: it is not there just for its own sake. It starts only at the age of 16 or thereabouts, but the problems it tries to address start earlier and need early intervention. Some 42% of young people, being more fully committed to social action, began getting involved before the age of 10. The Scouts point out that the NCS three-week programme costs about £1,500 per person—the National Audit Office has come up with a new report that raises the cost to £1,862—and claim that they can establish a place for a young person in an area of deprivation for between £400 and £550, but there are 45,000 people on their waiting lists to join because they do not have sufficient people to be scout leaders. That is fine: there are places for both organisations, particularly if the NCS is providing leaders, as was intended, not just for the NCS but to help all the other youth and community organisations. If it works properly, the NCS is a recruiting sergeant for a whole host of other youth organisations, whose expansion may often be curtailed by the lack of youth leaders and properly trained youth experts.

My plea is that we need more detail to make the NCS more sustainable and more complementary to, rather than conflictual with, other youth organisations that are doing some really good stuff in other parts of the kingdom. We need to make sure that we can justify its expense and its quality in the greater context of what else is going on. There is a lot of ambition in the NCS,

much of which has already come about, but we need to do much more to make it more widely available to a great many more young people who can benefit from it, just as 300,000 have so far, as the evidence shows. We need guarantees about value for money and quality across the whole sector and about the sustainability of ongoing volunteering among NCS graduates. Such volunteering is not just for the duration of the scheme itself, and social action projects are not just for a matter of weeks, but for perpetuity, with other local organisations—with the local authority, local businesses and local volunteers—helping to run those projects for the NCS cohorts in between other summer experiences.

I wish the Bill well. Questions will come up in Committee that will add yet further to the quality of the programme and, more importantly, to the enthusiasm of other people involved in helping young people in our society. Lots of good things came out of the Brexit debate, which has been mentioned even on this subject, but which I have avoided so far, but if we can all agree on one good thing that did so it was that the turnout of young people in the Brexit referendum—it was not called that, but that is what it became—was some 63%, against a turnout of young people in a normal general election of some 43%. The NCS can be part of the solution to persuading and encouraging young people to be part of decision making in our society. It is a great example of involving young people in its design, and it should be a great example of young people continuing to be involved in the fabric of the future of our country as a whole.

6.8 pm

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Like everyone else who has spoken, I welcome the Bill, which will secure the future of the NCS through a royal charter. I join hon. Members in congratulating former Prime Minister David Cameron on his role as the driving force behind the scheme.

My constituency has had considerable success with the NCS. When the scheme started, just 45 people joined the initial cohort, but the number of participants has now increased to more than 1,200. One of the reasons why is the dedicated and dynamic leadership of Lee Stephens, who is sitting in the Public Gallery. I pay tribute to him for showing his dedication by not only leading the scheme, but sitting through the whole of this debate, as well as the preceding Question Time.

The hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) mentioned the divides in our country and how the scheme brings people together. He spoke of rural, urban and regional divides. Representing a coastal community with the problems of poor educational standards and the like, I recognise the important role that the NCS has played. Those who participate gain new skills, enhance their CVs and are helped with the transition from school to further education. The value of the scheme has been recognised, certainly in the North East Lincolnshire part of my constituency, by the fact that every secondary school and academy has signed up to the programme, along with the two colleges, which are both working to integrate the NCS into their curriculums.

Only last Friday I visited my old school, Havelock school in Grimsby, where the headteacher explained to me the difficulties she has with a catchment area that is, shall we say, in one of the poor towns. It includes the East Marsh ward of Grimsby, which is ranked among

the 20th poorest wards in the country by various socioeconomic indicators. There is no doubt that the NCS has played a major part in involving young people from all parts of the community in the Cleethorpes constituency and the surrounding areas.

Over the past three or four years, I have visited many projects in the constituency. They include, to mention just three, the St Andrew's hospice in Grimsby, the Harbour Place centre for the homeless and the Alzheimer's Society, which a number of young people did some work for. Indeed, I recall a year or two ago visiting a care home at which young people were working where some residents were suffering from dementia. It is important that young people realise that that is a growing problem in our ageing society. Many of those young people went on to work with those sufferers when the scheme finished, which is a great tribute to them and those who organised it. There have also been schemes such as tidying up local cemeteries, and I also remember visiting a very enthusiastic group last summer that was involved in repainting New Waltham village hall in very vivid colours. The list could go on.

To turn to more technical aspects of the Bill, I particularly welcome clauses 5 and 6. They relate to the business plan and the annual report, both of which will focus attention each year on the targets, helping to ensure that the scheme does not run out of steam but continues to prosper.

Young people can get a bad press but, as we all know, the vast majority are a credit to their families and their local communities. Society today faces many challenges, as it always has. If we can develop the natural skills and enthusiasm of our young people, they will make a major contribution, through the NCS, to society. The scheme gives them a sense of satisfaction, a growing sense of self-confidence and a realisation that by giving to the community in which they live, they can not only fulfil many of their own aspirations, but contribute greatly to the society and community in which they live.

I give my wholehearted support to the scheme. Many of us will have seen groups of young people and individuals who have prospered and gone on to greater things as a result of the NCS. I welcome the Bill and urge Ministers to take note of what has been said. This is a debate in which there has been mutual support and respect for the Bill from all parts of the House. At a time when we have been talking about divisions and trying to bring a cross-party approach to some of the more contentious aspects of policy, this is an example of something we can learn from. I hope that Members of all parties will bear that in mind.

6.15 pm

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): I share the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) as he described some of the NCS social action projects in his constituency. In fact, I have agreed with almost everything that has been said today by Members on both sides of the House. I agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) when he spoke in his comprehensive speech about the jigsaw of empowerment for young people to which the NCS contributes. I agreed with the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) about the importance of coming together and learning tolerance. I also agreed with the hon. Member

for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) about the power of the NCS to inspire volunteering, although she was holding her papers so far from her face that I wondered whether, in the spirit of the NCS and volunteering, I should have dashed across the Floor and offered to lend her my specs.

Today, we celebrate the transformation of the NCS from an idea to something that has shaped the lives of more than 300,000 young people and now heads towards gaining royal charter status—an extraordinary journey. The three key aspects of the NCS—social cohesion, social mobility and social engagement—can be seen through various statistics. I was surprised by the fact that 30% of all participants are from ethnic minorities. All those three things can be brought alive by any of us who have hosted sessions with NCS groups or given out certificates at an NCS graduation.

I will never forget meeting a father whose daughter did her NCS with Gloucestershire College in 2012. He told me that his daughter had changed completely after going on that course, that she had seen much more of life than she had before and that she was now much more confident. According to him, it was all “down to the NCS”. It should come as no surprise that an independent evaluation of the NCS found that nine out of 10 young people feel that they have learned important skills for the future. It is no surprise either that three out of four feel more confident about getting a job later on.

The figures show some room for improvement, but I say that in the spirit of a sports coach telling the winner of an Olympic gold medal, “You can do better than that.” That was roughly the thrust of and ambition behind the contribution from the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed)—there is always room for improvement.

Today is a good moment to look back to the start of the NCS when none of the success was predictable or even expected. It is right to congratulate former Prime Minister David Cameron on his vision, and all those involved in the difficult business of a start-up. I thank those in the Cabinet Office at the time—my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd)—and it was good to hear the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) saying the same thing from the Opposition Benches. I thank all the civil servants involved in putting the programme together.

In the five years of the NCS's existence, the number of participants from Gloucestershire and Gloucester has expanded rapidly. So far, there have been 1,192 participants, which I believe puts us, as a county, at 30th out of 127, so just inside the top quartile. Of those, 216 this year alone came from my Gloucester constituency. I have been absolutely delighted by that, and I am delighted to support, contribute and encourage participation in the NCS. If I could wave just one magic wand, it would be quite simply to involve every teenager in our city of Gloucester and throughout the country in joining the NCS programme.

Two groups this year went on the Pelican tall ship—up the mast, manning the crow's nest and working night shifts—and that shows how comfort zones have been stretched. Such experiences will stay in the minds of the participants forever. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier), who also represents a

[Richard Graham]

cathedral city, made a plea for retaining adventure training, and I am sure he would heartily approve of such experiences.

Work for the community is also incredibly important, such as the redecoration of the Gloucester city farm community café or the work for Teens in Crisis on making a video to promote its online counselling service. In fact, participants from the Gloucestershire College courses alone have raised some £60,000 of cash and £24,000 of goods for good causes in our city and county. That really has made a difference. Putting the NCS on a permanent footing, following the Ipsos MORI evaluation and the report by the National Audit Office, will mean building on success, and increasing scale and transparency.

Let me comment briefly on the room for improvement that constitutes the second aspect of the debate. I agree that if the average cost to the taxpayer is £1,800 for each participant, it must be possible to reduce that, making the programme available to as many people as possible but not, I hope, at the price of squeezing out some of the more expensive adventures. I also hope that the letter from HMRC—presumably the same letter that gives national insurance numbers, which means no extra cost—will inspire more participation and get the message out more widely.

I am not entirely sure about widening the eligible age group to include people up to 25. The social benefits that are gained when teenagers from all and any backgrounds spend a month together are huge and proven, but I fear that mixing 25-year-olds and 16-year-olds would introduce more difficult dynamics. The Minister shakes his head, which I will take as an indication that that will not happen.

There is certainly room for improvement in one respect. If the figure is correct, participation by Members of Parliament stands at only 25%. I think that all who have spoken today would agree that this is a rite of passage that we should all directly support.

I have some sympathy with the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) about measurement, but I believe that there is something important that can be captured, if not precisely measured: what happens to people who have been on an NCS course in terms of the volunteering habit acquired, the confidence gained and, ultimately, the jobs won. It is the young themselves who will put a value on the NCS through their recommendations to those younger than them and their analysis of what has led to their future growth.

There is no doubt that the NCS has been a success. Its founders and everyone else involved should be proud, but we should not forget to congratulate those who make it happen on the ground: the colleges, charities and other organisations that have run courses, the volunteer mentors, and the participants themselves, who have created and run such spectacular social action projects.

Today's debate is more than an NCS lovefest; it is about the next stage. It is about reaching more young people, and more difficult-to-reach young people. It means everyone taking part in new and challenging adventures, outdoors and indoors, so that more and more families throughout the land see the NCS as not yet another acronym—they are not quite sure what it

stands for—but the symbol of a life-changing month in their lives that will do as much to build stronger communities all around us as anything else I know, and, on its way, will change perceptions of what our young people are capable of.

6.22 pm

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham). I wish that he had that magic wand, because I know that he is a real champion of young people. I have seen him do a huge amount of work in his constituency to create opportunities that young people often seize and from which they benefit directly. It is a wonder that he has not yet been made a Minister.

I am delighted to speak in the debate. The NCS has come a long way since the 2009 pilots. Nearly 300,000 young people have benefited from the opportunity, and 93,000 did so in 2016 alone. I am staggered that only 25% of Members of Parliament have had an opportunity to see at first hand the fantastic work that is going on in our communities. I have had the pleasure of experiencing every stage of the transformation: I have been on assault courses, I have been a dragon, I have been a mentor, I have taken part in dodgeball—I have still not forgiven the five-year-old who took me out in about 20 seconds—I have attended the graduation ceremonies, and I have bought a lot of cakes in the charity sales.

I speak not just as a Member of Parliament and a local resident, but as a former employer who employed a great many young people. I was particularly impressed by the genuine, total transformation of the young people who had taken advantage of this fantastic opportunity. A number of Members have already highlighted many of the skills involved: team skills, confidence, the public speaking ability referred to by the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley)—many of us could learn from some of those skills—and the ability to understand and appreciate their local communities. We have seen that that has led to 8 million additional hours of voluntary work within our local communities, which is fantastic. There is also the issue of maturity, of building young people's life skills that are important in transitioning from school into the real world and securing first jobs. The NCS logo is "NCS Yes", which genuinely refers to the opportunities for those who apply.

I noticed from the graduation ceremonies just how proud parents are in the transformation of their children. They talk about how nervous their children were about signing up, and how even at the last minute they questioned whether it was the right thing to do. I must give credit to the NCS website; most things vaguely connected to the Government do not do particularly well when it comes to the internet and website presence, but the NCS website is fantastic. It has lots of FAQs and success stories, and it is bright, confident and enthusiastic. We can see why those nervous youngsters take the brave step of signing up.

What surprises people about the NCS is that the young people do not all sign up together. It is often assumed that the young people all know each other—perhaps they are all in the same class at a local college that has collectively decided to go. In fact, it is actually a random collection of people stepping outside their comfort zones and giving up their valuable summer

holidays to do something constructive. Yes, it is enjoyable, but often they do not realise how enjoyable it is until the end.

I want the NCS to succeed even more, and to match the ambition shown by our Secretary of State and our Minister. They are so passionate about the opportunities created. I want to see their passion fulfilled, and I have a few small requests.

First, a number of speakers have highlighted how we would like every young person to have this opportunity but many are not aware of the scheme. There has been a problem in promoting the scheme. I welcome the fact that in the planned royal charter every young child will be written to with all the information set out; I used to love getting post when I was younger, so this brings back happy memories. That will give every child the opportunity to sign up. I also urge that that information should be extended to schools, to remind them of the bursaries that are available. I have spoken to a number of headteachers in my constituency to say what an opportunity this would be for children from more challenged backgrounds, and many of those heads were not aware that there was a bursary scheme and wrongly presumed this was something their children would not be able to afford.

All the speakers have highlighted some of the brilliant social action projects that have taken place. I have seen some fantastic ones, but I do think the NCS nationally needs to do a bit more to build a database, because sometimes groups have struggled to come up with meaningful projects. The best cases are where there is a tangible link between the members of the group. For example, a confident young girl was presenting to me to say why the group had chosen the Swindon women's refuge. I had not appreciated the fact that she was so passionate about that because when she was younger her family had had to use that refuge. She had personally benefited from that service, and had convinced her friends and colleagues that they should put all their energies into this refuge. They therefore had an extra incentive to go and make a difference.

I also think there should be more information on how best to deliver social action projects. I have seen some fantastic ones that have engaged with the business community and called in favours. One of the great things about young people is that they are very cheeky, and when deploying that with their endless enthusiasm and energy they have had some very successful social action projects. But I have also seen some lost, and a little confused about what to do, which has meant that they have missed an opportunity to really make a difference. I would also encourage the bringing in of mentors wherever possible to road test the ideas before starting to deliver the social action project. There are countless local businesspeople who would be more than happy to give up their time to support these fantastic aims.

Finally, I want to talk about quality. I have been visiting such schemes since 2012 so have seen every part of the process repeatedly, and I have seen some fantastic projects and some less good ones. I am concerned that in recent years, with some of the changes to some of the contractors, a number of the staff delivering the schemes are a little too young. Initially, in Swindon, it was delivered by New College and Swindon College. They are two well-established colleges, and the staff involved were lecturers doing additional work over the summer.

They instantly had the respect of the young adults, which is a particular challenge at the beginning, as those young people have not quite developed all the skills that they will have acquired by the end. Some of the younger staff struggle to hold the line; they are a little too integrated with the students. It is important that we get that right. The advantage of having those colleges involved is that they already have the buy-in of the students. It is no surprise that the numbers have fallen away since the colleges ceased to lead on this. That has also led to a lack of local knowledge. This is a vital matter. I know that ensuring that we do not have a postcode lottery is complicated, but there needs to be some really deep thinking in the procurement exercise.

Many speakers have talked about the £1,800 cost, and one of the challenges is finding facilities for the scheme to use. I do not really understand why the NCS providers should have to pay to hire facilities when we have fantastic college and school facilities that are often empty during the school holidays when the NCS courses take place. They could use those existing facilities without being charged for them, freeing up that money to be deployed to provide additional support elsewhere in the programme.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I would like to echo some of my hon. Friend's thoughts. Katy Stockdale leads the Huddersfield Community Trust NCS, which had 455 graduates last year. I remember the project at Beechwood care home, where they worked on disability access with local businesses and other local volunteers. People donated wood, stone and fountains, and the project had a lasting effect. My hon. Friend makes a good point about ensuring that all these projects are highlighted.

**Justin Tomlinson**: I thank my hon. Friend for that really powerful intervention. He highlights the real boost that these projects can bring to the local community, and the difference that the team in his area has made is a credit to it.

Many speakers have been tempted to suggest how we can tweak what we are doing and how we can empower people. The dreaded "Brexit" word was even mentioned. Please do not do this. Please do not ruin something that is working so well. There is nothing worse than out-of-touch adults prescribing what young people want. The vast majority of this country's youth clubs started to fail because "right-on" adults decided to prescribe what the young people should be doing. This scheme is a success because the students have been allowed to shape it. The NCS Youth Board is integral to what the scheme delivers. Its members know best because they have done it, they are young and they still understand what young people want. I know that we are well meaning, but please let the young people decide how to do this. Our involvement should be as mentors and supporters, showcasing the work and highlighting in the local media the very best that our young people can offer. That is something that the parents are extremely grateful for.

6.32 pm

**Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): It has been fantastic to sit through the debate and hear so much passion for this amazing organisation, the National Citizen Service. It is a huge pleasure to follow my hon. Friends the Members for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) and for Gloucester (Richard Graham), as well as the many other Members

[Ben Howlett]

on both sides of the House who have contributed to the debate. They have all been huge advocates during their time in Parliament for engaging with young people in their constituencies. It has sometimes been a little bit awkward for me, aged 30, to speak to an NCS group about what young people are thinking, because I was about 10 years older than them when I first went to an NCS event. However, we in this place have to do an awful lot more to engage with young people, and I believe that the NCS plays a huge part in the work that Members of Parliament do in that regard. I echo the comments that Members on both sides of the House have made about the fact that we should do more to engage with and attend NCS events. That is for sure.

I rise today to speak in support of this fantastic Bill. I should really declare an interest, in that I am very, very jealous of what the National Citizen Service does. I have seen at first hand some of the amazing things that happen at an NCS week away or day away. Like my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) I would probably end up having to be pushed up the rock-climbing face. Something that has perhaps not been mentioned today, and that underpins what the NCS does, is the element of fun. The main reason that young people want to get involved in the NCS is that it is fun. They enjoy getting involved. This is not about the Government telling young people that they have to join the NCS; this happens through word of mouth. The rampant rise about which we have heard across the House today comes as a result of young people who have been through the programme telling other young people that they enjoyed it, that they had a great time and that others should join up. That is why we have seen such a huge increase in the number of people joining the NCS programmes.

For the past two years, I have had the honour of presenting NCS graduation certificates for Joining Forces Training, which runs the NCS programme in my constituency. These ex-servicemen are really starting to promote their work, which has been so successful that it is being expanded into other areas, such as the east of England. Joining Forces Training has designed a range of programmes for young people and adults to help them succeed and progress in life. One example from the graduation ceremony that I attended early last year really sticks in my mind and shows how great the NCS is: a young man stood up to make a speech and said that if it was not for Joining Forces and the NCS programme, he would not be able to speak in front of the 200-strong audience of parents and his peers—a difficult thing for any young person to do. He had previously struggled in conversations with two or three people and could not imagine speaking to such a large audience. The NCS programme gave him the confidence to push boundaries that he had never expected to exceed. I am pleased that this Bill will give even more young people the chance to develop skills that will help them later in life. Where else do 15 to 17-year-olds, whatever their background, get the opportunity to develop key life skills in a safe environment away from their parents?

In Bath, the NCS provider is dedicated to inspiring the next generation. NCS is a fantastic programme for challenging and developing young people individually

in addition to building greater social cohesion, as many hon. Members have said, by mixing teams and getting young people to think about their local community. I asked Ed Hodges, the director of Joining Forces Training, why he thinks NCS makes such a positive contribution and he told me:

“One of the most rewarding aspects of the programme is the response you get from parents, teachers and most importantly the young people who take part. You see them grow in confidence, whether overcoming their fear of heights or standing in front of their peers and pitching an idea, and to see them grow as a team to plan and deliver some outstanding projects is great to be a part of.”

Young people also receive a session on democracy and how they can participate in bringing about positive change even before they reach voting age. They have contributed to some fantastic local and national campaigns and can look further afield into how they can make a positive difference to the world through global campaigns, which the International Citizen Service can enable them to do. In fact, one thing that sticks out for me given the current debates about international development is that on asking those young people what they would like to see prioritised in Government spending, they say that they would like to see not 0.7% but 10% spent on international aid. That might give good hope to the Secretary of State for International Development in the next Budget discussions.

I hope that the royal charter and the clear statement that the NCS is open to all will mean that more children from a wide variety of backgrounds, including those who are less fortunate, will take up the chance to join the scheme. I also support the use of HMRC to get out information to all young people alongside their national insurance number when they turn 16. That is an excellent way of publicising the opportunities available to all young people, enabling even more to benefit from this excellent scheme.

As many hon. Members have said, this is probably the least divisive debate that we have had in this place. The NCS is an excellent initiative that is going from strength to strength, and the Bill will give more young people the chance to take part. Joining Forces Training in Bath has made a fantastic contribution to the city and has delivered so much change into people's lives. I look forward to supporting it over the years as the programme develops.

6.39 pm

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): I thank all the hon. Members who contributed to this important debate. Youth social action plays a huge part in our society and, at both local and national level, we see its positive impact not only on individuals but on entire communities. Many Members cited the figures that more than 130,000 young people have already taken part in the NCS and that 300,000 are expected to have participated by 2020. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) expressed that and challenged us to increase the numbers even further, if possible.

I congratulate all those who have graduated from the NCS, as well as all those who help to deliver the programme each year. I also encourage all 16 and 17-year-olds to apply and take part. As my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) said, everyone should be encouraged.

As good as the statistics are, and as fantastic as the experience gained by all these young people will be, the Opposition are still concerned about social action, civil society and youth opportunities on a wider scale. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) made an important point about not just staying within our bubbles. We have already heard the slogan of a new shared society many times from Government Members. Civil society and the work of the NCS fit into that, but the reality we are facing is one of slashed funding for youth services, failure to develop citizenship education and an Office for Civil Society that is being moved around Departments when it should be working across Whitehall.

To that end, although the Opposition will not be dividing the House on Second Reading, we have concerns about the future course that Government policy might take. The issue of youth action is much wider than this Bill alone. In each of our constituencies we see local youth organisations working tirelessly to provide opportunities to our young people. I am sure that either we in this Chamber or our children have benefited from such opportunities—we have heard great examples today—but, with funding being slashed across the country, local youth services are closing, particularly in areas of high deprivation. The new shared society has a lot of work to do if it is to deliver for our young people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) spoke with passion about the importance of creating a cohesive society, and I am pleased to see that our National Citizen Service goes some way towards doing that. However, I will outline some of our concerns on the Bill. First, as many hon. Members have said today, the NCS finds its unique selling point in its ability to successfully mix people from all backgrounds and to allow young people to interact with others with whom they might otherwise never have had the opportunity to build relationships. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) talked about that with passion and eloquence. I was able to do it from a young age through sport, and it is such a pleasure to stand here speaking about the NCS in the knowledge that young people from across the country are also benefiting from that interaction, which is nothing but a positive not only for the individuals themselves but for society as a whole.

Having said that, I do not believe that the Bill goes far enough in emphasising the importance of that interaction. I and others, both Members of this House and those who deliver the programmes on the ground, would have hoped to see the Bill's wording include "social integration." Will the Minister commit to that? Otherwise, the unique nature of the NCS risks being watered down, which would benefit nobody.

Secondly, I do not wish to be accused of stating the obvious, but the hardest-to-reach young people are called that for a reason: they are the hardest to reach. I say that not to add a bit of humour to the debate but to reiterate what others have said today about inclusion within the NCS. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) made a wonderful analogy stressing the importance of inclusion, with which I wholeheartedly agree. With another approximately 170,000 young people set to participate in the NCS over the next three years, the Bill has a duty to ensure that barriers to

participation are broken down, not raised. The hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) cited the wonderful example of young people pushing boundaries.

The National Audit Office report on the scheme is concerning. It states that, in order to meet spending review targets, spending per participant must fall by 29%, which is a significant cut that, if not managed well, could have a detrimental effect on those who participate in the scheme. Recruitment of the hardest to reach inevitably costs more, because more outreach must be conducted and more time must be taken. Without that, the NCS runs the risk of becoming yet another opportunity for the few, which I am sure would disappoint us all.

To run the risk of stating the obvious again, barriers are what keep people away. Barriers are what stop people applying, or even knowing about the NCS. However, perhaps the Government need to hear the obvious. Dedicated work to include the hardest-to-reach groups is a necessity, as we are already seeing a falling percentage of NCS graduates coming from the lowest-income families. Will the Minister commit to ring-fencing a proportion of funding to engage with the hardest-to-reach groups?

Thirdly, I must pay tribute to the outstanding work of so many volunteer centres and civil society organisations, which provide so many opportunities to young people and whose staff work tirelessly to ensure the best programmes are available. Without those organisations many young people would be left with little to do in their communities. With the commitment of a funding injection of £1 billion, there is concern that this will squeeze out other youth service operators, as well as other operators who support the work of the NCS, and that they will not receive adequate resources to be able to do that to best effect. I was, however, pleased to learn that the Minister for Civil Society has written to the chair of the NCS Trust to outline his expectation that the trust will report on relationships with the voluntary sector. It would be comforting to hear this commitment again today from the Government, so as to ensure the continued good working relationship with voluntary organisations.

Finally, integration and inclusion should come at not only participant level, but all levels of the NCS. All too often, young people are looked over for governance roles, but there would be nowhere better suited for a young person to play an active role in the development of a programme and organisation than in this instance.

**Jason McCartney:** There was a bit of a bleak outlook in what the hon. Lady was saying there. I think the NCS is amazingly transformative, and certainly in Huddersfield it is bringing people from all communities together. Would she say a few words about her personal experiences of attending graduations in her constituency and about how well the NCS is doing in her part of the world?

**Dr Allin-Khan:** First, I agree that the NCS is a wonderful programme that should be supported, as indeed Labour does. But I would not be doing my role justice and we would not be doing our role justice if we were not to ensure the best possible outcome for all NCS participants and graduates. The hon. Gentleman asks about work in my constituency, so I can tell him that I have had the absolute pleasure of meeting people who have completed the NCS. In fact, over the summer a group of young

[Dr Allin-Khan]

people in Tooting were holding a food drive in a local superstore as part of their social action project and I personally contributed to the food collection. [Interruption.]

Let me continue by saying that the NCS develops the skills and confidence of young people, many of whom go on to graduate and work in future NCS cycles. Why should this development not lead to more young people on the board of patrons or being consulted on to inform plans and improvements? I am sure the Minister would agree about that. I wish to put on the record the fact that I support the call from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations for focus groups of young people to be brought together to inform a review of the social action element of the programme—as I said, I participated in that element in my community. These are young people who have lived these experiences, so why not capture that and learn from them directly? Does the Minister agree about that? What recommendations will be made to the NCS Trust on the inclusion of more young people in the development of the NCS going forward?

Young people harness so much positivity, passion, energy and drive that we should not seek to bottle this; we should seek to ensure it has the opportunity to be expressed. The NCS provides that, and providing opportunities for social action ensures it. We in this House have a responsibility to the young people in all of our constituencies to ensure that no barriers are set in place, and no opportunity is passed by to upskill them or develop their confidence. The NCS should be seen as an entry point to a longer journey of social action and volunteering. To do this, we need to ensure that all aspects of the NCS are high quality, that no participant feels their experience has not been the best it could be and that the NCS focuses on impact for both the participant and the community. As a starting point, the NCS should lead in to future opportunities for involvement in communities. I hope today the Government can see this as a wider opportunity outside of this Bill. The increased promotion of social action and volunteering is not a negative one. My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) made an excellent point about ensuring that the legacy continues.

There are 1.8 billion young people in the world today, and we are at a peak of youth; it is estimated that at no other time will there be more young people in the world. If we do not harness their passion, creativity and drive for change now, when will we? This Bill is a good step forward in ensuring that we do that here. I just hope the Government listen to our concerns, and the concerns of those in the voluntary sector, so to ensure that we can harness the potential of young people to the fullest. They are our future politicians, after all.

6.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Rob Wilson):** I thank all Members who have taken part in the debate. Not only that, but I thank them and all the others who have helped to make the NCS a success so far. I have been delighted to see how many Members have embraced the NCS in their own constituencies by visiting events, encouraging participants and taking part in “Dragons’ Den”-style panels that award funding to young people’s social

action projects. It is fitting that a programme that unites people from different backgrounds should be endorsed by both sides of the House. We will no doubt have debates and discussions—indeed, we already are—but I hope we can continue with the Bill in the spirit that has been discussed, with the common goal of making the NCS the best possible experience for future generations.

The NCS should be one experience among others. As Minister for Civil Society, I had the pleasure of seeing in action a huge number of programmes run by really excellent organisations. The NCS is not here to compete with other opportunities for young people—quite the opposite. I want the NCS to give young people an appetite for service, for other opportunities and for trying new things. Our vision is for the NCS to be a common experience for all, with scouts, cadets and other people who are familiar with service in the same team, sharing their experience with people who have never done anything like it before.

The NCS sees people with different backgrounds, faiths and interests coming together at a formative age and learning the effect they can have on the community around them. The independent evaluations show that we should not underestimate the impact of these four weeks on the young people involved. We can take the participants’ own words for it. NCS providers ask their graduates what they would say to someone considering the NCS, and one said:

“It is the most amazing experience you will ever have. Take it with both hands and mould your future.”

It is crucial that we get the delivery of this amazing experience absolutely right. Together with the royal charter, the Bill is designed to create a delivery body that the public will trust, and that spends money wisely and has the right priorities.

I turn to the issues raised by the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) earlier in the debate. Many Members spoke about social integration, a subject that the Bill and royal charter already cover extensively. The royal charter includes an objective

“to promote social cohesion by ensuring equality of access to the programmes by participants regardless of their background or circumstances”.

The Bill requires the National Citizen Service Trust to report on the extent to which participants from different backgrounds have mixed on the programmes. There are many excellent examples of social integration in practice on NCS programmes, including specific interfaith NCS groups. The NCS will continue to play an important role in promoting social integration, but I am of course willing to consider what has been said today.

On the duty to promote the NCS to people from disadvantaged backgrounds, the trust’s primary functions include enabling participants from different backgrounds to work together. The trust is tasked to be absolutely focused on promoting NCS to young people, regardless of their background.

On the National Audit Office report and some backgrounds being disproportionately represented, the NCS is working to increase the representation of disadvantaged people. There is a higher proportion of participants on free school meals than in the general population, and eight out of 10 participants feel more positive about people from different backgrounds as a result of their involvement, according to the 2014 Ipsos MORI survey.

Young people are at the centre of the NCS. There is a national youth board that feeds views into the trust from 19 regional youth boards throughout the country. There are also 120 NCS leaders—the hon. Member for Croydon North has spoken to them here in the House—who are ambassadors for the programmes and represent the interests of their peers. Under the new arrangements, a new board will be appointed as part of the process and will look at all suggestions for whom that might include.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier) made some excellent points about adventure training and the challenges that that represents for residential centres. That matter is not within the scope of this Bill, but I am happy to look at the issues he raises.

The hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) was right to highlight the non-partisan basis of the Bill and the royal charter. The aim is to strike the balance between independence of the NCS Trust and the accountability that it has to Parliament. He did raise a number of issues, including whether the annual report should be debated in this House. Of course the Bill requires the report to be laid before Parliament, so that Parliament can debate it if it so wishes.

Officials in the Office for Civil Society are drafting non-statutory guidance for local authorities and schools on the benefits of the NCS and how they can engage further with the programme. On ring-fenced funding, particularly for the hard-to-reach students, the Bill gives the trust the freedom to set its own commissioning practices, but requires it to report on the mix of its participants from different backgrounds so that we can assess it on outcomes—we are interested in outcomes rather than inputs.

**Vernon Coaker:** Just to rewind back a sentence or two, will the Minister explain why the Government are drafting non-statutory guidance on the NCS for schools rather than statutory guidance?

**Mr Wilson:** We want to ensure that there is the right balance between independence and accountability. To make the guidance statutory would enforce what the NCS Trust has to do and that could be a problem. We do not really want to go down that route.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) for the fantastic support that he has given to the NCS. He quite rightly paid fulsome tribute to the former Prime Minister, who is the reason why this transformational programme has seen the light of day. I did like the idea of building a movement. He asked about the threats to other parts of the sector. May I say to him that the trust is part of Generation Change, which is a group of youth organisations that is looking collectively to increase the scale, quality and status of youth social action programmes? The trust is committed to helping the NCS become a gateway to other programmes and opportunities, helping young people to see volunteering as a habit for a lifetime.

A number of Members talked about the detriment to other local authority services. This is additional funding that we have announced. There is also funding for other programmes such as #iwill and the Youth Investment Fund, and that is additional to local authority funding. There are some very good examples of local authority provision on youth services.

**Anna Turley rose—**

**Mr Wilson:** I only have a couple of minutes available, so I will push on.

We want the NCS to be accessible to every young person. A number of Members have asked about young carers and young offenders. There is a place for all of them on this scheme; every young person who wants a place can have one. My right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) mentioned heritage railways. Lord Ashton has asked the Office of Rail and Road to look into that, so I hope that that reassures her.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) asked about assistance for NCS providers to keep up the rate of participation and to promote best practice. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is working with the trust to issue guidance to the NCS providers to help them build relationships with local authorities, schools and other local organisations. That will ensure that NCS social action projects take on the needs of communities and that young people can participate in even greater numbers than now.

There were a number of questions about the devolved Administrations of Scotland and Wales. The NCS Bill will help the NCS Trust to continue to deliver the NCS programme across England. The Government would welcome the expansion of the NCS in the future, and the devolved Administrations are considering how the programme would work for them.

Northern Ireland is supportive of the NCS. Co-operation Ireland is a separate provider of the NCS in Northern Ireland. It is a charity that supports the peace process and it has unique and long-standing expertise. The Government have licensed the NCS intellectual property rights to Northern Ireland to allow the delivery of the programme.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) asked about the devolved Administrations, and the Bill extends to England and Wales as they are one jurisdiction but applies only to England as this is where the NCS Trust operates. The majority of the Bill therefore relates to England only, but there are some provisions relating to reserved matters, such as the clause pertaining to HMRC, that mean that the Bill as a whole does not meet the test to be certified as England-only. Though HMRC would only write to people in England, the functions of HMRC are a wholly reserved matter.

As for the question of why the same outcomes could not be achieved by running the same programme through the scouts or cadets, the recent NAO report finds that the NCS is distinct from other programmes, particularly as regards its focus on mixing people from different backgrounds. It is available, affordable and has a distinct combination of personal development and the chance to mix with people from other backgrounds. It is designed to be a single unifying rite of passage for young people that sits alongside the many other fantastic opportunities for young people.

This is a small Bill, but it is very important. It sets the framework for the delivery of a programme that will influence hundreds of thousands of young people—indeed millions in due course. Alongside the royal charter, it will ensure that there is a body that the public can trust that provides value for money and a quality programme. Public confidence is key to the success of the NCS.

[Mr Rob Wilson]

The Bill will help the NCS grow and become a rite of passage for future generations. Establishing the NCS for the long term is, in a small way, part of defining what sort of nation we want to be in the future. That is a nation that invests in young people, fosters social integration and believes in the values of service. More than 300,000 young people have benefited from the NCS already. The Bill is our opportunity to secure the same life-changing experience for generations to come: a National Citizen Service for everyone and a commitment to greater social cohesion, social mobility and social engagement. I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

#### **NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)**

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),*

That the following provisions shall apply to the National Citizen Service Bill [Lords]:

##### *Committal*

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

##### *Proceedings in Public Bill Committee*

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 26 January 2017.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

*Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading*

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

##### *Other proceedings*

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of any message from the Lords) may be programmed.—(Graham Stuart.)

*Question agreed to.*

#### **NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE BILL [LORDS] (MONEY)**

*Queen's recommendation signified.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),*

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the National Citizen Service Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State.—(Graham Stuart.)

*Question agreed to.*

### **Business without Debate**

#### **DELEGATED LEGISLATION**

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

##### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

That the draft Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 28 November 2016, be approved.—(Graham Stuart.)

*Question agreed to.*

#### **COMMITTEES**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** With the leave of the House, we will take motions 5 to 7 together.

##### **ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**

*Ordered,*

That James Gray be discharged from the Administration Committee and Mary Robinson be added.

##### **FINANCE COMMITTEE**

That Jake Berry be discharged from the Finance Committee and Stephen McPartland be added.

##### **REGULATORY REFORM COMMITTEE**

That Andrew Percy and Christopher Pincher be discharged from the Regulatory Reform Committee and Stephen McPartland and Mark Menzies be added.—(Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.)

## Defibrillators in Public Areas

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

7.3 pm

**Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Defibrillators save lives. That is the truth that drives the work of the Oliver King Foundation, a charity that campaigns to ensure that defibrillators are available in public places and that people are trained to use them. Every year, ambulance services in the UK treat about 30,000 people for a non-hospital cardiac arrest, but fewer than 10% of them survive—fewer than one in 10. Of the average 82 people who suffer cardiac arrest outside hospital every day in the UK, just eight live.

Cardio pulmonary resuscitation is often championed as the best way to treat cardiac arrest before the emergency services arrive. Indeed, in some cases it can double the likelihood of survival. But even then the chances of resuscitation are still as low as 20%, and that is only in some cases. Clearly CPR alone is not enough.

**Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): A little over a year ago, on 7 December 2015, my 28-year-old son had a cardiac arrest. He is one of the few lucky ones who got to hospital in time and survived. He has his own defibrillator, but does the hon. Lady agree that, in conjunction with defibrillator training, it is incredibly important that people are trained in CPR? In my son's case, his girlfriend was trained in CPR and saw him through the process until the paramedics arrived.

**Maria Eagle:** The hon. Gentleman has had a frightening experience in his family, and also learnt the incredible importance of not only having defibrillators available, but having people who know how to use them. I could hardly better his family's example of how important that is.

A study by the British Heart Foundation found that for every single minute without defibrillation, chances of survival fall by between 7% and 10%. The Care Quality Commission sets a response target of eight minutes for emergency ambulance services, but we know that ambulances cannot possibly arrive within that time in every case. Even if they did, the chances of survival without immediate defibrillation and CPR will have already plummeted to 20% or lower. Access to a defibrillator can therefore make a huge difference. If cardiac arrest is recognised, basic first aid is given, 999 is called and CPR is applied, in combination with rapid and effective defibrillation, the chances of survival can exceed 50%. In fact, in some cases it can be as high as 80%. However, immediate action is vital. A defibrillator must be at hand for those survival rates to be realised.

Three people who know that better than most are my constituents Mark, Joanne and Ben King. In 2011, Mark and Joanne King lost their son Oliver, and Ben lost his brother. Oliver tragically died following a sudden cardiac arrest while racing in, and winning, a school swimming competition. He was just 12 years old. He had a hidden heart condition, and without access to a defibrillator at school his chances of survival on that day were dramatically reduced. Had he lived, this Saturday would have been his 18th birthday.

I never met Oliver, but I have been struck by talking to those who knew him well. He was clearly a very happy and popular boy, judging by the tributes that poured in from those who knew him following the shock of that terrible day. He was known as a big character at King David High School. His teachers recall his “uncompromising zest for life” and how he was loved and respected by boys and girls and teachers alike. His best friend David recalls Oliver's charm and how it was deployed on more than one occasion to get them out of a tricky situation. This year is particularly difficult for David, as he will be celebrating the milestone of turning 18 without his best friend.

Everyone mentions Oliver's love of football—he was a staunch Evertonian. His family and friends all recall his great talent and potential on the pitch. One of his teachers describes him as

“a sportsman at heart and a natural at whatever he turned his hand to”.

Above all, Oliver was caring, loving and incredibly close to his family:

“family was everything to Oliver.”

It goes without saying that Oliver's death left many who knew and loved him with a great sense of loss. His family and friends are sadly not alone in going through this terrible ordeal. As well as the thousands of people who die every year following sudden cardiac arrest, there are thousands more who are now faced with the agonising reality of living without their loved one.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for bringing this important subject to the House and for her good fortune in having, potentially, three and a half hours in which to debate it. She has given an emotional case of somebody for whom, for the sake of a relatively simple and inexpensive bit of kit, the outcome might have been different. Does she agree that public buildings—certainly places such as schools—should automatically be fitted with a defibrillator?

Will the hon. Lady pay tribute to Sompting Big Local in my constituency, which has a lottery grant for the enhancement of the village? Its first priority was to install four defibrillators in every corner of the village, including one outside the local pharmacy, because it saw it as a worthwhile thing to do. Many other people have imaginatively used things such as redundant telephone boxes by replacing them with defibrillators as an obvious help point for local people. Should not we just be doing those things automatically?

**Maria Eagle:** I agree very much with the hon. Gentleman. He has set out an example from his constituency. Around the country, there are many ways in which communities are starting to ensure that they have access to defibrillators so that, if needed, they are there. I welcome that. We should try to ensure that defibrillators are available throughout our land—up and down, north and south, and east and west. What happened to Oliver is not as rare as we might hope. In the UK, some 270 young people tragically die every year of sudden cardiac arrest while at school. That furthers the hon. Gentleman's point that having defibrillators routinely available in schools seems to be a no-brainer.

In 2012, Oliver's parents, Mark and Joanne, set up the Oliver King Foundation in memory of their son. It aims to raise awareness of the conditions that lead to

[*Maria Eagle*]

sudden cardiac arrest, which is vital as the family did not know that Oliver had any condition that might have led to what happened. If they had known, probably with the diagnosis of a simple electrocardiogram test, they may well have been able to take steps that could have avoided what happened. Other aims of the foundation are to purchase and place defibrillators in schools and sports centres, to train staff how to use them and to hold screening events to enable simple, painless ECG testing to help diagnose such conditions and ensure that what happened to Oliver does not happen to the children of other families.

Mark and Joanne have done an incredible job. Their aim is simple: to ensure that no more families have to go through what they did, knowing that the death of a son, daughter, mother, father or friend may have been prevented. They campaign tirelessly and effectively to ensure that every school in the country is equipped with an automated external defibrillator. They have the support of more than 200 hon. and right hon. Members of this House, across parties.

Automated external defibrillators are specifically designed for use by non-medically trained people. They are remarkable, life-saving machines that are not difficult to use. The machine will apply an electrical pulse only when it detects an irregular heart rate and it talks the user through the process, step by step. However, at about £1,200, AEDs are not cheap and, even if provided, some people are often afraid of using them. As a result, many schools and high-risk public areas in the UK are still not equipped with them. As a direct result of the work of the Oliver King Foundation, more than 800 schools and public places now have this life-saving kit and people who are confident to use it. In Liverpool, Oliver's home city, not a single school is now without one thanks to the work of the foundation and Liverpool City Council.

The foundation has also managed to train 15,000 people around the country in how to use an AED, thus making sure that in sudden difficult circumstances the confidence is there to use this life-saving kit. As a direct result, 11 lives have been saved that would otherwise have been lost, including an elderly gentleman who suffered a heart attack at his local gym. Thanks to the staff's quick thinking and use of the gym's defibrillator, he was sat up and talking by the time the emergency services arrived. In Woolton in my constituency, where Oliver used to live, an AED provided by the foundation was deployed three times this December alone. If the defibrillator is available and training is provided, people will use one: it is as simple as that.

However, we cannot and should not be reliant on charities to do all the heavy lifting and work in this policy area. In November, the hon. Member for Lewes (*Maria Caulfield*) introduced the Defibrillators (Availability) Bill under the 10-minute rule procedure, with the purpose being to

“increase the rates of survival rates from non-hospital cardiac arrests across the UK”.

Its objective is basically to do for the nation what the OK Foundation has done for Liverpool and is continuing to do in its work in other places: providing defibrillators in public places and training people to use them.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I am not sure whether the hon. Lady is aware of the impact that these defibrillators have in cardiac ambulances. When I qualified, an ambulance just picked someone up and took them to a hospital, but the big, boxy ambulances have more equipment in them than was in a casualty unit in those days. Even in professional hands, this technology has transformed out-of-hospital cardiac arrest.

**Maria Eagle:** I thank the hon. Lady for that very useful information, from her own experience as a doctor. It is important that the availability of this kit is widened across our society in order to save lives.

Current legislation surrounding public access to defibrillators is practically non-existent. Last year, the Government produced a guide for schools recommending the purchase of AEDs. While I welcome that move to highlight the issue, the Government should do more. Will the Minister undertake to meet Mark and Joanne and the OK Foundation to discuss a realistic programme of providing AEDs in public places and training for people such that they feel confident to use them? Will he facilitate a meeting with the Prime Minister? I know that the OK Foundation would welcome an opportunity to argue its case at the highest possible level of Government.

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for raising such an important issue in this Adjournment debate. I, too, pay tribute to the Oliver King Foundation for all its hard work. This is one of those rare occasions when there is cross-party agreement. We agree on the need for these defibrillators, but the Bill that will come here for its Second Reading on 27 January is unlikely to make progress simply because of its nature as a ten-minute rule Bill. Does she agree that it would be good if the Government adopted the Bill, because this procedure does save lives, it is relatively cheap to introduce, and it would make a difference to young people? As she eloquently explained, 12 young lives are lost each week through these incidents.

**Maria Eagle:** I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing forward her Bill. Yes, it was done under the 10-minute rule procedure, but it is now there, and I echo her call for the Government to adopt it. As she realistically observed, the only reason it may not progress in this Session is that there is no time given its position on the list for private Member's Bill Fridays. The Government could transform that in an instant by taking on board aspects of the Bill—or the whole Bill, preferably—and putting them into some of their own legislation. The Minister might have something to say about that.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the eloquent and forceful speech she is making. She has already paid tribute to the King family. May I add my tribute to them for their great dignity and the constructive way in which they have taken the issue forward? I agree with the hon. Member for Lewes (*Maria Caulfield*) that the ten-minute rule Bill has virtually no chance of getting on to the statute book, but the Government could, if they had a mind to, adopt it and turn it into a Government Bill. Of course, if it is defective in any way, it could be amended, but nevertheless the spirit of it could be carried forward.

**Maria Eagle:** My right hon. Friend is completely correct on both those things. I know that he knows the King family, as many of us on Merseyside do. Many colleagues from across the House have met either the family or the campaigners associated with the Oliver King Foundation, which does a stunning job of getting across its campaigning efforts and its ask to Members across the House.

Losing Oliver was devastating for Mark, Joanne and Ben, and for Oliver's friends and his local community. Who knows what he would have been capable of achieving, had he lived? It would have been something remarkable, I have no doubt, given the way in which he had started off in life.

I would like to finish by saying how much I admire the positive and successful way in which Oliver King's family and friends have channelled their grief into ensuring that no other family has to endure what they did. They have done such good work in Liverpool and elsewhere, and they are moving on to other places to start installing AEDs in schools, sports centres and other public places. Only the Government can help them to achieve their goal nationwide, and I very much hope that the Minister, in his reply, will want to take the opportunity to announce a Government initiative to make that dream a reality. I think it would be a fitting tribute to Oliver King.

7.21 pm

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): I commend the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) for her excellent and thorough speech. I want to make only a few points. I absolutely agree that this is such a vital matter that it is for the Government to take some initiative. Although charities—including, as I have learned, the Oliver King Foundation—do amazing work, the matter is so important that it must be overseen by the Government.

In my constituency, thanks to the British Heart Foundation, we have some amazing kits for CPR work. I have had great fun going round businesses that have taken up my offer of hiring out those kits for nothing. They do the training in their lunchtime or before work, and in 20 minutes they are confident about doing CPR, thanks to the excellent "Mini Anne" resus kits, as we call them. That is fabulous.

Another Member mentioned defibrillators in red phone boxes, which is the work of the Community HeartBeat Trust. I do not know about others, but when I am travelling around I now notice when there is a defibrillator in a red phone box. It is a wonderful initiative, and, again, it is being done by a charity.

One of my concerns is about a situation I have encountered in my constituency. After one business had enthusiastically taken up my offer of use of the CPR kit, I said to those in charge of it, "You are in my central town of Twickenham. Would you consider having a publicly accessible defibrillator?" They looked into it, but they were put off not just by the initial up-front cost—as the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood said, it is realistically £1,000-plus—but by the maintenance costs and responsibility. If a defibrillator is used once, it has to be reset and checked, and there is some money involved in maintenance. I think it was the idea of having the responsibility for such vital equipment that put off my local business.

Public Health England or clinical commissioning groups could map the location of publicly accessible defibrillators and encourage schools, sports facilities and stadiums to have them. In London, we have the community toilet scheme, but we do not have an equivalent community defibrillator scheme whereby everybody would know where the nearest defibrillator was and somebody would be responsible for maintenance. That is all that would be required.

The great thing is that Members on both sides of the House—and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield)—are all thinking the same way, and there is an appetite among charities and the public for this, but I believe that now is the time for the Government to lead.

7.24 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat):** The hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) started her excellent speech by saying that defibrillators save lives. We accept that; there is no question but that that is the case. Before I respond to the points that she and my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) made, I want to add my congratulations to the Oliver King Foundation on its work, and to the family on turning a terrible tragedy into something positive. We have heard about what has been achieved in Liverpool, as well as more widely.

One of the asks of the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood was that I meet her and the family to talk about how to take this matter forward. I confirm that I would be very happy to do so. Indeed, the sports Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), who is with me on the Front Bench today, also feels passionately about this matter, which was in the sport strategy that was published about a year ago. I am happy to set up such a meeting. I am not in a position to set out tonight the Government's view if the private Member's Bill does not go through, but if the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood organises the meeting, I would be happy for it to be more widely attended by interested Members.

**Mr George Howarth:** I think the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) accepts, as I certainly do, that although a ten-minute rule Bill might have been a good way to raise the issue, it is not a suitable vehicle for taking this forward. The request is that the Minister and the Department look at the Bill as it stands, and that, if it needs to be amended or redrafted, they suggest ways of doing so, or even take it on themselves. The Government should bring a measure forward, rather than leaving this to a legislative vehicle that simply will not work.

**David Mowat:** As I have said, I am not in a position to say tonight what the Government will do in respect of the Bill. I am willing to say that we will meet and talk about it after this debate. As I will come on to say, there is a question about the extent to which defibrillators should be mandatory, as was raised in relation to schools, versus dealing with this through guidelines and other forms of help. I will try to make some of those points later.

The hon. Member for Garston and Halewood made the point that the survival rate of people who have an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest is in the order of about 10%.

[David Mowat]

It varies a little by ambulance service—it can be between 7% and 12%—and if we could get all ambulance services up to 12%, that in itself would save many lives. There is no question but that if defibrillators were available in time, the figure would be at least doubled and perhaps increased by more than that. We also accept the figure from the British Heart Foundation, which I think she cited, that every minute of delay reduces the probability of success by something like 10%.

We need to achieve two things: we need to create more access to defibrillators; and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), who is not now in the Chamber, said in relation to the incident in his family, we also need to increase training and CPR awareness. I recall doing CPR training and being taken through all this two years ago in a church hall in Warrington. It really did not take very long, and I hope I can still remember how to do it. Using these things must be done in parallel with other training. I understand that some defibrillators work fairly easily without too much training, but experience of and ability in CPR buys time, which is what we need to achieve.

I will talk about what the Government are doing in relation to public places, schools, the workplace more generally and, as I have mentioned, sports. I will also take a few minutes at the end of my speech—I do not think that we will be here until 10 o'clock—to talk about screening, which was mentioned as something we ought to consider.

Since 2007, ambulance trusts have had responsibility for the defibrillators around the country. That is because they are where 999 calls go, and they ought to know where the nearest defibrillator is when they get one. If there is a code or the defibrillator is locked, they are responsible for that. In addition, the British Heart Foundation in England—this is also happening in Scotland—is trying to create a database of the defibrillators that we believe are out there. The BHF thinks that there are something like 14,000 defibrillators. Unfortunately, for historical reasons that have grown up over time, there could be maintenance issues with some of them. We need to bring all that up to date, and the BHF is leading the charge on that.

In the past two years, the Government have allocated £1 million per annum for defibrillators in public places. That money is for England only and has led to some success. We had 700 new defibrillators last year as well as the cabinets that go with them, in addition to a range of CPR training, and we expect the same thing to happen this year. That represents an appreciable increase in the number of defibrillators. As I have said, we are doing that because we believe that defibrillators save lives, as does the training around them.

The Member for Garston and Halewood talked about schools. She rightly said that schools have been issued with guidance saying that we expect them to consider the installation of defibrillators, but it is also true to say that not every school has a defibrillator. The hon. Lady also talked about defibrillators costing in excess of £1,000. The scheme that we have put in place for schools uses NHS Supply Chain, which means that they can source a defibrillator for something like £435, which is clearly better than £1,000. I accept that that still comes out of a school's budget, but nevertheless a great number

of schools are taking that up. Schools can also apply to the British Heart Foundation scheme that we talked about earlier, provided that the defibrillator is publicly accessible, which in many cases it would be. However, I accept that we have not mandated such provision, as the Bill asks us to—I will talk about that a little later.

There are workplace health and safety aspects that every employer must consider. We have put in place a requirement that, from 1 January this year, everybody in a workplace who is first aid-accredited—obviously health and safety regulations require that there are such people—must have defibrillation training and be in a position to use those facilities. That is now happening, and it includes everybody who will have to do a first aid refresher course.

As I mentioned, sport is a priority area. Sports governing bodies will have formal responsibility, and many sports are taking this forward. We know of the incidents that have occurred. I think it was Fabrice Muamba during a Tottenham game who was saved by a combination of a defibrillator and a doctor in the crowd who knew CPR, and rugby league and rugby union are also involved. The Football Association has made available a £1.2 million grant to buy 1,300 defibrillators for use at football grounds up and down the country—and not just at the very large grounds. I am involved at Warrington Town football club, and we will be getting a defibrillator under that scheme as well. All FA-accredited coaches will also have to be CPR trained.

I know from the sports Minister that the sport strategy has made defibrillators in sports a priority. She has nominated Baroness Grey-Thompson to take this forward, in terms of putting a duty of care on the various governing bodies. It is an area of priority.

It is also important to understand more about sudden cardiac arrest and to make progress through research. The Government have provided funds through the National Institute of Health Research particularly to deal with the genetic aspects of the condition, given that it has a generic element. Work on gene discovery is also going on at the Oxford Biomedical Research Centre. I am not saying that we are close to a solution or a clear way forward, but this is a research priority. If we understood the genetics better, it would help us to do screening better, so let me move on to screening.

There is a school of thought that screening for children's genetic predisposition to heart problems could make a difference. In 2015, the UK's screening authority, the screening committee, considered screening people between the ages of 12 and 39. It did not support that, however, and I believe that that position is consistent with that of every other country in Europe. We have looked into this, and my understanding is that no other country carries out such screening. A number of reasons have been given: it is difficult to get clarity about the numbers of people who would be affected; there is concern that even if screening were to identify people with a potential weakness, there is no consensus on how that should be managed; and, finally, there is a significant concern about the efficacy of a test, especially regarding the number of false negatives and false positives, which it was felt could do more harm than good. If peer-reviewed evidence came forward, based on the findings of places that had conducted screening work, the matter would be reconsidered, but without that, it will not be looked at again until 2018. That leaves us with the issue of how

to make more progress on the number of defibrillators available. Perhaps the difference between the hon. Lady's remarks and my response is not whether it is a good thing to make progress on defibrillators, but whether the Government should mandate putting defibrillators in every school and sports facility.

**Maria Caulfield:** I understand the Minister's concern about whether this should be mandated. However, these days we would never operate a school without a smoke alarm or fire extinguishers, and we would not put children on a school bus without seat belts. For me, defibrillators are as essential a piece of safety equipment as any of those things.

**David Mowat:** I accept that. As I say, the guidelines are clear: any school can make use of the NHS Supply Chain facility to put in a defibrillator for £400 or so.

**Mr George Howarth:** The Minister talked about screening, which my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) also mentioned. Although I understand the conclusions and the advice that has already been given, to ensure that there is no confusion, is it not appropriate that if somebody has already been affected, screening should be available to their family, particularly their siblings?

**David Mowat:** I accept that. Also, a number of sports governing bodies offer screening for people who participate in their sports, but of course that is not the national screening of all 12 to 39-year-olds, which was the issue that was looked at.

Let me finish by reiterating my willingness to meet the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood, other Members and people from the Oliver King Foundation.

**Maria Eagle:** I conveyed a request for the Prime Minister to meet the Oliver King Foundation and Oliver's parents. Could the Minister help me to facilitate that?

**David Mowat:** I can do many things, but I cannot answer for the Prime Minister. I think I am right in saying that those people met the Secretary of State a couple of years ago. Perhaps when we meet, however, they can start at the bottom end of the food chain before working their way upwards.

When the Government invest in any aspect of health, whether it be cancer drugs or access to GPs, efficacy and cost-effectiveness must be evaluated. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence uses the criterion "quality-adjusted life years". Investment in defibrillators must be judged against investment in other necessities, such as cancer drugs, but it is clear from what has been said in a debate that has attracted interest on both sides of the House and the border that defibrillators save money as we start to save lives. The Government accept that, and I want us to make progress in this regard.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.40 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Written Statement

*Monday 16 January 2017*

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Winter Flooding

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Percy):** I would first like to thank all of those who supported local communities in the wake of the flooding in December 2015 and early January 2016. It is important that we recognise the enormous amount of effort that has gone into supporting households, businesses and communities repair and recover from these floods.

In the days that followed those storms, the Government very quickly identified that the immediate priority was to respond to the urgent needs of those affected and we have paid out almost £300 million to help householders, communities and businesses to get back on their feet. Furthermore, we have supported repairs to vital transport links, including getting the A591 in Cumbria open ahead of schedule, as well as improving flood defences and providing match funding for charity appeals.

Alongside this early response, Ministers informed the House of our intention to apply to the European Union Solidarity Fund. We submitted our initial application on 26 February 2016. The application was made within the 12 week deadline and included a provisional estimate of the cost of direct damage incurred by the floods in December 2015 and early January 2016.

The European Union Solidarity Fund is limited in principle to non-insurable damage and does not compensate for private losses, such as damage to private property. Long-term action—such as lasting reconstruction, economic redevelopment and prevention—are not eligible for support. In the case of a regional application, the Solidarity Fund retrospectively reimburses member states for

2.5% of the direct costs associated with the damage incurred. As the assistance received is therefore dependent on the extent of the costs incurred, it has been important that we ensure the application represents our best estimate of the damage. Subsequent to the initial application, my Department continued to work extensively with devolved Administrations, local authorities and other Government Departments to refine and update our cost analysis and comply with the complex rules of the Fund. As a result of that work, the Government finalised the UK's application to the European Union Solidarity Fund in September 2016.

The Commission has now completed its assessment of our application and has proposed to the European Parliament and Council that the UK receives a notional €60 million in assistance (subject to approval by the two bodies). However, owing to the costs involved in making an application and the effect of clawback through the UK rebate, the overall net benefit to the UK is only estimated to be €17 million (circa £15 million). This will be further offset by a payment of £14.5 million that the UK is legally obliged to make to the EU in respect of the UK's 2007 application (by the then Labour Government) for Solidarity Fund assistance following the serious floods that year. The Commission carried out an assurance review in 2010 and 2011 to verify that all of the expenditure incurred was eligible. The UK Government are obliged to repay funding where there was ineligible spending under the Labour Administration. Consequently, this funding does not offer additional support, but is only eligible to reimburse a small portion of the extensive financial support that has already been given by the Government to the areas affected.

The UK Government continue to stand squarely behind those flooded, working with local authorities to ensure households and businesses receive all eligible support. Furthermore, we are focused not only on ensuring the recovery from these floods, but also on preventing future damage—we are exceeding our manifesto commitment by building 1,500 new flood defence schemes that will better protect 300,000 more homes.

[HCWS412]



# Ministerial Correction

*Monday 16 January 2017*

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Broadcasting (Radio Multiplex Services) Bill

*The following is an extract from the Second Reading of the Broadcasting (Radio Multiplex Services) Bill on 13 January 2017.*

**Matt Hancock:** There have been some big changes in the past couple of years, including in the car market. Nearly 95% of new car radios are digital. The change is happening and it is a good thing, but we must do it sensibly and carefully, and the Bill has no impact on those plans.

*[Official Report, 13 January 2017, Vol. 619, c. 637.]*

The correct statement should have been:

**Matt Hancock:** There have been some big changes in the past couple of years, including in the car market. **Nearly 85% of new car radios are digital.** The change is happening and it is a good thing, but we must do it sensibly and carefully, and the Bill has no impact on those plans.

# ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 16 January 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ..</b>	661	<b>COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT—</b>	
Business Rates.....	675	<i>continued</i>	
High Street Store Vacancies .....	670	Neighbourhood Plans .....	672
Homelessness .....	668	Private Rented Housing .....	677
Homelessness .....	675	Pub Closures: Permitted Development Rights .....	676
House Building .....	673	Social Care: Funding .....	663
Local Authorities: Business Rate Retention .....	661	Social Care: Funding .....	668
Local Authorities: Long-term Funding.....	666	Social Care: Funding .....	671
Midlands Engine for Growth .....	677	Topical Questions .....	678

## WRITTEN STATEMENT

Monday 16 January 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>	<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT .</b>	23WS	
Winter Flooding .....	23WS	

## MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Monday 16 January 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT .....</b>	3MC
Broadcasting (Radio Multiplex Services) Bill.....	3MC

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**CONTENTS**

**Monday 16 January 2017**

**Royal Assent [Col. 661]**

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 661] [see index inside back page]**  
*Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government*

**Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) [Col. 686]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**National Citizen Service Bill [Lords] [Col. 687]**  
*Motion for Second Reading—(Karen Bradley)—agreed to*  
*Read a Second time*

**Defibrillators in Public Areas [Col. 741]**  
*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Written Statement [Col. 23WS]**

**Ministerial Correction [Col. 3MC]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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