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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 25 January 2017**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 25 January 2017*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

FAVERSHAM OYSTER FISHERY COMPANY BILL [*LORDS*]

*Bill read a Second time and committed.*

## Oral Answers to Questions

### WALES

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Infrastructure Developments**

1. **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions he has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) external stakeholders on infrastructure developments in Wales. [908303]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** This Government recognise that delivering world-class infrastructure in our transport and digital sectors is vital to improving productivity and driving economic growth. I hold regular meetings with ministerial colleagues and local partners on issues relating to Wales. Earlier this month I convened a mobile summit which brought together key stakeholders from the mobile network operators and the UK and Welsh Governments to explore ways in which we can work in partnership to improve mobile reception for people and businesses throughout Wales.

**Chris Elmore:** I notice that the Minister failed to mention the Swansea bay tidal lagoon report. That six-month independent review conducted by ex-Energy Minister Charles Hendry could not have been more conclusive in saying that moving ahead with a pathfinder lagoon at Swansea bay

“as soon as is reasonably practicable”

is a “no regrets policy”. There may be much to digest in the review’s detailed road map for a new industry, but there are no grounds for further delaying the start of that industry. When will the Government give the green light to this crucial infrastructure project?

**Guto Bebb:** I am delighted to state that Charles Hendry is in Cardiff Bay today providing more information about his report to the Assembly, and he is being supported there by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies). The report was comprehensive and detailed on the issues relating to a tidal lagoon. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree, however, that any decision must also be good for the taxpayer and good for the electricity end user.

**Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): The Minister will be aware of the campaign by the *Daily Post* newspaper to improve mobile phone notspots. What is he doing to help to improve mobile phone services for voice and data in north Wales?

**Guto Bebb:** I pay tribute to the *Daily Post*’s campaign in north Wales, which has highlighted this issue. That is partly why I was very keen to convene a summit of mobile providers to look very carefully at ways in which we could give them practical support in helping to deal with notspots in Wales. One of the key issues is the planning regime in Wales, which can be much more flexible in ensuring that the money being invested in Wales goes much further and deals with the notspots in all parts of Wales, whether rural or city.

11. [908314] **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): EU structural funding has really helped to improve key road routes across Wales. Can the Minister confirm that once we have left the European Union, equivalent funding for projects like renewing the Heads of the Valleys road will continue?

**Guto Bebb:** EU funding has had a clear impact in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency in terms of the Heads of the Valleys road, and indeed investment in the railway infrastructure. The south Wales metro scheme will generate £106 million of support from European funds, although it should be remembered that it is also receiving £500 million of funding from the UK Government. This Government have delivered a fiscal framework to Wales that has been described as both fair and sustainable, and I can assure him that Wales will be protected when we come to the negotiations to leave the European Union.

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Happy St Dwynwen’s day, Mr Speaker.

Eighty-four per cent. of Conservative councillors, 83% of Conservative MPs, a former Conservative Energy Minister, both Wales Office Ministers and the Conservative party manifesto all support the Swansea bay tidal lagoon project. The Minister failed to answer the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), so I will give him another opportunity: when will his Government kick-start the tidal lagoon project?

**Guto Bebb:** I restate that this decision will have to be made across Government: other Departments will have to look at the issue. I am sure the hon. Lady would agree that in an age where we are seeing industry in Wales worried about the cost of energy, any deal for the Swansea bay tidal lagoon must not only be good in terms of the tidal lagoon but right for the taxpayer and the energy user in Wales.

**Jo Stevens:** Last week in Westminster Hall, the Minister said that

“it is difficult to offer guarantees that”

European Investment Bank

“loans would be supported”.—[*Official Report*, 17 January 2017; Vol. 619, c. 264WH.]

By that, he meant supported by a guarantee from the Treasury when we leave the EU. What benefits has the European Investment Bank brought to Wales, and how much has it invested in Wales over the past 10 years?

**Guto Bebb:** I am sure that the hon. Lady will join me in highlighting the success of the Swansea campus development as an example of European Investment Bank investment in a Welsh context. I am sure that she will also join me in paying tribute to the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer for securing and guaranteeing EU funding up to the point of departure from the European Union. The key point that she must be aware of is that thus far, this Government have delivered a degree of protection for EU funding in Wales, and in due course further announcements will be made about further funding support in a Welsh context.

### Leaving the EU: Business Links

2. **Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of Wales's international business links since the UK's decision to leave the EU. [908304]

5. **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of Wales's international business links since the UK's decision to leave the EU. [908307]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** The UK, including Wales, remains the same outward-looking, globally minded country that we have always been. To support Wales's international business links further, I am jointly hosting a Wales business export summit in Cardiff in early March to ensure that businesses in Wales have full access to UK Government support.

**Stephen Crabb:** The Republic of Ireland is one of Wales's most important trading partners, with around 360,000 trucks passing through Welsh ports to Ireland every year. May I encourage my right hon. Friend to get really involved in the discussions about future UK-Irish border and customs controls to ensure that future arrangements not only uphold the peace process with the north, but protect Welsh interests by minimising checks and delays on trucks that use Welsh ports?

**Alun Cairns:** My right hon. Friend is a true champion of the port in Milford Haven and the links and benefits that it brings to the Welsh and UK economies, and he has played a significant part in developing it. As we negotiate our exit from the European Union, and the special situation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the Welsh situation is not being ignored. At every Joint Ministerial Committee it has been recognised not only by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, but at the Joint Ministerial Committee involving the Prime Minister.

**Karl McCartney:** Given the first-class universities in Wales, including my alma mater Coleg Prifysgol Dewi Sant, will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will highlight their expertise as part of his assessment of international business links?

**Alun Cairns:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. I have mentioned that the Joint Ministerial Committee involving the devolved Administrations plays an important part, but that does not mean that universities will not have a part to play in influencing the negotiations on exiting the European Union. I spoke to the vice-chancellor of Cardiff University last week. I am happy

to maintain a close relationship with my hon. Friend's former university and to ensure that all universities across the United Kingdom have their say as we negotiate our exit from the European Union.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The Secretary of State's response to the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) was not good enough, to be frank. We have had the same response to that question for some time now. We are going to have a common travel area, and it is going to impact heavily on Welsh ports. Will the Secretary of State put the case for Welsh ports and meet Welsh Members of Parliament to ensure that that important trade has a Welsh dimension?

**Alun Cairns:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for highlighting the issues relating to Holyhead, which are being taken into consideration in our discussions. I will happily meet him and any colleagues he wishes to bring along. The situation in Holyhead and Milford Haven is, absolutely, important to the Welsh and the UK economy, and it has issues in common with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. We want to ensure that we get a deal that works for all situations.

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): I am very pleased that the Secretary of State mentioned universities in his response about international business links. Is he aware of the profound concern that is shared by most vice-chancellors, including Professor Hinfelaar at Wrexham Glyndŵr University, about the impact that changes to migration rules will have on students from within the EU and outside it? Will the Secretary of State discuss the matter in detail with those vice-chancellors?

**Alun Cairns:** As well as the universities that I have highlighted, I am in close engagement with Universities Wales, which represents all universities, but I am happy to meet any of the vice-chancellors about the situation. Many assumptions have been made about migration controls. Clearly, it is in our interests to ensure that universities can succeed and prosper, and migration and international students are an important part of their model. Controlling immigration does not mean stopping immigration.

**Craig Williams** (Cardiff North) (Con): I am glad of my right hon. Friend's concentration on universities in his answers. He will be aware that just before Christmas, Cardiff University school of chemistry was formally presented with a royal warrant, officially awarding the department a regius professorship of chemistry in recognition of the exceptionally high standard of research at Cardiff University. What are my right hon. Friend and the Wales Office doing to make sure that our institutions and professors get such accolades and that we can stand on the international stage?

**Alun Cairns:** My hon. Friend makes an important point about the success and the role of universities. The UK Government have a part to play in recognising, championing and promoting that, as well as using Innovate UK money. He is right to highlight the new regius professorship that was awarded to Cardiff University. That underlines its expertise and success in the field of chemistry, and we are determined to ensure that that plays a significant part on the global stage.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): As the Secretary of State considers Wales's business links post-Brexit, will he give the highest priority to the Welsh steel industry, and will he not rule out a trade defence mechanism for steel if that is what is required to save Welsh steelworkers' jobs?

**Alun Cairns:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the steel industry. It is an extremely important industry for communities in Wales, but it is also of strategic importance for the whole of the United Kingdom. Last week, I met all the unions relating to steel, and we discussed the challenges that exist, as well as how the company, the pension trustees, the pensioners and the employees of the steelworks need to work their way through this. The Government stand ready to support the industry—we are determined to find a long-term, sustainable future for the steel industry—and I recognise its importance for Wales and for the UK.

### Industrial Strategy

3. **Mrs Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What discussions his Department has had with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on ensuring that the Government's industrial strategy benefits the whole of the UK. [908305]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** This Government have put in place an industrial strategy that will work for all people in every corner of the UK. Wales is home to world-leading sectors, be it compound semi-conductors in Cardiff, agri-tech in Aberystwyth or advanced manufacturing in Deeside. We are committed to building on our strengths to create an economy where everyone can share the benefits of our economic success.

**Mrs Villiers:** One of the most important themes of the Government's industrial strategy is the determination to ensure that all nations and regions of the UK can benefit from economic prosperity. An important aspect of that is science and research, which I hope the Minister will agree offers real potential for businesses in Wales to prosper and create jobs.

**Guto Bebb:** I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend about the importance of investing in skills and high-tech industries in a Welsh context. I know that our university sector stands ready to support the Welsh economy to ensure that we have such skills.

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): What representations has the Minister made to his Government about placing steel at the heart of their industrial strategy, and how will the UK Government support the innovative products and projects coming out of Swansea University that will future-proof steel making for many generations?

**Guto Bebb:** As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has stated, he recently met the trade unions in relation to the steel sector, and one of my first visits as a Minister was to the Tata plant in Deeside, so we understand the importance of steel to Wales. This Government have been unyielding in our support for the steel industry in Wales, and that will continue.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The UK has lacked a strategic approach to industrial policy for many years, and Wales has suffered as a result. What specific measures in the Government's industrial strategy will be brought in to help Wales?

**Guto Bebb:** It is very important to state that the industrial strategy in a Welsh context must be a partnership between the two Governments that Wales has—we have the UK Government and the Welsh Government—and Wales will succeed and prosper if those two Governments work together. I am glad to be able to say to the hon. Lady that in relation to skills for the energy sector, support for the car manufacturing sector and support for the steel sector, the two Governments are working together to ensure the best for Wales in terms of industrial strategy and developing new opportunities for the people of Wales.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): As the Minister has said, we have many important employers on Deeside—Airbus, Tata, Toyota—but we also have many companies in the supply chain that are very important. We must not only keep those companies post-Brexit, but encourage more to come in.

**Guto Bebb:** I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. Deeside is a great success story for the UK economy, not just for the Welsh economy. He is absolutely right that we need to build on that success by drawing in more investment, and that is why the Secretary of State and I will be holding a summit with the Department for International Trade in Wales in the very near future.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): One of the biggest infrastructure projects we are about to engage in is the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster. Will the Minister make sure that this is part of an industrial strategy for Wales? We do not have enough people in this country to complete the work, and we need academies in every constituency in the land to give young people the skills they need to work in this building.

**Mr Speaker:** The question is certainly part of an ingenuity strategy, on which I congratulate the hon. Gentleman.

**Guto Bebb:** I will obviously not comment on the issue of the refurbishment of the Palace, but I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of getting skills that are relevant to the fabric of buildings in Wales, historic buildings especially. I pay tribute to Coleg Llandrillo Menai, which is doing exactly that—training young people not just in building skills, but in traditional building skills as well.

### Leaving the EU: Agriculture Policy

4. **Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): What assessment he has made of priorities for Welsh agriculture policy after the UK has left the EU. [908306]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** We are determined to get the best deal on leaving the EU. We want a world-leading food and farming industry and the cleanest, healthiest environment for generations. Agriculture is clearly a devolved area,

and I am keen for Welsh farmers to add value to their products. We have the capacity and scope to be innovative, not only in growing great products and producing great food, but in processing and selling them worldwide.

**Tom Elliott:** I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he confirm whether, once the UK leaves the European Union, agriculture policy and funding will be devolved to the regions or remain here with the United Kingdom Government?

**Guto Bebb:** It is certainly the case that agriculture policy is currently devolved. Clearly, there will be a repatriation of powers from Brussels to Westminster as a result of the decision to leave the European Union, but there is an ongoing and positive discussion between Westminster and the Welsh Government in relation to where powers will lie. I say categorically that that partnership is essential for the success of agriculture. That partnership must be not only constructive but objective in respect of what works for the farming industry in Wales and the UK.

**Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con):** Many of my constituents farm cross-border and produce excellent, high-quality British agricultural produce. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure there is the widest possible market access for that produce post-exit?

**Guto Bebb:** I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, who knows the agricultural sector in north Wales and Cheshire extremely well, and who understands the cross-border nature of much farming in Wales. The key point is that we must be aware that we have a great product to offer the rest of the world. It is essential that we go out and sell that product, which is why the Wales Office is forging such a close relationship with the Secretary of State for International Trade. It is essential that we grow the markets for Welsh products, rather than be defensive about the issue.

**Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab):** Is this not a wonderful opportunity to reform agricultural subsidies to decouple Wales from the system in England that rewards people for owning land and not, as they are rewarded in Wales, for producing food? Should we not end the system of paying millionaires and billionaires up to £1 million each a year, while Welsh farmers have to struggle with small subsidies? Can we have Welsh policies for Welsh farmers?

**Guto Bebb:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that the aim of the Government is to have a farming policy that is right for the UK and right for Wales. He was much more positive about our farming industry in a recent Westminster Hall debate and I agree with the comments he made in that debate. It is essential that we support the farming industry in Wales, while moving forward following our exit from the European Union.

**Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con):** Does the Minister agree that Brexit gives us the opportunity to set a new agricultural policy in Wales, starting with positive changes to the common agricultural policy?

**Guto Bebb:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that, in view of our decision to leave the European Union, it is essential that we develop an agricultural system that

works for farmers in Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom. The common agricultural policy was guilty of the fossilisation of Welsh farming, because it encouraged people not to retire. It is essential to look at the problems created by the common agricultural policy while we design a new system for Wales.

12. [908315] **Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab):** Sixty-eight per cent of Welsh exports, including those from the Welsh agricultural sector, go to the European Union. Perhaps the Minister can tell us how leaving the single market and the customs union will lead to a better deal for Welsh exporters.

**Guto Bebb:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the percentage of Welsh exports that go to the European Union, but he should realise that access to the single market is what is now crucial. It was very apparent from the decision to leave the European Union that we will not be a member of the single market. We need to negotiate the best possible access deal with the European Union and I think that will be possible in due course.

**Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC):** Last Friday, I visited Trewen farm in Botwnnog with the Farmers Union of Wales. This dairy farm has contributed over £150,000 to the local economy in the last three years, yet only three years from now Welsh farmers are set to face a perfect storm. Can the Minister reveal what transitional arrangements will be put in place to safeguard our rural economy?

**Guto Bebb:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question and the use of the term “perfect storm”. It is an acknowledgement of the press release sent out by the Farmers Union of Wales. I can reassure her that the issue should be about access to the single market, and while the FUW has expressed its concern about the decision to leave the single market, my discussions and meetings with farmers’ unions in Wales, both the FUW and the National Farmers Union, have highlighted access to it as the crucial issue for Welsh farmers.

**Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab):** During Welsh questions last April, the Minister said:

“The extent of Welsh agricultural produce that is exported to the EU shows how important that market is; 90% of Welsh agricultural produce is exported to the EU and we should not risk losing that.”—[*Official Report*, 13 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 341.]

Given those comments, will he explain why his Government wish to leave the single market?

**Guto Bebb:** At the risk of repeating myself, let me point out that the hon. Gentleman is right that 90% of Welsh farming exports go to the EU, which is why I have repeatedly stated that the issue that farmers in Wales are concerned about is access to the single market. That is the issue that will make a difference to Welsh farmers and towards which the Department and the Government will be working.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) and wish him and his colleagues a happy Burns night.

### EU Single Market: Jobs

6. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on jobs in Wales of the UK leaving the EU single market. [908309]

7. **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on jobs in Wales of the UK leaving the EU single market. [908310]

9. **George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on jobs in Wales of the UK leaving the EU single market. [908312]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** Since the vote to leave the EU, we have seen employment hit record highs, and there are now 4,000 fewer people unemployed than six months ago. Trade with the EU is important to Wales, but it is clear that we need to increase our trade with the fastest-growing markets across the world. It is time for Wales, like Britain, to rediscover its role as a great global trading nation.

**Alan Brown:** I hope the whole Chamber will celebrate Robert Burns today.

This week, Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Government published a White Paper outlining their concerns about Wales and our leaving the EU. What actions will the UK Government take to address the concerns raised by the two largest parties in the Welsh Parliament?

**Alun Cairns:** My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was awaiting the document from the Welsh Government. It was received on Monday, and of course we will work through the details. It will be subject to discussion at the Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Negotiations—the right place for it to be considered and discussed—but much of the language around accessing the single market is not incompatible with what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said.

**Kirsten Oswald:** The Supreme Court ruling yesterday concluded that the Sewel convention was a convention and therefore not a matter on which it could rule. Our friends in Plaid Cymru are moving to table a legislative consent motion in the Welsh Parliament, and the Scottish Parliament will also vote on a legislative consent motion. Does the Secretary of State agree, in the spirit of democracy, that the devolved Governments are best placed to determine the future of the people living and working in our nations? [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We would like to hear the reply.

**Alun Cairns:** It is a matter for the devolved Administrations whether they choose to table legislative consent motions, and yesterday's judgment was quite clear. The approach of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the whole Government is to engage positively with the devolved Administrations—the Scottish Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Welsh Government—but we will also want to engage with other stakeholders in the nations as well.

**George Kerevan:** North Wales has been designated the central maintenance centre for all European F-35 fighters. Can the Minister assure the House that the aerospace companies in north Wales will be given the same assurances as Nissan that leaving the single market will not result in tariff barriers or a loss of access to European skilled labour?

**Alun Cairns:** I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman highlights the success of Sealand in winning the F-35 contract. It will be the global repair hub. I was there on Monday celebrating and recognising the effects and the impact that employees had on winning that global contract. The significance should not be understated. It offers positive prospects for the supply chain and that centre for decades to come.

**Mr Mark Williams** (Ceredigion) (LD): The Prime Minister has talked of a bold new trading relationship with New Zealand. Will the Secretary of State relay to the Prime Minister—she is here, so he can do so directly—the genuine concern of many Welsh upland farmers that they could lose access to the biggest market on the continent in favour of a market, and direct competitor, on the other side of the world?

**Alun Cairns:** Welsh produce, and Welsh lamb and beef in particular, is world leading, and there are great opportunities as we exit the European Union to explore and exploit new markets. Hybu Cig Cymru specifically recognised that £20 million could be brought to Wales from accessing the north American market. These are the ambitions that we want to have, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will of course put Britain first in any negotiations.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): I am not seeking a running commentary or any detailed negotiating information, but a special deal was cut for the car industry in the north-east. Did the Secretary of State seek a similar deal for the car industry in Wales?

**Alun Cairns:** I do not recognise the basis of the question. The automotive sector is exceptionally strong in Wales, partly as a result of the Nissan contract in Sunderland, for which many of the supplier companies are based in Wales. I also draw attention to the great success of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in bringing Aston Martin to Wales. We should recognise and celebrate the fantastic success on that MOD base.

**Hywel Williams:** Up to 200,000 jobs in Wales depend on our membership of the European Union, the single market and the customs union. I am not going to go through every sector, but will the Secretary of State seek sectoral deals for important parts of the Welsh economy as we leave the European Union?

**Alun Cairns:** It is clear that we want to get the best deal for the whole of the United Kingdom. We want to ensure that the market within the United Kingdom works effectively. After all, the most important market for Wales is the market from within the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman can take confidence from the fact

that, on the back of this Government's policy and success, Wales has been the fastest growing economy outside London since 2010.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Colleagues, we are visited today by Speaker Win Myint, the Speaker of the Hluttaw, the Burmese Parliament. He is accompanied by a delegation of his parliamentary colleagues. I am sure the House will wish to join me in welcoming Mr Speaker and his colleagues.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

## PRIME MINISTER

### *The Prime Minister was asked—* Engagements

Q1. [908363] **Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 25 January.

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** As the response from the whole House showed, we all indeed welcome the Speaker of the Burmese Parliament and his colleagues to see our deliberations today.

I am sure that the whole House will join me in sending our thoughts to the friends and family of the police officer who was shot in Belfast over the weekend. The Police Service of Northern Ireland does a superb job in keeping us safe and secure, and has our fullest support.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to my duties in this House I shall have further such meetings later today. Later this week, I will travel to the United States for talks with President Trump.

**Helen Jones:** I join the Prime Minister in sending good wishes to the police officer who was shot in Belfast.

They are the best drivers of social mobility, and 99% of them are rated good or outstanding, while 65% of their places are in the most deprived areas of this country, so why is the Prime Minister introducing cuts that threaten the very existence of maintained nursery schools? Is it not true that when it comes to social mobility, her actions speak far louder than her words?

**The Prime Minister:** I want to ensure, and this Government want to ensure, good-quality education at every age and every stage for children in this country. That is why we are looking at improving the number of good school places. The hon. Lady talks about my record speaking louder than words, so let me point out that I was very proud as chairman of an education authority in London in the 1990s to introduce nursery school places for every three and four-year-old whose parent wanted them.

Q2. [908364] **Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): The Prime Minister laid out a clear and bold plan for Brexit in her speech last week. Hon. Members quite rightly want an opportunity to scrutinise the plan. Does the

Prime Minister agree that the best way of facilitating that scrutiny would be a Government White Paper laying out our vision for a global Britain based on free trade in goods and services that will be to the benefit of us and other European countries?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises the question of parliamentary scrutiny. I have made clear, as have senior Ministers, that we will ensure that Parliament has every opportunity to carry out such scrutiny as we go through this process. I set out that bold plan for a global Britain last week. I recognise that there is an appetite in the House to see it set out in a White Paper—I have heard my hon. Friend's question, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) asked a question in the same vein last week—and I can confirm that our plan will be set out in a White Paper published for the House.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in expressing the condolences of, I am sure, the whole House to the family of the police officer who lost his life over the weekend in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister has wasted 80 days between the original judgment and the appeal. She has finally admitted today, after pressure from all sides, that there will be a White Paper. May we know when that White Paper will be available to us, and why it is taking so long for us to get it?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman asked for debates. I made very clear that there would always be debates in the House, and there have been and will continue to be. He asked for votes. There have been votes in the House; the House voted overwhelmingly for the Government to trigger article 50 before the end of March this year. He asked for a plan. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), I have set out a clear plan for a bold future for Britain. He and others asked for a White Paper, and I have made clear that there will be a White Paper.

What I am also clear about is that the right hon. Gentleman always asks about process—about the means to an end. The Government and I are focusing on the outcomes. We are focusing on a truly global Britain, building a stronger future for this country, the right deal for Britain, and Britain out of the European Union.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** My question was not complicated. I simply asked when the White Paper would come out. Will it be published before or at the same time as the Bill that is apparently about to be published?

Last week I asked the Prime Minister repeatedly to clarify whether her Government were prepared to pay to secure tariff-free access to the single European market. She repeatedly refused to answer the question, so I will ask her again. Are her Government ruling out paying a fee for tariff-free access to the single market or the bespoke customs union to which she also referred in her speech?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman has mentioned the issue of timing. There are actually two separate issues. The House has voted overwhelmingly that article 50 should be triggered before the end of March 2017. Following the Supreme Court judgment, a

Bill will be provided for the House, and there will be proper debates on it in the Chamber and in another place. There is then the separate question of the publication of the plan that I have set out, a bold vision for Britain for the future. I will do that in the White Paper. The right hon. Gentleman knows that one of our objectives is the best possible free trade with the European Union, and that is what we will be out there negotiating for.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Some of this is very worrying for many Members, but, more important, it is worrying for many other people. For example, the chief executive of Nissan was given assurances by the Prime Minister's Business Secretary about future trade arrangements with Europe, but now says that Nissan will

“have to re-evaluate the situation”

in relation to its investments in Britain.

The Prime Minister is threatening the EU that unless it gives in to her demands she will turn Britain into a bargain basement tax haven off the coast of Europe. Labour Members are very well aware of the consequences that that would have—the damage that it would do to jobs and living standards, and to our public services. Is the Prime Minister now going to rule out the bargain basement threat that she made in her speech at Lancaster House?

**The Prime Minister:** I expect us to get a good deal for trading relationships with the European Union, but I am also clear that this Government will not sign up to a bad deal for the United Kingdom. As for the threats that the right hon. Gentleman claims might happen—he often uses those phrases and talks about workers' rights—perhaps he should listen to his former colleague in this House, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who today said,

“to give credit to the Government...I don't think they want to weaken workers' rights”,

and goes on to say,

“I've seen no evidence from the conversations I've had with senior members of the Government that that's their aspiration or their intention or something they want to do. Which is good.”

As usual with Labour, the right hand is not talking to the far-left.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The evidence of what the Tory party and this Government really think about workers' rights was there for all to see yesterday: a private Member's Bill under the ten-minute rule by a Tory MP to tear up parts of the International Labour Organisation convention, talking down the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) to protect European workers' rights that have been obtained in this country. That is the real agenda of the Tory party.

What the Prime Minister is doing is petulantly aiming a threat at our public services with her threats about a bargain basement Britain. Is her priority our struggling NHS, those denied social care, and children having their school funding cut, or is it once again further cuts in big business taxation to make the rich even better off?

**The Prime Minister:** I simply remind the right hon. Gentleman that I have been very clear that this Government will protect workers' rights; indeed, we have a review of modern employment law to ensure all employment

legislation is keeping up with the modern labour market. One of the objectives I set out in my plan for our negotiating objectives was to protect workers' rights.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about threats to public services. I will tell him what the threat to public services would be: a Labour Government borrowing £500 billion extra. That would destroy our economy and mean no funding for our public services.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The threat to workers' rights is there every day: 6 million people earning less than the living wage; and many people—nearly 1 million—on zero-hours contracts with no protection being offered by this Government. What they are doing is offering once again the bargain basement alternative.

Will the Prime Minister also take this opportunity today to congratulate the 100,000 people who marched in Britain last weekend to highlight women's rights after President Trump's inauguration, and to express their concerns about his misogyny? Many have concerns that in the Prime Minister's forthcoming meeting with President Trump she will be prepared to offer up for sacrifice the opportunity for American companies to come in and take over parts of our NHS or our public services. Will she assure the House that in any trade deal none of those things will be offered up as a bargaining chip?

**The Prime Minister:** I again point out to the right hon. Gentleman that it is this Government who have introduced the national living wage and this Government who have made changes to zero-hours contracts.

On the issue of my visit to the United States of America, I am pleased that I am able to meet President Trump so early in his Administration. That is a sign of the strength of the special relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States of America—a special relationship on which he and I intend to build. But I also say to the Leader of the Opposition that I am not afraid to speak frankly to a President of the United States; I am able to do that because we have that special relationship—a special relationship that the right hon. Gentleman would never have with the United States.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** We would never allow Britain to be sold off on the cheap. How confident is the Prime Minister of getting a good deal for “global Britain” from a President who says he wants to put America first, buy American and build a wall between his country and Mexico?

Article 50 was not about a court judgment against the Government. What it signified was the bad judgment of this Government: the bad judgment of prioritising corporate tax cuts over investment in national health and social care; the bad judgment of threatening European partners while offering a blank cheque to President Trump; and the bad judgment of wanting to turn Britain into a bargain basement tax haven. So will the Prime Minister offer some clarity and certainty and withdraw the threats to destroy the social structure of this country by turning us into the bargain basement she clearly threatens?

**The Prime Minister:** We will be out around the world with the EU, America and other countries negotiating good free trade deals for this country that will bring prosperity to this country. The right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about Brexit, but I have to say to him that

he is the leader of his party and he cannot even agree with his shadow Chancellor about Brexit. The shadow Chancellor cannot agree with the shadow Brexit Secretary, the shadow Brexit secretary disagrees with the shadow Home Secretary, and the shadow Home Secretary has to ring up the leader and tell him to change his mind. He talks about us standing up for Britain; they cannot speak for themselves and they will never speak for Britain.

Q3. [908365] **David Warburton** (Somerton and Frome) (Con): On 27 December, another young woman lost her life driving through the west country on the A303. In the past decade, more than 1,000 people have been killed or injured on that road. For 40 years, Governments have promised to dual the lethal parts of the road where two lanes become three or three lanes become two, with no central reservation. The queues on the road are also legendary. I know that the Government are committed to an upgrade, but will the Prime Minister assure us that the proposed tunnel beneath Stonehenge will not hold up essential work elsewhere, and that we will soon see cones on the road and spades in the ground?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises an important issue, and he is absolutely right to do that. I can assure him that we are working generally to improve the safety of our roads. He refers specifically to the issue of the A303 and to the tragic incident that happened on 27 December. We have committed to creating a dual carriageway on the A303 from the M3 to the M5. I understand that Highways England has recently launched a consultation into the route under Stonehenge, and my hon. Friend will want to look closely at that issue. This is all part of our £2 billion investment in road improvements that will improve connections in the south-west, but I can assure him that we have road safety at the forefront of our mind.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): May I begin by wishing everybody a happy Burns day, and by extending congratulations to *The Scotsman* newspaper, which is celebrating its bicentenary today?

Yesterday, the Government lost in the Supreme Court, and today we have had a welcome U-turn on a White Paper on Brexit. In the spirit of progress for Parliament, and in advance of her meeting President Trump, will the Prime Minister tell Parliament what she wants to achieve in a UK-US trade deal?

**The Prime Minister:** First, I join the right hon. Gentleman in wishing a happy Burns day to everybody and in recognising the bicentenary of *The Scotsman*. I am sure everybody in the House will join me in that. He asks what we want to achieve in our arrangements with the United States. It is very simple: we want to achieve an arrangement that ensures that the interests of the United Kingdom are put first, and that is what I will be doing. We want to see trade arrangements with the United States, and with other parts of the world, that can increase our trade and bring prosperity and growth to the United Kingdom. Then, my aim for this Government is to ensure that the economy works for everyone in every part of the United Kingdom.

**Angus Robertson:** The European Union, which we are still part of, has among the highest food safety standards anywhere in the world, and we are proud on our continent to have public national health systems. The United States, on the other hand, is keen to have health systems that are fully open to private competition and it wants to export genetically modified organisms, beef raised using growth hormones and chicken meat washed with chlorinated water. Will the Prime Minister tell President Trump that she is not prepared to lower our food and safety standards or to open our health systems up for privatisation? Or does she believe that that is a price worth paying for a UK-US trade deal?

**The Prime Minister:** We will be looking for a UK-US trade deal that improves trade between our two countries, that will bring prosperity and growth to this country and that will ensure that we can bring jobs to this country as well. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that, in doing that, we will put UK interests and UK values first.

Q4. [908366] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Historic per capita spending in our regions, including Yorkshire, when compared with London is up to 40% lower for our local authorities, up to 50% lower for our schools and up to 60% lower for our transport projects. Does the Prime Minister agree that, if we want to build a country that works for everyone, we need a fair funding deal that works for everyone?

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise the issues that my hon. Friend has raised, and I can assure him that our commitment in relation to the northern parts of England, including Yorkshire, is absolutely clear. We want to back business growth right across the north, and we are backing the northern powerhouse to help the great cities and towns of the north to pool their strengths and take on the world. Yorkshire local enterprise partnerships have received an additional £156 million in Government funding this week, and we are spending a record £13 billion on transport across the north. As a result, there are more people in work in Yorkshire and the Humber than ever before, and the employment rate is at a record high. That is good news for people in the region and good news for our economy as a whole.

Q5. [908367] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The European Medicines Agency provides a single drug licensing system for 500 million people and results in the UK having drugs licensed six to 12 months ahead of countries like Canada and Australia. Yesterday, the Health Secretary stated that the UK will not be in the EMA, so can the Prime Minister confirm this and explain how she will prevent delayed drug access for UK patients?

**The Prime Minister:** There are a number of organisations that we are part of as members of the European Union. As part of the work that we are doing to look at the United Kingdom's future after we leave the European Union, we are looking at the arrangements we can put in place in relation to those issues. The pharmaceutical industry in this country is a very important part of our economy, and the ability of people to access these new

drugs is also important. I assure the hon. Lady that we are looking seriously at this and will ensure that we have the arrangements that we need.

Q7. [908369] **Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): Too few British entrepreneurs are connecting with the capital they need to start and grow. As part of her industrial strategy, which will be looking at access to capital, will the Prime Minister order a review of the enterprise investment scheme and the seed enterprise investment scheme in the hope that they can be simplified, helping to create the large pools of buccaneering capital that British industry needs?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises an important issue. He has long been a champion of entrepreneurship in this country, and I can tell him that in the industrial strategy we are committed to providing the best environment for business. The Treasury has established a patient capital review, for example, with a panel chaired by Sir Damon Buffini to look at the barriers that exist to long-term investment. We are also increasing investment in venture capital by the British Business Bank by £400 million, and that will unlock £1 billion of new finance. The Treasury is going to be publishing a consultation in the spring examining these issues, and I am sure my hon. Friend will wish to contribute and respond to that.

Q6. [908368] **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Four-and-a-half years ago, my constituents Chris and Lydia Leek were on a family holiday on the Greek island of Zante when their son, Jamie, was hit and killed by a speeding motorbike—it was his ninth birthday. The rider was convicted but has appealed against his sentence and, to date, remains a free man. Will the Prime Minister agree to meet Chris and Lydia to discuss how they can finally secure justice for Jamie?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to look at the tragic case that the hon. Lady describes. Our thoughts must be with Chris and Lydia at the terrible loss they experienced. As to the issue of what is happening in terms of the Greek criminal justice system, of course that is a matter for the Greek authorities, but I will look seriously at this case and see if there is anything that the Foreign Office can do.

**Mr Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester) (Con): President Trump has repeatedly said that he will bring back torture as an instrument of policy. When she sees him on Friday, will the Prime Minister make it clear that in no circumstances will she permit Britain to be dragged into facilitating that torture, as we were after 11 September?

**The Prime Minister:** I assure my right hon. Friend that our position on torture is clear: we do not sanction torture and do not get involved in it. That will continue to be our position.

Q8. [908370] **Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Seventy per cent. of my constituents voted remain, 15% are citizens of other EU countries, and almost all do not trust the Prime Minister's Government to negotiate a deal that secures the future prosperity of London and the UK. Will she give this House a veto on the deal that she does, or will she put the deal to a referendum of the British people?

**The Prime Minister:** People voted differently across the country. Parts of the country voted to remain and parts of the country voted to leave. What we do now is unite behind the result of the vote that took place. We come together as a country, we go out there, we make a success of this, and we ensure that we build a truly global Britain that will bring jobs to the hon. Gentleman's constituency and for his constituents.

**Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): This week, Milton Keynes celebrates its 50th birthday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] We have been the most successful of new cities and have one of the highest rates of economic growth. Does the Prime Minister agree that Milton Keynes has a great future and will be central to delivering this Government's ambitions?

**The Prime Minister:** I join my hon. Friend in marking Milton Keynes' 50th birthday. I understand that he has secured a Westminster Hall debate on the subject later today, so I congratulate him on that. Milton Keynes is a great example of what can be achieved with a clear plan and strong local leadership. We are providing additional funding for the east-west rail project, which he supported through his chairing of the east-west rail all-party parliamentary group, and the Oxford to Cambridge expressway road scheme. We will see a country that works for everyone. Milton Keynes has had a great 50 years, but I am sure that it will have a great future as well.

Q9. [908371] **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): Last week, a freight train from China arrived in Barking after using the channel tunnel, demonstrating the massive potential of rail freight. However, continental rail wagons and lorry trailers on trains cannot be accommodated on Britain's historic rail network because its loading gauge is too small. Will the Prime Minister therefore consider giving positive support to the GB freight route scheme, which will provide a large-gauge freight line linking all the nations and regions of Britain both to each other and to Europe and Asia? It would take 5 million lorry journeys off Britain's roads every year.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman raises the difference in gauges on railways here and on the continent, which has obviously been an issue for some considerable time. We want to encourage rail freight, we have been encouraging it, and we will continue to do so.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): The Ministry of Cake in Taunton, a company with a turnover of £30 million, has recently been bought by a French company called Mademoiselle Desserts. The Ministry of Cake trades across Europe and into China. Does the Prime Minister agree that that demonstrates confidence in our economy—in that a European company has bought into it—that we can unlock global trade and that the south-west is a terrific place to do business?

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The investment of a French company into the company in her constituency shows people's confidence in the future of our economy, the fundamental strengths

of our economy and that we can unlock global trade. Of course, the south-west is a very good place to do business.

**Q10.** [908372] **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): Robert Burns once spoke that whatever damages society, or any least part of it,

“this is my measure of iniquity.”

Does the Prime Minister agree that that description applies perfectly to the detained fast track system, recently found to be illegal by British courts, under which 10,000 asylum seekers were denied a fair trial, some of whom were probably illegally deported to face death and torture?

**The Prime Minister:** The issue of the detained fast track system in the asylum system is one that I obviously looked at when I was Home Secretary, and we made a number of changes to how we operated it. However, it is built on a simple principle: if somebody’s case for asylum is such that they are almost certain to be refused that asylum, we want to ensure that they can be removed from the country as quickly as possible, hence the detained fast track system.

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister assist in efforts to get an enterprise zone in my constituency of Morecambe and Lunesdale as part of the industrial strategy? It turns out that the Labour council and county council are talking about an enterprise zone-esque project in the area but have not applied for any funding whatsoever. Will she please assist me in this endeavour?

**The Prime Minister:** I know what a champion for Morecambe and Lunesdale my hon. Friend is and has been as a Member of Parliament, and I am sure that the Chancellor and the Business Secretary will look at the issue he has raised. I should also say how sad it is that Labour councils are not willing to put forward proposals to increase the prosperity and economic growth in their areas.

#### First Minister of Scotland: Meeting

**Q11.** [908373] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): When she will next meet the First Minister of Scotland.

**The Prime Minister:** I will meet the First Minister and leaders of the devolved Administrations at the Joint Ministerial Committee on Monday, but of course we regularly engage with the Scottish Government on a wide range of issues.

**Patrick Grady:** When the Prime Minister does eventually meet the First Minister, will the Prime Minister confirm whether she supports the principle in the Scotland Act that whatever is not reserved is devolved? Will she be able to tell the First Minister what powers will come to the Scottish Parliament in the event of Brexit? Will she confirm that the great repeal Bill will not be the great power grab?

**The Prime Minister:** I have been very clear, and this was echoed yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, that no powers that are currently devolved are suddenly

going to be taken back to the United Kingdom Government. We will be looking at and discussing with the devolved Administrations how we deal with those powers that are currently in Brussels when they come back to the United Kingdom. We want to ensure that those powers are dealt with so that we can maintain the important single market of the United Kingdom.

#### Engagements

**Oliver Dowden** (Hertsmere) (Con): It is currently an offence to assault a police officer, immigration officer or prison officer, but it is not a specific offence to assault an NHS worker, whether they are a doctor, nurse or paramedic. Does the Prime Minister agree that we should consider extending a specific offence to cover such people, to make it absolutely clear that the public will not tolerate violence towards our hard-working members of the NHS?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. Of course, we condemn assaults on anybody and any violence that takes place. The Secretary of State for Health has heard the case that my hon. Friend has put and will be happy to look into that issue.

**Q12.** [908374] **Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): When the Prime Minister introduces a UK agricultural policy because we have left the common agricultural policy, will the Duke of Westminster still receive £407,000 a year, will the Duke of Northumberland still receive £475,000 a year, and will the Earl of Iveagh still receive £915,000 a year from the British taxpayer?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman seems to know a lot about these ducal matters; it is most interesting. I am fascinated by the reply, so let’s hear it.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is right that one of the tasks we will have when we leave the European Union is to decide what support is provided to agriculture as a result of our being outside the common agricultural policy. I assure him that we are taking the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom into account when we look at that system and what it should be in future.

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Ah, yes, a Hampshire knight.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** Last weekend, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made a welcome visit to Ukraine, where he said that freedom and democracy are not tradeable commodities. As we mark the 25th anniversary of relations between our two Parliaments, may I invite my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to declare the continuing support of the United Kingdom for the maintenance of an independent sovereign state in Ukraine, which has been subjected to the most outrageous annexation of part of its property by Russia?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in confirming our commitment to the independent sovereign state of Ukraine. The Foreign Secretary has been doing a lot of work with other Foreign Ministers on this issue. We provide significant support to Ukraine, and I hope to be able to meet President Poroshenko soon and talk about the support we provide.

Q13. [908375] **Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): In her speech last week, the Prime Minister said that Parliament would get a vote on the final deal between the UK and the European Union. Will she set out for the House what would happen if Parliament said no to the terms of that deal? In those circumstances, would she negotiate an alternative deal, or would her no deal option mean our falling back on World Trade Organisation rules, which would mean 10% tariffs on cars, 20% tariffs on food and drink, and a host of other barriers to trade, investment and prosperity in the UK?

**The Prime Minister:** As I also said in my speech last week, I expect that we will be able to negotiate a good trade deal with the European Union, because it will be in our interests and the interests of the European Union to do so. There will be a vote on the deal for this Parliament. If this Parliament is not willing to accept a deal that has been decided on and agreed by the United Kingdom Government with the European Union, then, as I have said, we will have to fall back on other arrangements.

**Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): It was a great pleasure to welcome my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her Cabinet to Sci-Tech Daresbury earlier this week. I welcome the Government's industrial strategy, which will bring high-skill, high-wage jobs that will help close the north-south divide. The message is that Britain is open for business.

**The Prime Minister:** I and the whole Cabinet were very pleased to be able to visit Daresbury. I was pleased to sit down and meet small businesses on that particular site and to hear their support for what the Government are doing in the industrial strategy. We should be very clear that Britain is open for business. We will be out there trading around the world. We will be a global leader in free trade, bringing jobs, economic growth and prosperity to every part of this country.

Q14. [908376] **Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): We are all aware of the hundreds of thousands of women around the world who marched on behalf of women's rights last weekend. In this House, we have been lobbied by members of the Women Against State Pension Inequality. Many MPs have lodged petitions asking the Government to act. Can the Prime Minister tell us how many MPs have lodged such petitions?

**The Prime Minister:** I think the number of petitions presented in this Parliament is a matter for the House authorities. The hon. Gentleman also knows that the Government have already taken action in relation to the issue of women's pensions by reducing the changes that will be experienced by women and putting extra money into that.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Following her excellent EU speech last week, will the Prime Minister consider unilaterally guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens living and working in the UK? Not only is that the decent thing to do, but, by taking

the moral high ground, it will be a source of strength going forward in the negotiations. We can always return to the issue of non-reciprocation by the EU, if necessary, later in those negotiations.

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise the concern that my hon. Friend has raised, but my position remains the same as it always has been. I expect, intend and want to be able to guarantee the rights of EU citizens living here in the United Kingdom, but, as the British Prime Minister, it is only right that I should give consideration to the rights of UK citizens living elsewhere in what will be the remaining 27 member states of the EU. That is why I want that reciprocal arrangement, but, as I said in my speech last week, I remain open to this being an issue that we negotiate at a very early stage in the negotiations. There are a good number of other European member states that want that too. Some do not, but I am hoping to settle this at an early stage.

Q15. [908377] **Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on disability, we recently compiled an important inquiry report into the Government's pledge to halve the disability employment gap. Research shows that that pledge will not be met for 50 years. To date, no Minister has met the APPG to discuss the report. Will the Prime Minister place people with disability at the heart of policy and ensure that her Ministers engage with the APPG and its recommendations?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady raises an important issue about disabled people in the workplace. It is one of which we are aware. Of course, as we see unemployment going down, the ratios do change to an extent. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is looking very seriously at how we can ensure that there are more disabled people in the workplace. I am sure that he will see the requests that she has made in relation to the APPG.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): May I welcome the Prime Minister's meeting with the President of Turkey on Saturday, when we can show our solidarity in the fight against terrorism and deepen our trading relationship? Will she also seek support for a united and independent Cyprus, free from Turkish troops?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that matter. There are important issues that I will be discussing with President Erdogan and with the Prime Minister of Turkey when I meet them on Saturday. On Cyprus, I am hopeful that the talks will continue and that we will come to a solution—we are closer to a solution now than we have been before. I have already spoken to Prime Minister Tsipras and to President Erdogan about the need to ensure that we are creative in the thinking and in the finding of a solution. I had a further telephone call with Nicos Anastasiades over the weekend about this very issue. We stand ready as a guarantor to play our part in ensuring that we see a successful conclusion of these talks and the reunification of Cyprus that people have been working towards for some time.

**Mr Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): I join the Prime Minister in wishing a speedy recovery to the police officer who was shot and injured in my constituency

in north Belfast on Sunday night. Thankfully, he was not killed—but of course that was not the terrorists' intention. It is clear that the political instability brought about by Sinn Féin's collapse of the Assembly is not in anyone's interests in Northern Ireland. It is also clear that it is Sinn Féin's intention to try to rewrite the history of the past. Will the Prime Minister make it very clear that the one-sided legal persecution of police officers and soldiers who did so much to bring peace to Northern Ireland will not be allowed to continue?

**The Prime Minister:** As the right hon. Gentleman indicates, political stability in Northern Ireland has been hard earned over some considerable time, and none of us wants to see that thrown away. He raised the issue of the current situation with a number of investigations by the Police Service of Northern Ireland into former soldiers and their activities in Northern Ireland. It is absolutely right that we recognise that the majority of people who lost their life did so as a result of terrorist activity, and it is important that that terrorist activity is looked into. That is why one of the issues that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is looking at is the legacy question and how the issue of investigation on all sides can take place in future.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Social care provided by Labour-led Derbyshire County Council is failing miserably, with serious errors in process leading to shameful consequences for some of the most vulnerable people in my constituency. It is clearly not about funding, as the council sits on reserves of about £233 million. Will my right hon. Friend instigate an urgent review of social care practice at the county council, because the people of Derbyshire deserve better?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The success of social care is not wholly about funding. It is about practice on the ground, which is

why we have made it clear that it is important to see integration between social and health care at a local level, and local authorities should play their part in delivering that. This is an issue that needs to be addressed for the longer term as well. It has been ducked by Governments for too long in this country, which is why this Government are determined to introduce a sustainable programme for social care in future.

**Edward Miliband** (Doncaster North) (Lab) *rose—*  
[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** The right hon. Gentleman never knew he was quite that popular.

**Edward Miliband:** I was going to say, Mr Speaker, that it brings back memories.

As the first foreign leader to meet President Trump, the Prime Minister carries a huge responsibility on behalf not just of this country but of the whole international community in the tone that she sets. Can I ask her to reassure us that she will say to the President that he must abide by, and not withdraw from, the Paris climate change treaty? In case it is helpful, can she offer the services of UK scientists to convince the President that climate change is not a hoax invented by the Chinese?

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise the role that the right hon. Gentleman has played in looking at the issue of climate change, and I hope that he recognises the commitment that the Government have shown to this issue, with the legislation that we have introduced and the changes that we have brought about in the energy sector and the use of different forms of energy. The Obama Administration signed up to the Paris climate change agreement, and we have now done so. I would hope that all parties would continue to ensure that that climate change agreement is put into practice.

## Points of Order

12.45 pm

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP) *rose*—

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I think that the hon. Gentleman should be preserved; we should build up a sense of anticipation for him. I will take a point of order first from the hon. Lady.

**Alison Thewliss:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At 2 o'clock last Friday, just 58 minutes before the House rose, and on the day the world was watching the inauguration across the pond, the wee, sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beasties of the Department for Work and Pensions sneaked out their consultation response regarding the medieval rape clause and the pernicious two-child policy. The response included a number of concessions, but not nearly enough to give women and families comfort. I seek your clarification on whether at any point last week a DWP Minister indicated to you or your office their intention to make a statement to the House on this hugely important matter, or should right hon. and hon. Members be left to conclude that the Government hoped that this abhorrent news would be caught up in the avalanche of appalling policies emanating from the White House?

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer is no. However, I genuinely wish to thank the hon. Lady for her courtesy in giving me notice of her intended point of order. I am aware, as other Members will be, that she has a long-standing interest in this sensitive issue. That said, I must tell the hon. Lady and the House that I have received no notice from Ministers of any intention to make a statement to the House on this subject. That, of course, is a judgment for them, rather than for me. However, I am sure that her words will have been heard on the Treasury Bench, not least by a senior Whip, upon whom I trust we can rely to convey her sentiments to those who need to be aware of them. We will leave it there for now. Having built up a due sense of anticipation, let us now hear the point of order from Mr Ian Paisley.

**Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for preserving me. During Prime Minister's questions, the Leader of the Opposition said that a police officer was shot dead in Belfast at the weekend. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) has clarified, thankfully that is not the case—thank God. But for the family and for police officers generally, could we have that corrected by a Front Bencher urgently so that the record of this House does not contain the spurious suggestion that a police officer was murdered in Belfast?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said. He will appreciate that in matters of this kind I benefit from advice, and the advice that I have just received, and that I accept—it is my responsibility whether or not to accept it—is that there is no need for any further correction. It was an error. I recognise how upsetting that will have been, but it was a mistake. It has subsequently been corrected, and the hon. Gentleman himself has now quite properly used the opportunity of a point of order to correct it. I do not think that anything further needs to be said. The hon. Gentleman is a wily character and he has found his salvation.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will be aware that Members from across the House have the opportunity to sign the book of commitment for Holocaust Memorial Day. I am pleased that more than 200 right hon. and hon. Members have signed the book, but that does mean that more than 400 have not. May I, through your good offices, draw to the House's attention the fact that the book is available for signature at the bottom of the Members' Staircase between 2 pm and 4 pm?

**Mr Speaker:** That is a very helpful notice to colleagues. No disrespect to the hon. Gentleman, because that is very helpful for others, but my office had already planned for me to sign the book when I leave the Chair today, and I certainly shall, as I always do. I think that it would be a wonderful thing if a very large number of colleagues—preferably all colleagues—took the opportunity to sign the book, as the hon. Gentleman helpfully suggests.

## Town and Country Planning (Electricity Generating Consent)

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

12.50 pm

**Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the disclosure, consideration and approval of proposals for onshore electricity power stations of 50MW or less; to require the application of Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI) terms and conditions in certain circumstances; to require sector-specific collective national workforce agreements in other circumstances; and for connected purposes.

Power plants that produce 50 MW or below are not subject to the terms of national planning consent. Instead, these plants, including those that produce energy from waste, are regulated by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This system was supposed to give local people more control over developments in their locality, but it has also created loopholes and cover for unscrupulous employers seeking to undercut and exploit construction workers who work on these plants. That is because the hard-won terms and conditions of the national agreement for the engineering construction industry have not been applied to construction contracts for power stations of 50 MW or less. I raised this issue, and indeed presented this Bill, earlier in 2016, but as my Teesside colleagues who supported me then and support me today—my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Anna Turley), for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) and for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald)—and the GMB and Unite unions, with which we have worked, know, the problem still exists and has not been dealt with.

Some employers that build these smaller power stations are still using deliberating confusing contracts to employ workers on bogus self-employment terms. Indeed, they are still exploiting migrant workers. Rather than paying local workers the national industry agreement rate for skilled workers of between £16.28 and £16.97 an hour, depending on the competency level involved, they are importing and exploiting migrant workers, paying them between just £8 and £10.

One particularly egregious example is the Croatian company Duro Dakovic TEP. This firm's model of work is simple: bid for construction subcontracts from companies that refuse to work under the "blue book", or NAECI terms, and then undercut local wages by bringing over workforces wholesale from Croatia to work at Croatian wage levels. This same firm was exposed by GMB and Unite as underpaying its largely migrant workforce in 2015 when constructing a power station in Yorkshire. That job fell under the NAECI independent audit facility, so Duro Dakovic was made to repay every penny owed to its employees. However, disgracefully, it took the money back from employees under duress once they returned to Croatia. That is exploitation plain and simple, and it demonstrates the disregard that this firm has for all its employees.

Unfortunately, this very firm has since won six further contracts to build energy-from-waste power stations in the UK from the Danish firm Babcock & Wilcox Volund.

Unite and the GMB have worked to highlight and tackle this exploitation. Members have organised protests with members of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians outside sites owned by BWV in Teesside, as well as other energy-from-waste power stations in Yorkshire, Wales and Scotland. National officers from Unite and the GMB have travelled as far as Denmark and Croatia to try to educate the appropriate trade unions about this exploitation of their members.

Despite such hard work, any real solution to this problem must come from the House. The exploitation of migrant employees and the undercutting of British workers have happened only because of an unintended loophole in legislation—namely, that the trade union-negotiated NAECI standards do not need to be complied with in construction contracts for power stations producing less than 50 MW. Requiring these NAECI "blue book" standards to be written into contracts with companies constructing power stations of any size on British soil is the only way to prevent that undercutting and to allow workers of all nationalities to bargain collectively to improve their pay and conditions.

Since the vote to leave the European Union, Members from both sides of House have attempted to address the concerns about immigration that are felt in neglected industrial areas across the country. If, as a House and as a nation, we are to address those concerns, we must take action on such loopholes that allow companies to bring in migrant workers on a temporary basis and exploit them, thereby undercutting the wages and conditions of British workers. These pockets of exploitation lead to resentment among all workers from our communities, who are prevented from seeking and achieving meaningful employment. Instead, when they are able to get work on such sites, they work under confusing contracts that class them as self-employed and can sometimes cause them to pay national insurance contributions twice to benefit their employers.

In this case, as in others, our leaving the European Union presents both the threat that we will lose well-intentioned but inadequate EU protections against such practices, which afford migrant employees the host country's minimum standards, and the opportunity to strengthen protections to ensure compliance with not only minimum standards, but industry standards such as NAECI. We do not need to wait until we have left the EU to do that; we can act now and put a stop to the manipulation of migrant workers and the undermining of hard-fought employment standards in the UK.

This issue can and should be addressed to protect the integrity of hard-fought collective agreements, and the conditions and pay of workers. I therefore make no apology for raising it yet again and for again presenting this Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Tom Blenkinsop, Anna Turley, Sir Kevin Barron, Sarah Champion, John Healey, Andy McDonald, Alex Cunningham and Mr Iain Wright present the Bill.

Tom Blenkinsop accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 131).*

## Opposition Day

[19<sup>TH</sup> ALLOTTED DAY]

### Prisons

*[Relevant documents: Sixth Report from the Justice Committee of Session 2015-16, Prison safety, HC 625, and the Government response of Session 2016-17, HC 647; and oral evidence taken before the Justice Committee on 29 November 2016, 14 December 2016 and 18 January 2017 on prison reform, HC 548.]*

12.56 pm

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern recent serious disturbances at Swaleside, Birmingham, Lewes, Bedford and Moorlands prisons against the backdrop of a reduction of more than 6,000 frontline prison officers since 2010; notes that a planned recruitment drive has a target of hiring fewer than half the number of officers lost, and that previous recruitment drives have failed to achieve their targets; recognises that violence in prisons is at record levels with assaults up by 34 per cent since 2015, assaults on staff up by 43 per cent since 2015, and more than 60 per cent of prisons currently overcrowded; and calls on the Government to reduce overcrowding and improve safety while still ensuring that those people who should be in prison are in prison.

The last Opposition day debate on prisons took place nearly a year ago to this very day. Back then, as hon. Members will recall, my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) opened the debate for the Opposition. He told the House:

“The inescapable conclusion is that the prison system in this country...is not working, contrary to the famous pronouncement of the noble Lord Howard.”—[*Official Report*, 27 January 2016; Vol. 605, c. 333.]

A year on, the conclusion drawn by my hon. Friend remains inescapable.

Since 2010, Conservative Justice Secretaries have cut the number of frontline prison officers by more than 6,000. It was the political decision to impose austerity on the nation and our prison service that brought us to this point. That was married with an erratic prisons policy that veered first this way and then that way. First, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) wanted to reduce prison numbers; he was sacked. Then the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) took a very authoritarian line, introducing benchmarking and book-banning, both of which failed. Next, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) wanted to decentralise and hand autonomy to governors. The current Justice Secretary wants a bit of policy from each—prison policy à la carte.

The number of officers was cut with no check on the number of people being imprisoned, but the effect of that ought to have been obvious. The Government are imprisoning more people than they have decided they can afford. In the 12 months to June 2016, there were 105 self-inflicted deaths—nearly double the number five years previously, and an all-time high.

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Lab): Before my hon. Friend moves on from this point, may I draw his attention to the Select Committee report that said that if we are to try to cut the cycle of prisoners reoffending, it would

be good to try to provide employment for them, particularly by reducing national insurance contributions for employers? While that would not be a silver bullet, would it not play some part in reducing the pressure on prisons if such a policy were adopted by the Secretary of State?

**Richard Burgon:** My right hon. Friend makes a very valuable point about rehabilitation, a subject to which I will return.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): The hon. Gentleman quite rightly says that there is, as I think everybody will acknowledge, a serious crisis in our prisons, which at the moment are overcrowded slums and breeding grounds for crime. He sets out a rather interesting range of options for tackling this but, with respect, his motion merely concentrates on the Prison Officers Association’s answer, which is to spend more money and hire more prison officers, probably with improved pay and conditions. Does he have any views on the range of options that includes reducing the number of prisoners by addressing foolish sentencing policies so that there is room for the rehabilitation measures recommended by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field)?

**Richard Burgon:** I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for that constructive contribution. We are talking about far more than just staffing, so I will touch on sentencing and prisoner numbers later.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that there are too many people with mental health conditions in our prisons who should not be there in the first place? Was he as appalled as I was to hear the outcome of last week’s inquest into the tragic death of Dean Saunders, one of 113 people who took their life in one of our prisons in the past year? The inquest found that he should never have been in prison in the first place—he should have been in a mental health in-patient unit.

**Richard Burgon:** I share my hon. Friend’s concern, which she raised in Justice questions yesterday. I will deal with the tragic death of Dean Saunders later.

As I said, the Government are imprisoning more people than they have decided they can afford. There were 345 deaths in custody last year. In the same period, serious assaults on staff increased by 146%, and incidents of self-harm increased by more than 10,000. Within the space of just a few weeks, there were prison riots in Lincoln, Lewes, Bedford, and Moorland—not “Moorlands”, as it says in the motion. In December, HMP Birmingham saw what many described as the worst riots at a category B prison since Strangeways a quarter of a century ago.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): A lot of the hon. Gentleman’s criticism is predicated on the concept of austerity under this Government, but surely he will concede that the previous Labour Government, in much more benign economic circumstances, released 82,000 prisoners under the end of custody licence scheme, of whom 2,657 were recalled for licence breaches and over 1,200 for reoffending. In better financial times, there was still mismanagement of the prison estate.

**Richard Burgon:** The prison system has never been perfect, but under a Labour Government there was not a prison crisis, and under this Conservative Government there is a prison crisis.

In Birmingham, it took 13 Tornado teams more than 12 hours to regain control. Some estimate the cost of the damage as £2 million. The Ministry was warned back in October that urgent action was required in the light of staff worries about personal safety, but it remains unclear whether it did anything at all. Last October, in an unprecedented intervention—

**Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend as worried as I am that not only has there been the huge reduction in the number of prison officers, but there seems to be a deliberate strategy to get more experienced, more expensive prison officers to stand down—to retire—and to replace them with cheap apprentices and graduates? There is a real lack of experience in our prison sector as well as a dangerous lack of officer numbers.

**Richard Burgon:** My hon. Friend makes a vital point. We have a dangerous cocktail of experienced prisoners in prison, and experienced prison officers leaving prison. That is not good for safety and not good for the service.

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con) *rose*—

**Richard Burgon:** I must make some progress, I am afraid.

In the wake of those riots, the Justice Secretary told the House yesterday that more Tornado staff are being trained. Clearly she expects more trouble and expects things to get worse before they get better.

The Ministry has a long list of problems to contend with: overcrowding; understaffing; lack of safety; the quality of delivery from privatised probation services; drugs and drones; and the nearly 4,000 IPP—imprisonment for public protection—prisoners who are still in jail way past their tariffs.

**Maria Caulfield:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Richard Burgon:** I will not give way.

One prison officer told me that the situation in our Prison Service is like a game of Jenga where it feels as though we are on the brink of the final piece being removed and the whole thing coming crashing down around us. He did not say that lightly. The Government's White Paper has had a mixed reception from those with experience and expertise in the penal system and penal reform.

**Maria Caulfield** *rose*—

**Richard Burgon:** I need to make some progress.

Nearly all these problems stem from the axing of a quarter of prison staff since 2010. The Justice Secretary's colleague, the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), asked her yesterday at Justice questions whether she thought that cut was wise. She did not answer; she has the opportunity to answer today.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): That is fine; I stand by that—we all want more prison officers. Presumably the hon. Gentleman can now commit himself to a future Labour Government recruiting all these officers, can he?

**Richard Burgon:** A future Labour Government will not treat our hard-working, hard-pressed prison officers as the enemy—[*Interruption.*] I hear the roars of disapproval from those on the Government Benches. Anybody would think they were presiding over a successful Prison Service and there was not a prison crisis. If they would listen rather than roar at me, I would be grateful.

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con) *rose*—

**Richard Burgon:** I really do need to make progress, I am afraid.

The ambition set out in the White Paper to increase staffing levels is welcome, but 2,500 officers represent less than half the number of prison officers cut by Conservative Justice Secretaries since 2010, and in order to get 2,500 extra officers, 8,000 will have to be recruited in just two years. I wonder whether the Justice Secretary has confidence that that will happen, because I do not come across many in the justice sector who think it any more than a pipe dream under her management. In the year to September 2016, she had about 400 fewer officers. There is a crisis in staff retention; they are leaving more quickly than she can recruit them. The Prison Officers Association membership has very recently rejected a pay deal offered by the Government. What plans has she made to improve the offer and begin to make those jobs more attractive to the public? She currently faces a recruitment drive that is in danger of failing before it has begun.

Announcements that ex-service personnel will be recruited to the Prison Service might grab quick headlines, but in truth this is nothing new. There have always been former members of our armed forces taking jobs in our Prison Service. The role of soldier and prison officer are not exactly the same, by the way, as prison officers who have been in the Army have told me. The Secretary of State must explain how she can compensate for the fact that, as we have heard, so many experienced officers have left, and are leaving, our Prison Service.

Overseeing a transformation to a prison estate populated by more experienced prisoners and more inexperienced prison officers presents a clear and present danger. Inadequate staffing levels have a range of consequences. Prisons are less safe because staff are far outnumbered. Prisoners are spending more time in their cells because they cannot be managed outside, and prisoner frustration is heightened by the lack of time out of their cells.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): I commend my hon. Friend for his excellent speech. Does he agree that one way to reduce the prison population would be for the Government to make better progress in the transfer of foreign national offenders? At the moment, there are 10,000 foreign national offenders in our prisons, representing 12% of the prison population. The Government sign agreements, but very few prisoners get sent back.

**Richard Burgon:** I thank my right hon. Friend for making that important point. In Justice questions yesterday, the Minister with responsibility for prisons, the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), said that he was in discussions with the Department for Exiting the European Union about the matter. We need to hear more about the progress of those discussions.

The Justice Secretary frequently points to the emergence of new psychoactive substances as a major factor in the current crisis. Does she know that in Scotland, where prison policy has been stable for some years and where staffing has remained constant, violence has not rocketed as it has across the rest of the prison estate? Scotland has NPS issues, too, but it did not axe staff in vast numbers.

Our prisons are overcrowded. Armley prison, in my city of Leeds, holds nearly twice the number of prisoners that it was built to house. Wandsworth, Swansea, Brixton and Leicester are not far behind; they are all full to capacity with another 50% on top.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Richard Burgon:** This will be the final time that I give way, if that is okay.

**Philip Davies:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; he knows that I hold him in very high esteem. Lady Chakrabarti, the shadow Attorney General, said recently that she wanted half the prisoners in the UK prison estate to be released immediately. Is that Labour's official party policy? My constituents would be very interested to know.

**Richard Burgon:** I am certainly not aware of any such policy announcement being made. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are making some strange gesticulations. It is not Labour policy to release half the prisoners. Why on earth would that be the case?

We need a lasting way to manage the prison population. In November 2016, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Thomas, appeared before the Justice Committee. Not surprisingly, he was questioned on the prisons crisis, and he offered a view on what could be done:

"The prison population is very, very high at the moment. Whether it will continue to rise is always difficult to tell, but there are worries that it will. I am not sure that at the end of the day we can't dispose of more by really tough—and I do mean tough—community penalties."

Prison has always been seen as a punishment. A person breaks the social contract that governs much of our relations with one another, and they may be imprisoned. Members from across the House rightly see prison as a fitting sanction, and it must be right that when a convicted person is a danger to the public, they are kept away from the public until such time as they no longer pose a threat. A significant minority may never be safe to release. But we must ask whether prison is the right place for some of those who offend. We should always reflect on that, because if we do not, we find ourselves in the position that the Government are in now.

**Victoria Prentis:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Richard Burgon:** I have already said that I will not give way any further.

The warehousing of thousands of people without any support or access to rehabilitation means that when they leave prison, as they inevitably will, they will be in exactly the same position as when they entered. They might still be drug-dependent. They might still be homeless. They might still be in poverty. It is right—in fact, it is

our duty—not to be complacent, but to reflect and ask ourselves whether the way in which we deal with at least some of those who break the law is working. With many offenders, it is not. Their stay in prison is too short to teach them new skills, or for them to obtain a qualification or stabilise a drug addiction.

In recent weeks I have met stakeholders who question whether it is worth sending people to prison for a few weeks or a few months, and I have met prison officers who lament that they see the same people over and over again. When stakeholders, people at the frontline and experts raise such matters, we must take them seriously. We must punish and we must deliver smart sentences as well as strict sentences, always asking ourselves what the best way is to protect the public. I firmly believe that MPs must have that urgent discussion.

**Michael Gove** (Surrey Heath) (Con): Smart and strict—what does it mean?

**Richard Burgon:** The number of questions being shouted out by Government Members makes me wonder whether they know what they are presiding over. There are risks with sending people to prison, particularly for the first time. *[Interruption.]* There is laughter from the Government Front Benchers, but the situation in our prison system is not a laughing matter. They should take this debate seriously.

We throw people into the prison river, and the currents sweep them towards more drugs and more crime than they experienced outside. If rehabilitation fails, it is a failure to protect society. I must ask what the Justice Secretary is doing about imprisonment for public protection sentences. She urgently needs to come up with a scheme to release those whom it is safe to release. She should consider how that can be done—perhaps by releasing those people on a licence period in proportion to their original sentence.

In November last year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) published the interim findings of his review into the treatment of and outcomes for black, Asian and minority ethnic people in the criminal justice system. The stark findings of the review have implications for our prisons. For every 100 white women handed custodial sentences in the Crown court for drug offences, 227 black women were sentenced to custody. For black men, the figure was 141 compared with 100 white men. BAME men were more than 16% more likely than white men to be remanded in custody. Those figures ought to be of concern to the Justice Secretary, and she has a duty to find out why that is happening and what can be done about it. The findings are troubling in and of themselves, but such disproportionate sentencing adds to the strain on our prison system.

Rehabilitation is essential to any serious criminal justice system, but we are not yet getting it right. Most people who are in prison will one day leave prison, so if we are to protect the public and keep our communities safe, rehabilitation must be properly funded and taken seriously by politicians as an aim. It must not be treated as a soft option. Between January and December 2014, 45.5% of adults released from prison had reoffended within a year. Of those released from a sentence of less than 12 months, 60% went on to reoffend.

[Richard Burgon]

When the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell introduced the transforming rehabilitation programme, the probation service was reckoned to be performing well. Many stakeholders issued a warning against the breakup of the probation service but, as with many Ministry of Justice consultations at the time, the public were simply ignored and the proposals pushed through regardless. Community rehabilitation companies received negative reports last year in Derbyshire, Durham and London.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Richard Burgon:** I will give way for the final time.

**Dr Blackman-Woods:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Durham used to have the best probation service in the country, which did an amazing job of trying to rehabilitate prisoners, but it has, alas, fallen by the wayside because of the Government reforms. Does he agree that it would be nice to see Government Members taking some responsibility for what has happened to our prison and probation system? It is an absolute disgrace that it is failing in such a way.

**Richard Burgon:** What has happened to the probation services in the area and region that my hon. Friend represents is indeed a travesty. The privatisation of the probation service has been a disaster.

**Michael Gove:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Richard Burgon:** I will give way, but I promise that this is the final occasion.

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to what he considers to be weaknesses in current sentencing, the approach to IPPs, the approach to rehabilitation and the handling of probation, but he has not come forward with a single positive alternative. In the moments remaining to him, will he enlighten the House about what Labour would actually do, other than simply complain?

**Richard Burgon:** I certainly will do so, if the right hon. Gentleman will just bear with me.

The inspectorate of probation's report of May 2016 found that the work of the national probation service was considered better in a number of important areas. As I have said, privatisation of the probation service has failed. Of course, it is not just down to the Ministry and to probation to support people; if people are leaving prison faced with the same conditions as before they entered it, that will make any meaningful change difficult.

Support is needed: it is needed for employment and for housing. One women's prison had inmates leaving with nowhere to live, and it was handing out tents and sleeping bags to people when they left. This cannot be a feature of a modern justice system in the fifth-richest country in the world. The Prisoners Education Trust, while welcoming the White Paper, has said that

"in today's economy, gaining meaningful employment depends on more than just the ability to read and write. If the government is serious about lowering reoffending, it needs to equip people in prison with the attitudes and aspirations"—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Government Whip, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), should not shout out. He should not shout from a sedentary position, and he should not shout out while standing up. If he will forgive my saying so, to shout out while standing right next to the Speaker's Chair is perhaps not quite the most intelligent action that he has undertaken in the course, so far, of a most auspicious career.

**Richard Burgon:** I certainly did not take offence when the Government Whip was shouting out, "Are there any policies?" because I did not think that that question was directed at the Opposition.

The reality is that prisons are full of people with a range of problems—those with mental health problems, those addicted to drugs and those who are homeless. It is rarely mentioned that support services focused on issues of that kind have also been victims of austerity. Drugs support has been scaled back, and prisoners are leaving prison with nowhere to sleep. There are too many people in prison with serious mental health problems.

**Maria Caulfield:** Will the hon. Gentleman please give way?

**Richard Burgon:** MPs rarely break promises. I promised not to take any more interventions, but I will break that promise and allow another one.

**Maria Caulfield:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for eventually giving way; I am most honoured. The Opposition motion mentions Lewes prison—it is in special measures, as was raised during Justice questions yesterday—but he fails to acknowledge the huge amount of work that is going into the prison. This is not just about prison officer numbers; there are other issues, such as the huge rise in the number of sexual offenders in Lewes prison, which has made that old Victorian prison very hard to manage. I have not heard any suggestions by the hon. Gentleman about the way forward in helping places such as Lewes to tackle those problems.

**Richard Burgon:** The increases in the number of prisoners convicted of historical sex offences and in the number of people in prisons obviously have an effect, but does cutting the number of prison officers by a quarter mitigate that situation or make it worse? It seems to me that the answer to that is quite simple.

Before I draw my remarks to a conclusion, I want to turn—[*Interruption.*] The prisons Minister has an unfortunate habit of heckling at really inappropriate points. He has demonstrated that before and he has demonstrated it again now. I want to talk about the case of Dean Saunders, who tragically committed suicide in Chelmsford prison. An inquest jury found a number of errors in his treatment. Although prison staff recognised that he had mental health problems, they did not follow the procedure under which he might have been moved to hospital. The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), has said that he is

"seeking the details of all those cases to see whether there is a pattern".—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 156.]

Deborah Coles of the charity Inquest, who supported the family, said that Mr Saunders

"should never have been in prison in the first place. His death was entirely preventable."

The fact is that there is evidence in abundance from the various independent monitoring board reports and inquest jury findings. The Ministry must ensure that the recommendations of such bodies are acted on.

In conclusion, we need to be tough on crime, wherever it is found, and we need to protect the public. At the same time, we need to make prisons places where effective rehabilitation is a living, breathing reality. We want people to leave prison and become productive members of society, having left crime behind. At present, when it comes to the Prison Service, as in relation to so much else, this Government are failing. They are failing prison staff, they are failing prison inmates and their families, and they are failing the public. Ultimately, the mess this Government are making of our prison system means they are failing society. I commend the motion to the House.

**Mr Speaker:** I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. To move the amendment, I call the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice.

1.25 pm

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss):** I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “House” to the end of the Question and add:

“welcomes the Government’s comprehensive proposals for major reform of the prison system set out in the White Paper; further welcomes plans for an extra 2,500 prison officers, to professionalise the prison service further and to attract new talent by recruiting prison officer apprentices, graduates and former armed service personnel; notes new security measures being introduced to tackle the illegal use of drones, phones and drugs which are undermining the stability of the prison system; welcomes the commitment to give governors in all prisons more powers and more responsibility to deliver reform whilst holding them to account for the progress prisoners make; and welcomes the Government’s proposals to set out for the first time the purpose of prisons in statute.”

Since becoming Justice Secretary, I have been clear that the violence in our prisons is too high. We have very worrying levels of self-harm and of deaths in custody. Tomorrow, we will see further statistics on violence for the period from July to September 2016. The last set of statistics reaffirmed why we need to take immediate action. I have been clear that these problems have been years in the making, and will not be fixed in weeks or months. In fact, in a piece he wrote this morning, the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) acknowledged that there is no “magic fix” for these issues. We certainly did not hear any magic fixes in his speech today.

**James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con):** There may be no magic fixes, but does my right hon. Friend agree with the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) that this Government should take responsibility? They should indeed take responsibility for banning novel psychoactive substances at the request of prison officers, and they should take responsibility for a plan to increase the number of prison officers—she has outlined that plan—again at the request of prison officers.

**Elizabeth Truss:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I am absolutely determined to turn around our prisons. Unless our prisons are places of safety, they

cannot be purposeful places where offenders can reform. That is why we have taken immediate action, as my hon. Friend says, to stabilise security in our prisons and to tackle the scourge of drugs, drones and phones. It is why we have secured additional funding of £100 million annually to recruit an extra 2,500 prison officers to strengthen our frontline and invest in wider justice reforms.

**Toby Perkins:** It is good news that there is some additional money and that some more prison officers are coming into the service, but the Secretary of State is right to say that the scale of violence in our prisons is terrible. She and the Government must take responsibility for the lower number of prison officers that we now have. Will she tell the House how many prison officers are currently off work sick as a result of assaults received at work?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I have been clear that we need extra staff on the frontline. A number of issues have resulted in the situation that we now face, including the rise in the numbers of psychoactive substances, drones and phones. I have been clear that we need to address the issue of staffing, and we are determined to do so. We monitor the level of sickness in our prisons specifically to address that issue.

**Mr Jackson:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the only concrete analysis given by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman in his 30-minute speech was that there is a demonstrable link between staffing and violence. That has been controverted by evidence given to the Justice Committee by Dr David Scott of the Open University, who rejected such a link. There are other much more complex societal factors in the prison population and across the estate.

**Elizabeth Truss:** There are a number of factors, and psychoactive drugs are one. We need the proper level of staffing, which we are putting into prisons, to ensure that prison officers can supervise and challenge offenders properly. That is important not just for safety, but for reforming offenders.

The “Prison Safety and Reform” White Paper, which was published last November, detailed the biggest overhaul of our prisons in a generation to deal with the issues we are discussing. It is right that prisons punish people who commit serious crime by depriving them of their most fundamental right, liberty, but they need to be places of discipline, hard work and self-improvement. That is the only way we will cut reoffending and reduce crime in our communities.

**Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** I am really grateful to the Lord Chancellor for giving way. I want to help her on the staffing point. The benchmarking by the Ministry of Justice indicates that 89 prisons are under the staffing levels that her Ministry thinks is right for them. When the 2,500 prison officers are recruited, how many of those prisons will still be under her own benchmarking staffing levels?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I will address how we will recruit the additional staff later in my comments, but all of those prisons will not just be brought up to the benchmark level; we are increasing staff levels beyond that. We have

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to recruit the additional staff to bring prisons up to benchmark and then further additional staff. That is all within our plan to recruit 4,000 officers this year.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Elizabeth Truss:** I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) and then make a bit more progress with my speech.

**Maria Caulfield:** HMP Lewes is mentioned in the Opposition motion, but I have not heard that the shadow Secretary of State has visited it, unlike the prisons Minister. The shadow Secretary of State dismissed the effect of having a high number of sexual offenders in the prison, but that affects the retention of prison staff. To dismiss it out of hand shows a lack of experience and knowledge about what is happening in our prisons.

**Elizabeth Truss:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will come on to the prison population later in my speech and address the specific issue of sex offenders.

**Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Elizabeth Truss:** Very quickly.

**Mr Speaker:** There was no danger of the Secretary of State not hearing the right hon. Gentleman. I rather assumed that she would give way, because Chelmsford prison has been referred to.

**Sir Simon Burns:** The extra prison officers my right hon. Friend proposes to recruit are welcome, but I understand that it takes about nine months to fully train a new prison officer. As a short-term stopgap, would it not be sensible to relax the rules or give more powers to governors so that they could bring back into work retired, experienced prison officers on short-term contracts?

**Elizabeth Truss:** My right hon. Friend's assessment is absolutely right and we are, indeed, bringing back former prison officers on a temporary basis.

I will move on to what we are doing on recruitment and retention, because that is the most important issue we face as a Prison Service. We will not achieve our aims of reform if we do not have enough officers and if we do not train them properly and have proper career development to make the most of our workforce. In October, we started by announcing our plans to recruit an extra 400 staff in 10 of our most challenging prisons. I am pleased to say that we have so far made 389 job offers. We were due to do that by the end of March, so we are ahead of target. We recently launched a graduate scheme called Unlocked, which is like Teach First for prisons, to attract the top talented graduates. We had more than 1,000 expressions of interest in the scheme and within 24 hours, we had 350 graduates from Russell Group universities applying for it.

The idea that people do not want to do the job is not right. There are a lot of people out there who want to reform offenders and to get involved in helping us turn

around our Prison Service. We need to talk up the job of being a prison officer, because it is incredibly important. One prison officer described themselves to me as a parent, a social worker and a teacher. What could be more important than turning somebody who lives a life of crime into somebody who contributes to society? We find that when we go out and recruit, a lot of people are interested in the role.

Of course we have to retain our fantastic existing prison officers, but I want to correct the hon. Member for Leeds East. In fact, 80% of our staff have been with us for longer than five years, so the idea that we do not have a strong depth of prison officers is wrong. However, we do need to ensure that they have career and promotion opportunities. That is why we are looking to expand the senior grades in the service and to promote our existing staff. We want to give them a career ladder so that they have opportunities to train on the job and get the additional skills they need.

We are giving prison governors the opportunity to recruit locally for the first time. We have launched that in 30 of our most hard-to-recruit prisons. That means that the governor can build much more of a relationship with the local community, get people involved, show people what life is really like inside prison and encourage people to work there. The local recruitment and job fairs have been really successful.

Of course this is challenging. Recruiting 4,000 people in one year is challenging, but I think we can do it. We have the opportunity to do it, we are enthusiastic about it and we have the budget to do it for the first time in a number of years.

**Richard Fuller** (Bedford) (Con): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The opportunity for the governor to do more proactive recruitment has been welcomed in Bedford. In the amendment, she talks about decentralising authority to prison governors to enable them to make their own decisions. Does she find it interesting that that idea has been missed completely by the Labour party?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to give prison governors power over what happens in their own prison. They should decide what regimes to operate and what staffing structures to have. They should motivate and recruit their own team. They should also have more say over how lives are turned around. For example, we are giving them the power over their own education providers. We will hold prison governors to account for how people are improving in English and maths; how successful they are at getting offenders off drugs, which we know can lead to rehabilitation; and how successful they are at getting people into work when they leave prison, which will encourage them to work with local employers and set up apprenticeships. However, we need to give governors the levers and the responsibility that will enable them to do those things. We are also working on leadership training so that governors have the skills and capabilities to take on those extra responsibilities.

That is the only way we will turn lives around. Whatever I and my civil servants do in the Ministry of Justice, we are not the people on the ground in the wings who are talking to prisoners day in, day out. It is those people who will turn lives around. That is why we need motivated staff and governors who are empowered to do that job. That is what our reforms will achieve.

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): I think the whole House will sympathise with and support the right hon. Lady's comments on the morale of prison officers. When the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) and I were prison officers together in Dartmoor prison, it was evident to us that prison officers felt that they were out of sight and out of mind. They felt that nobody had any interest in their work until something went catastrophically wrong. Does she agree that it would be an excellent idea for right hon. and hon. Members not just to contact the Prison Officers Association, but occasionally to visit prisons to show that we do care and that they are not out of sight nor out of mind?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point. I am delighted to hear that he is a former prison officer. Perhaps he could be a shining beacon of the scheme to bring former prison officers into service.

**Stephen Pound:** I am so reluctant to disabuse and disappoint the right hon. Lady, but the hon. Member for Aldershot and I were only temporarily in Dartmoor as part of a television programme called "At the Sharp End".

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I thank Mr Mackay.

**Elizabeth Truss:** In any case, we are setting up a parliamentary scheme so that we can work more closely with prison officers and give them the kudos they deserve, because they do an incredibly important job, often behind walls. As part of the reform programme, I want to see prisons reaching out more into the local community and working with local employers. As the shadow Secretary of State said, ultimately, the vast majority of people in prison will one day be on the outside and be part of the local community, so we need to work on that.

While we are putting in place the long and medium-term measures to get additional staff in to reform our prisons, we are taking immediate action to improve security and stability across the estate. That includes extra CCTV, the deployment of national resources and regular taskforce meetings chaired by the prisons Minister. He holds regular meetings with the Prison Service to monitor prisons for risk factors, and that allows us to react quickly to emerging problems and provide immediate support to governors, on anything from transferring difficult prisoners to speeding up the repair of damaged facilities.

Hon. Friends have talked about psychoactive substances, which have been a game changer in the prisons system, as the prisons and probation ombudsman has acknowledged. In September, we rolled out to all prisons new mandatory drug tests for psychoactive drugs, and we have increased the number of search dogs and trained them to detect drugs such as Spice and Mamba. We are also working with mobile phone operators on new solutions, being trialled in three prisons, to combat illicit phones, and we have specific powers to block phones too.

**Philip Davies:** I am disappointed that my right hon. Friend has not mentioned the impact on the behaviour of prisoners of automatic release halfway through sentence.

If someone is sent to prison for six years but knows that by law they will be released after three, irrespective of how badly they behave in prison, surely their behaviour in prison will be worse than if they know they might have to do the full term if they do not behave. Is she not going to address that issue?

**Elizabeth Truss:** Clearly, if people do not behave, they will receive additional days. That is an important part of the levers that governors have in reforming offenders.

I was talking about security issues. We are also working to deal with drones, rolling out body-worn cameras across the estate and dealing with organised crime gangs through a new national intelligence unit.

Hon. Members have also talked about mental health. We are investing in specialist mental health training for prison officers to help to reduce the worrying levels of self-harm and suicide in our prisons. The early days in custody are particularly critical to mental health and keeping people safe.

**Dr Blackman-Woods:** As the Secretary of State will know, many women in prison have severe mental health problems, having been subjected to much abuse in their lives. Why is there so little about women in the White Paper? What is she doing to implement the recommendations of the Corston report?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We are working on a strategy for women offenders that includes looking after women on community sentences as well as custodial sentences. I want more early intervention to deal with issues that lead to reoffending, such as mental health and drugs issues, and we will be announcing further plans in the summer.

We are investing in an additional 2,500 staff across the prisons estate, but we are also changing the way we deploy those staff to ensure more opportunities to engage with offenders, both to challenge them and to help them reform.

**Keith Vaz:** May I put to the Lord Chancellor the question I put to the shadow Lord Chancellor about foreign national offenders? She will know that an easy way to reduce the number of people in our prisons is to follow through on the excellent work of her distinguished predecessors, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), who are both in the House today, in signing these agreements to send people back to their countries of origin. Why has progress been so slow?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments, and I am pleased to say that a record number of foreign national offenders were deported in the last year. We are making progress, therefore, but there is more work to do. My hon. Friend the prisons Minister is leading a cross-Government taskforce on this issue.

I return now to our work in recruiting 2,500 new prison officers and changing the role of prison officers. By recruiting these new staff, we want every prison officer to have a caseload of no more than six offenders whom they can challenge and support. Our staffing

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model aims to ensure that we have enough prison officers to do that. One-to-one support from a dedicated officer is at the heart of how we change our reoffending rates and keep our prisons and prison officers safe.

The hon. Member for Leeds East talked about the prison population, although I was none the wiser about Labour's policy after he had spoken. The prison population has been stable since 2010, having risen by 25,000 under Labour. As was mentioned earlier, fewer people are in prison for shorter sentences—9,000 fewer shorter sentences are given out every year—but more people are in prison for crimes such as sex offences. Not only are we prosecuting more sexual offenders, but sentences for sexual offences have increased considerably, which is absolutely right and reflects the serious damage those individuals do to their victims.

**Maria Caulfield:** It is much more difficult for prison officers to look after sex offenders than an average prison inmate—they often need to be segregated, but old Victorian prisons do not easily enable that—and that only adds to the pressure on officers.

**Elizabeth Truss:** We are doing important work on how better to deal with sex offenders and how to ensure they are on treatment programmes that will stop them committing such crimes in the future.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** The one policy that the Labour spokesman touched on was the future of the remaining IPP prisoners, of whom 4,000 remain in prison, years after the sentence was abolished and beyond their recommended term. Some are very dangerous and cannot be released, but is my right hon. Friend looking at how to make it easier for parole boards to reduce delays and alter the burden of proof and so release all those for whom there is no evidence that they would pose a serious risk to the public if released?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The Opposition talked about IPP prisoners. Of course, it was the Labour party that introduced that sentence, and my right hon. and learned Friend who abolished it, so well done to him. There is a legacy here, since some of them are still in prison, but I have established an IPP unit within the Department to deal with the backlog and ensure that we address the issues those individuals have so that they can be released safely into society. We must always heed public protection, however, and as he acknowledged, some are not suitable for release for precisely that reason.

**Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con):** Local police have raised with me the impact, particularly in Hedge End, of psychoactive drug abuse before people enter prison. The types of prisoners being managed are of a different ilk, and the type of addiction is unknown and difficult to quantify. How difficult is it on the ground for our prison officers?

**Elizabeth Truss:** My hon. Friend is right; this is a very serious issue, both in society and in prison. We are looking at additional training for prison officers and have introduced tests to help to get prisoners off these substances, as well as prisoner education programmes. These drugs do have a serious and severe effect. On her

point about the community, I want our community sentences to address mental health and drugs issues before people commit crimes that result in custodial sentences. Too many people enter prison having previously been at high risk of committing such a crime because of such issues. We need to intervene earlier, which I think is an effective way of reducing the circulation through our prisons, rather than having an arbitrary number that we release. What we need to do is deal with these issues before they reach a level where a custodial sentence is required. That is our approach, and I shall say more about it in due course.

From April, prison governors will be given new freedoms to drive forward the reforms and cut free from Whitehall micro-management. Governors will have control over budgets, education and staffing structures, and they will be able to set their own prison regime. At the moment, we have a plethora of prison rules, including on how big prisoners' bath mats can be. Surely that is not the way to treat people who we want to be leaders of some of our great institutions.

**Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):** I want to say how much I welcome the passage in the White Paper that gives to prison governors the very freedoms that my right hon. Friend has mentioned, particularly in respect of work and the commercial relationships that governors will be able to form with companies and businesses to get proper work into prisons. Will she say something about One3One Solutions?

**Elizabeth Truss:** My hon. Friend must have read my mind, because we were talking about One3One Solutions only this morning, and I know that he was involved in establishing that organisation. Employers are vital to our reforms, and what I want to happen on the inside has to be jobs and training that lead to work on the outside. We need to start from what jobs are available on the outside and bring those employers into prison. We are looking at how to develop that. First, governors will have a strong incentive, because there will be a measurement of how many prisoners secure jobs on the outside, as well as of how many go into apprenticeships on the outside. I want to see offenders starting apprenticeships on the inside that they can then complete on the outside, so that there is a seamless transition into work.

We already have some fantastic employers working with us—Greggs, for example, and Timpson whom I met this morning—but we need more of them to participate. Former offenders can be very effective employees, and we need to get that message across more widely. There would be a huge economic benefit if, once people leave prison, rather than go on to benefits they go into employment instead. That will also reduce reoffending. We shall launch our employment strategy in the summer. I will go into more detail subsequently and look forward to discussing it further with my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt).

A number of hon. Members have mentioned the probation service. Just as we are measuring outcomes for prison services, such as employment, housing and education, we want to see similar measures for the probation services. We need to make sure that when people are in the community, they are being encouraged to get involved in activities and to get off drugs, so that

they are less likely to reoffend. We shall say more about probation in April, when we announce our changes to the probation service.

It is difficult, of course, for reform to take place in dilapidated buildings or in old and overcrowded prisons. That is why we are modernising the prison estate to create 10,000 prison places where reform can flourish. This is a £1.3 billion investment programme that will reduce overcrowding and replace outdated prisons with modern facilities. As part of that, we shall open HMP Berwyn in Wrexham next month, which will create over 2,000 modern places. We have already made announcements about new prisons in Glen Parva and Wellingborough, and we shall make further announcements about new prison capacity in due course.

I am pleased to tell hon. Members that the prison and courts reform Bill will be introduced shortly. It will set it out in legislation for the first time that reform of offenders as well as punishment is a key purpose of prisons. One of the issues we faced as a society was that we did not have such a definition of prisons. At the moment, legislation says that as Secretary of State I am responsible for housing prisoners. Well, I consider myself responsible for much more than housing prisoners. I consider myself responsible for making sure that we use time productively while people are in prison to turn their lives around so that they become productive members of society. That is going to be embedded in legislation, and it will be accompanied by further measures, including new standards, league tables and governor empowerment.

We will also strengthen the powers of Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons to intervene in failing prisons, and we will put the prison and probation ombudsman on a statutory footing to investigate deaths in custody. Hon. Members have referred to some of the very tragic deaths in custody, and the prison and probation ombudsman performs a vital role here.

The whole House will acknowledge that there is too much violence and self-harm in our prisons. It is also right to say that we have decade-long problems with reoffending. Almost half of prisoners reoffend within a year, at a cost of £15 billion to our society and at huge cost to the victims who suffer from those crimes. That is why this Government's prison reform agenda is such a priority, and it is why we have secured extra funding and are taking immediate steps to address violence and safety in our prisons. This will be the largest reform of our prisons in a generation. These issues will not be solved in weeks or months, but I am confident that, over time, we will transform our prisons, reduce reoffending and get prisoners into jobs and away from a life of crime.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I hope to be able to get everybody in on the basis of a seven-minute limit.

1.56 pm

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): I have three prison establishments in Don Valley: HMP Hatfield, which is an open establishment; HMP Moorland, which is a category C secure prison with 340 sex offenders, 260 foreign prisoners from 40 nationalities and 480 other cat C

prisoners; and HMP Lindholme, which has 1,000 prisoners in a cat C secure prison. In Doncaster itself and the Doncaster Central constituency, there is another prison, which is a private establishment. I have visited these prisons over many years, and the relationship has been good, with the community assured that whatever is happening in the prisons it is not having an adverse effect on them, although we have seen a rise in the number of people absconding from the open establishment.

I know that this is a very difficult area. One of the things of which I was most proud when I was a Minister in the Home Office was the introduction of drug testing on arrest for acquisitive crime, so that the drug problem that was leading people to steal could be identified, and people could be put into treatment even before they ended up in court. I believe we should do everything we can to address the causes of crime, as well as being "tough" when people break the law.

The Government have owned up to the problem. It has been acknowledged in the White Paper that the levels of assault on staff are the highest on record and rising. Comparing the year to June 2016 with the same period in 2012 shows that total assaults in prisons are up by 64%; assaults on staff are up 99%; incidents of self-harm are up 57%; and deaths in custody are up 75%. So prisons are less safe for staff, but they are also less safe for prisoners. As the Lord Chancellor wrote in November,

"almost half of prisoners commit another crime within a year of release".

So the system is failing to rehabilitate and, as such, is failing to protect the public from further crime. As she also wrote in November in the *Daily Mail*,

"What is clear is that the system is not working."

I am afraid that what is also clear is that on the coalition Government's watch and on this Government's watch, the Government are failing, too. They are failing in their duty to care for prison officers and staff; failing in their duty of care of prisoners who are more likely to be assaulted, to injure themselves or take their own life; failing in their duty of care to the public, as they are failing to reduce recidivism; and failing the taxpayer. In the Justice Secretary's own words today, the Government have admitted that the cost of reoffending is £15 billion.

If we look at violence in prisons, we find that the latest safety in custody statistics show for the year up to September 2016: 324 deaths in prison; 107 self-inflicted deaths; a doubling of self-inflicted deaths among women prisoners—from a low base, but importantly up from four to eight; and over 36,000 cases of self-harm, which is a staggering 426 incidents of self-harm for every 1,000 prisoners. The figures also show 10,544 prisoners self-harming and 2,583 hospital attendances, with injuries serious enough to require hospital treatment, with the added pressure that places on staff who have to escort them, leaving others to deal with situations in prisons that have seen reductions in staffing.

In the year to June 2016, there were 23,775 assaults, an increase of 34%—that is 278 assaults for every 1,000 prisoners—and 3,134 serious assaults, an increase of 32%. This is not a happy situation, as we know from the trade unions working in the sector, whether we are talking about the Prison Officers Association, Community or, for that matter, Unite. A constituent of mine works in a prison providing training to rehabilitate prisoners

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and help them to find jobs when they leave. Little is said about the prison employees who, if staffing levels are not sufficient, could also be on the receiving end of assaults.

I was disappointed that the Secretary of State did not meet members of Community, which represents most of the staff in private prisons, to discuss its charter for safe operating standards. Like the POA and others involved, Community has come up with some very constructive practical suggestions, but it worries me that, according to the union's research findings, it is common for one officer to be on a wing containing at least 60 inmates. I should be interested to hear from the Minister how the Government will ensure that lone working ends as part of their attempts to find better ways of making prison work.

There is much in the White Paper that needs to be discussed. It refers to improved training for staff, the piloting of body-worn video cameras, and cognitive skills programmes for prisoners so that they respond to problems without using violence. I approve of all that. The White Paper also recommends that governors should have more freedoms. I can tell the Secretary of State that in one of the prisons in my constituency, the turnover of governors over the last decade has been enormous. We need governors who can stay put and bring about any changes that they want to introduce.

I am sure the Secretary of State agrees that staffing is still key to improvements in our prisons. Prisons need stable staffing so that people can work with prisoners, but also with each other, to the best possible effect. The Secretary of State has promised 2,500 more staff, but that will not return staff numbers to their 2010 level. During Justice questions yesterday, the Government claimed that the 2,500 figure meant 2,500 extra staff members, but in answer to questions in the Justice Committee on 29 November 2016, the Under-Secretary of State said that it meant recruiting 8,000 staff in the next two years—1,000 per quarter. That is two to three times the rate of recruitment achieved in recent years, and it looks to me like a tall order.

The number of operational staff at HMP Lindholme, in my constituency, fell from 352 in March 2010 to 296. That is a loss of one in seven staff in three years. In HMP Moorland, the number fell from 386 to 354, which is a 9% drop in three years. Between 2015 and 2016, 300 to 800 prison officers were recruited in each quarter, but even that has failed to stem the shortfall. Moreover, we are dealing with an ageing prison population. It is important to look at new ideas for the support and rehabilitation of prisoners, but without the right staff numbers I think that that will be a tall task, if not impossible to achieve.

2.3 pm

**Michael Gove** (Surrey Heath) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Don Valley (*Caroline Flint*). She is a highly effective advocate for the causes in which she believes, and she was an outstanding Minister. I hope that when the Labour party comes to its senses, she will be restored to the Front-Bench position that she deserves.

Congratulations are also in order to the shadow Justice Secretary, the hon. Member for Leeds East (*Richard Burgon*). It is important for us to have an opportunity to reflect on what is happening in our prisons. The hon. Gentleman has devoted his life to justice, as a distinguished trade union lawyer, and I am grateful to him for securing the debate. It was a pity, however, that while he understandably drew attention to concerns about what is happening on our prison estate, he did not put forward a single positive alternative proposition. The contrast between his speech and that of my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary was striking.

My right hon. Friend has been in office for less than 12 months, but during that time she has unveiled and advanced a series of reforms that I believe have the potential to transform our justice system more powerfully, for the good, than those of any of her predecessors for a generation. The fact that she dealt so skilfully with interventions, and also outlined—not just in policy detail, but with authority and humanity—what needs to be done, underlines how fortunate we are to have a genuine, passionate and humane reformer in such an important role.

It is right to pay tribute to those who work in our prisons, and I expect that nearly every speaker in the debate will do so. I always remember a visit that I made to HMP Manchester, formerly Strangeways prison, during which I talked to a prison officer who was working with the most refractory and difficult prisoners. I asked him why he had chosen deliberately to work with some of the offenders whose cases were the most complex and whose behaviour was the most threatening. He explained that he had been brought up in a part of Manchester that was afflicted by crime, with unique challenges, and that one of the things that he wanted to do was put something back by working with offenders to ensure that their lives were changed and that, as a result, people who had been nothing but trouble—people who had been liabilities to society, people who had brought misery and pain into the lives of others, people who were wasting their own lives—could be turned into assets, and we as a society could ensure that whatever talents they had, long buried in many cases, could at last be put to the service of the community.

I remember being inspired by the fact that this young man from a working-class background had decided that the greatest service he could give to the community that had raised him was to try to turn around the lives of others, and it is that spirit that animates nearly everyone who works in our prison system. Despite the occasional frustrations that I experienced in dealing with members of the Prison Officers Association when I was Justice Secretary, I was never for a moment anything other than grateful for their service, their commitment and their dedication. That is why I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend for the steps that she has taken to enhance the way in which the professionals who work in our prisons can do the right thing—not just the reform governors who are changing the way in which prisons work by exercising a greater degree of control and autonomy over the individual prisons that are their responsibility, but those who work on the front line in our wings, particularly, but not only, in our reform prisons, and who are being empowered to play a much more positive role in encouraging and securing rehabilitation.

I pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friend for an initiative that she has unveiled, Unlocked for graduates. As she pointed out, more than 350 undergraduates from some of our very best universities have now applied explicitly to work in prisons. Just as Teach First played a part in transforming the reputation of teaching, so this initiative is helping to recruit more people to our prisons. Alongside the work of Unlocked, the implementation of Sally Coates's review of prison education is ensuring that those who are in custody finally receive a higher quality of education and the chance to transform their lives for the better. Moreover, the work of Charlie Taylor in reviewing youth justice is being followed up and implemented by my right hon. Friend. In so doing, they are making sure that those whose contact with the criminal justice system occurs relatively early in their lives, and who would otherwise be set on a course of criminality, are diverted from crime and assured of a productive future at the earliest possible stage.

I think we can all draw an important lesson from the experience of the youth justice system over recent years. It is the case that youth crime has fallen dramatically in the last few years, and that at the same time the number of young offenders in custody has fallen as well. It is not the case that in order to be tough on crime, we need to maintain the same number of individuals in custody as the number we currently have. There are smarter alternatives to incarceration that we need to contemplate. Let me be clear, however: there will always be some criminals for whom custody is the only appropriate answer, given the seriousness of their crimes and their capacity to reoffend. Sometimes society will be so outraged by particular crimes that incarceration is the only answer.

**Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): As my right hon. Friend may know, I represent an inner-city constituency. A couple of years ago, on a visit to a Salvation Army centre, I came across someone who had been in prison, had become institutionalised by the experience, and therefore wanted to go back fairly soon afterwards.

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Some individuals become institutionalised by prison life, and many individuals, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out, are in prison as a result of problems they acquired—mental health problems, substance abuse, or related issues—which mean that their behaviour is such that, for their own health and for society's safety, they need for a time to be separated from society. But they should not be in prison; they should be receiving appropriate mental health care, because the custody and incarceration environment they face will only harm them and will do nothing either to heal them or to make sure they become positive and contributing members of society.

One thing I would like to see—I know my right hon. Friend is looking closely at this—is the possibility of building on the experience of problem-solving courts, where those charged with sentencing offenders have the option, of course, of custody, but can also say to the offender that if they commit to undertake either an appropriate course of mental health care or to deal with their drug or alcohol addiction or to change their behaviour in a meaningful way, they have the opportunity to serve their sentence out of custody.

I also think that release on temporary licence is the right way to go. There should be the opportunity for people who have shown genuine redemption and a desire to commit to society to be released early under strict terms, so that they can reacquaint themselves with the world of work and learning. I know of one prisoner, C. J. Burge, who has been serving her sentence, after one horrendous mistake, in a women's prison in Surrey, and who, as a result of the sensitive use of release on temporary licence has not only been able to act as a mentor to young offenders, to steer them away from a life of crime, but is now pursuing training to become a barrister in order to ensure that a life that she herself was responsible for harming can now be turned to good. I think all of us in this House can embrace that example and that path, and for that reason I support the amendment.

2.11 pm

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). He, like me, is one of a number of exes in the Chamber who have had responsibility for the prison service; we know how difficult it is to deal with these issues in the post of Secretary of State or prisons Minister.

The right hon. Gentleman made extremely important points about who we imprison, how we use imprisonment and how we use alternative sentences. Those points should be listened to. However, even he will recognise that there are many challenges in the current system. Judging from the current Secretary of State's contribution, she knows that as well, as does the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), who moved the motion. I speak today as a member of the Justice Committee, supported by the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), in the absence of our Chair, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill). I want to set out some of the challenges as we on the Justice Committee see them.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) told us some of the statistics, and the situation is extremely challenging. We have had six major incidents. We have also had an escape—such occurrences have been unusual over the past 13 to 14 years. Sadly, we have the very high level of 107 self-inflicted deaths, which is an increase of 13% over the previous year, and I expect that number to rise still further in the figures that will be announced tomorrow.

**Stephen Pound:** I do not want to interrupt my right hon. Friend's flow, but he will be aware, as we all are, that on 16 December last year, Jenny Swift tragically killed herself in HMP Doncaster. The position of transgender prisoners is one that has agonising implications, and we simply have to recognise that. Does he agree that we need to do more for transgender prisoners in view of the horrendous record of self-harm and suicide that has afflicted them?

**Mr Hanson:** I agree. I think the first question at yesterday's Justice questions was about that very issue and the Secretary of State indicated that it is a priority for the Government. We do have a number of vulnerable people in prison, and the situation regarding those

[Mr Hanson]

self-inflicted deaths, as well as the homicides that have occurred, is extremely difficult. As we have heard, there has been a 26% increase in reported incidents of self-harm and we have a massive 35% increase in hospital attendances. We also, sadly, have a massive 34% increase in the number of assaults on prison officers. There are also increases in attacks with bladed weapons, spitting and the use of blunt instruments, which means that the situation is very challenging.

I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has to some extent made a U-turn on the staffing cuts put in place by her predecessors. She will know that it is a real challenge to achieve an increase of 4,000 posts over the next two years to get a net increase of 2,500 officers. I know that the Committee welcomes that on the whole, but we have seen a 26% cut in staffing numbers since 2010, so we will not be anywhere near getting back to the number of prisoner officers who were in post in May 2010. The Secretary of State needs to look at how we will achieve that.

That is not the only concern we have today, however, and, in the absence of the Chair, I want to highlight some of the things that we in the Justice Committee are currently considering. I hope that the prisons Minister will respond to these key issues. As a Labour MP, I would like to be in a position to be able to implement policies now, but Labour Members will not be able to do that for some years, so we need to offer strong scrutiny to what the Government are doing. That is the key thing for the Justice Committee in the next few weeks and months.

We have now established a prisons sub-committee to look at a range of issues to do with governor empowerment and the challenges faced by the Minister. I am pleased to share a role on that sub-committee with the hon. Member for Banbury. However, we are still a little short of some of the detail about the Government's programme. It would be helpful for the Minister and the Government, not only in the winding-up speech but in the forthcoming debates, to look at putting the meat on the current extent of their activities so that we can judge what will be taking place in whatever time they have left in office.

We can talk about what the Opposition's alternative policy would be, but the election could be almost three and a half years away, and the Government have a key role to play before then. We have heard today that governor empowerment will take place in April—just over two months' time. One third of prison governors will be given greater power and autonomy, but I am genuinely not yet clear about how that will work in practice, what the benchmarks will be, how Ministers will monitor those governors, what the outcomes will be for those governors, and what freedoms they will have to make a difference. I am not sure that the speed of bringing in those changes has yet been thought through by the Government. As the Minister will know, six reform prisons were piloted only in the last six months, and we do not yet know the outcomes of those reforms. It is incumbent on the Minister to indicate the current outcomes for those six reform prisons.

I am not clear about the accountability either. I used to have the prisons Minister's job, so I know that when something goes wrong in a prison, it will end up on the prisons Minister's desk, and almost certainly on the

front of the *Daily Mail* or *The Sun*. I am not clear about how accountability will work in relation to prison governors, so I would like some clarity today from the Minister about what a decision in a prison 200 miles from his office in the Ministry of Justice will mean for accountability when it ultimately lands on his desk.

I want some clarity today about what the commissioning process will be for prison governors. Do they have the skills and training to be able to commission services for employment, health or procurement? Those things have previously been done centrally. I am not sure whether all that local commissioning will mean that we lose some of the Ministry's economies of scale.

In a fractured, localised system, what is the role of the MOJ when setting out directions? I am not sure how governors will recruit local prison officers. I would welcome some clarification, on behalf of our Committee, as to whether terms and conditions of service, training and delivery will be devolved. Those issues go to the heart of the Government amendment, and to the heart of the work of the sub-committee, which will be looking at them on a cross-party basis in the near future.

I am not sure whether there is discretion. When we heard evidence from Peter Dawson of the Prison Reform Trust last week, he said that this would

“unleash competition between governors, prisons and probation and between prison, probation and the police. It is a competitive environment. There are pros and cons to that, but it is likely to drive up cost overall.”

We need some real vision and clarity from Ministers, not on the direction of travel—we know what that is—but on what the bones of that travel will be.

It is also important that we have an indication of what the performance measurements and league tables will look like. Ultimately, as the Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East have said, we are caring for people through the gate. Most prisoners will leave prison and return to society, and our duty as the state is to ensure that they return in a way that does not lead them to reoffend, and that they contribute positively to society. We need more facts and more direction from the Government.

2.20 pm

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), another member of the club of exes. When I held the responsibilities that are now held by the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Sam Gyimah), the right hon. Gentleman knew perfectly well which bits of the system were difficult to change, and I remember being regularly twitted by him about the impossibility of being able to transfer the necessary number of foreign national offenders out of the system. His regular interrogation on how we were doing on the numbers showed his expertise and understanding of the system. I am delighted with the work that he is doing on the Justice Committee and with his contribution to this debate. I hope that my reflections on the system, as another of the exes, will also make a positive contribution today.

I am delighted that my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey, is now the prisons Minister. In my experience, he has been open to talking to people

with experience of the system, to getting ideas and to getting well across his brief. He is to be congratulated on that. He is lucky enough to be serving under the present Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, who has the qualities that my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) had. My right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath and the current Lord Chancellor put policy back into the place where it had been left by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), under whom I had the honour to serve. The hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) said that the change of policy between 2012 and the arrival of my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath as Lord Chancellor had created significant difficulties for the prison service. I know that the policy during that period will have found some favour with my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), but we are now dealing with the consequences.

The Prison Officers Association is not innocent in this matter. The priority for my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) was to deliver the savings targets that the Ministry of Justice had to meet, and they were significant. He was presented with a deal by the Prison Officers Association: if he ended the competition programme for the potential privatisation of prisons—a programme started by the Labour party—and the wings were left in the control of the public sector, the POA would agree to the establishment changes in the public sector bid to try to hold on to the management of Birmingham prison. Those involved savage cuts to the establishment. Indeed, the winning bid for HMP Birmingham by G4S involved about 150 more staff than the public sector bid.

The second round of cuts, which were put into the service after 2012-13 and implemented during the course of 2013-14, involved severe establishment reductions in the prison service, all in the public sector. My hon. Friend the Minister is now having to wrestle with the consequences of that. The Government have now woken up to those consequences and are putting 2,500 prison officers back into the establishment. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) had to deal with the consequences of the previous policy when he was prisons Minister, and immensely difficult it was, too.

The message that I want to give to my hon. Friend the Minister involves the possible role of the private sector, and I want to try to win this argument across the House. The problem under my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell was the row with Serco and G4S over the management of the tagging contracts. Whatever the rights and wrongs of that, it resulted in those companies—the biggest suppliers of private sector services in the custodial system—not being considered for contracts. That meant that we lost a serious amount of competition; indeed, the whole competition programme was stopped.

The right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) referred to Doncaster prison, which is run by Serco. When I went to see it as prisons Minister, it was a quite outstanding prison. Serco had engaged with the Department, and its contract to manage the prison incentivised it to deliver the necessary rehabilitation. There is no right or wrong answer on public or private sector involvement, but the big advantage of private

sector prisons is that they are cheaper to run and cost the service less. The companies also invest heavily in leadership in those prisons. In my experience, the most innovative practices and regimes, particularly around rehabilitation and the management of offenders, were in the private sector. I know that the reforms in the White Paper will try to give some of those freedoms to the governors of public sector prisons, and I wish my hon. Friend the Minister all power to his elbow in achieving that.

There are two ways in which to get resources into the custodial estate, and that process has to be done in partnership with the private sector. First, we need to change and improve the estate, which means continuing the process of selling off the old prisons—they are expensive to run and often occupy expensive real estate—and building new ones. Those new prisons should be built and operated by the private sector. We can take the savings there. If the money is not available in the public sector budget just now, at least the private sector will give us the ability to deal with the funding over a prolonged period.

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): What about Oakwood?

**Crispin Blunt:** The former shadow spokeswoman asks about Oakwood prison. The cost of a place there was £13,000 a year, compared with an average cost of £22,000 per place in a more expensive prison.

2.27 pm

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), and I thank him for the interest he showed in the Durham prisons while he was prisons Minister. However, I profoundly disagree with his view that the privatisation of prisons is the answer to the problems that they are facing.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), I have three prisons in my constituency: Durham prison, a community prison with about 1,000 prisoners; Frankland prison, a high security prison with more than 800 prisoners; and, more unusually, a women's prison. There are not many of those in the country. I also have a youth offender institution. I am therefore in a pretty good position to have direct, first-hand knowledge of what is happening across all aspects of the prison estate, and the picture is not a good one.

Prison budgets have been reducing since 2010; they have been cut by almost a quarter since that time. Up to last year, savings of up to £900 million were made, with another £91 million of savings being requested from prisons this year. At the same time, the prison population has not really fallen, and most of the cuts have been to prison staff numbers. There has been a reduction of more than 6,000 since 2010. This has had an enormous impact on the ability of our prisons to run effectively. As we have heard this afternoon, welcome though it is that the Government are recruiting another 2,500 prison officers, it does not make up for the shortfall or the cuts since 2010. Of course, the Government will have to recruit many, many more than 2,500 to get back to the number of prison staff that we need.

What has been the impact on our prisons? Deaths in custody are up by 14%, self-harm is up by 21% and

[Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods]

assaults are up by 13%, with assaults on staff up by 20% and serious assaults on staff up by 42%. I do not know about the prisons Minister, but that is not a record that I would want to stand up and defend. In such circumstances I would want to come to the House to say, “We recognise that there are real problems in our prisons, and these are the measures that we shall take as a matter of urgency to get our prisons back on track.”

A White Paper does not really cut it, so one of the things I want to hear from the prisons Minister in his winding-up speech is what he will do as a matter of urgency to tackle some of the problems facing our prisons. As I have only a minute for each of them, I will quickly run through what I think he needs to do.

Far too many women are inappropriately sent to prison, such as Low Newton women’s prison in my constituency. Some 52% of women in our prisons have children, and lots of those children end up going into care when their mother is inappropriately put in prison, often for quite short periods. I would like to see a clear Government strategy to deal with women prisoners and direct them to other forms of custody. I look forward to hearing the plan for women offenders that the prisons Minister and the Justice Secretary said they would come forward with later this year, particularly as it relates to cutting the prison estate so that more women are given sentences in the community or other types of custody, rather than being sent to prison.

At Durham, a community prison, the rate of recidivism is really high. Measures are needed to cut recidivism and, in particular, to continue investing in education, skills and work experience. We know from the monitoring reports and the inspections that not enough attention is paid to education and skills, and it is really difficult to maintain high levels of education when numbers are being cut. That is an area that the Government need to address.

In some respects, Frankland prison presents the biggest challenge to the Government. Its prisoners have very complex needs, and we know from the monitoring reports that it is crucial that the Government continue to resource, for example, the centre that aims to turn around violent behaviour in the prison population.

All those specialist services are at risk if prisons are not properly staffed and resourced. I want to hear what the Minister will do quickly to resource our prisons more effectively and to ensure that recidivism is reduced and that alternatives to prison and custody are adequately resourced for men and for women.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Before I bring in Gordon Henderson, I advise people that the time limit is going down to six minutes. We may have to review it again later.

2.33 pm

**Gordon Henderson** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): Thank you for sharing that good news, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It can be five minutes if you want some even better news.

**Gordon Henderson:** It is great to follow the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods). Like her, and like the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), I have three prisons in my constituency: Elmley, Standford Hill and Swaleside, which is mentioned in the Opposition motion. Combined, those three prisons house almost 3,000 inmates—one of the largest concentrations of prisoners in the country.

I start by paying tribute to the fantastic men and women who work in Sheppey’s prisons. They are dedicated, hard-working professionals, of whom I am immensely proud. They work in an extremely challenging environment, facing the threat of violence almost daily, with few complaints and great courage.

That threat of violence is growing for all sorts of reasons, some of which have been mentioned. Those reasons include: the increased use of drugs, which are smuggled into prisons, often by drones that deliver contraband direct to cells; the consumption of illicit alcohol; an increased gang culture in prisons; retribution for non-payment of debts; violence generated by the recovery of stolen contraband such as mobile phones; and frustration caused by a reduction in recreation time as a result of a shortage of prison officers. I am particularly concerned about that last factor because unless something is done soon to increase staffing levels in Sheppey’s prisons, all those other problems will simply get worse.

There is no denying that morale among prison staff is low, which is hardly surprising given the environment in which they have to work. The police are dealing with people all day, but many of those people are either victims of crime or people suspected of a crime but who turn out to be innocent. The people with whom prison officers have to deal day in, day out have all been found guilty of a crime, many of them violent crime.

If a police officer is attacked and injured, the perpetrators are rightly tracked down, prosecuted and, if found guilty, sent to prison for a lengthy sentence. However, if a prison officer is attacked by a prisoner, too often the only punishment meted out has been withdrawal of privileges. I believe that prison officers should be treated in exactly the same way as police officers. If a prisoner attacks a prison officer, or indeed another prisoner, that person should be tried and, if found guilty, given as harsh a sentence as if the crime had been committed outside prison. That sentence should then be added to the sentence that the prisoner is already serving.

We need a proper review of the working conditions and pay structure of prison officers, which might include a regionalisation of pay to recognise the higher cost of living in the south-east of England and the difficulties of attracting people into a job with so many challenges when better employment opportunities are available. I believe that the Government also need to re-examine their policy on prison officers’ retirement age. It is simply unfair that police officers and firefighters can retire at 60, whereas prison officers, whose work is just as physically demanding, are expected to work until they are 68.

My prison officers have a very difficult job, made worse by the ratio of frontline officers to inmates, which I will set out using information from the National Offender Management Service quarterly workforce bulletin. The key operational grades in public sector prisons are band 3 to 5 officers. According to the most recent available figures, on 30 September 2016 there were

18,000 band 3 to 5 officers in post. At the same time, of course, there were 80,000 prisoners, so what are the implications for those 18,000 band 3 to 5 prison officers?

First, we have to take into account the fact that at any one time about 20% of those officers are off work for one reason or another, such as sickness, court duties or holidays, which leaves a total of 14,400 officers. But, of course, those officers work only 37 hours a week, yet prisoners are incarcerated 24/7, which is 168 hours a week, so it takes 4.5 officers to provide continuous cover over a whole week. That means that at any one time there are just 3,200 band 3 to 5 officers on frontline duty in prisons in England and Wales. Each officer on duty has to look after 25 prisoners.

Finally, I will quickly address the Opposition motion. There is much in the motion with which I cannot disagree, not least because the facts it sets out are incontrovertible. Indeed, if the motion had finished on the word “overcrowded”, I would have been happy to support it. However, I am not happy with the remaining lines of the motion. Calling on the Government to “reduce overcrowding and improve safety while still ensuring that those people who should be in prison are in prison” is both illogical and nonsense. I will not be voting against the Labour motion, but I cannot support it.

2.39 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is a pleasure to follow such an informed and powerful speech by the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson). I should declare that I am co-chair of the justice unions parliamentary group and the family court unions parliamentary group.

The Ministry of Justice cites three key objectives that underpin the operation of the Prison Service: to hold prisoners securely, to reduce the risk of prisoners reoffending and to provide

“safe and well-ordered establishments in which we treat prisoners humanely, decently and lawfully.”

Wales has four jails, housing 3,436 inmates—4% of the total prisoner population in the joint legal jurisdiction of England and Wales. On Monday, I visited HMP Berwyn, the brand-new prison in north Wales, which is due to open next month. With places for 2,106 men, this so-called super-prison will increase Wales’s capacity for housing prisoners by over 50%.

Plaid Cymru continues to have several concerns about the prison, especially the massive strain it will place on North Wales police, which is expected to face extra staffing costs of £147,000 a year as a direct result. At a time when the already underfunded police force is stretched, with limited resources and tight budgets, I must question why it is acceptable to expect a local force to foot the bill for a UK Government project. That super-prison is designed first and foremost to meet the needs of north-west England, not those of north Wales, yet the Government insist that North Wales police is responsible for covering the cost of policing that facility.

My reservations about this Government’s prisons policy should not be mistaken for any kind of criticism of the dedicated staff who work in the criminal justice system. I thank operational supervisor Peter Buffel, who was an excellent guide and advocate for the ethos of HMP Berwyn. I was struck by a strong sense that the staff—both experienced prison personnel and new

recruits—were looking forward to contributing to a worthwhile social facility. Two prison officers were forthcoming in explaining that they had moved from posts at other prisons specifically because of the quality of the new-build estate at HMP Berwyn and the prison’s innovative, exciting offender management objectives. Those reasons are important. I am sure that we will be following the prison’s progress closely.

However, I ask the Minister once again to ensure that we have the correct staff in terms not only of experience and skill, but of language, because HMP Berwyn is in close proximity to some of the most Welsh-speaking regions in Wales. I want to give the Minister the opportunity to assure the House that appropriate provisions, including the hiring of Welsh-speaking staff, will be made to enable the prison to operate effectively bilingually. Will the Minister confirm that NOMS will work with HMP Berwyn to draw up an institution-specific Welsh language plan?

While Wales has the ability to set much of its own health and social policy, the criminal justice system is still dictated by Westminster, which of course prioritises the needs of England. If Wales is truly to help people reintegrate into society and to prevent reoffending, those powers must be devolved to the Welsh Assembly. I have a request: this Government are supposedly committed to decentralisation and if the Minister and the Secretary of State are committed to reducing reoffending, will they once again consider the devolution of the criminal justice system? At the very least, will the Minister respond to the Silk commission’s requests that a formal mechanism be established for Welsh Ministers to contribute to policy development on adult offender management, and that a feasibility study of the devolution of the prison and probation services is undertaken?

2.43 pm

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I want to confine my remarks to the subject of fixed-term recalls, which I wish were much more widely understood by the public and in this House. They represent one of the biggest outrages of our prison system, and yet hardly anyone knows anything about them. Most people believe that if someone is let out of prison early—whether halfway through their sentence, a quarter of the way through the sentence on a home detention curfew, or at some other point before they actually should be let out—and they reoffend or breach their licence conditions, they should at least go back to prison to serve the rest of their original sentence. Unfortunately, that is often not the case. In reality, the overwhelming majority of the public believe that offenders should serve the whole of the sentence that they were given by the courts in the first place. In a survey carried out by Lord Ashcroft, 82% of those asked thought that prisoners should serve the full prison sentence handed down by the court. That, for many, is not rocket science; it is just common sense.

Fixed-term recalls were introduced to reduce the pressure on prison places in 2008, and many people do not know about what is going on. A fixed-term recall is when the offender breaches their licence or reoffends and is returned to prison not for the rest of their prison term—not even for most of it—but for a mere 28 days. When fixed-term recalls were introduced, they excluded certain offenders. However, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)

[Philip Davies]

was Lord Chancellor, he relaxed the rules by way of a change to the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 in a bid to reduce the prison population still further. As of 3 December 2012, fixed-term recalls were made available to previously denied prisoners: offenders serving a sentence for certain violent or sexual offences, those subject to a home detention curfew and, most shockingly, those who had previously been given a fixed-term recall for breaching their licence in the same sentence. Now, I do not think that many people out in the country know that, but I certainly know that many people will not like it.

Fixed-term recalls do not happen just occasionally. They were given to 42% of all offenders who were recalled in both 2013 and 2014 and to 28% in 2015. That is an awful lot of people going back to prison for only 28 days instead of the rest of their sentence. Those 28-day recalls relate to sentences of one year or more, so we are talking about the most serious of offenders. Recalls of 14 days apply to shorter sentences, but they are a much more recent concept.

The more I investigated 28-day fixed-term recalls, and as more figures have been released, more disturbing things have become clear. In 2014, 7,486 prisoners were recalled for just 28 days. Of those, 3,166 had been charged with a further offence. That means that 3,166 people were charged with a further offence when they should have been in prison in the first place and then escaped serving the rest of their original sentence despite committing this further offence. The vast majority had 15 or more previous convictions. Burglary is the most common original offence for which a fixed-term recall is given for a breach or a further offence. Over half of all those given this pathetic slap on the wrist were people who had committed a very serious crime. They were also given to people convicted of manslaughter, attempted homicide, wounding, rape and robbery.

Perhaps the icing on the cake in this whole sorry state of affairs is that, in 2015, 816 offenders were allowed more than one fixed-term recall on the same original sentence for another breach or offence. In just three years, 3,327 of the most serious offenders in our prisons were released from prison, breached their licence, were returned to prison for 28 days, released again, were returned to prison for just 28 days for a further breach of licence and then released again. That is a complete failure of policy and is completely indefensible. I raised fixed-term recalls in Justice questions yesterday, and the Minister's reply about risk was very interesting, but this is a sad joke. As far as I am concerned, these people should not have been released early in the first place but, having been released, there should be no other option but for them to be returned to prison for breaching their licence, especially for reoffending, for the remainder of their original sentence at the very least.

Finally, the weak response to reoffending is becoming so well-known in the criminal community that some people are taking the chance of getting recalled knowing that the punishment is pathetic. It is like a 28-day, all-inclusive mini-break. Worse still, some prisoners who have been released deliberately try to get themselves back into prison to give themselves enough time to see how their criminal operation in prison is carrying on while they are out, knowing that they will only be there

for 28 days. That has been confirmed in research by Manchester Metropolitan University, which stated that prisoners had reported being able to earn £3,000 in just 28 days by bringing in drugs. One prisoner said that "everyone keeps going and coming back in on these recalls with more drugs."

This is an absolute farce. The criminals are laughing all the way to the bank while nothing is being done to stop this nonsense. When will the Minister get a grip and end this fraud on the public?

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. The time limit is now five minutes.

2.49 pm

**Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow a fellow member of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies). He has raised the issue of fixed-term recalls before, and I am sure that by the time the Minister responds to the debate, he will have got a grip on the matter and announced some changes that will satisfy the hon. Gentleman. If he does not, I am sure it will be raised again, not only in the Justice Committee but in the House.

In the short time available, I shall raise just one issue—foreign national prisoners. I agree wholeheartedly with what has been said by other right hon. and hon. Members about the crisis in our prisons. If we are thinking about having a club of ex-Ministers, I should say that I used to be a Minister in the Lord Chancellor's Department, but at that time, responsibility for prisons lay with the Home Office, so I take no responsibility for what happened in the past. Perhaps a seminar of ex-prisons Ministers, chaired by the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), the author of that definitive book on prisons, could meet to come up with the solutions that all Members would like to see adopted to bring the crisis to an end.

To return to foreign national prisoners, I am delighted that the prisons Minister is chairing the taskforce, about which we want to hear more. It remains a mystery to me why 12% of our country's prison population happens to be foreign national prisoners. Half that 12%—more than 4,000 prisoners—are from EU countries. Bearing in mind the fact that we will continue to be a member of the EU for the next two years, it is extraordinary that we have not been able to send back more foreign national prisoners from our prisons. After all, what is the point of undertaking negotiations and signing transfer agreements with EU colleagues if they are unable to take back their own citizens? It must be a priority for the Government to ensure that, in the two years available before Brexit, citizens from countries such as Poland and Romania, which are top of the list in terms of numbers, should be returned to their countries.

I was surprised to hear in the Select Committee the Minister's chief officer, Michael Spurr, tell the House that more prisoners would have been sent back to Poland under the agreement had it not been for a mistake. I think he said that 130 should have been sent back but had not been. As the Minister and the House know, the derogation for Poland ended on 31 December, so when the Minister responds I hope he will tell us that

the matter is being looked at very carefully and that prisoners are being transferred. I am glad that a record number were removed last year, but the headline figure was so low that practically any additional figure becomes a record. We need to do much better than we are doing at the moment.

We have heard recently that, under the agreement with Albania, only 17 Albanian prisoners have been transferred from our prisons. It is not that we are against foreign national prisoners, we are just in favour of their being able to serve their sentences in their countries of origin. If that happens, it will reduce the prison population by 10,000 and save the taxpayer £169 million, so I very much hope that the Minister will give us some new information that will encourage the House to believe that this issue is being taken very seriously.

2.53 pm

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I declare an interest as a trustee of the Butler Trust, an organisation that seeks to improve the skills of prison officers throughout the country and share best practice. I have the pleasure to serve alongside P. J. McParlin, a very distinguished former chairman of the Prison Officers Association with whom I am proud to be a fellow trustee.

I am pleased that the Ministry of Justice has managed to secure the funding to recruit an extra 2,500 prison officers. I pay tribute to the work that prison officers do day in, day out. They are an outstanding group of public servants whose work is unfortunately not as well known and well appreciated as it should be. The moves towards more autonomous prisons with greater community links will help local communities to appreciate more fully the sterling work that prison officers do day in, day out.

On safety, I want us to ensure that prison officers are always supported as well as possible by good local police co-operation, so that when there are assaults on prison officers, the information can be passed on and the matter dealt with effectively. In my time as prisons Minister, I found that the co-operation between local police forces and prisons varied throughout the country. It needs to be uniformly good to provide the support that our prison officers deserve.

I am pleased that both Opposition and Government Members have spoken about reducing the numbers of foreign national offenders, which is important not only because the British taxpayer is paying, but because if we could reduce that 9,000 prisoners in our prisons, it would give us the headroom and flexibility to do rehabilitation better throughout our prisons. Both sides of the House are keen to see that, and it is very much the focus of the "Prison Safety and Reform" White Paper, which I was delighted to see published in November.

I am pleased that the Ministry of Justice is taking forward the Farmer review on prisoners' families. Strong families are essential to strong communities throughout the country. They are engines of social mobility and matter very much for prisoners for lots of practical reasons. We know that if a prisoner's relationship or marriage does not fall apart, they are more likely to have somewhere to live when they come out of prison and are more likely to get into work, so I strongly welcome the MOJ's support for the Farmer review.

The continuing emphasis on education is excellent, and there is greater focus on testing and making sure that there is improvement.

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): On that point, there was an event in the House of Commons yesterday that was organised by the Cultural Learning Alliance, of which I should declare my sister is a member. The actress Fiona Shaw and artist Grayson Perry were here in Parliament to support the publication of their most recent research, which shows that young offenders who take part in arts activities are 18% less likely to reoffend. That is of huge benefit to the public purse and, of course, to the prisoners and their families. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important that we invest in arts education in prisons?

**Andrew Selous:** I thank the hon. Lady for raising that issue. When there is clear evidence that arts education leads to reduced reoffending, we should absolutely support it.

One phrase that I never liked to hear when I went around prisons was that prisoners were being "taken to education". Education should run across the whole prison: on the wings, in the landings and in prisoners' cells. We need to have a whole-prison learning environment. I commend what is happening in Wandsworth prison, where the inspirational governor, Ian Bickers, has taken 50 prisoners with level 3 qualifications—he is paying them and has given them a uniform, and they can lose their job if they do not perform well—and getting them to work alongside those doing education in the prison to spread learning throughout the prison. That is an excellent initiative.

The focus in prisons on work and training that will lead to a job on release is absolutely right. I am really pleased that prison apprenticeships, which will carry on when prisoners move into the community, have been established well. We often hear namechecked the employers who do the right thing and take on ex-offenders—that play fair by everyone to reduce reoffending and keep everyone safe—but I have to tell the House that a number of employers, including several very well known national employers, do not take on ex-offenders as a matter of policy. I am not going to name and shame them today because I am in correspondence and dialogue with them, and I hope that quiet persuasion will lead to them doing the right thing. Nevertheless, just as we namecheck those who do well, I put those who do not do the right thing on notice that there will come a time when we will call them out and urge them to do better.

I was pleased to hear from the Secretary of State that in April she will be saying more about probation. We need high standards for probation. I pay tribute to our probation officers, as they are yet another very dedicated group of public servants. They need to work hand in glove with prison officers. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), will make sure that that does happen. In particular, I want to see probation officers making sure that the emphasis on education and employment that is taking place in prison carries on during the probationary period—for example, that the focus on work continues and that the ex-offender is attending the local college. That will take us forward and is extremely important.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** I give a warning that I mean to drop the time limit to four minutes after the next speaker. I call Toby Perkins.

3 pm

**Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab):** Like many Members today, I wish to pay tribute to the people who work in the Prison Service. They take on an incredibly difficult task and we are very grateful to them. What they do was brought home to me when I took up what my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) said, in advance of it being made a challenge, about visiting a prison. I visited Nottingham prison, and I encourage others to do the same. Any MP who is voting in this debate but who has not been around a prison are doing so from a position of ignorance.

There was much in the Secretary of State's rhetoric that I support. We all agree with much of what she said about the issues and challenges facing the Prison Service, but her vision of what is going on and the policies of this Government bear little relationship to prison officers' actual experience.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) criticised the motion. Although we recognise that, of course, there are many more aspects to prison than those contained in the motion, it seems to me that there is little to disagree with in it.

Four of my friends were recently employed at Moorland prison in Doncaster. Two have been recently retired on medical grounds and one is off sick at the moment. This debate rightly refers to the overall reduction in prison officers, but what is not so much focused on is the deliberate strategy of replacing experienced prison officers with cheap replacements and people right at the start of their career. That is an extremely dangerous policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) spoke about private prisons, but such practice is also happening in the Government estate.

One of my friends who worked at Moorland recently left the service. He was assaulted three times in a six-month period—once very seriously indeed. On the first occasion, he was encouraged to phone the staff welfare hotline. The third time he phoned it, he was told that he had used the hotline too many times and, although he had been seriously assaulted, he was not allowed to take time to get any support.

Another friend in the service needs knee surgery, but he has had to cancel the operation because he believes that if he takes time off to get his knee repaired he will be sacked on capability grounds. He specifically asked me why experienced prison officers should feel too intimidated to get the medical treatment they need.

Another friend who worked in the service for 25 years left last year. He said that when he started at Moorland there were 12 prison officers to a landing containing 90 prisoners; now, just three prison officers are there. He said that three prison officers are adequate when things are quiet and everything is going okay, but it leaves them with little capacity to engage with prisoners and carry out rehabilitation work, as they want. When a prisoner takes a phone call at 7.55 am, telling him that his wife has left him or that his children have been taken away by social services, he needs support. Prison officers have to step in and do an incredibly important job. When those resources are not there—whether it be for a

moment of crisis in a prisoner's life, to prevent fights, or simply to support prisoners and advise them on what courses to take on their path to rehabilitation—a vital chance is lost to help a prisoner back on to the right path.

Prison officers no longer feel that their role, which is incredibly important in our society, is as fulfilling as it once was, and that should concern us all. When prisoners start to think that no one is interested in them, we see the violent episodes that have taken place recently. Not enough is being done to prevent reoffending.

Experienced prison officers are crucial to the development of new staff. Managers in prisons now are much less experienced than once they were. What chance do the new £19,000 prison apprentices have if they are put into overcrowded prisons with disillusioned and inexperienced prison officers and if the mentoring that would once have been available for new staff is no longer there? Are we just setting them up to fail?

I support the motion in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), but I go further and say that, unless the Government recognise why the riots are happening, stop their deliberate attempt to chuck experienced officers out of the system to save money, and implement their strategy to retain experienced staff and see them as central to the success of the recruitment of the new generation of prison officers, not only will the problems continue to escalate but our prisons and our society will pay a very heavy price for that failure in years to come.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I call—Simon Hoare.

3.5 pm

**Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con):** I hope that there are no lessons to be learned from the fact that mine is the first speech that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, have reduced to four minutes and that you forgot my name. I shall of course be editing my Christmas card list when I get back to the office.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins). I agree absolutely with him and with the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) that it should be a requirement of all of us who have prisons either in our constituency or close by to visit them so that we can see things on the ground.

I have Guys Marsh prison in my constituency, which I have visited on a number of occasions—so many in fact that some of the prisoners and I seem to be on first-name terms. I have seen the excellent work done with the prisoners by both the Prison Officers Association and the voluntary sector. I sat in on a training session by Cleansheet, which was delivered by one of my constituents, Jane Gould. It was all about preparing prisoners to get skills and a good CV to equip them for work. Working alongside that charity were a number of national businesses, reflecting on what my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) has just said, which are very keen to take on ex-offenders when they have finished their sentences.

**Andrew Selous:** I am very glad that my hon. Friend mentioned volunteers. Does he agree that we should salute the work of the volunteers who go into our prisons across the country to work alongside prison officers?

**Simon Hoare:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend if for no other reason bar the fact that it says to those prisoners that society has not forgotten them and has not dismissed them out of hand, and that it still sees them as, potentially, a productive part of the community when they come back.

There are two things that I wish to talk about today and to which I hope the Minister will pay attention. The first is in very specific relation to Guys Marsh prison, which the Ministry of Justice team will know was in the media relatively recently and has had problems. I will, if I may, make a brief comment about the robustness of Carillion as the contractor. Contracts have two sides to that particular coin. The first is clearly on the company that is contracted to deliver the service to actually deliver that service. The other side of the coin is for the person who lets the contract to monitor it properly and to enforce what is required from it. I remain to be convinced that Carillion—certainly as far as it has performed in relation to Guys Marsh—is up to the job and that NOMS as the monitor of the contract has actually done the job it is required to do.

I do not take a “private sector good, public sector bad” view, or vice versa, but sometimes I do think that some of these companies that are contracted to do this very important work need to raise their game. I have spoken to the Minister about that, and I know that he and the Lord Chancellor are receptive to the case.

Yesterday, I was called at Justice questions to talk about recruitment—an issue that has dominated the debate today. In response to my question, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice replied that

“Guys Marsh has been made a priority prison, which means that the governor is getting extra resource, in addition to our national campaign effort, to recruit the staff he needs.”—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 147.]

Of itself, that is excellent news. I thank the Minister for it. I welcome it, as does the governor, Paul Millett. As I pressed in my question—I make no apologies for pressing again today—having a prison in a rural area presents recruitment problems. The cost of our housing is high. Public transport is scarce. Our unemployment rate, luckily, is very low. We only have about 300 people on jobseeker’s allowance in North Dorset. In that recruitment drive, may I urge Ministers to ensure that there is flexibility and scope for innovation? That might be providing help for a new prison officer to buy a vehicle or motorbike so that they can get to and from the prison. It might be help with relocation or housing costs—some form of grant to help to pay a deposit, or a loan. Terms and conditions should be looked at. I appreciate that this is a sensitive matter, but I hope that the POA would support something such as that if the end game were to deliver more prison officers to rural prisons, thus making the regime and atmosphere much safer for staff.

I encourage the Minister to work far more closely with the Ministry of Defence. Blandford Camp is a few miles from the prison, and there are a number of military institutions in Wiltshire, which seems to be a fertile recruiting ground for new prison officers as we meet the challenge of staffing.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Peter Heaton-Harris.

**Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con):** No, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am terribly sorry, you have conflated two hon. Members. I am very closely related to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), but I am not he. Is it me you intend to call?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** It is you—Peter Heaton-Jones.

3.10 pm

**Peter Heaton-Jones:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The prison system faces challenges, but the Government have taken enormous steps to address them. We have heard about some of them, and extra investment of £1.3 billion to reform and modernise the prison estate is front and centre in the White Paper that was published last October. None the less, the prison system faces challenges. I was taken with the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) that no one on either side of the House would deny that the Prison Service faces serious challenges. That is absolutely the case.

I welcome the White Paper, and I have mentioned the £1.3 billion to reform and modernise the prison estate, which I greatly welcome. I also welcome the fact that we are recruiting 2,500 frontline officers. I was pleased that the Lord Chancellor mentioned at the beginning of the debate the further commitment to fast-track 400 new prison officers into 10 of the most challenging prisons by the end of March. We are more than on track with that, and I think that she said that 389 appointments have been made under the scheme, which is excellent news.

In the remaining time, I want to discuss security, which concerns me. I have discussed it with Ministers in the past, and I am particularly concerned about the growing problem of drones being used to deliver drugs, contraband, mobile phones and various other things to prisoners. I have long held the view that, as a society, community and perhaps Government, we have not quite grasped the difficulties caused by drones. There has been an explosion in the number of people who own them. Quite apart from security matters in prisons, there have been awful cases of near-misses with aircraft, and we need to tackle that. We need to look at that very seriously when considering the problem of security in prisons. Practical measures have been taken, including basic things such as putting up netting to prevent things from being dropped. We need to look at that more carefully and at the issue of drones overall.

I am also concerned about the continuing challenge we face with the misuse of mobile phones. Mobile phones are being delivered to prisons using what I understand are increasingly ingenious methods—I do not use that word as praise, but merely to say that new ways are being found all the time to deliver mobile phones to prisons. We have to stop that, with practical, hard measures. The mobile phone industry has a responsibility as well, and it needs to do more technically to work with us and the prison authorities to ensure that there are ways of blocking mobile phone signals.

More can be done. I know only too well as the MP for North Devon that many places do not have a mobile phone signal. That is unintentional, but I am sure that

[Peter Heaton-Jones]

there is a technical solution. We can ask mobile operators to take responsibility and make sure that there are intentional blackspots to stop mobile phones getting into prisons.

I support the Government amendment, I praise the work that is being done, and I welcome the White Paper.

3.14 pm

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones). One of the most exciting parts of the speech made by the Secretary of State concerned the pilots on blocking mobile phones in prisons. Mobile phones increase the amount of organised crime that can be carried out on a daily basis in prisons, so it is critical that we deal with that. It is also a pleasure to follow a number of distinguished exes who have offered fantastic ideas. Aren't we lucky that we do not have to recall them, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) would like us to believe, to benefit from the brilliance of their ideas to improve the serious problem of prison safety?

The Justice Committee published its report in May 2016, when we urged the Government, as the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) said, to act quickly on prison safety. It is clear from everything that has been said, not least by the Secretary of State, that the MOJ is bursting with ideas. The Justice Committee welcomes the White Paper. In due course, we will scrutinise, and probably welcome a great deal of, the police and crime Bill—we have been given some nuggets this afternoon. However, to do our job of holding the Department to account, we need adequate information.

On 29 November, when the prisons Minister kindly appeared before us, he said that he would give us monthly reports on safety indicators. We have not had them, despite our chasing, so I urge him again to produce them as quickly as possible because we need that information. We also welcome the extra money that has been given to our prisons. About a fifth will be spent on staff, which we support, but we need more information about where the rest of it will go. Substantially higher funding will be given to Bristol, Hewell and Rochester so that they can improve safety. We will want to know if that works, so we need the data to assess that.

I understand the Department's frustration with Members who say that reducing prison numbers is an easy solution to its problems. My ideas about who to release—they are not, I stress, the Committee's ideas, many of which have been mentioned—include IPP prisoners; foreign national prisoners, although we know that is not easy; and women prisoners and veterans, who have low reoffending rates. However, that is tinkering at the edges of the large prison population. If we cannot recruit—I accept that the Department is trying desperately hard to do so—will the Minister make a commitment at least to consider whether there should be a shift in the sentencing framework, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) suggested, towards community-based alternatives? I would also ask the Minister to consider the fact that we desperately need more secure mental health beds so that we can screen

prisoners immediately on reception and divert them to the best place. No one on the Justice Committee thinks that the prisons Minister has an easy job, and we welcome many of the reforms that the Government have recently set out, but we need the data so that we can do our job of holding him to account.

3.18 pm

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate. When I was first elected as a Member of Parliament, I remember being taken to a police station and seeing a room with 18 faces on the wall. The police officer said that when a large number of those people were on remand or in prison, crime went down, but that the opposite happened when they were not. I served as a magistrate in Westminster for six years. Although we had very strict guidelines, and we obviously listened carefully to the excellent probation officer before giving sentence, I was always aware that we would not know the outcome of the judgment that we were making.

A few years ago I had the opportunity to visit the Amber Foundation, which is a very worthwhile charity in Exeter—it has a number of sites—that works with ex-offenders to give them a pathway back to full citizenship. I want to use the time available to talk about the importance of education. Education and rehabilitation have to be the Department's major focus, because unless we get this right, we will be in the awful cycle of putting people away and then releasing them, only to have them go back in again, which has a very poor impact on crime levels and on those individuals for the rest of their lives.

I hope that the Government will continue their ambition to give prison governors real autonomy so that programmes that are put in place will work for their institutions and can command authority to drive real change. We also need to be realistic about the complexity of reforming prison education. What incentives is the Minister considering to ensure that prisoners will choose to take part in educational and vocational programmes? I am pleased to hear about apprenticeships, but given that so many prisoners have learning difficulties and no formal education, will he allow them to have increased pay, time out of their cell or even early release in exceptional cases? We must contemplate radical policy options if we are to see a step change in this area.

What is the Department's view of the balance between providing holistic education that is focused on developing potential, including in the arts as well as in basic literacy and numeracy, and vocational programmes that are focused on local labour market outcomes after prison? Will the Minister give local governors sufficient autonomy on that issue? We need to bear in mind that a very high proportion of prisoners have special educational needs and therefore need individual attention, which is expensive. What plans do the Government have to help with the recruitment of those with the specialist skills to work in what is a very challenging sector? I welcome the announcement on investment and increased resources, but let us be under no illusions about the complexity of the challenge. I hope that the Minister will give some detail when he responds to the debate.

I congratulate the Government on getting to grips with many of these issues and the original thinking that I am hearing from the Dispatch Box.

3.22 pm

**Richard Fuller** (Bedford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen). With the House's permission, I will be very parochial and focus on Bedford prison, given that it is mentioned in the motion. I commend the Minister, because on the afternoon and evening of 6 November, following the disturbances in the prison, he managed, notwithstanding his responsibilities to recover the situation, to keep me fully informed throughout. As my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) said, that is a hallmark of this particular Minister, and I am very grateful to him. Since the disturbances, the prison has been recovered and rebuilt. As I have been nice to the Minister, I would ask him to meet me to discuss the possibility of a very small investment that has been pending for Bedford prison, which could make a substantial difference.

I want to talk about accountability. One of the issues leading up to the problems at Bedford prison was that 72 recommendations for change and improvement had been made by the inspectorate, but only 12 had been enacted two years later. I have every confidence that the governor, who has recently returned to her position, will find remedies to those problems. However, as governors are given more accountability, how does the Minister think that they themselves will be held to account? Bedford prison has an excellent independent monitoring board. What will be the role of IMBs across the country with regard to accountability?

Prison officers have been mentioned frequently with regard both to numbers and to pay. Having spoken to a number of members of staff at Bedford prison anonymously after the disturbances, it is clear to me that two other issues ought to be addressed. First, this is not just about pay; it is also about the prestige of the profession. Many Members have paid strong compliments to the profession today. Too often prison officers are seen as the "nearly force"—they are not quite held in the same regard as the police. There are a number of things that the Minister could do on prestige as well as pay that could make a difference.

Prison officers also talked to me about the importance of experience. There has been a downgrading of the age range at which people can be brought into the prison officer corps, but that does have a knock-on effect for confidence and teamwork when people are put in very difficult situations.

Finally, given that last year was the 150th anniversary of the Howard League—it is named after a former high sheriff, John Howard—may I reinforce the comments that have been made about the attention that needs to be paid to suicides in prison? I will be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about that. At its 150th anniversary, I said that the Howard League was the essential irritant to Governments on prison reform.

Having listened to the Opposition today, I have to say that, unfortunately, the Labour party has absolutely no positive suggestions. I expect the Minister to do much better in his contribution.

3.25 pm

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I start by paying tribute to all prison officers in this country, who do a fantastic, difficult and often dangerous job, and particularly

to those at HMP Lewes in my constituency, which has seen disturbances in recent months and was put into special measures just before Christmas. I am not sure whether the shadow Minister has visited Lewes prison—I know that the prisons Minister has—but I encourage him to do so if he has not. Having visited the prison on a number of occasions, I know that one cannot fail to be moved by the dedication of the prison officers who work there so tirelessly.

I am disappointed by the Opposition's motion—I note that no more Opposition Members wish to speak—because it fails to demonstrate any understanding of the issues facing prison officers day in, day out. This is not just about staffing levels. In Lewes prison, for example, there have been a number of vacancies for some time, but the prison has not been able to fill them. I take on board the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) because it is hard to fill such vacancies in a rural constituency in the south-east of England. I welcome the Secretary of State's moves towards local recruitment, whereby a governor can manage people leaving and have replacements ready at hand, as well as managing the skills mix and experience of their prison officers to make the transition much easier.

Lewes prison is difficult to manage because its old buildings make it difficult to see what is going on, particularly with reduced staff numbers. It is also a depressing prison inside—there is hardly any lighting—which makes it a tough place not only for inmates, but for the prison officers who work there day in, day out. The inmates are changing. While there are the usual faces who keep coming through the revolving door, there are also now sexual offenders. That type of prisoner was never there 10 or 15 years ago, so that has increased pressure on the prison officers and prisoners.

In the minute and a half remaining, I want to support what my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) said about the Opposition. Labour Members have not even touched on what motivates people to commit crime, and therefore enter prison, in the first place. We know that a quarter of prisoners have been in care at some point in their lives, that 59% of those entering prison are reoffenders who have been in prison before, and that about three quarters of prisoners have problems reading or writing.

**Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Maria Caulfield:** I will not because there is so little time.

We absolutely have to deal with the way in which people enter prisons. I have talked to young people in Newhaven Foyer in my constituency, many of whom have come from the care sector. Many of them deliberately committed crime to get into prison, because they were not confident about getting housing or care, and many of their friends are in prison already. Until we address issues relating to life chances, the same people will be going through the prison system.

I know that the Ministry of Justice is not working in isolation. It is working with the children's Minister, with the relevant Health Minister on mental health problems, and with the Housing Minister to deal with housing problems. That is why I am so disappointed with the

[*Maria Caulfield*]

Opposition motion, which fails to tackle any of the factors that contribute to prisoner numbers and shows no understanding of them at all.

3.29 pm

**Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (*Maria Caulfield*).

Last year Anjem Choudary, an extremist preacher and vocal supporter of the death cult Daesh, was jailed for five and a half years. Like many, I was pleased that justice had been served, but I was also deeply concerned about what influence he might have over his fellow inmates while serving his sentence. The impact that radical inmates can have on other prisoners should not be underestimated. Prisons have always had gangs, and this death cult is just another gang on the prison block.

I therefore firmly welcomed the measures introduced following the Acheson review—particularly the stronger vetting of prison chaplains and frontline staff, and the removal from the general prison population into specialist units of those spreading extreme, violent and corrosive views. I ask the Minister to do all he can to ensure that, once contained in those specialist units, extremists are not able to collaborate and further propagate their dangerous ideologies. I have long asked for tighter vetting for so-called faith leaders, and for all sermons and services to be conducted in English.

We hear of a reluctance among prison staff to challenge pernicious extremist views, particularly radical Islamic beliefs. Prisons must not be allowed to exist as breeding grounds for Wahhabism or Daesh, and it is vital that we continue to push for the appropriate training of prison staff in this area. I welcome the recruitment of more prison staff, but they must be properly equipped and deployed to combat extremism. I was shocked to read that inmates in Belmarsh and other prisons were found with publications containing extremist content. Surely the Minister will agree that that is an offence under terrorism legislation, and that penalties must therefore be served.

In addition, I ask the Minister to ensure that there is greater emphasis on the education of inmates who are identified as being at risk of radicalisation. There appears to be an important link between poor education, mental health issues and radicalisation. Education, from basic English to maths, must of course run in tandem with the pastoral and mental health support provided through the Prevent programme.

Beyond educational assessment, prisoners should be screened for radical beliefs on entry into prison to make sure that such beliefs are detected as soon as possible. That would mean that, from day one, prison staff were aware of those likely to pose risks. I would also suggest that prisons record inmates' religious beliefs, if they have any, on entry and on exiting prison. That would throw up data on how many were converting to an alien faith or being forced to convert in prison to survive.

I am a member of the Home Affairs Committee, and we have investigated the rise of psychoactive substances. I am pleased that groundbreaking reforms have been introduced to tackle the use of legal highs in prison. In addition to those reforms, I ask the Minister to ensure that the link between mental health and drug use is not

ignored, and I welcome the fact that prison governors will be given greater flexibility and autonomy in allocating mental health resources.

Finally, to turn our prisons into places of safety and reform, we must track the progress made by prisoners in combating addiction, and address the extremist prison gangs and the levels of religious conversions to Wahhabism and other violent, oppressive cults. We must also help our prisoners to gain the critical skills, and meet the basic educational requirements, that they need to get a job and function outside prison.

3.33 pm

**Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): If I am honest, I am entering the debate with a certain amount of trepidation, for the simple reason that we seem to have a veritable cricket team of former prisons Ministers and, for that matter, lawyers who have been involved in this area.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (*Crispin Blunt*), who came with me on a cricket tour to Jamaica, where we visited a very interesting prison. The work he did to make sure there will be a new prison there, so that we can, hopefully, transfer some of the Jamaican prisoners in this country back to Jamaica, was quite helpful.

I am not going to pretend for one moment that I have any prisons in my constituency. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, I worked as the Conservative party agent in Mitcham and Morden for the prisons Minister at the time—one Angela Rumbold—and I learned quite a bit. Indeed, I visited Wandsworth prison, where staff were trying to get Ronnie Biggs to go back. When I asked what was happening, they said that they had his clothes and that they wanted him to go back and collect the stuff in person, which, of course, he eventually did.

In my constituency, I have probably the busiest custody suite in the whole country, and that is the end we have to start from.

We need to make sure that three things happen. First, people must be able to read, write and add up. I commend the Government for producing a league table of prisons that are achieving that. That is very good news. Secondly, we must get people off drugs. The Government are obviously very aware of that issue. Thirdly, we must think about veterans. I represent a naval garrison city with a large and growing Royal Marine population. I pay tribute to Trevor Philpott, who runs an organisation called Veterans Change Partnership that is seeking to change the justice system so that we do not get veterans in it in the first place. I encourage the justice system to make greater use of people who have served in the military as magistrates. That would be incredibly helpful, because at least they have some idea of what happens—

**Jenny Chapman** *rose*—

**Oliver Colvile:** I am sorry, but I will not give way because I am very short of time.

I am involved in an organisation called Forward Assist in which the shadow Northern Ireland Secretary, the hon. Member for Blaydon (*Mr Anderson*), has also been very involved. When I served on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, we went to Washington, where we learned how veterans are dealt with in veteran

treatment courts. I urge the Government to examine at that in no uncertain terms, because it is vital that we get this right. We must also do something about mental health, where I ask the Government to look at better training for prison officers. Prison officers do a brilliantly good job. I have a lot of prison officers in my constituency who work just outside it in Dartmoor. I am really looking forward to visiting Exeter and Dartmoor prisons.

3.36 pm

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be able to close this debate, in which Members have spoken very eloquently and knowledgeably about the issues facing our prison system. Before I go into what they have said, I want to thank our prison officers, prison governors, and all those who work in the Prison Service. They face very great challenges every day of their lives, and we owe them a lot for the work that they do for us.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who has three prisons in her constituency, talked about the work that she achieved as a former Minister in trying to reduce the amount of violence in prisons. She comprehensively set out some of the failures of this Government. I am sorry if that disappoints Conservative Members but, as I will explain, there has been a failure to tackle some of the big issues facing our prisons.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods), who also has three prisons in her constituency, said that the prisons budget had been cut by a quarter, with £900 million being taken away. That will obviously have an impact on how prisons are run and on their staff. She raised three issues that the Minister should be looking at. First, there are far too many women in prison, especially women with children, and there does not seem to be any clear strategy within the prison system to assist them or to deal with situations such as how children can visit their parents. That is reflected in the Ministry of Justice's figures on suicides that have occurred in prison, which show that a much higher percentage of women have committed suicide and self-harm. My hon. Friend also talked about reoffending, and the education and training that would prevent it, as well as mental health issues and personality disorders. Funding for those services has been cut, and those things need to be addressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) talked about the fact that many experienced staff have left the Prison Service and been replaced by inexperienced staff. It is well accepted that prison officers do far more than simply locking and unlocking the gates and taking prisoners in and out. They are often the only people prisoners will speak to. Prison officers act as mentors, advisers and family members, and they provide a sympathetic listening ear. It is not good enough to have inexperienced people taking over that work. I agree wholeheartedly with what the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) said about the tremendous work that prison officers do. As he said, their terms and conditions should be looked at properly and put on the same footing as those of people who do other difficult and sensitive jobs, such as police officers. Prison officers should be remunerated properly.

Since the Government came into power in 2010, they have made massive cuts to the number of prison officers, and that is a big reason for some of the current prison issues. It is all very well for the Government to say that they are trying to do things; that is good, but they should never have cut the number of prison officers in the first place. If they had not made that false economy, we would not be in half the mess we are in now. I try not to be party political about this, but it was the wrong decision and it would be good if the Government accepted that. There is no harm in owning up to the fact that an error was made.

One suggestion for dealing with some of the prison problems was made by the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Although I more or less agreed with him on international issues when I was a member of the Committee, I have to tell him that privatisation in prisons is not the answer. It has not been the answer for probation. The probation service used to have a four-star gold rating but it has gone downhill since the privatisation, and that has had some impact on the Prison Service.

**Crispin Blunt:** The Foreign Affairs Committee's loss is the Opposition Front-Bench team's gain. Will the hon. Lady be explicit about the potential role of the private sector under Labour policy? Labour had a commercialisation strategy, and Labour opened up the competition for Birmingham prison in the first place. Is the Labour party saying that there is no role for the private sector in the delivery of justice in our country, simply on ideological grounds?

**Yasmin Qureshi:** The Labour party also introduced IPP sentences, and I was not one of those who favoured that provision. I will touch on its impact on our prison system. The Secretary of State spoke about the fact that the Government are trying to deal with the issues caused by the remnants of the IPP regime. One problem is that people who have served their IPP sentence cannot get out of prison until they have done specific, designated training courses, but unfortunately there has been a lack of funding for those courses. The Government have to take responsibility for the fact that many thousands of people in that position have not been released from prison.

As I have said, this has been a very good and interesting debate. Many experienced people have spoken, including former Ministers and Secretaries of State. I think we can all agree that everyone is concerned about this issue. It is not a big vote winner or an issue that is often spoken about on the doorstep, but it is important because it shows what we stand for as a society. The one thing on which most people agree is that we have got problems, and there is a crisis in our prison system.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), a former Minister, talked about some of the proposals in the White Paper that the Government have brought forward to deal with this issue. He set out all the shortcomings and all the questions that have not been answered. The White Paper seems to suggest that each prison will be run by its governor and then every problem will somehow be resolved. However, it does not provide answers to questions such as whether governors will have complete autonomy from the centre, and whether they will have enough money to be able to

[Yasmin Qureshi]

carry out everything they want to do. For example, if a prison governor thinks that 500 inmates require a two-month detoxification and rehabilitation programme, will he or she have the money to carry that out? It is all very well to say that governors can do such things, but where will the funding come from, or will they have an unlimited pot of money? How will people be recruited, and to whom will they be answerable? The White Paper raises a lot of questions that have not been answered, and it does not deal with the problems.

**Nusrat Ghani:** The hon. Lady has raised a number of issues, but we have yet to hear the Labour party's solutions. Does she agree with Shami Chakrabarti, the shadow Attorney General, that half of all prisoners should be released immediately? Is that the policy of the Labour party?

**Yasmin Qureshi:** If the hon. Lady had been in the Chamber at the beginning of the debate, she would know that that question was asked by another Member; I think it was the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies). On the first point, you are the Government—[*Interruption*]*—and it is for you to deal with the crisis of the—[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. The hon. Lady will resume her seat while the Chair is standing. May I just remind her that there is a reason why we do not address people directly in the second person? It is because things can get very heated. The hon. Lady should address her remarks through the Chair.

**Yasmin Qureshi:** I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

They are the Government. They have been in power for the past seven years, and prisons have been under their control. It is under their watch that 6,000 staff have been cut.

**Simon Hoare:** I will take the hon. Lady's lead and not be party political, but given the huge crisis that she is outlining to the House—her Front-Bench colleagues clearly share her view—will she explain why, on an Opposition day motion, Labour ran out of speakers and we did not?

**Yasmin Qureshi:** The hon. Gentleman is trying to deflect attention from what the Government should have been doing for the past seven years.

As I was saying, about a quarter of all prisoners are held in overcrowded or unsuitable conditions. In the past 12 months, there have been 6,000 assaults on staff and 24,000 assaults on prisoners. There were also 105 self-inflicted deaths of prisoners, which is a record increase of 13% on the previous year. The levels of poor mental health and distress among prisoners are higher than those for the general public. The number of incidents of self-harm in prisons has increased by more than 25% in 2016 compared with the previous year. When we look at all the statistics provided by the Ministry of Justice, we can see that the number of incidents of self-harm has gone up and the number of assaults has gone up, and that deaths have occurred and suicides

have happened. I am afraid to say that that is the responsibility of this Government because they have been in charge of prisons for the past seven years.

3.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah):** I echo the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) in thanking our brave prison officers for the hard work they do and extend those thanks to the Prison Service's Tornado officers, who have been active over the past few months and have done a splendid job.

This has been a well informed and, at times, lively debate. We heard one speaker from Plaid Cymru, five from the Labour Benches and 13 from the Government Benches. The Government Members included two former prisons Ministers and two former Justice Secretaries, which shows how seriously we take issues in our prisons and turning around people's lives.

**Jenny Chapman:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Gyimah:** I will make some progress first.

The Government have owned up to the problem. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said from the moment she was appointed that the level of violence in prisons is too high and has acknowledged that staffing is part of the answer to that complex problem, which has developed over a long period of time. There is consensus across the House that something needs to be done about this problem. The difference between the Government and the Opposition is that in the 30 minutes for which the shadow Secretary of State spoke, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) so eruditely put it, we did not get "a single positive alternative". Listening to the shadow Secretary of State, I realised why one old wag referred to this House as the gasworks: his speech was full of hot air.

Our plan is very clear. In the immediate term, we are monitoring the situation and supporting governors to maintain order across the estate. In the longer term, we are tackling security threats, improving staffing levels and transforming the ways prison officers support and challenge prisoners. As part of that, we are looking at raising the prestige, status and role of prison officers. Those are not just words; they are backed by action, as was set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. There is a White Paper, new investment in staffing has been secured, and a prison and courts Bill, an employment strategy, a strategy to deal with women offenders and the probation service review are on the way. That is real action to tackle the serious problems in our prisons.

**Jenny Chapman:** Does the Minister take any responsibility at all for the deterioration in our prisons since 2010?

**Mr Gyimah:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it very clear that it is incredibly simplistic to say that the problems in our prisons are simply due to staffing. There is the rise of new psychoactive substances and old taboos in prisons have been broken. It used to be the case that prisoners never attacked a female prison officer. Now we see that routinely on our wings. Our prisons have changed and to deal with that complex problem, we need a multifaceted set of answers. That is what this Government are delivering.

The Opposition made two principal points. The first was about overcrowding. However, we still do not know whether the Opposition agree with themselves, given Lady Chakrabarti's view that we should reduce prison numbers to the tune of 45,000. Even on the issue of prison officers, when my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) challenged the shadow Secretary of State to commit to increasing prison officer numbers by 2,500, he could not make that commitment. At the end of an Opposition day debate, I am none the wiser about Labour's solution to a problem it calls a crisis. It called the debate but has been unable to offer a solution.

In the brief time I have to sum up, I will pick up on some of the points made in the debate. The right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) made a very good speech. On leadership, I agree that we want governors to stay put for longer. We also want to ensure that staffing is effective on the wings, and I totally agree that we do not want the 1:60 ratio she mentioned. The former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath, made a characteristically erudite and eloquent speech, and I agree on the need for smarter alternatives to incarceration. One way is to deal with problems before custody. He also mentioned problem-solving courts. That concept, which we are currently trialling, is one I am very hopeful about.

**Dr Poulter:** I commend the Government for taking action on some important issues. Does the Minister agree that the key to breaking the cycle of reoffending is tackling substance misuse not only in prisons but on discharge and release from prison, but that there is a problem with the fragmentation of substance misuse services in so many areas? I hope he will look at that as part of the excellent work in the White Paper.

**Mr Gyimah:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), also a doctor, is dealing with this matter, and we will bring forward proposals later.

The former prisons Minister, the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), whom I always enjoy listening to, given his constructive approach, made several detailed and constructive points about governor empowerment, local recruitment and performance management. The Justice Select Committee has written asking for answers to some of these questions, and I will ensure that it gets a rapid response. In addition, I will offer a meeting to sit down with him and the prisons sub-committee to discuss the details of the White Paper.

On staffing, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State talked eloquently about our plans in the White Paper.

**Toby Perkins:** In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), the Minister was unable to accept any responsibility for what has happened. He is right that staffing is not the only problem, but it is part of the problem. We are down 6,000 prison officers. Will he replace them?

**Mr Gyimah:** If the hon. Gentleman has been following the debate, he will know that we are down 6,000 prison officers but that we have also closed 18 prisons. As my

hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) mentioned, in relation to drugs, this is a complex problem. The Government have committed to increasing the number of prison officers; today, the Opposition could not even match that. So I will take no lessons from them on what to do about staffing levels in our prisons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) talked about attacks on prison officers. I completely agree with him. Prisoners who assault staff should feel the full force of the law— independent adjudicators can already impose additional days on prisoners. We are working with the Attorney General, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure that offenders face swift justice and that we can provide better evidence to courts, and we are working with the judiciary to give them powers to impose consecutive, rather than concurrent, sentences for these crimes. It is in order to help protect prison officers that we are rolling out body-worn cameras across the estate.

The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) mentioned foreign national offenders. As he will have heard at the meeting of the Justice Committee yesterday, a record number of offenders were deported to their own countries last year, but there is still much work to do. A ministerial taskforce made up of Ministers from the MOJ, the Home Office, the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is looking at the levers in our relationships with these countries in order to deport people as quickly as possible.

In a debate called for by the Opposition, we have heard no positive alternative to the plans offered by the Government. I urge all Members to vote for a clear plan that the Government have put forward to deal with the challenging issues in our prisons that would also help us to turn people's lives around.

*Question put (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.*

*The House divided: Ayes 196, Noes 289.*

#### Division No. 132]

[4 pm

#### AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Cadbury, Ruth
Abrahams, Debbie	Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Alexander, Heidi	Champion, Sarah
Ali, Rushanara	Chapman, Jenny
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Austin, Ian	Clwyd, rh Ann
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Coaker, Vernon
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Coffey, Ann
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cooper, Julie
Benn, rh Hilary	Cooper, Rosie
Berger, Luciana	Cooper, rh Yvette
Betts, Mr Clive	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Coyle, Neil
Blenkinsop, Tom	Creagh, Mary
Blomfield, Paul	Creasy, Stella
Brabin, Tracy	Cruddas, Jon
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cryer, John
Brake, rh Tom	Cummins, Judith
Brennan, Kevin	Cunningham, Alex
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Bryant, Chris	Danczuk, Simon
Buck, Ms Karen	David, Wayne
Burgon, Richard	De Piero, Gloria
Butler, Dawn	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.

Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Jim  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Durkan, Mark  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Field, rh Frank  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Flynn, Paul  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Godsiff, Mr Roger  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Mr Mark  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Alan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Graham  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marris, Rob  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian

McCabe, Steve  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Mulholland, Greg  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Pugh, John  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simpson, David  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Spellar, rh Mr John  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Turley, Anna  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Wilson, Sammy

Winnick, Mr David  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Jessica Morden and**  
**Jeff Smith**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Sir Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Carswell, Mr Douglas  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colvile, Oliver  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinéage, Caroline

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evennett, rh David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, rh Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Herbert, rh Nick

Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, Mr Nick  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny

Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Osborne, rh Mr George  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric  
 Poulter, Dr Daniel  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline

Spencer, Mark  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward

Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Heather Wheeler and**  
**Christopher Pincher**

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)),*  
 That the proposed words be there added.

*Question agreed to.*

*The Deputy Speaker declared the main Question, as*  
*amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).*

*Resolved,*

That this House welcomes the Government's comprehensive proposals for major reform of the prison system set out in the White Paper; further welcomes plans for an extra 2,500 prison officers, to professionalise the prison service further and to attract new talent by recruiting prison officer apprentices, graduates and former armed service personnel; notes new security measures being introduced to tackle the illegal use of drones, phones and drugs which are undermining the stability of the prison system; welcomes the commitment to give governors in all prisons more powers and more responsibility to deliver reform whilst holding them to account for the progress prisoners make; and welcomes the Government's proposals to set out for the first time the purpose of prisons in statute.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** I now have to announce the result of the deferred Division on the question relating to financial services. The Ayes were 292 and the Noes were 191, so the question was agreed to.

*[The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.]*

## School Funding

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** I inform the House that the Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Before I call the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) to move the motion, I must point out that 36 Members wish to speak in the debate. I ask those on the Front Benches to be as concise as possible, and if Members wishing to speak in the debate make interventions on Front Benches I am afraid that they will find that their names have mysteriously slipped down the speaking list. I am sorry to say that we are going to start with a limit of three minutes on Back-Bench speeches. If people keep their interventions to an absolute minimum, everyone might get in. Otherwise, the people at the bottom of the list will not be able to speak. With that, let's get going!

4.16 pm

**Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House regrets the impact of school funding cuts on the ability of children to reach their full potential; and calls on the Government to ensure that all schools have the funding that they need to provide an excellent education for every child.

I will try to keep interventions to a minimum, Madam Deputy Speaker; I warn hon. Members of that as I start my contribution.

We have heard much this week about respecting the mandate that the British people have given us, so today I am giving Conservative Members the chance to do that, by implementing the pledge that they gave to the country in their election manifesto. It stated:

“Under a future Conservative government, the amount of money following your child into school will be protected. There will be a real terms increase in the schools budget in the next Parliament.”

That pledge was repeated by the last Prime Minister—the one who actually fought an election—and he was very clear about what it meant. He said:

“I can tell you, with a Conservative Government the amount of money following your child into school will not be cut.”

There is one question that the Secretary of State has to answer today: will she keep her party's promise to the British people?

The National Audit Office has revealed that, under the current spending settlement, there will be “an 8 per cent cut in pupil funding”

between 2015 and 2020. That same conclusion was reached by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. That means that schools in every region, every city, every town and, yes, every constituency will lose money because of the failure of this Government to protect funding for our schools.

**John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Angela Rayner:** I want to make some progress.

Will the Secretary of State tell us whether she intends to keep that manifesto pledge? Let us consider the context.

**John Redwood:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Angela Rayner:** I want to make some progress.

Let us consider the context.

“Britain has a deep social mobility problem, and for this generation in particular, it is getting worse not better”—

as a result of—

“an unfair education system, a two-tier labour market, an imbalanced economy, and an unaffordable housing market.”

That was the conclusion of the Government's own Social Mobility Commission. And what about our education system?

“We still have too many underperforming schools and low overall levels of numeracy and literacy. England remains the only OECD country where 16 to 24-year-olds are no more literate or numerate than 55 to 64-year-olds.”

Again, that is not my conclusion, but that of the Government's own industrial strategy Green Paper, which quite rightly makes it clear just how central education is to our economy, especially following Brexit.

**Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab):** My hon. Friend is talking about the broken pledge on increasing funding for schools. Is she aware that 74 out of 77 schools—that is 96% of them—face real-terms cuts of more than £200,000 by 2019? How is that defensible? How is it evidence of a Government who care about education?

**Angela Rayner:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend—there is no justification for these cuts.

The Secretary of State has, of course, unveiled the proposed solution, her so-called national fair funding formula, which she presented to her Back Benchers as a kind of reverse distribution. On the Government's own figures, they are quite literally robbing Peterborough to pay for Poole, but it will not take long for Members on both sides of the House to discover that not only is there nothing fair about the proposed funding formula but that it will not make up for overall real-terms cuts. Concerns about what that means for our constituents are shared on both sides of the House. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) has said that his message to the Minister for School Standards is:

“I don't get this and I don't think it's particularly fair.”

I hope that we will see the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle in the Chamber this afternoon and that he will put his concerns forward. I hope he will speak.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady) has said:

“Every secondary school in Trafford will lose funding, even though it is one of the places famously underfunded for education.”

Perhaps we will hear from him, too. The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who of course co-chairs the f40 group of historically underfunded local education authorities, said just this morning:

“The bottom line is that it's created some distorted outcomes which we think require some significant remodelling.”

No wonder he is concerned, because nearly half of the f40 group face further cuts, rather than increases, under the Minister's national funding fiddle.

Of course there is one Government Member who seems quite happy to accept the cuts in her own constituency: the Secretary of State herself. Schools in her own constituency are set to lose some 15% of their funding per pupil. Perhaps she will be lobbying herself.

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): The hon. Lady is listing Members who are unhappy. I, like her, am unhappy. All the schools in Southend are receiving a cut under this funding formula, and I think it is the only local authority area outside central London where that is the case.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): No, it is not.

**James Duddridge**: The figures I have are from the House of Commons Library. I apologise if I have misread them, but that is my reading. Is not the point that this is a consultation? If this were a fait accompli, I would not support the Secretary of State, but this is a consultation.

**Angela Rayner**: I hope that the hon. Members I mentioned will make contributions today, because the motion before the House makes it clear that our schools are facing a cocktail of cuts that will see 98% of schools lose out in the funding formula. I hope that the Government think again about their proposals.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. In my constituency we are looking at cuts of £437 per pupil between 2015 and 2019. With the Government saying that they believe in and want to support social mobility, and with a third of our children across the country not achieving even five good GCSEs, does she agree that this is absolutely the wrong time to be cutting school funding for the pupils who most need it and that it is an own goal when it comes to thinking about our future shared prosperity?

**Angela Rayner**: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I would go so far as to say that the meritocracy that the Prime Minister talks about is already in tatters.

The National Audit Office has said that the Secretary of State expects schools to make £1.7 billion of savings by “using staff more efficiently.” Can she guarantee today that those so-called efficiencies do not mean fewer staff? A £1.7 billion cut could mean up to 10,000 redundancies for teaching staff in our schools. She has resolutely failed to give us figures on the impact of the planned cut, but her own analysis of the research conducted by the education unions shows that, for example, the cuts in my region—the north-west—would amount to well over £400 million, requiring the loss of more than 2,000 teachers. Given that the Government have failed to meet their own teacher recruitment targets for the past five years in a row, I urge her to think again before she tries to solve school budget crises on the back of hard-working staff.

Make no mistake, this is a crisis. Indeed, schools are already resorting to staff cuts in order to cope. A Unison staff survey conducted last year showed that, even then, more than one in 10 respondents were reporting redundancies in the past year and in the coming year. More than one in five said that their school had left vacant posts unfilled over the past year or had cut maintenance. Nearly a quarter had seen increased class sizes, and over a quarter had experienced cuts to budgets for books and resources over the past year.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. I am sorry that she does not agree with fair funding. How can she

possibly justify a child in the constituencies of the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Home Secretary receiving, on average, £6,229 a year and £6,680 a year respectively while a child in my West Sussex constituency, which has deprived wards, will receive less than £4,200?

**Angela Rayner**: The Labour party is for fair funding, but this is not fair funding; this is unfair funding for every school in our nation. The hon. Gentleman should take heed of what that might mean for his constituency. Pulling people down is not the way forward. If we want to make the best of our economy post-Brexit, we must ensure that we invest in all our schools, not take from one school, robbing one group of young people, to give to another, leading to an overall cut in distribution.

**John Redwood**: Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Angela Rayner**: I have given way once, so I am going to make some progress.

It was no surprise when the National Audit Office found that the number of maintained secondary schools in deficit rose from 33% to nearly 60% between 2010 and 2015. Its report refers to a sample of schools that said that typical savings came through increased class sizes, reduced teacher contact time, replacing experienced teachers with new recruits, recruiting staff on temporary contracts, encouraging staff to teach outside their specialism, and relying more on unqualified staff, none of which are measures that parents would want to see at their school. The NAO tells us that the Department’s savings estimates do not even take account of the real impact on schools. For example, the Government seem to remain committed to cutting the national education services grant, which amounts to £600 million, but they have not yet completed any assessment of how that will impact on schools across England. When will that assessment be put to the House?

Just this Monday, the Public Accounts Committee heard from headteachers who are desperately trying to keep providing an excellent education in the face of funding cuts. I hope that the Secretary of State heard the contribution of Kate Davies, headteacher of Darton College in Barnsley, for example. She said that as a result of funding cuts she had had to

“reduce the curriculum offer and cut out the whole of the community team. We have reduced staffing and reduced the leadership team.”

I am sure the Secretary of State heard Tim Gartside, headteacher of Altrincham Grammar School for Boys, say only this morning that the funding cuts that his school faces are so severe that he only has three options left: reduce the curriculum, increase class sizes, or ask parents to make a cash contribution to keep the school running. What is the Secretary of State’s plan? Does she want schools to cut subjects, increase class sizes, or make parents foot the bill? Is she not worried that routinely requesting termly cash donations from parents risks discriminating against low-income families and schools in lower-income areas? We have heard similar from not only the representatives of teachers, but unions that represent teaching assistants, such as Unison and the GMB. If she thinks assistants are a soft target for cuts, she is much mistaken.

Evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation shows that teaching assistants have a particularly important impact on the literacy and numeracy of pupils on free

[Angela Rayner]

school meals and on those who were previously struggling—the very pupils that the Government said only earlier this week needed extra support if we are to increase skills and productivity. Teaching assistant pay has declined so far since the Government abolished the school staff negotiating body that many are now on the minimum wage. There are literally no more cuts to make to pay. Any further cuts will hit teaching staff directly.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): I have in my constituency a big secondary school that gets the pupil premium for 67% of its kids, and it believes that it will lose £300,000. Does my hon. Friend believe that that lives up to the Prime Minister's rhetoric?

**Angela Rayner:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that the reason the debate has been over-subscribed is that many hon. Members from both sides of the House have realised that the national funding formula and the cuts faced by our schools are taking them over the edge and building a crisis in our school system.

The Conservative party's promise was not to spend more on schools; it was to spend more on each pupil, in real terms. Yet the Government will cut per-pupil spending. Under Labour Governments, education spending increased by 4.7% per year. The fact of the matter is quite simple: the Secretary of State and her party entered government on a manifesto that pledged to protect per-pupil funding. That promise is being broken.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I have noticed over the past two years that the Opposition seem to have an awful lot of money to spend, and the hon. Lady is obviously suggesting spending more. Does she accept the analysis performed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies of the Labour and Conservative manifestos, which effectively said that the two parties' commitments to investment in education came to exactly the same figure?

**Angela Rayner:** The difference between the Labour and Conservative manifestos is that when Labour was in power, in 1997, 2001 and 2005, our manifesto pledged to increase spending on education, and we delivered on that. It is the Conservative Government who are not delivering on their promises. Government Members should hold them to account.

Instead of proper funding for our schools and investment in our future, we have seen years of regressive tax giveaways to the wealthiest, and now the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have threatened to turn Britain into an offshore tax haven for billionaires—a bargain-basement economy that loses billions of pounds in tax revenues each and every year. The Government are faced with choices, and time and again they make the wrong decision.

I know that every Member, on both sides of the House, will want every child in their constituency and in our country to get the best possible start in life, but if the Government do not change their course, that simply will not be possible. So today is the chance for the Secretary of State to tell us whether she will keep

her manifesto pledge and commit to provide the real-term increase in school budgets that was promised. If she will not, I call on all Members of the House to send a clear message today: that we will accept nothing but the best possible start in life for every child in our country.

4.33 pm

**The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):** I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and add:

"shares the strong commitment of the Government to raising school standards and building a country that works for everyone; and welcomes proposals set out in the Government's open schools national funding formula stage two consultation to move to a fair and consistent national funding formula for schools to ensure every child is fairly funded, wherever in England they live, to protect funding for deprived pupils and recognise the particular needs of pupils with low prior attainment."

Members on both sides of the House can agree that we want to deliver a world-class education system that gives every young person the chance to make the most of their talents, no matter what their background or where they come from. Indeed, the true value of an excellent education is that it can open up opportunity and support young people to reach their true potential. For me, education was certainly the route to my having a much better life than my parents had.

We are keeping our promises and our record in government speaks for itself. We now see 1.8 million more children in good or outstanding schools than in 2010. We are keeping our promise by protecting the core schools budget in real terms over this Parliament. The shadow Secretary of State talked about what parents want in schools, but what they do not want in schools is what the previous Labour Government left them with: children leaving school without the literacy, numeracy and qualifications they need; and children leaving school thinking that they had strong grades when in fact what they were seeing was grade inflation. We have steadily sought to change that and to improve our education system. Many young people now leave our education system in a much better place to achieve success in their future life.

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): The right hon. Lady will be aware that the Public Accounts Committee, of which I am a member, heard from the permanent secretary, Jonathan Slater, on Monday in our session on the National Audit Office report to which my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) referred. That report does acknowledge what the Secretary of State says about a real-terms increase in the overall budget, but because there are more pupils than was envisaged, there will be an 8% reduction in per-pupil funding. Does she agree with the NAO report and the acknowledgment of her permanent secretary to that effect?

**Justine Greening:** The NAO report makes it very clear that there are cost pressures, which I shall talk about later on in my speech. It also makes it clear that there is significant scope for efficiency in our school system. Although we are raising standards in many schools—nearly nine out of 10 schools are now rated as good or outstanding—many young people are still not achieving the necessary standard in our education system.

**John Redwood:** I welcome my right hon. Friend's decision on fairer funding. Does she agree that schools in areas such as mine that were at the bottom of the pile under the previous Government's formula need quite a step up over the next few years because they were very badly done by?

**Justine Greening:** I do agree. We want every child to have the same chance to do as well as possible no matter where they grow up in our country or, indeed, where they start from academically. That is why we must ensure that the resources going into the system reflect our high ambitions for every child wherever they grow up, and that they are distributed to that effect. It is because of this Government's economic policy, which has seen jobs, growth and the careful management of public finances, that we have been able to protect the core schools budget in real terms over the course of this Parliament. In fact, our core schools investment is the largest on record.

**Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):** David Cameron promised that the funding per pupil would be protected but, as we have heard, that is not happening. In my constituency, funding per pupil is being reduced further as a result of the formula. Why is David Cameron's promise being broken?

**Justine Greening:** It is not. We are protecting funding per pupil as well. On apportioning funding fairly between schools, we know that it is time to look at the school funding formula to ensure that we rectify the current unfair and outdated system, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) set out. At the moment, funding is not distributed evenly across our country and does not take account of pupil needs. For example, a school in Sutton receives £75 in extra funding for each pupil with English as a second language, but in Tower Hamlets that figure is £3,548. We know that a primary school pupil who is eligible for free school meals and who has English as an additional language attracts £4,219 in East Sussex, but just down the road in Brighton and Hove, that same child would attract £5,813 for their school. We know that a secondary class of 30 children with no additional needs attracts £112,100 of funding in Staffordshire, but £122,500 of funding in Stoke-on-Trent. That is a difference of £10,400 for one class.

We know that parents and families see that unfairness playing out for their children, and it is simply untenable to say that these historical imbalances and differences in how we fund our children across the country are something that we should accept. No parent should have to put up with such disparity. I hear the shadow Secretary of State say that she does not like our proposed funding formula, but it is subject to consultation. I have actually extended the consultation period from 12 weeks, which was the longest period ever for such a consultation, to 14 weeks, because this is complicated. It is important that we have a measured, proportionate debate around the right way to proceed with the funding formula. What is absent from Opposition Members' speeches is any suggestion of a better way of doing things. When the shadow Minister wraps up the debate, I will be interested to hear whether Labour has any alternative to the national funding formula—or any other education policy for that matter. We are right to be taking action.

**James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con):** Small primary schools in my constituency very much welcome the fact that sparsity has been taken into account. They think that they have a Government who understand the needs of the countryside.

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The formula recognises that different schools face different costs, particularly in rural areas, so the sparsity factor recognises that rural schools often have a higher cost base. That sits alongside a lump-sum element that is built into the formula to make sure that schools have the money that they need to be able to function effectively. Colleagues in rural seats will recognise that small rural schools have gained an average of 1.3% under the formula. Primary schools in sparse communities will gain 5.3% on average.

**Clive Efford:** There was a manifesto commitment to increase school spending per capita, but secondary schools in Greenwich face the prospect of having to make on average £1 million savings between now and 2019, with primary schools saving more than £200,000 each. Some 74 out of 77 schools face those cuts. Is that consistent with what the Conservative party told parents in my borough before the election?

**Justine Greening:** We said that we would protect the core schools budget in real terms, and that is exactly what we are doing. In relation to the hon. Gentleman's local community, the change in the funding formula partly reflects the fact that, for a long time, we have used deprivation data that are simply out of date. It is important that we use up-to-date deprivation factors. For example, in 2005, 28% of children in London were on free school meals. That percentage has now fallen to 17%. It is right that we make sure that we have consistent investment for children from deprived communities, because that is where the attainment gap has opened up. It is also important that funding is spread fairly using up-to-date information.

**Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab):** When I was a schoolteacher under the Thatcher Government, I remember my school running out of paper in about February. A colleague and I had to go into the attic of the library and tear pages out of books from the 1970s so that our children could write on them. I remember wondering how we could expect children to write in those circumstances. Is the Secretary of State proud of that record, and what does she think that the scale of these cuts will do to staff morale in schools up and down the country?

**Justine Greening:** I was actually at school during that time period, and I felt that Oakwood comprehensive gave me a great start in life that set me up to be able, hopefully, to make a meaningful contribution to both the economy and my local community.

We are introducing the national funding formula. I accept that it is complex and challenging, and there is a reason why such a thing has not been done for a long time: it is difficult to ensure that we get it just right. That is why we are having a longer consultation. We have provided all the details so that colleagues can see how their local communities will be affected, and then respond.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): In my constituency, which already has one of the lowest-funded education authorities, two thirds of schools will receive a cut and a third will receive a maximum increase of 0.3%. That situation will undoubtedly lead to teacher losses and probably school closures. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to look at the situation? This might be only a consultation, but the proposal needs a radical overhaul.

**Justine Greening:** I recognise my hon. Friend's concerns. I am happy to talk to him one to one about his local community, as I have done with other colleagues. We are undertaking the consultation so that we can ensure that we get the new formula right. It is important that the formula works effectively on the ground. Alongside it, we will make sure that we protect the funding for deprived communities so that we can use that mechanism to tackle the attainment gap. We have also made sure that an element of our formula follows children who start from further behind, for whatever reason. Low prior attainment is properly addressed in the formula to make sure that if a child needs additional investment to help them to catch up, wherever they are in the country, that investment is there.

The second stage of the consultation on the funding formula runs until 22 March. We want to hear from as many school governors, schools, local authorities and parents as possible. I know that colleagues on both sides of the House will also want to contribute. As I said, we have put a lot of data alongside the consultation because we want to ensure that people have the information that they need to be able to respond. The transparency that the new formula will give us also means that we will have much more informed debates in this House about how we want to fund our schools, and the relative balance we want between core funding, deprivation funding and low prior attainment funding, as well as issues such as sparsity.

**Nick Herbert** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I strongly support my right hon. Friend in seeking to achieve fair funding, which is absolutely the right thing to do. However, there will be little help for secondary schools in my constituency, and the primary schools will actually lose out. How can that be right, given that West Sussex is already the worst-funded shire authority? Will she undertake to have another look at the draft allocation before it is finalised?

**Justine Greening:** My right hon. Friend will want to contribute to the consultation. It is important that we hear from as many colleagues, and indeed schools, from across the country as possible. As I said, we have put out a lot of additional information so that we can have an informed debate in the House, and these proceedings form part of that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Justine Greening:** I will make a little more progress because I know that many Members want to have their say on behalf of their local communities.

I want to move on to the broader cost pressures that schools are facing. Many of those pressures actually come from steps that we have taken, for example by introducing the apprenticeship levy. That levy will benefit millions of young people in the coming years, but it will

also benefit schools through the training and development of existing staff. We have also introduced the national living wage, which benefits low-paid workers in schools and other organisations, and that was the right thing to do.

My Department has a role to play in supporting schools across the country to drive greater efficiencies. We have analysed the cost bases of different schools that operate in similar circumstances. As the National Audit Office report sets out, we believe that efficiencies can be made.

**Victoria Borwick** (Kensington) (Con): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way; I appreciate that this is a very busy debate. I want to speak up briefly for London. I need an assurance from her—I am sure that she has touched on this—because of the negative effect that the reform of the funding formula may have on schools in London, some of which face intolerable pressures.

**Justine Greening:** Under the proposed formula on which we are consulting, London schools, purely because of the underlying cost pressures of running schools in London and the deprivation levels in their areas—although they have reduced, they are still comparatively high—will still receive, on average, 30% more. My hon. Friend will of course want to speak up on behalf of her community. This is about ensuring that we fund the right amount by using current data on deprivation, rather than data that are five or 10 years old.

We believe that the Department can work with schools to help them to make the best use of their resources. I want every single pound that we put into our schools system to be used efficiently to improve standards and have the maximum impact for pupils. We know that we can work with schools to ensure that they can use this record funding to make the maximum impact. Indeed, I would point to the situation in York. It has been one of the lowest funded authorities in the country, yet 92% of its schools are good or outstanding. We therefore know that we can make progress in education while making efficiencies.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I very much support what the Secretary of State is trying to do, since Wiltshire is one of the worst-funded education authorities in the country. However, will she look again at the sparsity factor, because school governors are currently crunching the figures, and some of them are saying that they worry about the viability of small schools in rural locations being undermined, which clearly will not be the intention of the Secretary of State?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Indeed, we looked at the formula to ensure that we did introduce a sparsity factor. Not all local authorities actually had a sparsity factor in their local formula, but we are now making sure that it is there for every single school. We have also introduced the lump-sum formula.

We got to the stage in developing the formula where the only way we could continue to improve it was to ask people what they thought about it, which is why the consultation is so important. It is important that we get

the formula right, but I recognise that this complicated formula has to work for schools around the country that are in very different situations, which is why the debate is so important. Following the phase 1 consultation, it is right that we steadily take the time to hold a phase 2 consultation to help us to finalise a formula that can work and have real longevity.

We will work with schools to help them to improve their efficiency. We have already published a school buying strategy that sees us launching an efficiency website. We are putting in place national deals to help to ensure that schools get the best deals on things such as utilities. We are putting in place buying and digital hubs so that strong procurement teams are close to schools to give them advice when they need it. We are also setting up school business manager networks so that we work with the people who are driving efficiencies in schools to share best practice and improve performance. Over time, I believe that we really can take some steps forward on that.

We are making sure that record funding is going into our schools, we are making sure that our curriculum is stronger than ever before, and we are actually turning out young people with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful. That is not the only part of our education policy; we are also investing in apprenticeships and radically reforming technical education. We are going to make sure that this Government end up being able to say that every young person, wherever they grow up, is able to do their best and reach their full potential. I hope that, over the course of the debate, colleagues will recognise that that is the strategy that we will deliver.

4.52 pm

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): I am sure that, in her characterisation of different education authorities, the Secretary of State would say that Slough is unfairly generously funded, but I want to speak about the hundreds of pupils in Slough who get no funding at all for their education. You might think, "How can that be?", but this is a very serious issue, which is not properly addressed by the Secretary of State's proposed fair funding formula.

There is swift growth in areas such as Slough. For years, we have been in the top 10 authorities for growth in pupil numbers, and we do not get paid until 18 months later for extra children who arrive after the October census date. Locally, that is dealt with by taking a top slice of the dedicated schools grant of £1 million or £1.5 million to fund bulge classes in existing schools.

Obviously, other authorities face churn and growth in pupil numbers, but in most places the number of additional pupils is not particularly significant, and new arrivals after October tend to be balanced by departures. Also, most of the extra children are born in families who are already there, so they apply at the usual time for schools.

That does not happen in Slough. When I asked schools about the numbers, the results were stark. One primary school had 13 children leave, but it had 23 new starters: one was completely new to English, others had English as a second language, and two more from overseas start next week. One secondary school estimates that the pupil formula for the 13 extra pupils who arrived after the census date in 2015-16 would have been worth £49,937; in the current year, the figure is £39,595. Those figures have gone down partly because

the school has been subject to the minimum income formula, which I call the maximum cut formula, because that is the case for the secondary schools in Slough.

A primary school that opened two extra classes in November 2015 to accommodate children new to the town now has 63 pupils above its standard number. The bulge classes are funded by the top-slicing of the dedicated schools grant, but that money only lasts for a year, and the extra pupils will not be funded by the DFE until next year, so this year two whole classes are being educated in one primary school with no capitation funding. We are not talking about children who are easy to teach, and there are the children who arrive from—

**Alison McGovern:** My right hon. Friend is making a unique and important point about places like Slough. Does she agree that this shows that the Government are yet to properly listen?

**Fiona Mactaggart:** Indeed. There is a hint in the new funding formula that they might do something about this, but no clarity about what. This is absolutely urgent, because the per-pupil comparisons between different authorities are not accurate. Places like Slough and London that have historically been quite well funded and are facing the largest cuts are the places with the largest numbers of pupils who are not being paid for at all.

The Minister for School Standards knows about the massive problems we face in teacher recruitment. Over the past five months, five geography teacher posts in Slough have been advertised, with not one single applicant. The Migration Advisory Committee will not make the teaching of English, where we have a real shortage, a job that can be applied for by teachers overseas. We are in a crisis, and the Department is not responding to the real needs of the community that I have the privilege to represent. I really want answers on this now.

4.56 pm

**Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): The very fact that we are having this debate is proof that there has been a huge step forward, because there is a proposal on the table for fairer funding. We should salute the Government for getting this far. We are obviously in a consultation process. The Education Committee is part of that process, in a sense, because we will be seeing the Minister for School Standards shortly, and we will expand on many of my points then.

In a funding situation where schools in a county like Gloucestershire are, in effect, no further forward and some are actually going backwards, there are clearly issues to explore. One of those is the need to lift the baseline, which can be done in a number of ways; I will suggest three. First, we must look at the deprivation assessment in line with the pupil premium, because the two things are clearly related, and it would be wise to consider the impact of one in the context of the other. That provides scope to lift the baseline.

The second area is small schools. We all want to support small schools, but we might need to look at the ratio between what we think of as a small school and a slightly larger school. The use of statistics, as we all know, can have unpredictable and unintended consequences, and that is possibly the case with small schools. The

[Neil Carmichael]

third area is recalibrating the 3% floor, which could give authorities that have had historical problems with underfunding some way out of that.

I know those three ideas are complicated in the context of these reforms, but we need to demonstrate that we really are committed to providing fair funding. If we think carefully about the impact of the various measures I have outlined, in conjunction with the wider question of the objectives of the new funding system, we may well deliver for our children exactly what we want.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Neil Carmichael:** No, I am not going to give way, because too many people wish to contribute.

In an ideal world, we would want to spend more on education. When the Government continue to grow the economy, as I am sure they will, with or without Brexit, that will be achieved. But we have to be realistic about the size of the cake and make sure that everybody has an appropriate slice.

4.59 pm

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The Department has produced a school-by-school analysis of the impact of the proposed funding formula. For schools in Liverpool, the results are worrying; 80% are forecast to lose funding, and we are set to lose around £1.3 million from the schools block in the first year, 2018-19. When the formula is fully implemented, unless it changes, that will increase to slightly more than £3 million. I know that consultation is still under way, but it is very important that schools in my constituency know what is happening as soon as possible so that they can plan their budgets.

I welcome the fact that the Liverpool settlement will mean more money for high-needs funding. There is, however, concern from the council and schools that that high-needs funding will not be available in time to alleviate the cuts in the schools block. What timescale do the Government envisage for full implementation of the new formula, particularly the high-needs funding element?

As we know, early years education is vital to pupils' life chances. I have two nursery schools in my constituency, Ellergreen and East Prescott Road, both of which have been rated outstanding by Ofsted. Both are very concerned about the Government's plans for nursery school funding. I seek assurances from the Minister that long-term funding for our nursery schools will be secure, so that they can continue their excellent work of providing quality early years education.

When I saw the motion for this debate, I wrote to the heads of schools in my constituency, asking them for their concerns. Blackmoor Park Infant School in West Derby told me about its need for repairs. It is using four mobile classrooms, which are three years beyond their shelf life. The headteacher told me that the school does not have enough money to replace them, because of the financial pressures that it faces.

**Alison McGovern:** Like my hon. Friend, I wrote to local schools. Does he agree that given the importance of the subject, it is unsurprising that so many people want to speak in this debate?

**Stephen Twigg:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The financial pressures that the schools told me about are highlighted in the Opposition motion. Secondary schools are also feeling the pinch. The head of St Edward's College in my constituency told me that

"small budget lines are being nibbled away and in the end this is going to have a massive cumulative impact."

The headteacher of St Cecilia's Infant School told me that she is worried about the impact of budget cuts on staffing levels, particularly with regard to support staff.

Pupils with special needs present particular challenges for school budgets. The head of Croxteth Community Primary School raised with me the issue of educating those whose needs are more challenging and complex. The headteacher of Redbridge High School, a very good special school in my constituency, is worried that the imposition of a national funding model for children with additional needs has taken away local flexibility to move money around. Another of the fantastic special schools in my constituency is Bank View High School. The headteacher, who is concerned about the impact of cuts elsewhere in the public sector, said to me:

"How are we able to make our pupils effective members of society, who are able to be employed, if support agencies such as CAMHS are also having their funding reduced?"

**Richard Graham:** The hon. Gentleman is making very reasonable points on behalf of schools in his constituency. Does he recognise that it is fundamentally unfair for small cities, such as my constituency of Gloucester, to receive approximately 50% less per-pupil funding than the metropolitan city area that he represents, and that it is right for the Secretary of State to address that?

**Stephen Twigg:** I certainly recognise that it is hugely challenging to ensure that there is fair funding for all schools in all parts of the country, but the cuts that I am referring to, and the cuts that my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State talked about, are not to do with the national funding formula. I addressed it because it is an important issue, and because it is contained in the Government's amendment to the motion. The motion is about the funding pressures that schools face before the implementation of the national funding formula, and we need to address that as well.

**Gloria De Piero** (Ashfield) (Lab): Like my hon. Friend, I consulted headteachers in my constituency. Jackie Sainsbury, the headteacher of Brookhill Leys Primary School, where 55% of kids are on the pupil premium, said, "How am I going to find £230,000 out of next year's budget?" Do the Government not have a duty to help headteachers such as Mrs Sainsbury?

**Stephen Twigg:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Schools across the country in constituencies in all parts of the country are facing these challenges. In the end, my view is that investment in education should be a priority, and we should be able to agree to that on a cross-party basis.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stephen Twigg:** No, I am running out of time.

I urge the Minister to listen to the concerns of schools in Liverpool and elsewhere, so that school budgets are protected. It is vital that schools have the money they need to deliver the quality education that children and young people deserve.

5.5 pm

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): Last week, I was fortunate enough to secure a debate in Westminster Hall on the funding for schools in Devon, and it was well supported by my colleagues from across the county. In that debate, several of us—including my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter), who cannot be in his place this afternoon—made it clear that unless there were some changes, we would find it extremely difficult to support the Government.

It was therefore with some interest that I was made aware of this debate, and I thought it would be an occasion—in my case, a very rare one—when I would not be able to support the Government. However, I have studied the motion and the amendment carefully, and having heard the opening remarks of the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), I have to say that the Whips can relax, because I am now more convinced than ever that I will be able to support the Government amendment.

I know that the hon. Lady was not in this place during Labour's rule, but I would say gently to her that had she not been asleep under a tree like Ferdinand the Bull, she might have noticed that during the period from 1997 to 2010 a Labour Government exacerbated the educational funding gap between rural and urban areas. The team we now have in the Department, with the Secretary of State and her Minister for School Standards, are excellent. They inherited an extraordinarily difficult situation, and they are attempting to resolve it in as fair a way as possible. *[Interruption.]* I know the hon. Lady, who is chuntering from the Opposition Front Bench, was not in the House in 2010, but if she had been, she would have realised, as did many of her colleagues—this fact is worth remembering—that the Exchequer was left completely empty. Labour blew the economy, and they blew their credibility. It was not until 2015 that there was some rebalancing, when the coalition Government provided a much-needed boost in funding for more rural schools.

I would say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that there is currently a consultation on this issue, and it is one that I and my colleagues in the south-west feel passionately about. I am grateful to the Minister for School Standards, who I understand has agreed to meet a delegation of headteachers from Devon secondary and primary schools. Our situation is very bleak at the moment. Historically, Devon has been one of the lowest-funded education authorities in the country, and when we were told there would be a reassessment, we assumed that it would benefit us after all these years. Following all the campaigning we have done for a fairer deal over the decades, we did not think that the result of the consultation would mean that we were worse off. If implemented, the national funding formula proposals will result in 62% of Devon schools gaining, 37% losing

out and 1% remaining the same. The proposals will reduce Devon County Council's overall schools funding by £500,000 for the first year—but more of that on another occasion.

5.8 pm

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): After seven years of Lib Dem and Tory Government cuts to my community, the Government have failed to meet their deficit reduction target and they are back doing all that they know how to do, which is to make further cuts, this time targeting children in my constituency. I do not believe children should suffer for the Government's failure. Southwark schools perform above the national average, but they face specific challenges, including increasing class sizes as a result of our growing population. I was therefore surprised to find my borough targeted with £5 million in cuts by this Government.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend accept that that will add to the recruitment crisis within the teaching body?

**Neil Coyle:** Absolutely, especially in London.

My constituency is even more badly affected than the borough of Southwark. On the Department's statistics, my schools will lose £1,050 per child per year. They are the worst affected schools anywhere in country, but the Government have claimed that this is fair. There are 35 schools in my constituency, of which the ones losing out are Alfred Salter, Globe Academy, Walworth Academy, Bacon's College, Boutcher, Charlotte Sharman, City of London Academy, Cobourg, Compass, Crampton, English Martyrs, Friars, Harris Academy, Notre Dame, Peter Hills, Redriff, Riverside, Robert Browning, all three St Joseph's, Snowfields, Southwark Park, St George's, St John's Catholic, St Jude's, St Michael's, St John's Walworth, St Paul's, St Saviour's and St Olave's, Cathedral, Surrey Square, Tower Bridge, Townsend and Victory. If anyone was keeping a tally, they will know that that was a list of 35 schools. Every single school in my constituency will lose out, and not one school will benefit, under the Government's proposals.

**Stephen Timms:** Does my hon. Friend agree that if the proposal of the Chair of the Education Committee to remove the 3% protection were implemented, the position for schools in his constituency and many others would be a great deal worse?

**Neil Coyle:** I completely agree.

The cuts proposed by the Government have led parents to get in touch with me to say, "What is it about Southwark children this Government do not like?" Why is my constituency being targeted for cuts? These cuts will impede the progress that schools have made, prevent them from managing the challenges they face and damage the prospects of the children and families I serve, but whom this Government are failing.

Of course, the Department's figures do not include costs that schools cannot ignore: pension contributions, the apprenticeship levy and higher national insurance contributions. The National Audit Office figures suggest that the borough of Southwark will lose £12.5 million by 2018-19 and that schools in my constituency alone will lose £6.9 million.

[Neil Coyle]

If Ministers push forward with these plans, they will fail schools, fail teachers and fail families and children, and the Secretary of State will undermine parents' aspirations for their children, undermine future opportunities for Southwark children and undermine the prospects for this country overall. The Government must rethink this blatant attack on opportunity and stand by their manifesto commitment.

5.11 pm

**Victoria Atkins** (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I welcome the consultation and the review because my constituency will see an increase of 2.6% or £1.3 million. Forty two of my 54 schools will see an increase, which is 77% of them. Some of the increases are significant. New York Primary School will see an increase of 11.4%. North Cockerington Church of England Primary School will see an increase of 10.2%. The theme that runs through the increases is that these schools were historically underfunded by the Labour Government. This Government recognise the challenges that rurality and sparsity present for local schools.

**Rebecca Pow:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Victoria Atkins:** I will not, thank you.

Louth and Horncastle is an extremely rural constituency, with less than one person per hectare. Some of the wards on the coast are among the 3% most deprived communities in the country. They deserve a better funding deal and that is what the Government are trying to achieve. This is not about the Tory shires as some, although not all, Opposition Members like to paint it. It is about making funding fairer than it has been historically.

I echo the concerns of colleagues that the laudable principle of including sparsity must work on the ground. The Minister for School Standards has agreed to meet me to discuss individual schools, for which I am grateful, to ensure that the principle applies in practice. I recognise that the 12 schools in my constituency with decreases face a challenge. I do not underestimate that and look forward to discussing it with the Minister.

There has been much talk among Opposition Members regarding cuts. When I hear that the education of children in the Leader of the Opposition's constituency is funded to the tune of more than £6,000 per student, whereas in Lincolnshire the figure is £4,379 per student, I simply do not understand how Opposition Members can claim that that is fair and not deserving of review. I say that understanding only too well the challenges in education.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend making such an important speech. She is highlighting the fact that schools such as the Judd and Tonbridge Grammar in Kent, which have such great reputations, are massively underfunded. This settlement will go some way towards making the situation fairer.

**Victoria Atkins:** I am extremely grateful. This is about making sure that the cake is cut just a little more fairly than it is at the moment.

I will make one final point because I am conscious of time. I also apologise to colleagues from whom I have not accepted interventions. May I thank the teachers, the governors and the staff of my 54 local schools? I look forward to meeting all of them before the general election. That is my promise and I will try to keep it. I love it when they come to the House of Commons because, if nothing else, bringing our schools into this place to show them how democracy works is how we get young people interested in our democracy.

5.14 pm

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Schools already face real-terms cuts to their budgets, and now, for every single one of the 26 schools in my constituency, the new national funding formula represents a further blow of the axe. For every pupil in the city of Nottingham, funding is being cut by an average of £650, while more affluent areas are expected to gain. This is not just bad for children in Nottingham; it is bad for our country and our society. According to Ofsted's latest annual report, there are now twice as many inadequate secondary schools in the midlands and the north as in the south and the east. Sir Michael Wilshaw has rightly warned:

"Regions that are already less prosperous...are in danger of adding a learning deficit to their economic one."

I support the principle of fair funding, but that cannot be at the expense of children in cities such as Nottingham, where there are high levels of need and poverty and where we already face the challenge of closing the gap in educational outcomes between children from poorer homes and those in wealthier ones.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): Will the hon. Lady confirm that Nottingham schools have failed for decades under Labour-run councils?

**Lilian Greenwood:** Secondary schools in my constituency are not the responsibility of Nottingham City Council; they are academies, and sadly some of them are still not improving. We already face intense funding pressures. The Institute for Fiscal Studies tells us that all schools face an 8% real-terms cut to their budgets as a result of higher national insurance contributions, increases in employer pension contributions and unfunded national pay rises. The National Audit Office has provided evidence of growing financial pressures, particularly in secondary schools: 59% of maintained schools and 61% of academies were in deficit last year.

The NAO also concluded that the Department's approach meant that schools

"could make spending choices that put educational outcomes at risk".

Local headteachers have told me what that will mean: fewer teachers, less pastoral support, bigger classes, more contact time for teachers, less choice at key stages 4 and 5. The added enrichment—the breakfast clubs, the school trips, the reading sessions for parents, the extra-curricular sports, culture and arts activities—will be the first to go, yet these are the very things that can make all the difference to children growing up in poverty.

**Rebecca Pow:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Lilian Greenwood:** I am afraid not.

I know that Nottingham has schools that need to do better, but it is some of these very schools that are losing out under the Government's new national funding formula. Learning is not a matter of chance. The quality of school leadership and teaching is critical, yet there is a national headteacher shortage and a teacher recruitment crisis. As the Social Market Foundation found, schools in deprived areas are more likely to have fewer experienced teachers, teachers without formal teaching qualifications or degrees in relevant subjects—[*Interruption.*] I cannot hear what the Secretary of State is chuntering about—and a higher teacher turnover than schools elsewhere.

These latest funding changes will make school improvement harder not easier. The Secretary of State and Minister say they want more good and outstanding schools. It is a noble ambition. It is what I want for every child in my constituency, and I am proud of the work that Nottingham's educational improvement board is doing to try to make it a reality, but creating more good schools requires more than ambition; actions speak louder than words, and right now actions must mean adequate funding.

5.18 pm

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It is a great pleasure to have caught your eye so early in the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to speak in favour of the amendment and against the motion.

The motion is wrong in fact—this is a novel point, so it is great to make it now—because it refers to “school funding cuts”. That is wrong as a matter of fact. This year alone, the Government are spending more than £40 billion on schools up and down this land, which is more than any other Government. There was a time when Labour was in favour of fairer funding. As recently as March 2010, the then Labour Government were looking at a national funding formula, but as ever it has taken a Conservative Government to grasp the nettle.

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that when Labour tried to introduce the funding formula, most of the per capita spending, which was £4,000, came from private finance initiatives?

**Michael Tomlinson:** I am very grateful for that intervention. Indeed, if we look at the per-pupil funding figures, we find that that is where it is most important. The hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) mentioned fairness and deprivation. In his constituency, pupils receive £6,450 per pupil; in my constituency in Poole and in Dorset, they receive £4,100 and £4,200 per pupil.

**Neil Coyle:** One academy head told me that as a result of current funding pressures and class size growth, he is having to cut art and tech classes. That is today; that is the “efficiency saving” about which the Secretary of State speaks. How will a cut of £100,000 under the Government proposals help?

**Michael Tomlinson:** The point I am making about per-pupil funding is one of fairness. If this were done on areas of deprivation or on an index of deprivation, I could look my constituents in the eye and say, “That is why you are receiving, on average, £2,000 per pupil less than you otherwise would.”

**Rebecca Pow:** I thank my hon. Friend for letting me get in at last. Does he agree that it is grossly unfair that the pupils of Somerset have had, on average, £2,000 per pupil less than the national average? We are very grateful to the Government for increasing funding to Taunton Deane by 4.5%. This will make it fair, when historically things have been grossly unfair.

**Michael Tomlinson:** I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, who is right to highlight the unfairness. If there were a rhyme or reason or an explanation, and if it had been done on the basis of an index of deprivation, I could support it, but it is not. It is based on historical anomalies. That is why I wholeheartedly support the principle of fairer funding.

I want to make two points about the detail of the fairer funding. First, the schools that are right down at the bottom, in local authorities such as Poole and Dorset, should not, I suggest, see any reduction in funding. When I respond to the consultation, which I very much look forward to doing, I will make that point to the Minister.

My second point relates to grammar schools. I warmly welcome what the Government are doing in their move towards grammar schools, giving our parents a greater choice. We know that this is popular and that parents want to make the choice that is best for them and their children. I welcome the Government's direction of travel, but it does seem odd that 103 out of 163 grammar schools appear to be losing out under this formula.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I echo all that my hon. Friend is saying. Similarly, in Wiltshire, we have seen a 2.6% increase, but the two grammar schools are the two out of the 10 schools in the constituency that are suffering, so this needs some further examination.

**Michael Tomlinson:** I am grateful for that. I see the Minister for School Standards in his place and I know that he is listening carefully. I suggest that a delegation of Members of Parliament should go to see him—I know that, of all things, that will gladden his heart. He has been very receptive in the past, and I know that he will be again in the future. That is why I support not only the principle of fairer funding, but the fact that we have a chance at the second stage of the consultation running all the way up to 22 March. I see the Minister nodding, so I shall take it as an open invitation to come and knock on his door, with a delegation from the cathedral city of Salisbury and from Mid Dorset and North Poole. I greatly look forward to that meeting. The principle is right; let us now get the detail right.

5.23 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I make no apology for talking about schools in my constituency, which is the eighth worst affected in the country, while the neighbouring constituency, Chelsea and Fulham, which makes up the rest of the borough, is the seventh worst affected. All 48 schools will lose significant sums, and the borough loses £2.8 million. According to the excellent work done by the National Union of Teachers and the other teaching unions, that represents £796 per pupil per year, or 15%.

[*Andy Slaughter*]

When I look at where the money is going from, I find it particularly objectionable. Wormholt Park is the highest-losing primary school with £65,000 gone; while Burlington Danes Academy is the highest-losing secondary school. Both are excellent schools with excellent staff, but they are in two of the most deprived wards not just in my constituency and London but in the country: College Park and Old Oak, and Wormholt and White City. What do we expect? What sort of message does this send out to the pupils, parents and teachers of those schools, who are working hard to try to ensure that the excellent standard of education continues against the odds?

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): Westminster's is a mixed story, but a number of schools, including those that are among the 3% most deprived in the country, stand to lose substantially. Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the fact that the Government are finding resources for a number of free schools that have been unable to fill places? When the Government talk about efficiency, could they not question the efficiency of that?

**Andy Slaughter:** My hon. Friend is right. It constitutes a triumph of ideology over practicality.

Let me quote what has been said by two of the people in my borough who know what they are talking about. The head of the borough's schools forum, who is also the principal of one of our excellent local secondary schools, has said:

"If schools' budgets are cut, at a time when costs are increasingly significantly, it can only have a negative effect on the education that we are able to deliver.

We will not be able to employ the number of high quality teachers and leaders that we need to be able to maintain standards."

The council cabinet member responsible for these matters has said:

"It's clear that the government is trying to redistribute a pot of funding that is just too small. Cutting funding hardest in London, rather than giving all schools the money they need for teachers, buildings and equipment, is divisive and just plain wrong."

That is absolutely right. According to the National Audit Office, there are extra cost pressures amounting to £2 billion across the country, but London is far and away the worst affected region. It contains eight of the 10 biggest losers in the country, which are in most boroughs and most constituencies—although not in every one: I know that the constituency of the Minister for London is the 12th biggest gainer. I find that particularly objectionable because London is a success story, and success is being punished.

From the London Challenge to the London Schools Excellence Fund, ever since the days of the Inner London Education Authority, we have prized education, particularly for people from deprived parts of London. We see it as an opportunity. It is a shame that a London Member, the Secretary of State, is overseeing this denuding of resources from London schools.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I am sure that my hon. Friend has received letters from teachers expressing great concern about the implications of this. Surely the logic of the argument is that if there

is to be fair funding for schools, funding should not be taken away, but should be increased in other areas. The Government are pursuing a ridiculous policy.

**Andy Slaughter:** I entirely agree. This is a very crude exercise, and it is also a political exercise. I find some of the triumphalism that we have seen on the Conservative Benches extremely objectionable.

Early one morning last year, my neighbour knocked on my door. When I said, "I have got to go to work"—if you call this work—she said, "This is more important. Will you come round to my children's school? We are having a meeting about the funding formula." So I went to the Good Shepherd primary school, which is in the street next to the one in which I live, and listened to parents and teachers who were both very well informed and very concerned. The same is true of schools throughout my constituency. Real people are having to address real problems, and I am afraid that the Secretary of State's contribution today showed an extraordinary degree of complacency. She knows the problems in our schools, because she is a good constituency Member, and she must address them. This cannot be a levelling down. It cannot be robbing Peter to pay Paul. We must be fair to everyone.

5.28 pm

**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Education has the power to change lives. As the motion recognises, it helps children to fulfil their potential. Like many Members of Parliament, I have campaigned to ensure that my constituency gets its share of funding through a new, fairer funding formula, because it has been historically underfunded. I want to see a formula with a significant element allocated to core funding, to ensure that every school has the funds it needs. Funding for good education is not only important, but necessary.

I want to focus, for a moment, on the implicit suggestion in the motion that it is the Government's funding decisions that are inhibiting children from reaching their full potential. Funding on its own is insufficient to ensure excellence. Let me give two examples. The first relates to early years. In its 2016 report, Ofsted emphasised the success of our early years education. When it came to recommendations, it said not that more money was needed but that parents needed to take up the education opportunities that were already being offered. It reported that 113,000 children who would have benefited from early years were simply not taking up Government-funded places.

**Rebecca Pow:** My hon. Friend is making a very valid point about early years. Does she agree that this is not just about a new fairer funding formula? This Government are putting much money into education, particularly for the new 30 hours of free childcare. Neroche pre-school in my constituency is having a brand-new building built on the back of that money and it is only too grateful to the Government.

**Lucy Frazer:** My hon. Friend makes an important point: it is not just about fairer funding. I am very pleased that my area of East Cambridgeshire was one of the 12 opportunity areas announced last week to get significantly more money—£72 million in total. So this is not just about fairer funding money coming in.

I mentioned that there were two examples, and I want to move on to the second. On secondary education, in the same report Ofsted mentioned that secondary schools in the north and midlands were weaker than those in other areas of the country. It remarked that

“lower performance across these regions cannot be fully accounted for by poverty or by differences in school funding.”

The Ofsted report also stated that leaders and teachers had not set sufficiently high expectations for the behaviour of their pupils, which leads me on to my key point. To raise standards and to allow children to achieve their aspirations, we need to do so much more than provide adequate funding. We need to champion teaching as a vocation. We need to inspire more outstanding teachers to teach. We need to give teachers the respect and autonomy they deserve. We need to support our students in the classroom to enable them to deal with life’s challenges, from helping them with mental health issues to building up their resilience and aspiration. We need to work with industry to identify local skills shortages and to raise standards in our technical education. These go hand in hand with funding, and all these measures have been championed by this Government, whether in the industrial strategy Green Paper announced this week, the Prime Minister’s statement on mental health earlier this month, or the “Educational excellence everywhere” White Paper last year.

Education is a building-block for the future. Good funding is essential, but we need to work together across all Departments to ensure that our children fulfil their potential.

5.32 pm

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): As a former teacher, experienced school governor and parent, I fully understand the value of providing every child with an excellent education. Education changes lives, it empowers individuals, it increases social mobility, and it is the single biggest driver of economic success for a nation. It is right that we pursue high standards and seek to provide the very best education for all the children of this country.

This Government are going about things in the wrong way, however. The new national funding formula will see 98% of schools worse off and demonstrates more than anything else could that the Government are not serious about raising educational standards or about social mobility. My constituency of Burnley, which continues to have some of the highest levels of social deprivation and is in the top five most deprived areas in the whole of Lancashire, will lose £477 for every secondary pupil and £339 for every primary pupil. In the past, the Secretary of State has said that no school would lose more than 1.5% of funding per year under the new formula. How can she square that with projections that my schools will lose 8% on average by 2019?

Even before these cuts, we are already seeing increased class sizes, subjects being dropped from the curriculum, pupils with special educational needs and disabilities losing vital support, and teacher vacancies. I ask the Secretary of State how she believes cutting funding for schools in Burnley will help a whole generation of young people to succeed.

There is nothing fair about funding that is not sufficient. How can it be fair to take educational funding from

schools that are already stretched to breaking point—schools that already go the extra mile to give every child the best possible start in life?

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): The hon. Lady said that 98% of schools will lose, but I understand from the figures that I have that 70% of the hon. Lady’s schools will gain from this new funding formula. Would she like to comment on that?

**Julie Cooper**: I hope that the hon. Gentleman’s figures are correct, but I fear that they are not. My information suggests that they are not. The research that I have done shows that that is not the case.

My schools are already working flat out to ensure that children coping with social and economic deprivation can overcome disadvantage and fulfil their potential, yet those schools are having the rug pulled from under them. Robbing Peter to pay Paul—or robbing Peterborough to help Poole—is not going to help. In my constituency, there has been a concerted effort by the key stakeholders, the schools, the council and businesses to work together to grow the local economy. That has not been easy, but we are making good progress. We are focusing our energies on raising skill levels, confidence and aspiration among young people. Considerable effort has been expended on this, and these funding cuts feel like a kick in the teeth.

Education is the key not just to better life chances for individuals but to our economic success. Ensuring adequate funding is crucial so that every child, wherever they live and whatever their background, can fulfil their potential. As a nation, we know that every citizen matters in the widest possible sense, not least to our economy. Investing in education is an investment in the economy, and failing to do that is short-sighted in the extreme. A Government who talk of increased social mobility and growing a strong economy need to understand that investment in education is absolutely fundamental to those aims.

5.36 pm

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper).

The Secretary of State and her team are to be congratulated. To many Conservative Members, and probably to some Opposition Members, this problem seems almost too large and intractable to wrestle with. However, we are in a consultation process. Of course there will be one or two anomalies and a few little creases will have to be ironed out. There will be unforeseen circumstances that need to be attended to. The scary thing is that those Opposition Members who have spoken so far have been either unable or unwilling to see the inherent unfairness of a system that they not only promoted but fed, either because it was to their advantage to do so or because they had no interest in rural areas.

The Government have been trying to counterbalance the differentials in funding for 2016-17, but when House of Commons Library research shows that Manchester has a per-pupil figure of £4,619 and Doncaster has a figure of £5,281, but the figure for Dorset is £4,240, we know that something has gone wrong. This tells us quite clearly that it is thought that taxpayers in Dorset and their children’s needs are less important than taxpayers

[*Simon Hoare*]

and their children in other areas. There was nothing fair in the funding formula that Labour bequeathed to us. We could have had a knee-jerk reaction, which really would have put the cat among the pigeons, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her predecessor have adopted an incremental approach to try to address and arrest the problem, and they are to be congratulated on that.

I concur with many of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), among others. When we go into our village primary schools, we see the enthusiasm of the teachers, parents, governors and staff in general. We see their enthusiasm for education, but we know that they have been trying to do their work with one hand tied behind their back because they have been penalised for living and working in a rural area.

**Ms Buck:** There is great passion among the teachers in schools such as the Westminster Academy, which has one of the highest proportions of children on free school dinners anywhere in Britain, but that school stands to lose at least £250,000. How is that fair?

**Simon Hoare:** I took over from the hon. Lady as chairman of the governors of Wilberforce primary school many years ago, so I am familiar with the problems facing schools in her constituency, as well as those elsewhere. Perhaps I need to make the point to Opposition Members quite baldly that just because schools that have done very well under an unfair system start to see some rebalancing while the cake is being re-divided, that is not necessarily an argument for saying that there should be no change for those schools that have disproportionately enjoyed funding while those in rural areas have not.

**Rebecca Pow:** Does my hon. Friend agree that many of our rural schools in Somerset and Dorset have been doing so well with the funding they have had? This extra funding might enable them to put in place some of the things that they have not been able to have because there simply has not been enough money to go around.

**Simon Hoare:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Back in the summer, I convened a roundtable of all the headteachers and chairs of governors at my schools. They said that the key thing was the recruitment and retention of teachers, and that the heart of the problem was the inequity in funding and the lack of a formula that recognises rural sparsity and the additional costs that such schools face.

**Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Simon Hoare:** I will not.

I declare an interest, because I have three young daughters at a village primary school in my constituency and—here is the plug—my wonderful wife is the chairman of its parents, teachers and friends association. The hard-working farmer Spencer Mogridge gets up at 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock in the morning to look after his livestock, but he still goes to the PTFA meeting at 7 o'clock in the

evening to organise the school fun run—[HON. MEMBERS: “Were you on the fun run?”] I was not on the fun run. I think the words “fun” and “run” should never be used in the same sentence; it is an oxymoron.

I see such keenness at all levels of the rural educational establishment. That is why people want a fairer funding model that addresses the imbalance, recognises needs, and ensures that the lifeblood of many of our rural communities, which I believe our rural schools are, can continue long into the future.

5.41 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): In recent weeks, the Government have revealed their reforms to the national funding formula. The reforms paint a bleak future for the schools of Bradford, promising stagnant funding allocations that fail to meet increasing pupil demand. The city has faced, and continues to face, difficult times, but it is trying its best to improve standards. This perfect storm of funding cuts will damage Bradford's education system and harm the life chances of our children.

What I fear most is that the reforms mark a determined and intentional culture of underinvestment by this Government in our school system. What do the national funding formula reforms mean for Bradford? Overall, 89% of Bradford's primary schools, secondary schools and academies face cuts to their budgets, with funding for early-years provision set to be cut by £2.4 million, which is more than 6%.

Difficult funding decisions are already being taken in Bradford. In recent weeks, the Bradford schools forum took the difficult decision to divert millions of pounds from the budgets of mainstream schools to help to fund additional school places for pupils with special educational needs. Every child, whether they are learning in a mainstream school or a special school, deserves an excellent education.

Against that woeful financial backdrop, it is not only day-to-day teaching budgets that are becoming ever more constrained. Investing in new provision is becoming less and less viable for our schools system. In recent months, the Prime Minister has said that she wants parity for mental health provision in this country. That must be as true for our young people as it is for the rest of the population. Many believe that mental health provision for our children and young people is in need of urgent improvement.

In response to my recent parliamentary question, the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families said:

“Schools are able to decide on, and make assessments of, the support they provide for their pupils, based on their individual needs.”

At a time when our schools' budgets are facing real-terms funding cuts, it is unlikely that they will be able to find extra funding for new provision, even if they believe that additional support would benefit their pupils.

If the Prime Minister is truly committed to parity of care between physical and mental illness, her Government must seriously consider making additional ring-fenced funding available to schools. If, as a country, we are genuinely committed to driving improvements in educational attainment, tackling inequality and supporting our children with decent mental health provision, fair and decent funding is nothing short of vital.

5.44 pm

**James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): I am lucky to represent a constituency in one of the best—if not the best—boroughs in the country for school results and Ofsted ratings. Having visited every school in my constituency at least once, I can safely say that that is due to the exceptional teaching and school leadership on offer. My comments are informed by the many meetings I have had with headteachers from across the constituency, including in a delegation that I brought to see the schools Minister last year.

Overall funding is now at its highest level, but there is additional demand. When we discuss how public spending should be divided, I will make no apology for asking for more money for schools, but that must be set against the demands made by Government and Opposition Members for more funding for everything from the NHS to national infrastructure—the money has to be divided up somehow. That brings me on to the national funding formula.

The existing formula was plainly unfair, and a cross-party group of MPs said that it had to be made fairer. Under the existing formula, Kingston has the third worst-funded schools in London. Pupils in Kingston get £2,406 less than pupils in Tower Hamlets, which is in the same city, just 14 miles away. How can that be fair? I campaigned for a fairer funding formula along with parents in my constituency. I am pleased that we have seen a marginal increase in our funding and that, importantly, mobility is being taken into account.

**Lilian Greenwood:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the social circumstances in the area of London that he represents are quite different from those in Tower Hamlets? Schools in places that are affected by high levels of deprivation require more funding per pupil.

**James Berry:** I ask the hon. Lady to come and repeat that in the poorer parts of my constituency, where some people are just as deprived as those in Tower Hamlets. In addition, a high proportion of children receive the pupil premium. I do not disagree that deprivation should be one of the most important factors or that schools in boroughs such as Kingston will always get less because deprivation is a key factor, but that level of disparity is simply not fair. There will be winners and losers whenever a funding formula is reorganised unless there is a massive increase in funding to level things up rather than down, but no party committed to such funding in its manifesto.

**Stephen Timms:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**James Berry:** No, I will not.

Headteachers make the legitimate point that the increased costs of the national living wage, and national insurance and pension contributions, are putting pressure on their budgets. The situation is the same in other areas of the public sector, but we should not forget that point in this debate.

Finally, high-needs funding, not the national funding formula, is the biggest issue in my constituency. Such funding has resulted in an overspend on the dedicated schools grant of some £5 million, which will have to be found from school budgets as a whole. The council and free school providers have put in two applications for

new special schools in the borough—one in Kingston and one in Richmond—which will reduce pressure in the medium term, but there is no clear answer to where that £5 million will come from in the short term, apart from every single child's school funding. I am pleased that the Minister was able to meet the council leader and me a few weeks ago to discuss that.

All the points that I have made must be taken into account in addition to the funding formula. I am pleased that Kingston schools will receive a small increase. We could have been bolder and made bigger reductions elsewhere to make the situation even fairer to pupils in my constituency, but there must be fairness across the board, as my constituents recognise. I will be submitting a response to phase 2 of the consultation, just as I did previously, and it will be informed by my constituency's headteachers—the best headteachers in the land.

5.48 pm

**John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): This week, the Public Accounts Committee reviewed the National Audit Office report on the financial sustainability of school funding, and the most helpful thing I can do now is to give the Chamber some flavour of how that went. Present were officials from the DFE, including the permanent secretary, Jonathan Slater, but the session with them was preceded by a panel made up of headteachers and Russell Hobby of the National Association of Head Teachers. Understandably, they spoke of the current severe financial pressures, the effects of tight funding, and the strategies they have to deal with that, which will be familiar to those who have listened to the debate so far—things such as reducing the curriculum; increasing class sizes; phasing out support for special needs and mental health; cutting out extracurricular activities, professional development and school trips; and increasing teacher contact time.

Unsurprisingly, the officials from the Department did not altogether recognise that picture. Interestingly, though, Government Members should be aware that they did not dispute any of the financial facts. There was no disagreement whatever that schools have to save £3 billion in the current spending round, which represents an 8% cut by 2020, or that this is the toughest challenge since the 1990s, when the previous Conservative Government were in power. The Department simply did not dispute the financial facts that more schools are in debt and that debts are growing bigger; nor could it, because it had agreed the report with the NAO.

The Department's argument was not about the financial facts themselves, but about the effects of those facts. It suggested that if every school procured efficiently, particularly on things such as heating and insurance, used its available balances and managed its payroll effectively, disaster could be averted. The Department stands ready, as does the Secretary of State, with the advice, tools, tutorials and data to help schools to do that. It thinks that disaster can be averted—that it is, in the words of the permanent secretary, “doable”.

My view is that there are good reasons for scepticism. The DFE exercise, such as it is, has largely been a desk exercise. The Department knows little about the individual circumstances of schools, and how could it? There are just too many for central Government to gauge and understand. It is a fact that not every school can actually

[John Pugh]

reduce its payroll costs—not if it is endowed with experienced and established staff, and not if it needs to take up the slack caused by the reduction, or abolition, of the educational support grant. The latter is particularly true for small schools. Not every school can reduce its procurement costs—not if it is in an old, leaky building, has already reduced them, or is tied into long-term contracts. What is doable in theory is simply not doable in practice.

The most chilling passage in the NAO report is at paragraph 2.6. I do not have time to enlarge on it, but I advise Members to read it very carefully.

5.52 pm

**Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I rise to speak about school funding. Many people in this place will not be aware that I was very involved in school funding and in trying to get a fair formula for schools many years ago, when I was the chairman of the Grant Maintained Schools Advisory Committee, which is now called FASNA—Freedom and Autonomy for Schools National Association. Work has been going on for 25 years to get a fair formula.

The civil service always says there will be winners and losers; of course there are winners and losers—there are now. In Derby City, the highest-funded school gets paid £5,564 per pupil, while the lowest-funded gets only £4,739. The gap is around £800 per pupil. If a school has 1,300 or 1,500 pupils and that £800 is multiplied up, it makes an enormous difference to the quality of education that can be provided. We know that some schools need more funding than others, and we recognise that they do not all want to lose £800—some of them need that extra funding—but those at the bottom of the list are consistently at the bottom of the list.

I am delighted that the Government have decided that we are going to have the school funding formula, because it is about time. We have wanted it for more than 25 years, so I am delighted that the Government are tackling it and are going to consult on it and get it right.

**Amanda Solloway**: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) for giving way. Does she agree that the formula is a good news story for Derby City, because we need extra support and could gain 8.4%?

**Pauline Latham**: Yes, the new formula could make a huge difference to Derby schools. It is important that the extra support is given to the right schools, and that those schools that have been underfunded for so many years get a fair crack of the whip. We must not allow Derby City Council to skew it in any way, shape or form so that the same old schools get extra money and those that have been deprived do not.

There are issues with schools at the moment, and I know that many are looking forward to the national funding formula. Schools have fixed costs. Their costs are the same whether they are in an inner city or a leafy suburb, so why are they paid different amounts of money? The biggest problem at the moment—certainly this applies to one school in my constituency—is that

the apprenticeship levy is hitting now, but there is no more money for it. We must look at how we can help fund it, because it is within the overall budget. Schools have no choice over it, but it is a very good thing.

Schools are also having to drop participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, because they cannot afford to run it any more. The scheme is really important for Derby schools. There are amazing opportunities for young people. If we lose those extracurricular activities, we are not giving pupils the all-round education that they should have. I hope that the Minister will look at that.

When schools are full, they maximise the amount of money that they can have. What I do not want to see this year is schools having to increase class sizes and reduce teaching time. I would like us to look at that again. The national funding formula cannot come soon enough for the schools that have been looking forward to it for years.

5.55 pm

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): Every child in this country, and every disabled child in this country, deserves a decent education. The principle that no child should be worse off as a result of these funding reforms should run through this consultation. Where a child was born should not dictate their life chances, yet that is the case for too many children in our country, and too many children in Wakefield, where 25% of them are growing up in poverty. I was proud to be a member of the last Labour Government, who lifted nearly a million children out of poverty, and I am so disappointed by what this Government have done, overseeing the closure of 800 Sure Start centres and changing the goalposts on measuring child poverty.

Wakefield schools have taken a very deep hit from these proposals.

**Lucy Frazer**: Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mary Creagh**: No, I am not giving way.

Fair funding should mean a levelling up, not a levelling down. Every school in my constituency will see their funding cut under the Secretary of State's proposals. The manifesto promise to protect education spending has been broken, as we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg). The Government have not provided for funding per pupil to increase in line with inflation; have not accounted for the increase in pupils attending schools; and have not considered the costs of higher national insurance and pension contributions, which now have to be absorbed by the school budgets. When the efficiency savings are factored into the funding formula, funding in Wakefield per pupil will fall from £4,725 this year to £4,211 in 2019-20—a real-terms cut of 11%.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mary Creagh**: I will not give way.

Nine maintained schools across Wakefield district are projected to be in deficit by 31 March, which means increased class sizes, subjects dropped from the curriculum, pupils with special educational needs and disabilities losing vital support, and teacher vacancies left unfilled.

There will also be a very worrying impact on special educational needs. At the moment, there is some flexibility to move money around and to move it into the high needs block. Under the new formula, there will be disruption and uncertainty around special needs funding for cities such as Wakefield. The funds are simply not enough for children in our city who need that extra support.

**Lucy Frazer:** The hon. Lady said at the outset that it was important for all children to get the same opportunities. She also mentioned that class sizes would go up. Does she think it is fair that, for the children in my constituency, class sizes in every single secondary school are over 30, and that those schools have been historically underfunded for years and years and years?

**Mary Creagh:** The hon. Lady reinforces my point, which is that the Government must take into account rising pupil numbers. This formula and the efficiency savings fail to do that, so she needs to have a word with her Secretary of State about them.

We cannot have a situation in which there is just not enough money to go around to educate all children well. In Wakefield, we will see 1,000 more pupils start school in September and yet no money has been allocated for that increase, which means that the schools and the pupils will miss out. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that schools in England face the steepest cuts to funding since the 1970s.

Despite those circumstances, headteachers such as Martin Fenton at Greenhill Primary, Rob Marsh at Cathedral Academy, and Georgina Haley at Netherton Junior and Infant School are doing excellent work in my constituency to improve the life chances of children in Wakefield. I urge the Secretary of State to drop her grammar school plans, revise the national funding formula for schools, and make sure that we do not go back to the bad old days. I was at school at the same time as she was. I had to pay £12 for my O-level physics textbook, and we did not have a teacher for two years in the good old days of the 1984 teaching budgets. We do not want to go back to those days.

6 pm

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): “This is welcome news for Lincolnshire schools as we are one of the lowest-funded authorities in the country. We have been campaigning for a fairer funding allocation for some years because it can’t be right that authorities in other parts of the country get more money to pass on to schools due to historical allocations. This is long overdue and we will be making our strong views known in any consultation leading up to the changes. A fairer funding allocation is what our schools deserve.”

Those are not my words, but those of Councillor Patricia Bradwell, executive member for children’s services at Lincolnshire County Council. She is right: she knows that rural sparsely populated areas can be areas where deprivation, special needs, the challenges of students whose first language is not English, and a host of other issues are just as common as they are in cities. The Government’s proposed funding formula makes huge strides in righting that historic injustice and I welcome it.

The funding formula is in a consultation phase, so I hope that the Government will take the opportunity to make it even better. The Library tells me that 29 of my 39 schools for which they have data will see their funding rise by up to 2.9%. On current form, 10 will see a slight fall—for the same overall total, it would be perfectly possible to see no fall at all.

I would make two pleas to the Department, with one overarching theme: for the same amount of money, distributed fractionally differently, we could do even better. First, the Government are rightly committed to the expansion of grammar schools, which are engines for social mobility, with fine institutions in Boston and Skegness and, indeed, across Lincolnshire. In the fourth-lowest funded authority in the country, those schools were not over-funded in the past. A tweak to the formula could improve their situation markedly. Secondly, in many communities, small rural primary schools bind together friends and neighbours and keep villages sustainable, functioning units for community cohesion. If the formula is to have a sparsity factor, it is only right to acknowledge that a county such as Lincolnshire is about as sparse as they come. Again, for no overall increase, it could be done slightly better. One approach might be simply to give local authorities even greater powers to decide how spending might be allocated.

In conclusion, Lincolnshire is on record as welcoming a £5 million boost for schools across the county. That rights an historic wrong and will go a long way towards meeting genuine needs and ending the pretence that urban areas have a monopoly on deprivation. Lincolnshire further welcomes the consultation as a way of making sure that the extra money, which is very welcome, is spent even more effectively after these very promising proposals are implemented.

6.3 pm

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): First, I should declare an interest, as my two children attend a local school that is affected by the cuts. My wife is the cabinet member for children and young people on our local authority of Cheshire West and Chester. By happy coincidence, my local council has an exceptional record on education, with over 90% of schools rated “good” or “outstanding”. Not one school is “inadequate”.

All that good progress, however, could be jeopardised if the planned reductions to funding are implemented. The extent of the reductions in both the lump-sum allocations and the basic per pupil amount will remove almost £7.9 million from schools in Cheshire West and Chester. That equates to a 2% cut across the board, with the biggest losers facing a cut of just under 3%. Thirty-two of 33 schools in my constituency will not maintain their per pupil funding in cash terms, contrary to what the Government promised. With that in mind, I wrote to local schools in my constituency to ask what they thought. I am extremely worried by the responses that I have received.

Ellesmere Port Catholic High School has seen huge improvements since being placed in special measures in 2013. The headteacher and the school worked exceptionally hard to turn things around, and in June 2015 they were awarded a “good” rating. So impressive was the improvement that the chief inspector of Ofsted, Sir Michael

[Justin Madders]

Wilshaw, referred to the school in a speech he made in November 2016 about schools that have made remarkable transformations, stating:

“At Ellesmere Port Catholic High School, only a third of pupils achieved 5 good GCSEs. Now almost three-quarters do”.

Those improvements should be applauded, so I was deeply concerned to learn that the school is projecting funding deficits for the next few years, which will threaten the improvements it has made. It tells me that early indications show a £44,000 annual reduction from 2018-19, on top of the deficit already forecast. That will make the approved deficit reduction plan completely unachievable unless cuts to staffing are made. The headteacher told me,

“we are already stretched to the limit and it is a very bleak outlook knowing that we will have to make further reductions...the Government must invest in schools for the sake of our children and future.”

Whitby High School told me that it could face a funding reduction of £111,000. By 2020, the School Cuts campaign estimates that it could be facing a 10% real-terms budget cut, equivalent to a staffing reduction of 17 if savings are not found elsewhere. Governors of Little Sutton Church of England Primary School told me that they are very concerned about the school's future sustainability following the new funding arrangements. Cambridge Road Primary School has told me that since 2013 it has already experienced a real-terms reduction in income of 4.4%, or £65,000; and that, combined with wage increases and inflation, the real-terms reduction has been in excess of £100,000.

**Michelle Donelan:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Justin Madders:** I am sorry, but I do not have time.

St Mary of the Angels Catholic Primary School has estimated that by 2019 its budget will be down by £90,138, which could clearly lead to a loss of staff if savings are not found elsewhere.

This is a terrible situation for local schools. As one headteacher said to me,

“it does appear that the ‘fairer’ funding model being discussed is far from fair.”

I could not have put it better myself.

6.6 pm

**Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con):** When I met headteachers in my constituency campaigning for fairer funding in the county of Nottinghamshire, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who is my parliamentary neighbour, told those gathered there that he had only ever met two people who understood how these formulae work; one of them was dead and the other had gone mad. It gives me a lot of pleasure to see that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has at long last grasped the nettle and is tackling an issue that our right hon. and learned Friend, as a former Education Secretary, said no Education Secretary would ever take on.

The funding formula was manifestly unfair, as many hon. Members have said. On behalf of schools across the county of Nottinghamshire, which was one of the

f40 counties, I am delighted to welcome an increase of 0.8%—admittedly small, but an increase none the less.

I also think that it is incredibly important to take on difficult issues and not to kick these cans down the road, as happens time and again in politics, for example with tax credits. It is immensely difficult to take money away from people, even if the reasons for providing the money have been proven to be wrong and the formulae are outdated—the opposition to that is considerable. This is an example of the Government taking on a difficult issue, rather than kicking it further down the road.

This formula also sends out a signal that there is poverty in rural areas, and no county exemplifies that better than Nottinghamshire. I may be privileged to represent the more affluent rural parts of the county, but at least half of it is made up of ex-coalfield communities, such as Ollerton, Ashfield and Mansfield, with deep-rooted social problems, left to fester by the Labour party. This formula will not benefit my constituency; it will benefit those deprived parts of Nottinghamshire. I am proud of that, even if it is a difficult conversation to have with most of my headteachers.

My last point—given that so little time is available—is that there are parts of this country that have been well funded but produced appalling results, and nowhere exemplifies that better than the city of Nottingham. We have heard today from representatives, colleagues and friends who represent the city that their funding has fallen. I feel sympathy for that, but those relatively well funded schools have let down generations of students, with an appalling local authority and poor-quality leadership. As well as increasing funding for my schools in Nottinghamshire, I look to the Secretary of State to find a strategy to address the intergenerational failure in places such as Nottingham, which desperately needs it.

6.9 pm

**Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD):** In my first week as an MP, I received a letter from the headteacher of the school my two children attend—the local school in the constituency I represent. The school highlighted some of the very real issues that it and other schools in my constituency will face in the next few years. When I got to the end of the letter, I realised that I had received it not because I was the newly elected MP but because I was a parent, and every parent at my children's school had received the same letter. I thought to myself, “This is surely unprecedented. This is surely an indication of the deep anxiety felt by the headteachers of my children's school and the other schools in my constituency, in both Kingston and Richmond, about the future of their funding.” I therefore spoke to the headteacher of my children's school about the issue.

The Secretary of State refers to using staff more efficiently. In my children's school, that means cutting teaching assistants, which means that the biggest impact will be felt by those pupils who need the most help—those with special educational needs or additional language needs. These cuts, therefore, will increase the gaps in attainment between those at the top and those at the bottom, and they will limit opportunities for those who already have the least opportunities.

I attended a meeting of headteachers in the Kingston borough with the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), and one of the things that was

highlighted—it seemed extraordinary to me, but it was confirmed to me by the headteacher of my local school—is that schools have to pay an apprenticeship levy and that that is adding to their costs. It is extraordinary that schools have to find money from their budgets—to take money that would otherwise be used for teaching staff and resources—to pay a penalty for not providing training. I find that an absolutely extraordinary anomaly, and I hope the Secretary of State will look into it as a matter of urgency, because it seems an unnecessary burden for schools in my constituency and elsewhere.

I understand the motivation to ensure that the distribution of funding is evened out across the country, and I understand that that will be seen as fairer for some people, but I urge the Secretary of State to achieve that by looking for ways to increase funding to schools that are already disadvantaged, not by taking it from schools that have traditionally received more, because that will cause a great deal of hardship for schools not just in my constituency but elsewhere.

6.12 pm

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Of course I commend the Government's determination to build a new schools' funding formula, but I am pleased it is still at the consultation stage.

Representing South Cambridgeshire—a constituency in a county that, until 2015, was the lowest funded in the country and had been for decades—I understand only too well how underfunded schools have struggled. The proposed new formula, though it has laudable intentions to focus on deprivation and poor educational attainment, does not yet recognise three additional critical factors. First and foremost, consideration must be given when a school has been seriously underfunded for decades. My schools have been mending and making do for years—I do not exaggerate when I describe broken window panes and holes in roofs. For us, teaching assistants are a luxury, and the purchasing of text books and even basic equipment is the ask of local businesses and the community. It is not a question of cutting teaching assistants—filling even core teacher vacancies is often not possible.

The Government showed an appreciation of that when they provided a small but welcome interim funding boost last year and this year, but I am afraid that the reality is that the money has been completely absorbed in pension and national insurance increases. Furthermore, under the current funding proposals, not only will this interim funding not be maintained as a starting baseline, but 27 of my schools would be even worse off, with a real-terms cut of about 4%. Every one of my rural primary schools with fewer than 150 pupils would lose money, and Members have spoken today about sparsity. So I urge the Secretary of State to recognise that the new formula, though built on many sensible principles, cannot simply be superimposed on a landscape of significant historical under-investment—not if we expect those schools to survive, let alone to halt and close the widening free school meals attainment gap.

I now turn to the additional financial pressures experienced by areas of high growth, which we have also heard about today. In the next four years, we will have opened 24 new schools in Cambridgeshire since 2012 just to cope with basic need. It is not right that we

subsidise that in the early years with money from existing schools. For example, a typical secondary school would contribute £41,000 out of its annual budget towards it. I recognise that the consultation is open-ended about growth and how we should deal with it, but we clearly need to find a way of fixing this, perhaps through a separate fund to help these schools in the early years.

Finally, I ask that we look at the cost of living. In Cambridgeshire, particularly South Cambs and the city, house prices are about 16 times the average wage, so we need to think about how we can help with teacher recruitment, because people's budgets simply do not go that far.

Having spoken to the Secretary of State, I believe that there is genuinely a sincere desire to offer up this proposed model for road testing, and that is what we are doing today—we are kicking the tyres.

6.15 pm

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): Unsurprisingly, I am here to speak for the children of Oldham, who, under these proposals, will be significantly affected by money being taken away from their much-needed education. I should declare an interest: I have two young boys, one at secondary school and one at primary school, both of whom will see cuts—

**Michelle Donelan:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jim McMahon:** I am going to carry on for a time because I am conscious that other people want to speak.

Both of them will see real-terms cuts to their education provision, as will another 60,000 young people in the town. Every single one of Oldham's 99 schools will see a cut, with the average being 9%. We are meant to be an opportunity area. According to the Government, the roads are paved with educational opportunity gold. They say that they have recognised that there are issues and are determined to turn things around, so we should welcome the investment of £16 million. Unfortunately, they then come and take £17 million away. So let them tell me, and tell the young people, parents and teachers in Oldham, where the new money is. How can we turn around educational attainment when the problem is so deep-rooted and the situation is so unequal—when education has not been valued in previous years and we are desperate to realise the opportunities that these young people deserve for the future? Let the Government tell Oldham how it has a positive future when the rungs are being taken from under it.

We have seen money being taken away from early years. We have seen nearly £1 million taken away from a sixth-form college. We have seen £3.5 million taken away from Oldham College. Time and again, money is being taken away. I do not resent for one second any other Member of this House saying that their area needs more money to provide a decent standard of education. If they represent a Tory shire, then that is fantastic—they can make that case and I will support them in doing so, but not at the cost of children, and their families, who have been let down for generations, and who need this chance more than most.

The world is more complex than it has ever been. The skills that people need will be more complex than ever before, but people are being set up to fail under this

[*Jim McMahon*]

model. I make this plea: next time the Secretary of State visits Oldham and my constituency, instead of just giving a courtesy notice, why not attend a roundtable with the headteachers and the governors to really listen and understand the impact of these cuts? If the Government really do care, let us have fewer words, more action, and more investment.

6.18 pm

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): Solihull is mentioned in many surveys as being one of the best places to live not just in the west midlands but in the UK as a whole and that is due in no small part to its schools. My schools have put in a Herculean effort for years. They do more with less. They have embraced change and gained the benefits from so doing, despite having been one of the losers in the fairer funding formula for many years. I welcome the Government's commitment to making the necessary changes. Although this is a consultation at the moment, I hope that they will take on the comments that many hon. Members are making so that we can get this right and set for the future.

In my constituency, although secondary schools gain, and I am very grateful for that, some primary schools do not, with some losing up to 2.5%. In addition, the unequal treatment of Solihull schools compared with those of neighbouring Birmingham has not yet been fixed, with those in the city still enjoying a substantial per-pupil advantage, currently standing at £1,300 per year.

To put that into a real-world context, schools in Birmingham can use the extra cash to offer more competitive salaries and attract newly qualified teachers, especially in subjects such as mathematics and science, and that hurts schools in neighbouring communities that do not have the money to spare. Schools in Birmingham also have more funds to set aside for facilities, extracurricular activities, school trips and all the other things that allow schools to provide a rich and well-rounded education.

In a compact, urban region such as the west midlands, even small inequalities of that sort can have serious consequences for those who are left out, and the inequalities are more visible than they might be elsewhere. Local headteachers tell me that parents regularly ask them why pupils in Birmingham schools are taken on exciting school trips, but their own children are not. Such unfairness is made all the worse by the fact that so many Birmingham children are educated in Solihull. I believe that up to 40% of the children in some of our local schools come from outside the borough, but those pupils do not bring their funding advantages with them.

I am pleased that the need for fairer funding in our schools is widely recognised, and that the Government are grasping the nettle. The proposals are an important first step, and now we have our consultation, but we must go further to end the unequal treatment of communities such as Solihull.

6.21 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Teachers in the borough of Hounslow have achieved amazing results over the last 10 or more years. Almost all our schools are good or outstanding, and value-added is positive in every school. That is in a borough where all

schools and all classrooms contain children with additional needs of some kind—children who arrive not speaking English, children with disabilities and special educational needs, children who are homeless and keep having to move on or who are sofa surfing with their parents, and children with many other needs. Most of our schools suffer from severe aircraft noise from planes approaching Heathrow.

The overall savings proposed by the Department for Education for schools in my constituency by 2018-19—a combination of the national funding formula and the wider cost pressures that they face now—amount to £5.1 million. That is a 6.2% cut. The existing cost pressures include, as other Members have mentioned, inflation, the apprenticeship levy, pension and national insurance costs, the requirement for independent careers advice, and more children with special needs in our mainstream schools.

As in the Secretary of State's constituency, the cost pressures that my heads face will mean, on the whole, fewer teachers and support staff, plus other cuts. We have established that each of our secondary schools will have to lose between nine and 18 teachers, and primary schools will have to have up to 11 fewer teachers. Fewer subjects will be taught at key stages 4 and 5, there will be fewer external visits and fewer specialists will come in to teach and enthuse children about future jobs and careers, staying safe or other specialist issues that we want our children to learn about and get their heads around. There will be less specialist and individual support for children who have additional needs, who do not speak English, who are very gifted or who have mental health problems and need counselling. Agency costs for supply teachers, as our headteachers face the recruitment and retention crisis that is affecting all subject areas, will add to the salary bill.

In classrooms where there are children who need additional attention, teachers and children will feel the impact of the cuts every day. More classes will be taught with only one adult—the class teacher—in the room. The lack of additional support is a cost for every child in the classroom, both those who have additional needs and those who do not. The cuts will mean that less is spent on repairing buildings, improving outdoor space or buying the equipment and materials that the curriculum requires.

6.24 pm

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): For reasons that will become evident to the House, I am particularly grateful to have caught your eye in this debate, Mr Speaker. I commend the Secretary of State for tackling this issue, because it is quite clear from the debate that, in a modification of the Lincoln dictum, on this issue one can only please some of the people some of the time. Inevitably, when there is no more cash around, there will be winners and losers. Unfortunately, my constituency is one of the big losers.

I campaigned with the f40 group for over 10 years, and the absolute sun on the horizon was the national funding formula, but now that the consultation on the formula has arrived I find that my schools will actually get less money. In Gloucestershire, we will get a 0.8% cash-terms increase this year, and in the Cotswolds, there will

be a 0.3% cash-terms increase. Two thirds of my schools will get a cut, and a third of them will get a very small increase.

In Gloucestershire, schools were already very efficient. They had amalgamated a lot of back-office functions and had formed partnerships. The secondary schools had done everything they could to become academies, being among the earliest in the country to do so. Gloucestershire is therefore a very efficient county, but we now find that our schools will get cash-terms cuts. That is on top of the Government having imposed limits on above inflation increases in relation to funding teachers, the national minimum wage, pensions, national insurance and procurement. A cash-terms cut for over half my schools means a real squeeze on education in Gloucestershire.

I should pay tribute to the parents and governors of my schools, because the vast majority go well beyond the extra mile to give my children the very best education. As a result, on very meagre funding, we get reasonable results in Gloucestershire. However, the figures I have given from the consultation will put Gloucestershire down from 108th to 116th in the f40 league. That is simply unacceptable because it means that some teacher posts will definitely be lost, and it is likely that some of my smaller schools will close.

**Heidi Allen:** Will my hon. Friend do what I am doing, which is to encourage all my governors, teachers and parents to feed into the consultation? I suspect there are some anomalies because it is the same in my area, in that we expected more and it has not been delivered.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I do urge all people to do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) is sitting beside me, and I am sure that all Gloucestershire's MPs will feed into the consultation. I am also sure that many of my aggrieved headteachers, parents and governors will do so.

It is inevitable that some of my secondary schools, which face some of the largest cuts, will have to reduce the breadth of the curriculum they currently offer. That would be unfair because every child in the country should have roughly the same breadth of curriculum in their schools. I accept that that is often difficult in smaller secondary schools, but it will be very hard for children and their parents to bear if their A-level choices are no longer available as a result of Government policy.

I simply say to my hon. Friend the Minister that I know this is a consultation, but I am looking for some very radical changes. The weighting for deprivation and other measures in the consultation is too high, and the basic pupil funding should never in any circumstances be cut.

6.28 pm

**Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab):** I pay tribute to the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), who made a brilliant speech. She demonstrated, as has the fact that a large number of Members wanted to speak in this debate, that education truly matters in our country.

I will make a few brief points. The first is that the narrative of this discussion is completely wrong. It is a typical Tory divide-and-rule strategy. I do not believe

that schools that might gain from a change in the funding formula want to do so at the expense of other children, teachers and schools. For example, I know that the folks who are set to gain from the changes in Knowsley, just across the River Mersey from where I live, do not want to do so at the expense of children and schools in Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral. We should not be dividing people, but bringing them together.

Schools in Wirral are set to lose hundreds of pounds per pupil. That plays into another classic Tory narrative, which is that people do not need money to get anywhere in life or to help in education. The hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) said that money is not sufficient to drive achievement. In fact, money may not be a sufficient condition, but it is a necessary one, as all the evidence shows. I am next to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who led the London Challenge. I know he would say that it was reform and improvement, alongside decent funding, that resulted in those achievements under the last Labour Government that we are all proud of.

**Stephen Timms:** Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming one element of the funding formula, which is the inclusion for the first time of a mobility factor to reflect the additional costs of high pupil turnover? However, does she agree that it ought to be larger than the 0.1% of the total that is being allocated on that basis at the moment?

**Alison McGovern:** I have never disagreed with my right hon. Friend yet and I do not now.

As a Member of Parliament, I am afraid of very little, but I still get nervous when I have to go and see local headteachers. I want to give the final words of my speech over to those headteachers. To begin with, Mark Whitehill, who is head of Gayton Primary School in Heswall, spoke this simple truth:

"If Education really is a priority, we need the staff to help us deliver it!"

Another brilliant head in my area, Catherine Kelly, agrees with that. She said that her job is about life chances, but colleagues whom she respects as fantastic educationists are talking about leaving the profession because, as heads, they are not focusing on the right things as they are having to balance the books and make ends meet. She said that they are "invariably being set up to fail".

She is frugal and knows that if the school is overstaffed, it is a waste of the students' resources, so she would never make that happen. She says she is afraid that the Government "clearly doesn't understand education", which I believe is true.

The last word goes to David Hazeldine, a great head from Wirral, who says:

"The fundamental issue is that there is not enough money in the system. Teacher recruitment shortages and massive underfunding are placing children's education and well-being at risk."

He says that that is "creating a perfect storm".

Those three heads have put it better than I ever could. I ask the Secretary of State to learn the lessons of schools in her own constituency and recognise that although money is not all that schools need, they cannot do without it if they want to give kids a chance.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** There are five remaining would-be contributors and the Front-Bench speeches to wind up the debate should start at or extremely close to 6.40. Two minutes each will suffice and colleagues can help each other.

6.32 pm

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): Many parents are attracted to my constituency by the excellence of its schools. I look forward to visiting Oakfield Primary Academy and Brownover Community School this Friday. We have a broad range of schools, including a bilateral school that provides co-educational grammar school places, which is incredibly popular and oversubscribed.

Under the consultation, Warwickshire will remain one of the counties with the lowest funding at £4,293 per pupil. That is among the lowest figures we have heard today. It is a credit to the heads and staff of the many schools in my constituency that they achieve such excellence with that sum. There will be a 1.1% increase, which is very welcome. That will affect 29 schools in my constituency, most of which are rural primaries. Nine schools will receive the same or rather less. In many cases, those are the excellent secondaries to which I have just referred, one of which will lose £90,000 a year. Of course, many of those schools have sixth forms and so face a particular challenge because there are smaller classes and they want to offer specialist subjects—often the very A-levels that lead to the qualifications that our country so badly needs.

Since coming to office, the Government have been steadfast in their commitment to ensuring that all children, irrespective of their background and where they live, get a world-class education. This consultation levels the system out. It will be a fairer system. The shadow Secretary of State spoke about cuts. There are no cuts. The Secretary of State has made it very clear that the overall budget will remain the same. This is about ensuring that we allocate the funds within our system fairly and that there is a level playing field for pupils across our country.

6.34 pm

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): In the two minutes I have to speak, I would like to welcome the Government's commitment and commend the Secretary of State for tackling this difficult issue. The hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) spoke about fairness. Children in the area represented by the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) currently receive £178 more per pupil than my children in Suffolk. After the change, her area will receive £219 more per pupil. I would like the consultation to iron out these anomalies. We in Suffolk are grateful for the uplift, but I, like many others, have campaigned for fairer funding—my children deserve to be treated equally.

I appreciate that it is too complex to make the change in one go, because that would mean walloping some schools harder than others, so we need to have a gentle trajectory. That said, we must not stand back and fail to grasp the nettle. For too long, our children, particularly in rural areas—we have heard from Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Essex—have been underfunded. We have had to play second fiddle to large metropolitan areas.

Children in those areas do not deserve better life chances; they deserve the same life chances as others. I have areas of deprivation in my constituency and children who could do with more money spent on their education. This is the right way to continue.

This morning, I held a roundtable of businesses and educationists from across the region. They are talking about skills. Please let us concentrate on early years. That is a bit difficult in Suffolk, because we are losing more than we currently spend on it, but we provide outstanding education. Please can we also look at rural England? Hon. Members should not assume that we have everything. When we consult—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order.

6.36 pm

**Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I will be brief, pithy and to the point, if possible.

I am a school governor of St Andrew's primary school, which is in a very deprived community. I have to tell the Secretary of State and the Minister that there is an 11 to 12-year difference in life expectancy between the north-east of my constituency and the south-west, around Devonport, so I understand some of the issues of deprivation. Moreover, in the 1980s, I was the agent to the Education Minister who introduced the local management of schools, the national curriculum and other such things.

I am grateful to the Government for taking a fresh look at the funding formula. My constituency has done quite well—we have an increase of about 4% for schools, which is incredibly good news. The one concern is what happens to the grammar schools. I am incredibly grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for Schools Standards for agreeing to meet my grammar schools to talk about how they could improve their position.

My constituency has a very good education offer. We have not only three grammar schools, but a university technical college and a creative arts school. I am grateful to the coalition Government and this Government for delivering on that. Without further ado, I conclude by saying: carry on going, and please do not let anyone down.

6.38 pm

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I was proud to stand on an election platform representing a Government who had delivered 1.4 million good and outstanding school places over the preceding five years. That that was delivered in the most challenging financial circumstances is to the Government's credit and that of schoolteachers across the country.

I am conscious that the Government are spending a record amount—£40 billion—on our schools, thereby protecting the schools budget. However, I also recognise that the Government's laudable policies to invest in our workers and give them a pay rise are eating into a schools budget that is largely spent on employees. I had hoped that the school funding formula would address some of the shortfalls in my constituency, but although my constituency overall gets a 1.5% increase, with 16 schools getting an increase, unfortunately 23 will see their funding drop, which causes me concern. I hope that the consultation will iron out some of those anomalies.

I recognise that it is the Opposition's job to oppose. It is fine to be long on talk and to say the right things, but it is appalling that Opposition Members have delivered no ideas or policies to make things better during this debate.

On that note, I suggest three things that would help but not affect our wish to eradicate the deficit. First, schools and education have to be the No. 1 priority for increasing productivity. We have set up a £23 billion productivity fund, so is there a way to tap into it to help our schools? Secondly, is there a way of finding room for schools not to be included within the apprenticeship levy? Thirdly, given that our schools are looking after mental health, can we find a way to get some of the funding for that through their doors?

6.40 pm

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I shall be brief. I fully support funding every school in the same way, creating a level playing field for pupils across the country. In 2010, the Labour Government tried to implement a funding formula. At that time, it was £4,000, and most of it went on private finance initiative schemes, which was why it was never put forward. At a time when more than £40 billion is going into education—the highest amount spent in our history—we should be positive, rather than looking at the policy negatively. We should not have a system in which schools in some areas get less money per pupil, as that makes it harder for them to attract teachers and to put in place the support that students need. For too long, and for no real reason, the disparity of funding throughout the country has been ignored. I was proud to stand on a manifesto that pledged to change that.

I have looked at schoolcuts.org, which is run by the NUT and Association of Teachers and Lecturers unions. Quite frankly, it is irresponsible. Some of the figures on the site have been quoted in the Chamber today, but they have been plucked out of thin air. They are worked out by dividing the money for an area by the maximum money to be claimed per school—it never is—without taking the number of pupils into account. The website published information about areas and schools before the Department even announced any figures. It must have had luminaries and soothsayers like Nostradamus working for it. I am fed up of the unions politicising my children and constituency. There are heads in my area who are unionising the kids to make them strike and stay off school. Surprise, surprise—their schools did the worst in the area, and therefore lowered my area's results in the national SATs, which is unforgivable.

To wrap up, I think that this is a very good move. I hope that the Government will implement the formula sooner rather than later to give all our children a fair fighting chance.

6.42 pm

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): For the first time in a generation, schools will face spending cuts to their budgets—[*Interruption.*] Right out of the gate, the Secretary of State is chuntering. In her authority area, that equates to a 15% cut, with £13 million coming out of her schools' budgets by 2020. I look forward to campaigning in her constituency on this issue.

The Department expects schools to find £3 billion of savings in this Parliament to counteract cumulative cost pressures, including pay rises, the introduction of the

national living wage, higher employer national insurance contributions, contributions to the teachers' pension scheme and the apprenticeship levy, as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) and Labour Members said. The hon. Gentleman is happy with the national funding formula, but I have to point out that his schools will receive an overall cut of 12% in this Parliament. We are talking about an 8% real-terms reduction in funding per pupil in this Parliament.

The Department regularly compiles a list of future policy changes that will affect schools, but it has no plans to assess the financial implications for schools of these changes. We have no assurances that the policy is affordable within current spending plans without adversely affecting educational outcomes. The Government are leaving schools and multi-academy trusts to manage the consequences individually. The Department has clearly not communicated to schools the scale and pace of the savings that will be needed to meet the expected cost pressures.

The proportion of maintained secondary schools spending more than their income increased last year from 33% to 59%—[*Interruption.*] No matter what the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) says, this Government have racked up a £1.7 trillion debt on their watch and now want to pass on part of that debt to our school system. The Department expects much of the savings to come from procurement and the introduction of shared services. Changing procurement and shared services requires strong leadership, clear plans for achieving savings, effective risk management and support from stakeholders. That leadership is clearly lacking among the Government Members. The Minister himself has said that he is confident that pages of guidance on the Department's website will provide enough support for schools—it will not.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mike Kane:** I have literally seconds left.

As the National Audit Office has suggested, school leaders who do not have support are likely to make decisions that make the teacher retention crisis worse. The NAO went on to say that the Government's current "approach to managing the risks to schools' financial sustainability cannot be judged to be effective or providing value for money".

It is important to recognise the impact that the required efficiency savings will have on staff. We expect already unsustainable workload pressures to increase as staff efficiencies eventually start to bite. Moreover, the size of the savings that schools will have to find will lead to worse educational outcomes, and the biggest impact will be felt by those in the most deprived areas and those with special needs.

We know that staff costs represent any school's largest expenditure—74% of schools' budgets are spent on staff—so it is not hard to see that to save money over the next few years, schools will inevitably end up cutting back on staff. That will have a knock-on effect on workload, morale, class sizes and the breadth of the curriculum that schools can offer. All this is happening at a time when we are expecting a 3% increase in the number of children entering school.

[Mike Kane]

A bad situation is compounded by the national funding formula. Some Conservative Members, who really missed the point, had been expecting “jam tomorrow” from the formula, which was a manifesto commitment, but now they are waking up to the reality that the schools in their constituency will not benefit from its introduction. Hardly any area is left unscathed. In their excellent speeches, the hon. Members for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) and for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) said that the funding formula was not the point; the point was the cuts and pressures faced by schools.

I ask the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire to speak to her hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), who completely missed the point. The House will have been astonished by the slap in the face for northern teachers, who are apparently not ambitious enough for their pupils, and that is from a Government who introduced the Weller report on raising standards.

**Lucy Frazer:** If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my speech carefully, he would have understood that I was quoting the 2016 Ofsted report. Those were not my words; they were the words of Ofsted.

**Mike Kane:** It was a slap in the face, and the hon. and learned Lady’s authority in Cambridgeshire will face a 4% cut on top of all the other pressures that are going on.

The Tories are failing our children. They are overseeing the first real-terms cut in the schools budget for over two decades—indeed, since the 1970s, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh). By their own preferred measure on standards, we have declined in the world PISA—programme for international student assessment—rankings.

In a moment the Minister will stand up and either talk about synthetic phonics, or say that 1.8 million children are in better schools. That, of course, is because Labour identified those schools in 2010 and Ofsted came back to reassess them, and because there are now more children in the system—the primary system. This dire situation for our schools will only continue to get worse as a result of the Government’s cuts and their new funding formula.

6.48 pm

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Nick Gibb):** Of course, the PISA students who were tested in 2015 spent their primary school years being educated under a Labour Government, not under the reforms implemented by this Government.

This has been an important debate, featuring excellent contributions from Members in all parts of the House, at a time when the Government are consulting on the details and weightings of the factors that will make up the new national funding formula.

The hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) launched our debate today with her joke about robbing Peterborough to pay Poole. Alas, her facts are as weak as her joke, because Peterborough will see a rise of 2.7% under the formula, an increase of £3.7 million, and Poole will also see a rise of some 1.1% under the formula. What we have learnt from Labour today is

that it does not support the principle of equal funding on the basis of the same need, and half of Labour Members will see a net gain in funding as a result of the new formula, including the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), where funding will increase by £1.7 million, with an extra £1.2 million for schools in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne. [Interruption] I will not give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) asked us to look again at the deprivation block. The proportion of the formula that we have applied for deprivation reflects what local authorities are already doing across the country at the moment. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) asked about high-needs funding; Liverpool is due to gain 14.4% in high-needs funding under the formula, with increases of 3% per year in 2018-19 and again in 2019-20.

My hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) was right to say that the new national funding formula is resulting in the cake being cut a little more fairly. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) was right to point out the flaw in Labour’s motion. The Government are not cutting school spending; it is at an all-time high.

I welcome the constructive and supportive speeches from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), and my hon. Friends the Members for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham), for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), for Newark (Robert Jenrick), for Solihull (Julian Knight), for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile), for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) and for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris).

In our manifesto, we promised to remedy the unfair and anachronistic funding system that no longer reflects the genuine needs of pupils and schools. It had become atrophied on the basis of factors as they stood in 2005, rather than the make-up of the student population today: an outdated system, fixed in amber where a pupil in Brighton and Hove secured £1,600 more than a pupil in East Sussex, with countless other examples of unfairness up and down the country.

The Government have already consulted on a set of principles that should drive this new formula—a basic unit of funding; one for primary schools, one for key stage 3 secondary pupils and one for key stage 4 secondary pupils. This figure would make up the vast bulk of the formula, and would be the same figure for every school in England.

On top of this, there is a factor for deprivation, ensuring that schools are able to close the educational attainment gap between those from wealthier and poorer backgrounds. There is also a factor for low prior attainment, ensuring that schools are able to help children who start school educationally behind their peers. There is a factor for sparsity, addressing cost pressures unique to rural schools. There is a mobility factor for schools that routinely take pupils part way through the year. There is a lump sum to help address the fixed costs that disproportionately affect small schools. And there is a

factor that takes into account higher employment costs in London and some other areas.

These are the right factors, as responses to the first stage of the consultation confirmed. They are the right factors because they will help drive our education reforms to the school curriculum, which are already resulting in higher academic standards and raised expectations. They will further drive our determination that all children, regardless of background or ability, will be well on their way to becoming fluent readers by the age of six, which 81% of six-year-olds are now, compared with just 58% five years ago. They are the factors that will help further drive the introduction of new, more academically demanding, knowledge-based GCSEs, putting our public exams and qualifications on a par with the best in the world.

As part of our consultation, we wanted to be transparent about the effects of the new formula on every school and every local authority on the basis of this year's figures, and 54% of schools will gain under the new formula. But with any new formula there will be winners and losers. Even within local authority areas that gain overall, some schools with few of the factors that drive the additional funding will see small losses in income. That is the nature of any new formula, built on whatever basis or weightings—unless, of course, the new formula maintains the status quo.

Accepting that a new formula, by definition, produces winners and losers, accepting that we will ensure that the losing schools lose no more than 1.5% per pupil in any year and no more than 3% in total, accepting that the gaining schools will see their gains expedited by up to 3% in 2018-19 and by up to 2.5% in 2019-20, and accepting in principle that the factors of deprivation and low prior attainment are right, what is left is the question whether the weightings are right. These weightings are crafted to drive social mobility. They are calculated to help children who are falling behind at school, and they are motivated by our desire to do more for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The national funding formula is not about the overall level of school funding or the cost pressures that schools are facing over the three years from 2016-17 to 2019-20. The formula is about creating a nationally delivered and fair school funding system. We wanted to grasp the nettle—a nettle that previous Governments have assiduously avoided—and introduce a new national funding formula, ending the postcode lottery and ensuring that over time we have a much fairer funding system.

Despite all the pressures to tackle the budget deficit that we inherited from the last Labour Government—an essential task if we are to continue to deliver the strong economic growth, the high levels of employment and the employment opportunities for young people that we want—we have managed to protect core school spending in real terms. Indeed, in 2015-16 we added a further £390 million, and for 2018-19 and 2019-20 there will be a further £200 million to expedite the gains to those historically underfunded schools that the new formula seeks to address.

Despite this, we know that schools are facing cost pressures as a result of the introduction of the national living wage and of increases to teachers' salaries, to employer national insurance contributions, to teachers' pensions and to the apprenticeship levy. Similar pressures are being faced across the public sector—and, indeed, in the private sector—and they are addressed by increased

efficiencies and better procurement. It is important to note that some of these cost pressures have already materialised. The 8% that people refer to is not an estimate of pressures still to come. In the current year, 2016-17, schools have dealt with pressures averaging 3.1% per pupil. Over the next three years, per-pupil pressures will average between 1.5% and 1.6% a year. To help to tackle those pressures, the Department is providing high quality advice and guidance to schools about their budget management, and we are helping by introducing national buying schemes for products and services such as energy and IT.

We are consulting, and we are listening to the responses to the consultation and to the concerns raised by my hon. Friends and by Opposition Members. The Secretary of State and I have heard representations from some low-funded authorities about whether there is a de minimis level of funding that their secondary schools need in circumstances where few of their pupils bring with them the additional needs funding. We will look at this, and at all the other concerns that right hon. and hon. Members have raised.

This Government are taking the bold decision, and the right decision. We are acting to right the wrongs of a seemingly arbitrary and deeply unfair funding system. Over the past seven years, while fixing the economy, the Government have transformed the education system. We have ended grade inflation, breathing confidence back into our public exams. Effective teaching methods such as Asian-style maths mastery and systematic synthetic phonics are revolutionising the way in which primary pupils are being taught.

More pupils are being taught the core academic subjects that facilitate study at this country's world-leading universities. Some 1.8 million more pupils are now in schools judged by Ofsted to be "good" or "outstanding". The attainment gap between disadvantaged 16-year-olds and their better-off peers has closed by 7%. That is a record to be proud of.

**Mr Nicholas Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure* (Standing Order No. 36).

*Question put forthwith*, That the Question be now put.

*Question agreed to*.

*Question put accordingly* (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.

**Michael Gove** (Surrey Heath) (Con): You can't take it. You can't stand the truth.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle)**: Mr Gove, I think you need to calm a little. A little peppermint tea might help.

*The House divided*: Ayes 178, Noes 285.

**Division No. 133]**

**[7 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane	Berger, Luciana
Alexander, Heidi	Betts, Mr Clive
Ali, Rushanara	Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Blenkinsop, Tom
Austin, Ian	Blomfield, Paul
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Brabin, Tracy
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Beckett, rh Margaret	Brake, rh Tom
Benn, rh Hilary	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas

Bryant, Chris  
 Buck, Ms Karen  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Chapman, Jenny  
 Coaker, Vernon  
 Coffey, Ann  
 Cooper, Julie  
 Cooper, Rosie  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Danczuk, Simon  
 David, Wayne  
 De Piero, Gloria  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Durkan, Mark  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Field, rh Frank  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Flynn, Paul  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Godsiff, Mr Roger  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Mr Mark  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Alan  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Graham  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz

Kinahan, Danny  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marris, Rob  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Mulholland, Greg  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Pugh, John  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Spellar, rh Mr John  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth

Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Turley, Anna  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 West, Catherine

Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

#### Tellers for the Ayes:

**Jeff Smith and  
 Jessica Morden**

#### NOES

Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Sir Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Colvile, Oliver  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James

Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel  
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evennett, rh David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, rh Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard

Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, Mr Nick  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel

Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric  
 Poulter, Dr Daniel  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rutley, David  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom

Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen

White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Heather Wheeler and  
 Christopher Pincher

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)),  
 That the proposed words be there added.*

*Question agreed to.*

*The Deputy Speaker declared the main Question, as  
 amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).*

*Resolved,*

That this House shares the strong commitment of the Government to raising school standards and building a country that works for everyone; and welcomes proposals set out in the Government's open schools national funding formula stage two consultation to move to a fair and consistent national funding formula for schools to ensure every child is fairly funded, wherever in England they live, to protect funding for deprived pupils and recognise the particular needs of pupils with low prior attainment.

## PETITION

### Sentencing for Death by Dangerous Driving

7.14 pm

**Claire Perry** (Devizes) (Con): I rise to present the Justice for James petition on behalf of more than 14,000 residents of the United Kingdom who have signed this and similar online petitions. The petitioners request that Members of the House of Commons urge the Government to change the law so that sentencing for death caused by the most extreme forms of dangerous driving should carry a charge of manslaughter.

*Following is the full text of the petition:*

*[The Petition of residents of the UK,*

*Declares that the death of James Gilbey in a hit and run on a pelican crossing is appalling; further that the driver who killed James was racing another car at speeds in excess of 90mph in a 40mph residential zone; further that the impact (adjudged to be 80mph) was such that James landed 70m down the road and was killed instantly from receiving multiple injuries; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that the driver, leaving James on the road, fled the scene, disposed of the vehicle and burnt his clothes; further that we believe that choosing to drive and behave in this way is a calculated act, that should bring charges of manslaughter and not causing death by dangerous driving; and further that there is an e-petition on this subject, titled 'Death caused by racing should bring a charge of manslaughter not dangerous driving' at <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/164488>.*

*The petitioners therefore urge the House of Commons to change the law so that death caused by racing should bring a charge of manslaughter and not causing death by dangerous driving.*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

## Rifleman Lee Bagley: MOD Duty of Care

*Motion made, and question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Guy Opperman.)*

7.15 pm

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I have secured this debate following the experience of one of my constituent's, former rifleman Lee Bagley, of No. 5 Platoon, B Company of the 2nd Battalion the Rifles. Former rifleman Lee Bagley had his right leg amputated below the knee in September 2012 following an incident that took place on the night of 24-25 February 2010. His experience during the 31 months between the date of incident and the amputation highlights issues of duty of care, which he and I believe need to be examined, and lessons that need to be learned to ensure that no serviceman has to go through the experience that he has had to endure.

Rifleman Lee Bagley returned from a tour of Afghanistan towards the end of 2009 and subsequently underwent further training in Northern Ireland. On 24 February 2010, the platoon was accommodated by the infantry school at Brecon to rendezvous with platoon commanders before flying to Belize at 5pm on 25 February 2010 to undergo jungle training.

On the afternoon of 24 February, the commander ordered the platoon to attend a night out in Brecon town as a reward for having completed an intensive training package in preparation for the forthcoming exercise and to benefit from some team bonding, particularly for those new members of the platoon who had just completed a strenuous tour in Afghanistan.

On the morning of 25 February, at approximately 2am, the platoon was leaving a bar and getting into taxis to head back to Dering Lines, the local barracks, when one of the platoon members was seriously assaulted by 10 to 12 civilian personnel. Along with fellow members of the platoon, Lee Bagley rushed to the aid of his colleague and was also assaulted. A number of the attackers jumped on Lee's leg. The original victim of the assault went immediately to accident and emergency, but Lee returned to his camp. He did not receive any immediate medical treatment and it was only later that day that he started to complain about the pain and swelling in his leg to his platoon commander who took him to accident and emergency en route to visiting his colleague who was already in hospital.

The platoon subsequently flew out without Lee. Lee was then flown to Ballykinler barracks in Northern Ireland where he had to visit the hospital in Downpatrick as requested by the chief medical officer at the camp.

From 25 February 2010 to 27 October 2010, Lee received physiotherapy in Northern Ireland, but failed to make any progress. He attended the rehabilitation unit at Aldergrove on 20 July and received an MRI scan on 22 July.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I have requested permission to participate in this debate. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a duty of care, as exemplified in this case, also exists for those who fought under Operation Banner in Northern Ireland? Some 30,000 British soldiers were deployed and 1,442 died in combat. Does he think that the Ministry of Defence needs to show greater awareness of its duty of care in future with regard to

operations in which British soldiers are placed in uncompromising situations to offer assistance, whether that care is legal, physical or emotional?

**Mr Bailey:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I think that my subsequent remarks will make it clear that I agree with the thrust of his comments.

The British Army website states:

"All wounded, injured and sick soldiers will be assigned a Personnel Recovery Officer (PRO) either from their unit or through the Personnel Recovery Units for more serious injuries.

Their role is to assist the soldier in their recovery by co-ordinating all the support needed from agencies such as the Ministry of Defence, Army Primary Healthcare Services, Service Personnel Veterans Agency, housing contacts, and specialist charities.

The PRO will visit the soldier if they are on recovery duty at home, or arrange an appointment with them at the Personnel Recovery Unit at regular intervals to monitor their progress and update their Individual Recovery Plan as well as their records on the Wounded Injured and Sick Management Information System.

The frequency of visits will depend on the needs of the individual, but at a minimum soldiers will be visited once every 14 days, with their recovery plan and needs accessed every 28 days."

After a couple of months' treatment, it should have been obvious that Lee Bagley's injuries required the assignment of a PRO, but that did not happen.

On 27 October 2010, Lee Bagley was sent home on sick leave for the next five months. He was, in his words, "sofa surfing with his mom or partner's family at their homes"

in the Black country. During that time he had great difficulty accessing information on his future treatment. Some of his telephone calls to his unit in Northern Ireland went unanswered, and when he did get through he was told that he would be informed in due course. After three months, he was asked to return to Northern Ireland for 24 hours, because his sick-at-home grading was due to expire. He then returned home.

When Lee Bagley eventually obtained an appointment for 4 February 2011 at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court in Surrey, he did not receive the correspondence, so he missed it. He eventually had a revised appointment on 25 February. From 27 October 2010 to 25 February 2011, he was at home waiting for that appointment. That raises a significant issue. Lee Bagley had complex injuries that were not obviously responding to treatment. Why was he sent home without access to specialist support for that length of time? Every day in the national health service, we hear tales of people who are unable to leave hospital because of inadequate intermediary care, but here we have an example of a soldier who was sent home without a fixed abode and with no access to the specialist support that his condition warranted.

That appears to be in complete contravention of the advice given in the Army General Administrative Instruction volume 3, chapter 99, Command And Care Of Wounded Injured And Sick Personnel, section 99.111a, which states:

"Soldier at Home or Resident Address. The first recovery visit must be completed by the end of Day 7. No more than 14 days may elapse between subsequent visits."

Again, this clearly did not take place.

The Army website outlines what needs to be done for soldiers with long-term injuries:

"Soldiers who are likely to need more than 56 days to recover will be graded as Temporarily Non-Effective (TNE). At this point units can also apply for the soldier to be transferred to a Personnel

Recovery Unit (PRU), where the soldier can receive dedicated recovery support rather than remaining on their home unit's strength."

Surely he should have been classed as TNE by 27 October and an application should have been made for transfer to a PRU. That did not happen until 14 November 2011, the following year, when he was assigned to the PRU at 143 Brigade in Telford.

Lee Bagley eventually had his amputation on 28 September 2012, nearly a year later. He subsequently had one month at Tidworth House, and then further admissions at Headley Court. He was discharged from the Army in 2014 after a year of complex trauma admissions and prosthetic care. I must make it clear that his criticisms of his treatment do not extend to the period after 14 November 2011, when he was allocated to the PRU, and his subsequent discharge; he has nothing but praise for the exercise of the duty of care that he received once he had been admitted to the PRU. However, he does feel—this seems to be backed up by the evidence—that for six months he was a forgotten man.

This is someone who was injured coming to the rescue of a comrade who had been severely assaulted. If it had happened in theatre, he would have been praised and possibly given a formal commendation. Instead, he went back to his barracks and received no attention at all, until it became obvious that he needed to go to hospital. Subsequently, it took almost a year, both in hospital in Northern Ireland and then at home on sick leave, before he was admitted to Headley Court in Surrey. It was then another six months before he was admitted to the personnel recovery unit.

It seems unbelievable that there was such a delay for injuries that were serious enough ultimately to justify amputation. Whether the delays in admission to the PRU contributed to the amputation is a matter of clinical judgment. Even if it did not, any soldier going through that experience is entitled to believe that the Army would exercise its duty of care with the utmost professionalism and diligence, and that everything possible would be done to prevent the loss of his limb. Lee Bagley's experience from 27 October 2010 to 14 November 2011 has left him with severe doubts that that is so.

Lee Bagley is entitled to know: why he was not appointed a personnel recovery officer earlier in his treatment programme; why he was sent home without any support; why he found it so difficult to obtain information while at home; why he did not receive the dedicated personnel support that he was entitled to; and why it took so long for the duty of care to be transferred to the PRU. He deserves answers to those questions.

I am sure that everyone recognises that our young people who join the armed services, exposing themselves to danger in order to protect us, deserve and have the right to expect the best possible medical care, whether in theatre or in other circumstances.

Every soldier injured, whether in battle or on other duties, should be able to have confidence that the medical response will be exercised with the utmost professionalism and diligence, and that everything possible will be done to secure recovery. That is why I have secured an Adjournment debate. Our soldiers have the right to expect the best possible care in any circumstance. I do not want the experience Lee Bagley has endured to be repeated for anyone else.

The Army has a huge volume of regulations covering the processes designed to deliver the best possible medical support, but somehow, despite all the regulations and guidance, Lee Bagley failed to get the support he needed. He and I hope that raising these issues on the Floor of the House will ensure that, in future, these regulations are implemented in a way that can be recognised by the patient and that secures the confidence of the public.

7.30 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster):** It is a pleasure to respond, and I start, of course, by congratulating the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) on obtaining this debate about his constituent, ex-Rifleman Lee Bagley, and the Ministry of Defence's duty of care following an injury he sustained during a night out in Brecon on 24 February 2010. Perhaps I may also take this opportunity to remind the House of my interest as a member of the Army Reserve.

I should like to begin by offering my personal sympathies to Mr Bagley. The injury he suffered has had a profound and life-changing impact on him. I can only begin to imagine the pain and anguish he has been through.

Let me turn to the specific points raised. The hon. Gentleman will recall our correspondence back in 2015, when he wrote to me about this case. In particular, his constituent raised similar concerns to those that have been raised today, and I advised at the time that, should Mr Bagley feel there were failings in the way his unit treated him, he should consider raising them through a formal service complaint. I advised that although such a complaint would be outside the usually permitted time limit of three months, Mr Bagley was able to make representations about why his complaint was not submitted within the time limit. My officials advise that Mr Bagley has so far not submitted a service complaint—something he is still within his rights to do. I take this opportunity to encourage Mr Bagley to submit a complaint, and I would certainly be pleased if it were admitted, because it would be appropriate to address this issue through the independent service complaints ombudsman.

I am sure the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that, given that the events in this sequence occurred up to seven years ago, and given the time available to prepare for this debate, it is difficult to piece together without an investigation—something that could be done by the service complaints ombudsman—the detail of every decision and action that was or was not taken by Mr Bagley's unit. There are a number of factors that make things difficult, not least the changeover of unit staff since 2010. I am not, therefore, in a position to determine during this debate, at relatively short notice, whether the care provided to Mr Bagley by his unit was sufficient or to address the specific questions the hon. Gentleman raised at the end of his speech.

The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that 2009 and 2010 were particularly tough years in the Afghanistan conflict, and Mr Bagley's unit, the 2nd Battalion the Rifles, was at the heart of the action. Very sadly, this meant it suffered a significant number of fatalities and casualties during that period. I am not trying to make excuses, but those are the facts as they stand.

What is clear, however, is that the Army has in place specific guidelines, as outlined by the hon. Gentleman, regarding the command and care of wounded, injured

[Mark Lancaster]

and sick personnel. These are set out in Army General Administrative Instruction, volume 3, chapter 99. AGAI 99 has been updated a number of times since 2010, but a brief outline of the timelines within which wounded, injured and sick personnel can expect to be looked after is as follows. Service personnel should be recorded on the wounded, injured and sick management information system on day 14 of their sickness, and a unit recovery officer assigned. On day 21 of sickness, the first visit of the unit recovery officer should have been completed. Personnel should have regular recovery visits thereafter, with no more than 14 days between visits, and a unit care review meeting every 28 days to review the case. If the individual remains sick at the 56-day point, they should be graded as temporarily non-effective. Clearly and unequivocally, it is unacceptable if this policy is not properly followed. If an individual feels that their chain of command is not complying with it, they should raise a complaint.

Mr Bagley was injured at a time when the MOD had acknowledged that it could and should do even more to help not only our wounded, injured and sick personnel, who deserve nothing but the best care, but to ensure that those who were caring for and administering them were appropriately resourced. That is why in 2010 we began developing the defence recovery capability—an MOD-led initiative delivered in partnership with Help for Heroes and the Royal British Legion, alongside other service charities and agencies. The defence recovery capability ensures that wounded, injured and sick armed forces personnel have access to the key services and resources they need to help them either return to duty or make a smooth transition into civilian life.

It is only right and proper that where personnel are injured while carrying out their duties, or develop an illness that can be linked to their service in the armed forces, they are properly compensated. Such circumstances are covered by the armed forces compensation scheme, which provides compensation for any injury, illness or death caused by service on or after 6 April 2005. The war pension scheme compensates for incidents up to this date. The rules of the scheme are not prescriptive in terms of when awards can be made—they allow for a variety of circumstances—but the key is whether the injury or illness has been caused by service. Personnel do of course have a right of appeal if their claim under the scheme is turned down or they are unhappy with the level of award made.

Despite the concerns raised by the hon. Gentleman, I understand that Mr Bagley's injury was sustained during a night out—in other words, he was off duty. There is no evidence that he was compelled by the service to go out for the evening in question. As a consequence, his

claim under the armed forces compensation scheme was rejected, and this decision was subsequently upheld by the first-tier tribunal.

I should stress at this point that when a member of the armed forces has to be medically discharged, as in Lee Bagley's case, the armed forces compensation scheme is not the only means by which they can receive financial assistance from the Ministry of Defence. Personnel can also receive an ill-health pension under the armed forces pension scheme, irrespective of whether their injury or illness that led to them being medically discharged was attributable to their service. I can confirm that Mr Bagley is in receipt of such a pension.

**Mr Bailey:** It is perfectly true that, parallel to this issue, ex-Rifleman Lee Bagley has been pursuing compensation, but I deliberately focused my comments on the duty of care rather than the legalistic process that surrounds the compensation issue, and that is what I really want brought out today.

**Mark Lancaster:** That is a perfectly reasonable intervention. I hope that I have already explained to the hon. Gentleman how, since 2010, quite a lot has been done through the development of the pathways that we have discussed. The great joy of these debates is that they are an opportunity for the House to discuss, using individual cases, the fact that we do have a duty of care and how the system can be improved.

It would be wrong of me to close without stating that the Ministry of Defence ensures that armed forces personnel can serve safe in the knowledge that when they leave active service they will be well supported to translate their acquired skills, experience and qualifications into the second career they aspire to. Personnel who are medically discharged are entitled to the highest level of resettlement provision through the Career Transition Partnership's core resettlement programme. The MOD also offers specialised support for wounded, injured and sick personnel, and those with the most complex barriers to employment, to ensure that they receive the most appropriate support within their recovery pathway.

I can confirm that Mr Bagley made full use of the Career Transition Partnership, and that the assistance it provided helped him to secure employment immediately after leaving the British Army. That said, I know that no level of practical help or compensation could ever make up for the distress and turmoil that he has suffered as a result of his injuries. I should like to close by reiterating my sincere sympathy for him.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.39 pm

*House adjourned.*

## Deferred Division

### FINANCIAL SERVICES

That the draft Bank of England and Financial Services (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2017, which were laid before this House on 2 December 2016, be approved.

*The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 191.*

### Division No. 131]

#### AYES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Sir Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Carswell, Mr Douglas  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colville, Oliver  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Danczuk, Simon  
 Davies, Chris

Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Elliott, Tom  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evennett, rh David  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, rh Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard

Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, Mr Nick  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kinahan, Danny  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria

Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Oppord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Osborne, rh Mr George  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Daniel  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tomlinson, Justin

Tomlinson, Michael  
Tracey, Craig  
Tredinnick, David  
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
Truss, rh Elizabeth  
Tugendhat, Tom  
Turner, Mr Andrew  
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
Vara, Mr Shailesh  
Vickers, Martin  
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
Walker, Mr Robin  
Warburton, David

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

Huq, Dr Rupa  
Hussain, Imran  
Jarvis, Dan  
Johnson, rh Alan  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, Graham  
Jones, Helen  
Jones, Susan Elan  
Kerevan, George  
Kerr, Calum  
Kyle, Peter  
Lamb, rh Norman  
Lavery, Ian  
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
Lewis, Clive  
Lewis, Mr Ivan  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Caroline  
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan  
Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
Malhotra, Seema  
Mann, John  
Marris, Rob  
Marsden, Gordon  
Maskell, Rachael  
Matheson, Christian  
Mc Nally, John  
McCabe, Steve  
McCaig, Callum  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonald, Stuart  
C.  
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair  
McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
McGovern, Alison  
McInnes, Liz  
McMahon, Jim  
Mearns, Ian  
Monaghan, Carol  
Monaghan, Dr Paul  
Morden, Jessica  
Mulholland, Greg  
Mullin, Roger  
Nandy, Lisa  
Newlands, Gavin  
Onn, Melanie  
Onwurah, Chi  
Osamor, Kate  
Oswald, Kirsten  
Owen, Albert  
Paterson, Steven  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Perkins, Toby

Phillips, Jess  
Phillipson, Bridget  
Pound, Stephen  
Powell, Lucy  
Pugh, John  
Qureshi, Yasmin  
Rayner, Angela  
Rees, Christina  
Reynolds, Emma  
Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
Robertson, rh Angus  
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
Rotheram, Steve  
Ryan, rh Joan  
Saville Roberts, Liz  
Shah, Naz  
Sheerman, Mr Barry  
Sheppard, Tommy  
Sherriff, Paula  
Skinner, Mr Dennis  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Jeff  
Smith, Nick  
Smith, Owen  
Smyth, Karin  
Spellar, rh Mr John  
Starmer, Keir  
Stephens, Chris  
Streeting, Wes  
Stringer, Graham  
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
Tami, Mark  
Thomas, Mr Gareth  
Thomas-Symonds,  
Nick  
Thornberry, Emily  
Timms, rh Stephen  
Turley, Anna  
Twigg, Derek  
Twigg, Stephen  
Vaz, rh Keith  
Vaz, Valerie  
Weir, Mike  
West, Catherine  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Williams, Mr Mark  
Winnick, Mr David  
Wishart, Pete  
Woodcock, John  
Wright, Mr Iain  
Zeichner, Daniel

### NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane  
Alexander, Heidi  
Arkless, Richard  
Bailey, Mr Adrian  
Barron, rh Sir Kevin  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Berger, Luciana  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Black, Mhairi  
Blackford, Ian  
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
Blenkinsop, Tom  
Boswell, Philip  
Brabin, Tracy  
Brake, rh Tom  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brock, Deidre  
Brown, Alan  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bryant, Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burgon, Richard  
Butler, Dawn  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
Champion, Sarah  
Chapman, Douglas  
Clwyd, rh Ann  
Coaker, Vernon  
Cooper, Julie  
Cooper, Rosie  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Coyle, Neil  
Creagh, Mary  
Cruddas, Jon  
Cunningham, Alex  
Cunningham, Mr Jim  
Day, Martyn  
De Piero, Gloria  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin

Donaldson, Stuart Blair  
Dowd, Jim  
Dowd, Peter  
Durkan, Mark  
Eagle, Ms Angela  
Eagle, Maria  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Ellman, Mrs Louise  
Elmore, Chris  
Fellows, Marion  
Ferrier, Margaret  
Field, rh Frank  
Fitzpatrick, Jim  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Flint, rh Caroline  
Flynn, Paul  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Furniss, Gill  
Gapes, Mike  
Gardiner, Barry  
Gethins, Stephen  
Gibson, Patricia  
Glindon, Mary  
Grady, Patrick  
Grant, Peter  
Gray, Neil  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Hanson, rh Mr David  
Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
Harris, Carolyn  
Healey, rh John  
Hendrick, Mr Mark  
Hendry, Drew  
Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hollern, Kate  
Hopkins, Kelvin  
Hosie, Stewart  
Howarth, rh Mr George

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

# Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 25 January 2017*

[ROBERT FLELLO *in the Chair*]

## Palace of Westminster: Restoration and Renewal

9.30 am

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster.

The motion is the formality, but I do not think that by the end of this one and a half hours we will have considered the matter properly. The Government should be tabling a motion so that the whole House and, for that matter, the House of Lords, can do so. It is now 19 and a half weeks since the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster produced its report. At the rate we are going, it will be six months from the delivery of that report to the moment when we start debating it properly and coming to a decision. That is verging on the irresponsible.

I want to lay out the nature of the problem that we have in the building. Many people think it is falling down—it is not falling down, although the Clock Tower does incline a little. The mechanical and electrical engineering systems that keep the place lit, heated, cooled, drained and dry are already well past their use-by date. The risk of a catastrophic failure such as a fire or a flood rises exponentially every five years that we delay. We should be in absolutely no doubt: there will be a fire. There was a fire a fortnight ago and there are regularly fires. People patrol the building 24 hours a day to ensure that we catch those fires.

Some of the high-voltage cables in the building are decaying and doing so deep inside the building in the 98 risers that take services from the basement past all the rooms in the building up to the roof. They are so blocked up with additional services that access to them is virtually impossible. That is why a fire in any one of them could spread very rapidly from floor to floor and take the whole building with it.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I am very pleased that my hon. Friend secured this debate. Does he agree that anyone who has any doubts about the problems that we face would do well to go on a tour of the basement and see the wiring, the plumbing and the risers that are key to the risks?

**Chris Bryant:** Yes. I have done about 30 of those tours now, with different members of the public, broadcast outlets, newspapers and other Members of Parliament. Everybody has been struck by the fact that 75% of the work that we have to do is on the mechanical and electrical gubbins of the building. This is not about a fancy tarting up of the building—it is about whether the building can function.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): I apologise for being a moment or two late, Mr Ffello. On the point about fire, will the hon. Gentleman accept that there are quite a lot of fires and occasions for fires when buildings are closed for repair and renovation? Irrespective of

when or how the work is done, doing the work of itself does not make this place infallible. We can have a fire at any time. It is a bogus point.

**Chris Bryant:** It is not a bogus point. One of the problems with the building is that it is not very well compartmentalised, which is why fire could move from one part of the building to another very quickly. That was one of the problems in 1834. Just prior to 1834, Sir John Soane had built a beautiful corridor from the old House of Lords to the old House of Commons Chamber, which took the fire from one to the other. The problem in the building at the moment is that, if we were to have a fire, it could easily spread very quickly across a large part of the estate.

**Simon Hoare:** I remember from my induction being told by the House staff that the reason why the fire spread was nothing to do with the corridor, but to do with the vents over Central Lobby being open for ventilation purposes. That is what caused the draw of the flame.

**Chris Bryant:** We should all read Caroline Shenton's book and debate that later. The truth of the matter is that everybody was predicting a fire long before 1834 and we did not take any of the action necessary to ensure that we preserved the building. It is only good fortune that we ended up being able to save Westminster Hall, which is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world.

Another problem new to us in the 20th and 21st century is the substantial amount of asbestos in the building, which simply has to be removed. There have already been several asbestos scares.

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. On the subject of asbestos, I walk around the estate all the time seeing the little "a" stickers everywhere. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if we stay in the building over the period of renovation, asbestos is a health hazard for staff and Members?

**Chris Bryant:** There is a very serious point here. Some people are arguing—I will come on to this point later—that we should stay in the building while the work is being done. That incurs a very significant risk to our safety and that of the people who work here. If we were to take the measures necessary to protect people properly while removing asbestos, that would dramatically increase the cost of and the risk to the project and the public.

Water is penetrating much of the stonework and doing lasting damage. Many of the 3,800 bronze windows, which were a wonderful idea when first installed, no longer work properly and have to be refitted.

We should be thoroughly ashamed that disabled access in this building is truly appalling. It is phenomenally difficult to get around the building for someone in a wheelchair or who has physical difficulties. The roundabout routes that many have to take to make an ordinary passage through the building are wrong. We still expect members of the public to queue for more than an hour in the pouring rain, which is not acceptable in the 21st century.

[Chris Bryant]

We have to act because this is one of the most important buildings in the world. It is part of a UNESCO world heritage site. The walls of Westminster Hall date from 30 years after the Norman conquest, the ceiling dates from the time of Richard II at the end of the 14th century and the cloisters date from the time of the Tudors. Every single tourist who comes to this country wants to be photographed in front of this building, and every film, Hollywood or otherwise, that wants to show that it is set in the UK or in London shows this building.

The people of this country have a deep affection for the building. One poll—I am very sceptical about polls, but none the less I am going to use this one—showed this week that 57% of the public want us to do the work and 61% think that we should move out to allow it to be done more effectively, more quickly and more cheaply.

Today's MPs and peers hold this building in trust. It is not ours—we hold it in trust. Our predecessors got it hideously wrong in the 19th century. They kept on delaying necessary work. That delay made the fire in 1834 not only possible but inevitable, and so we lost the Painted Chamber, St Stephen's Chapel and what was reputedly the most beautiful set of medieval buildings in the world. They then insisted on staying on site while the new building was built around them and constantly complained about the noise and the design. The result was long delays and a massive budget overrun. They started in 1840, but it was not completed until 1870, by which time Barry and Pugin were dead and their sons were battling about the ongoing design issues. If we do the same today, we will not move back in until 2055 at the earliest.

Of course we have to be careful about money, which is why the Joint Committee, which started with a very sceptical point of view on the project, recommended what we believed to be the cheapest and best option, which is a full decant. I say "cheapest" because, however we cut the numbers that have been put together on a very high-level basis for the two Houses, the option of full decant comes in at £900 million less than trying to stay in the building.

The Earl of Lincoln, the first commissioner of works, told MPs in 1844 that

"if I had been employing an architect in the construction of my private residence, I should have a right to fool away as much of my money as I thought fit; but in the case of a public building, I consider myself acting, to a certain degree, as guardian of the public purse, and to have no right to sanction any expenditure, either for the gratification of any pride, or the indulgence of any fancy I might entertain, as to the proper and efficient construction of the building."

We should adopt that same attitude today. We should be going for the cheapest option—our constituents would expect that of us—but not a cheap option that does not do the job properly.

Our argument in Committee did not hinge entirely on the money. Three Members in the Chamber were on the Committee—my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), and the hon. Members for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) and for North Antrim (Ian Paisley). They would agree that, when we started our consideration, we all assumed we would come up with some kind of plan that meant we stayed in the

building—a kind of half-and-half solution. We consulted widely, but every single person we asked told us that that was simply not workable. "Not workable, unfeasible, impracticable, foolhardy, risky and dangerous" were the sort of words people used. We should listen to them.

I want to deal with some of the things that other people have been suggesting. First, something I have heard often, though not so much in the Commons or Parliament, is that we should move to elsewhere in London or outside the capital. I disagree. This is the home of Parliament and should remain the home of Parliament, but there are good reasons beyond the romantic association. If we were to leave the Palace forever, we would still have to do the work to protect it because it is a world heritage site, and we would not save a single penny. If we moved elsewhere in London, we would have to find a space that can accommodate everyone not only in the Palace but on the rest of the parliamentary estate—Portcullis House, Norman Shaw North, Norman Shaw South, Parliament Street, Millbank and all the Lords' offices—which would be a considerable piece of prime estate to find. If we moved outside London, we would have to move the whole of Government as well, because all Ministers are Members of the Commons or the House of Lords. That option is impracticable and very expensive.

The second thing I hear—this is the most common—is that, if we leave we will never come back. I have been told that by four Members of Parliament today alone. They argue that the Commons should sit in the House of Lords, and the Lords should sit in the Royal Gallery. That is basically the proposal of the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh)—he is not right hon. but he should be, and learned and gallant and all sorts of other things as well. I have discussed the issue with him many times and we can be friendly about it, but there are lots of problems with his proposal.

That proposal would add £900 million to the cost—I have already quoted the point made by the Earl of Lincoln in 1834. Furthermore, public and press access would be very restricted under the hon. Gentleman's plan, and it would be difficult to have any kind of fully functioning Public Gallery in his scheme, whether for the Commons or the Lords. His plan would rely on keeping a large part of the building open around the work, because of the need for Whips Offices, rooms for Doorkeepers, police officers and Ministers, and—who knows?—some people might even want a Tea Room.

**Mark Tami:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Chris Bryant:** On the Tea Room?

**Mark Tami:** Not actually on the Tea Room itself, however vital that is. Some Members who may think that proposal a good idea do not realise that there is one system for the plumbing and all the electrics. The House of Lords is a separate House, but it does not have a separate supply system. We would have to build some great structure outside to ensure that one part of the building could carry on working.

**Chris Bryant:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. Basically, there is one electricity system, one drainage system, one central heating system, one cooling system—the building is a unity. If we want to keep part of it open,

especially a whole corridor, we would have to put in temporary services to accommodate everything. That is an expensive and, I would argue, risky business.

**Simon Hoare** *indicated dissent.*

**Chris Bryant:** The hon. Gentleman is shaking his head, but the specific work done by the House authorities on the proposal of the hon. Member for Gainsborough shows precisely that: it would be very expensive. The proposal is theoretically feasible, but it is very expensive.

**Simon Hoare** *rose—*

**Chris Bryant:** I will not give way. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will catch your eye later, Mr Ffello—you have very good eyesight and, well, you have your glasses on anyway.

Another point for hon. Members to think hard about is that if we were sitting down at the other end of the building, the 240 or so MPs who now have offices in the historic Palace would by then have their offices in Richmond House—quite some distance from where people intend us to sit. Most importantly, however, we would either have to walk along a corridor specially created as some kind of bubble for us while work was going on all around, including the removal of asbestos—a risk in itself—or, alternatively, walk outside along the pavement; 650 or 600 MPs walking in a hurry along the pavement at known times of day for votes is a security risk that I would not be prepared to countenance.

For all such reasons, that proposal simply does not wash. The truth is that the Chambers are not hermetically sealed units. They rely, as my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside said, on services from the rest of the building. Both the Chambers themselves will have to be closed, and the cost of temporary mechanical and electrical services would run into millions of unnecessary taxpayer pounds.

People also ask, “What about Westminster Hall?” Personally, I have a romantic attachment to Westminster Hall: I like the idea of sitting in the Hall where Richard II was removed as King by Henry IV in the shortest ever Parliament, which lasted one day. We could sit back and take inspiration from the angels carved on the ceiling. The Committee looked at the suggestion very seriously, but the problem is that the floor is not as solid as it looks. It is not sitting on the ground; the flagstones actually sit on a pillared grid, which simply could not take the weight of the large construction necessary to sit 600 or 650 MPs, members of the press and public, and all the other paraphernalia of the Chamber. In addition, such a Chamber would have to be heated, and all the advice we had from restorers and people who know about ancient buildings and historic wooden artefacts is that that would pose a risk to the ceiling that simply could not be countenanced. The roof of Westminster Hall is one of the most beautiful and precious things on the whole parliamentary estate, so that is not an option.

Some people have said—one Conservative Member present has said this to me several times: “You did not really look at the option of our staying in at all.” Yes, I am looking at the hon. Gentleman—or he is looking at me—

**Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): North West Cambridgeshire.

**Chris Bryant:** The hon. Member who represents North West Cambridgeshire—I am very grateful to him for helping me.

The truth, however, is that we did look at the option of our staying in, and so did the original report. The IOA, or independent options appraisal, costed and evaluated both a rolling programme and two different versions of staying in the building. That is all part of the original report provided, so it is simply wrong to say that we did not look at the idea of staying in. We looked at it very seriously, but we came to the conclusion—all of us, from different political parties of different persuasions—that it was simply unfeasible, unworkable and impracticable for us to stay in.

Some people have also asked me, “If the work is so urgent, why don’t we get on with it now?” The truth is that we are getting on with work now: the cast-iron roofs are being restored; three years of work is about to start on the Elizabeth Tower, or Big Ben, which will cost £29 million; and last year we spent £49 million on repairs alone. The point is, however, that the mechanical and electrical elements constitute one very large, single project that needs to be well prepared for—we cannot just start tomorrow.

Furthermore, the Palace authorities do not have the requisite capacity or skills. I am not doing them down; they themselves would argue that they do not have the capacity or the skills in-house to manage such an enormous infrastructure project. We need to put a sponsor body in place, with Members of both Houses sitting on it, and some others, to commission a delivery authority with the expertise and technical know-how to do things properly, much as with the Olympics.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Timing is important in this whole thing. If we are to meet the 2023 target start date, we need to set up the delivery authority pretty soon. It will require a statute of this House to do it, so the authorities need to get on with the matter.

**Chris Bryant:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we should have started some considerable time ago.

About 10 years ago, when I was Deputy Leader of the House for five minutes, we were already arguing that we needed to get this work on the road. The Committee was asked to delay publishing its report until the local government elections were done, until the referendum was done, until we had a new Prime Minister, and so on, and still there has been no debate. We have to get a move on.

**Mark Tami:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the amount that we spend on just patching things up grows every year, and it will continue to grow if we do not bite the bullet now?

**Chris Bryant:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In addition, when all that minor work is going on, which still costs millions of pounds, there is further risk in the building. There is building work going on. Indeed, a few weeks ago, the House of Lords decided that it could not bear the noise that was going on and had to suspend its sitting. I think that if we tried to sit in the building while work was going on, we would do that every single day.

[Chris Bryant]

I can just see the hon. Member for Gainsborough standing in the Chamber in 15 years' time—if he gets his way—saying, “I can't even hear myself think, let alone speak!”

Another thing that has been said is: “What about giving up on the September sittings?” That is quite popular with quite a lot of colleagues, especially when they are asked in September. That was specifically factored into the rolling programme option in the independent options appraisal. It was termed “scenario E1A”, because it would be enabled by longer recesses and what the IOA called an acceptance by MPs of considerable disruption for three decades. That option also assumes that there will be alternative Chambers for use during an unexpected recall of Parliament. It is worth bearing in mind that recalls are a simple fact of life. During the last Parliament alone, we were recalled twice in 2011, twice in 2013 and once in 2014, and of course we were, horribly, recalled last year after Jo Cox's murder. There will be recalls—that is just a fact.

I have heard one other argument: “We need to put on a good show in times of Brexit. We can't just meet in a car park.” Let me be absolutely clear: the temporary Chamber will not be some cardboard cut-out. It will be a properly impressive Chamber with full access for the public and the press. Moreover, any half-and-half proposal will delay our full return to the building and keep the scaffolding up for another decade or two.

But there is a much bigger point. The last thing we want as we leave the European Union is to look as if we are hanging around in an old ancestral mansion like a dowager duchess, running with buckets from one dripping ceiling to another. Nor can we risk a catastrophic failure, such as a flood or major fire. That really would give the world the worst possible impression. We want to show the world that we can take tough decisions—that we value our heritage but have a strong, modern, outward-looking vision for the future. What better way is there of showing that than taking this 1,000-year-old building, restoring what is beautiful and historic about it, and renewing it so that it really works for the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th centuries?

As a Labour Member, I think that we should see this as an opportunity. The Committee was advised repeatedly that the workforce in this country does not actually have all the skills to complete this project. After Brexit, we may have even fewer qualified builders. We should see this project as part of our industrial strategy today, and use it to show that this country can deliver a massive infrastructure project on time and on budget. We should train youngsters now in the craft and high-tech engineering skills of the 21st century, so that young people from every single one of our constituencies can work on what is the best-loved building in the world—an icon of British liberty, democracy and the rule of law.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Robert Flello (in the Chair):** Order. May I point out to hon. Gentlemen—they are predominantly gentlemen, although there are a few hon. Ladies—that I will begin calling the Front Benchers at about 10.30 am? With that in mind, I call Sir Alan Haselhurst.

9.54 am

**Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con):** It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Flello. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on securing this debate and on his telling opening.

I understand that there is enormous attachment to this home of Parliament. That attachment has led to a drift; for at least 20 years, to my knowledge, people have known that something has to be done and have been thinking about what we should do. Every time someone has been brought in, the report has shocked people and they have said, “We can't do that,” so things have been left for a while. More experts have then been brought in two years later and said, “It's worse,” and people have said, “Oh, no, we can't tackle that.” This problem has been getting steadily away from us. It is to the credit of the current administration and those in the House who support it that work is now being done to come to a decisive conclusion. I believe that some of my colleagues are blinded by their attachment to the place into supposing that the problem is not really all that bad somehow, and we can work around it.

During the last Parliament, when I was Chairman of the Administration Committee, I was privy to some of the work that was going on, and I came rapidly to the conclusion that has been reached in similar circumstances by the Parliaments of Austria, Canada and Finland: if a major exercise of this kind has to be done, the only sensible thing for us to do is to get out of the building and let the work be done. Some 12 months of study were undertaken by our colleagues in the other place and in the House of Commons, and having gone into the detail and consulted independent experts, they are persuaded that that approach is right for us, too. Colleagues can rake over the independent options appraisal—they can look at it and play with the figures and estimates as much as they like—but it is crystal clear that option 3 would take less time than option 2, option 2 would take less time than option 1, and in each case, less time means less cost.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned some of the objections, and I will refer to some of those and perhaps others. I have been told that our leaving would deprive some Members of ever serving in this building. There is in fact now a way around that. The timescale is such that it is possible for the work to bridge two Parliaments, so if that is a real problem, it can be overcome. But the honour and responsibility of being elected as a Member of Parliament lies first in doing the job, not in carrying out the job in a particular place or building.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the argument that if we leave, we will not come back. I have heard level-headed people say, “They won't let us.” Who are the “they” in all this? We are sovereign. We can decide that. Frankly, it is unthinkable that we would not come back to this Palace at the first opportunity. It has also been said that Westminster Hall might be needed for a major state event. I think that we can rely on the fact that the royal household has been consulted and has not blocked what is recommended.

It has been said that an appalling message would be sent out to the world during Brexit, but I think an even more appalling message would be sent if we soldiered on in this place in difficult conditions and there was a

catastrophic failure. That really would make it look as though this country and this Parliament were breaking down.

It is said that too much public money is involved. However much we look at them, the alternatives to option 1 are more expensive, but the fact is that the public are solidly behind us on this matter. They love this place and believe it is an important symbol of our democracy. They have been very understanding, as has the press, so if we are responsible about this, we should not worry on that front.

Another objection—in contrast to some of the others—is: “If there is a risk of catastrophic failure, why are we waiting and not getting on with it?” The reason we are not getting on with it is that people have balked at doing so every time a report has been produced since the 1990s. There has been delay, delay and delay. The risk is mounting. That is the problem. We will do the work as soon as we can, but there have been difficulties to overcome to make the arrangements for it to be approached logically.

I cannot help feeling that the distrust that has manifested in many parts of the world has also manifested here; people want to kick the establishment at every point and think that experts cannot be trusted, so we must take their advice with a large pinch of salt. Frankly, if I feel ill I want to get the advice of my doctor. If I want to have a legal instrument drawn up I go to a lawyer. If I want help with my accounts I go to an accountant. That is a normal thing to do. It is always possible, of course, to have a second opinion. We have had a second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth opinion—and still there are those who distrust those opinions and say, “Oh, well, they would say that, wouldn’t they? They are in it for themselves; they will line their pockets.” I do not think that that is fair to the Royal Institute of British Architects or the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, which have given unbiased advice to our colleagues on the Committee.

**Mark Tami:** The right hon. Gentleman has reminded me of a previous employer of mine: when we got legal advice that he did not like he would always say, “Get another lawyer.” That is the argument that some people are putting forward, when they do not like the expert advice they are given.

**Sir Alan Haselhurst:** I agree; that is the problem. At some point we must make a decision. Continually putting it off is causing the bill to rise and the dislocation to increase.

If the Palace is loved as much as I believe it is by almost every person elected to Parliament—it is certainly loved by the staff who serve us here, and the hundreds of thousands of visitors who clamour to come here and take great pleasure from being in the Palace and standing on the Floor of the House of Commons where great names of the past served—it is our duty to put safety before romance. The alternative suggestions magnify risk, perpetuate inconvenience and threaten security. It was when we came back for sittings one September and work was going on in the Committee corridor, with builders all over the place, that intruders got in masquerading as builders. It will be an enormous security threat if we are prepared to have hundreds of workers here at the same time as we try to do business.

I am astonished that some colleagues seem keen to work here while unquantified amounts of asbestos are removed, intrusive noise is unabated and an army of workers operates in our midst, and while any one of several vital services could fail at any moment. I am not surprised that some colleagues recoil from a total decant, but we must look at things in a hard-headed, not emotional, way. We must do the right thing and choose the option to which the evidence overwhelmingly points, and which has persuaded our colleagues on the Committee. I believe that it will then be all the sooner that the Palace, which we see as the symbol of parliamentary democracy, can be restored to its full glory and effectiveness and serve the nation and people for a century, or centuries, more.

10.2 am

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): I am sure that the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) will not misunderstand when I say that neither he nor I will be likely to sit in the reconstructed Chamber. It can safely be said of both of us that we are not speaking out of personal self-interest.

In a debate in November 2012, I urged that work should be undertaken so that we can be prepared from 2020 onwards, so I have some form on this. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on making a very good speech outlining, as did the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden, why the work is essential. I hope that whether we agree to option 1, 2 or 3—and there is bound to be division not only today but when the matter is debated in the Chamber—we will agree on one thing. I hope that even the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), who intervened earlier, will agree on this: the work is essential. I fear, as I said in the Chamber four years ago, that we will find ways and means of delaying the decision—because of finance, because there are other problems that the Government or Parliament must deal with, because it is not possible to reach a decision along the lines that so many of us want. The decision I want is simple: that from 2020 the work will begin, either through a total decant—I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda that that would be right—or otherwise. However, the Parliament elected in 2020, if that is when we have a general election, would sit in a different place.

**Simon Hoare:** May I just clarify something? No one doubts—I certainly do not—the scale of the work that needs to be done, the need for it, or the underlying urgency. We question the means of delivery of the works.

**Mr Winnick:** I do not disagree, obviously. The hon. Gentleman clearly accepts that the work needs to be done. One reason for today’s debate is to look at ways of delivery; but obviously there must be a major debate in the Chamber.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda mentioned the possibility of a meltdown of mechanical and electrical services. It is all in the report, and I am sure we have all read it. In many instances the cables and pipes are surrounded by dangerous asbestos. The report says that much of the building is riddled with asbestos. As to water penetration, we know from experience that when there is heavy rain there is flooding in parts of the building. We have seen it with our own eyes, let alone what the report states about the situation.

**Mark Tami:** The key issue about asbestos, with which my hon. Friend rightly says the building is riddled, is that we do not know where it is. When there is drilling, or when things are taken out, the starting presumption must be that there is asbestos there. That would add massively to the cost of working in a fully occupied building.

**Mr Winnick:** My hon. Friend certainly makes a powerful case for a full decant.

It should not be forgotten that, as has been mentioned, every year the cost of maintaining the building goes up. The figure given in the report for 2014-15—the latest figures, unless the Deputy Leader of the House has further information—is nearly £50 million. That is public money that is essential just so that the building can be in some kind of working condition. I agree that full decanting is essential. I understand why some feel that for historical and ceremonial reasons, and so that people can come to this building, there is a case for partial decanting, but in practice and when we consider the amount of work involved on what would be a huge building site, how on earth could we continue to debate in the present Commons or Lords Chambers, or the Robing Room? Imagine the constant pleas to the Speaker or Lord Speaker: “It is impossible to hear. Can the work stop for a while?” and the rest of it. It is not practical—and I do not understand how anyone could argue otherwise—to work with the constant noise and disruption and constant changes of location between the two Chambers. That is not the way to proceed, even if it was done after the 1834 fire. I think we have made some progress since then.

**James Heapey (Wells) (Con):** I am the chairman of the all-party group on the events industry; is the hon. Gentleman aware that the delay in making a decision is having an impact on event and conference bookings at the Queen Elizabeth II centre, and that, more generally, the cost of a decant in which the conference centre was used for the Lords would have an impact of hundreds of millions of pounds on the wider Westminster economy that comes with all those conferences and events?

**Mr Winnick:** The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point.

I am speaking in the debate because I want to urge that a decision be reached as quickly as possible. It has been said in some parts of the media that the work is for ourselves. It is not: we come and go; we are tenants. Neither is it for our staff, the officers or anyone else working in the building. That is not why the work should be undertaken, despite the cost. It is for the democratic process. It is for British democracy to have its traditional home, which is recognised throughout the world. We should take pride in the building, and we should take pride in the fact that British democracy is recognised in the way it is, especially in countries in which, unfortunately, the rule of law and civil liberties are totally absent. That is why it is so essential that a decision is taken in the very near future. I want to see a building fit for purpose, a place that ensures the continuation of the democratic process and the rule of law.

Of course, we could go elsewhere. Parliamentary democracy in the United Kingdom certainly does not depend on one particular building—it would be farcical if it did—but this is our traditional home, and hopefully

will be for future generations. That is why it is so important that what the report outlines should be seriously considered and a decision should be reached in the near future.

When the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons responds, I hope he has the authority to say that a major debate will take place on the subject this year—in the first part of 2017. The House itself can then reach a decision on option 1, 2 or 3. Whatever it may be, at least the decision will be reached that work should commence following the 2020 general election.

10.11 am

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con):** I am grateful to have caught your eye, Mr Ffello. As one of the few chartered surveyors in the House and as a member of the Finance Committee for more than 10 years, I have been heavily involved with this matter from well before the inception of the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster, and all the way through to date. The Palace of Westminster is an iconic symbol of this nation. It is absolutely symbolic of everything the UK stands for. In many ways, the strength of our democracy is upheld by the strength of our Parliament encased in these buildings. As politicians, we have an absolute duty to the people of this country and to future parliamentarians to maintain it properly and get this whole thing right.

Much has been said in the debate, so I will be brief. Over the course of our history, including following the damage caused by the burning of Parliament in 1834 and 14 separate bombings during the blitz in 1940, only piecemeal repairs have been carried out. It is surprising to say the least, considering Great Britain’s prowess for engineering thoroughness, maintenance and ability, that no comprehensive record has been kept of what work has or has not been done on the building.

I will briefly outline what is wrong in layman’s terms. When any system or service has failed in the past, there has been simply a “make do and mend” response—a pipe added here or a wire added there. The high pressure steam heating system is encased in asbestos insulation, which has remained well beyond its designed lifespan and original capacity. It could burst and produce asbestos fibre at any minute. The main sewage pump needs replacing, as does the electricity supply, which is liable to major failure. It is unacceptable that Parliament could be plunged into darkness at any minute during great occasions, such as the Queen’s Speech during the state opening of Parliament. There is no doubt in anybody’s mind that this work needs to be done.

The timing of the restoration and renewal works is crucial. As a chartered surveyor, my view is that the entire building must be cleared so that all of the asbestos can be removed in one go, and as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said, so that all of the services—water, electricity, sewage, internet and so on—can be renewed and separated in one concerted action. Doing that piecemeal or by partial decant is completely impractical.

Other concerns have been raised, first that Parliament will never return. Frankly, after an expenditure of £3.5 billion, that would be a national scandal. The second concern is what will happen to MPs who are here for only one term. The delivery authority will have to ensure that the Chamber is open for at least part of any Parliament. The third concern is the legislative

status of the temporary Chamber in Richmond House. For goodness' sake, surely we can design something that is worthy of this Parliament? If that cannot be done in Richmond House, let us put it in the Foreign Office or the Treasury. That problem can surely be overcome.

I will address the fourth concern for a minute or two. A lot of concerns have been raised, including by me, about the cost and delivery of this enormous project. I have done a little bit of research, and the nearest comparable project I could find was the demolition of Chelsea barracks, which cost £3 billion. That was a third smaller than this place, which covers 73,000 square metres. It is therefore likely that the cost of this project will be well in excess of £3 billion. That cost is well substantiated by Deloitte in its report.

The report is excellent on financial grounds, but the problem is that the report has not scoped the work properly, so I do not know how it can be completely costed. That is why a shadow delivery authority needs to properly scope the work, consult parliamentarians on what is needed in this place and come up with realistic costings. However, Deloitte makes the important point that, for every year of delay, we add £60 million to £85 million to the cost of the project.

The only option is a full decant and a continuous, unbroken period of restoration and renewal. It is our responsibility to get on with this work, so that future generations and parliamentarians do not make the same mistakes as previous generations. Indeed, we are in grave danger of making the same mistakes ourselves if we go for a partial or continuous repair option—options 1 and 2 in the report.

The public support the project. We need to appoint a shadow delivery authority as soon as possible to scope the work, consult parliamentarians on what facilities they want in place—as the hon. Member for Rhondda said, the disabled access is appalling and it is a scandal that we have such poor facilities for our guests—produce proper costings and report back to Parliament. The work must then be enshrined in statute, so that a statutory delivery authority can begin to get on with the work as early as possible in the next Parliament.

10.16 am

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the debate and that, at last, the matter is before the House. I urge the Government and the Deputy Leader of the House to drive this matter, get behind it, get it on to the Floor of the House and ensure that a decision is taken as urgently and expeditiously as possible.

The public and, indeed, Members are right to feel confused. I feel a little bit confused because people who are leavers in another debate are coming to me and saying they wish to remain, and remainers from that same debate are coming to me and saying they wish to leave. Let us be absolutely clear: we need to leave the House as urgently and expeditiously as possible to allow the work to commence, so that we can come back to a new and better Palace that serves generations to come.

What are we? We are parliamentarians. Let us be the generation of parliamentarians that gets this right. Let us not have it said of our generation that we missed the opportunity, or that we could have got it right but we failed like the generations before us. We have it in our

grasp. Let us seize this moment and seize it right. We must take those decisions, drive this matter, and ensure that we at last put in place a board, with parliamentarians on it, and the finance to deliver the project once and for all. We have a duty to do this. We would be derelict in that duty if we failed. Future generations have a right to come to a wonderful Palace of Westminster, as it has been for 1,000 years before, to see what has happened and what will continue happen in this place.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is absolutely right that there is no cheap option. Let us not kid ourselves that there is a way around this, or a way of doing it cheaper. There is not. This is a multibillion pound project whichever way we cut it. The sooner we get on with it, the better for future generations. I served on the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster, and I arrived there a traditionalist and as somebody who was going to do his darnedest to ensure we stayed in this building. It is not possible. All of the evidence is compelling, and it suggests that we are sitting on a ticking time bomb—that the House will have either a catastrophic flood or a catastrophic fire. How would we feel waking up one morning to that news? Where would fingers be pointing that morning? Now is the time to act and get this right.

It is a financial fantasy to think that we can do this in some other way. I urge the Deputy Leader of the House to speak to the powers that be, to encourage the Government to get on with this matter and to get it in front of the House. It is important for the House to realise more than 8,000 incidents since 2008 have been recorded as significant. Sixty of them could have brought it to a pile of rubble. Are we prepared to wait for one of those incidents to be catastrophic? I say, “No.” I say, “Let’s get on with it expeditiously.”

10.20 am

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): I agree with the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) that the Government need to get on with this and that we need a proper debate on the Floor of the House. It is not acceptable—this is not the fault of the hon. Gentleman—that we now have only 10 minutes, if my hon. Friend the Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara) is called now, to hear an alternative point of view, and there is an alternative point of view. It is held by people who are just as committed to maintaining safety as anyone else.

I congratulate the Committee. We all love this place and we all want to preserve it for future generations, but there is an alternative point of view. I urge the Government to bring a motion to the Floor of the House. If the building is at such risk and if there is a real danger of fire, we need this debate. We were promised it yesterday, so let us have it in two or three weeks and get on with coming to a decision. We should base the debate on the draft motion provided by the Joint Committee of both Houses on page 100 of its report. I for one will seek to table an amendment to it. We already have scores of names on that amendment and we will have a full debate and the House will make its mind up. Let us get on with it.

My view is well known and my amendment will say that we should start work now. We are already spending £100 million, so we should start work now. We should

[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

retain ultimate control, although I accept that no one is suggesting that Members of Parliament should be telling builders, architects and surveyors which part of the building to close at any time. There is doubt about passing too much control to an enabling authority, so we must retain ultimate democratic control.

The third vital point of view, which is held by many Members of Parliament and many peers, is that, as during the second world war, the House of Commons debating Chamber should, at all times, retain a presence in the old Palace of Westminster. The hon. Member for Rhondda briefly alluded to the fact there is an alternative, expert, independent point of view that, instead of building what I would deem to be a folly costing £85 million of a replica chamber in the courtyard of Richmond House, we should, as in the war, use the House of Lords Chamber with a line of route through Westminster Hall and St Stephen's chapel to the House of Lords Chamber.

The Government have come up with a reply to my proposal and, as the hon. Member for Rhondda mentioned, stated it will cost £900 million more. We dispute that. My architect tells me that people persistently miss the point that our option is a total shutdown, not a hybrid of options 2 and E1. The point is that our proposal is a total shutdown of the mechanical and electrical systems with a full strip-down from day one. The temporary services of the Lords and Royal Gallery are just that—temporary, not lash-ups keeping part of the existing services going. Both the financial impact in section 2.5 most importantly, and the timing in section 2.3, are based on a false premise and exaggerated. The problem is that the writers of the report are not engineers. A properly briefed engineer would pick up that point immediately.

There is an alternative point of view and we will put it during this debate—time is short and I want to give my hon. Friend the Member for North West Cambridgeshire a chance to say a few words. He will talk primarily about the figure. I want to talk about the 1 million visitors to this place every year. We are talking about those who propose a full decant. By the way, I must repeat that the report says the matter is so urgent, but a full decant would not take place until 2023.

I accept that we are going to move back to this place. I have never used the argument that we will never move back. We will eventually move back, but I do not believe it will be in five years. When we lose control, it could be six years. When I was shown round on a tour of the basement, I was told privately that it would be eight years. It is a long time and we would pass away control.

This is not just about us, but about the 1 million people who visit this iconic place every year. My proposal, which I believe is a sensible compromise—services could be taken into the House of Lords Chamber if necessary from outside, so we could shut down all services in one go if we wanted to—would at least keep Westminster Hall open to the public and keep the debating Chamber.

My final point is that, during the second world war, both Attlee and Churchill made an absolute political decision that the Nazis would not bomb us out of this building. We decided to stay here which is why, despite the massive damage to the building, we kept the debating Chamber of the House of Commons in the House of Lords throughout the second world war. Although the

issue is not primarily about sentiment or emotion, this is not an office block. If it were I would agree we should move out, but it is not. It is the centre of the nation and the nation should keep its debating Chamber in this building.

10.26 am

**Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): I wish to take issue with the argument in the Joint Committee's report that it would cost £3.5 billion to decant and that that would be the cheaper option. I start by pointing to the opening page of the summary, which says in the third paragraph:

"However, there is significantly more work to be done by professionals before budgets can be set, buildings are vacated and works can commence."

I deeply regret that that caveat is not being emphasised a lot more—indeed, it has not been mentioned by anyone in today's debate.

It is disingenuous to say that leaving here would cost £3.5 billion and be the cheaper option. That figure does not take account of the fact that some £600 million would be spent until 2023 when the full decant would take place. Nor does it take account of the fact that if we fully decant, there would be rental costs for the offices and space that would be needed outside this building. The figure does not show up in the costing on page 39 of the report. It simply says that professional advice will be required. We are talking about millions and millions of pounds of rental costs that are not accounted for.

There is an issue with security costs. If the peers go to the QEII centre, that will mean additional security. A full decant would require additional space outside the Palace of Westminster. Those security costs have not been factored in either—again, it would be serious millions of pounds. The tourism industry was mentioned. If the QEII building closed, that would affect the conferences normally held there, which attract significant sums of money to the local economy; I have heard that it would affect our local economy by some £200 million. Nearby hotels are worried because they will not be able to let out their rooms to people who go to conferences at the centre. There will be an impact on restaurants and taxis.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said that if there were a rolling programme of works and we stayed here, that would be £900 million more expensive. I gently suggest that my figures come to a whole lot more than £900 million; had they been factored into the calculations in the report, we might be having a different debate.

The argument that we must move out is simply not the only one in town. Work is being done at Buckingham Palace. It has 100 miles of cables and 20 miles of pipes, yet the work will carry on while Her Majesty stays there with the entire royal household. Work will be done in segments. During the fire at Windsor Castle in 2002, 20% of it was burned down, yet Her Majesty and the royal household continued to operate from there. They did not have to move out.

As for the advice sought from experts, let us be clear: one does not need to be an expert to work out that the work will be easier if everyone leaves the place of work. That is a given, but the point is that this is no ordinary

building. It is the seat of Government, and we have to take account of that fact. At the time of Brexit, when we seek to make new friends overseas and secure favourable trade agreements, do we really want to convey the image of a temporary building in the courtyard of another Government building? We have to take into account the soft-sell power of the iconic building that is Parliament. I put it gently to hon. Members that the selling power of this building far exceeds any figures for costs that have been produced here. As we have been told, it is an iconic building.

Furthermore, at a time of austerity when we are writing to our constituents and saying that they cannot have an additional few pounds for whatever they are seeking money for, do we really want to go to the public and say that, nevertheless, we want to spend billions of pounds on our place of work? I do not think that in the present economic climate that is sustainable.

The question that should have been put to the experts is not what the best way of working from here is, because the best answer is obviously that we should all clear out. What they should have been told was, “This is Parliament—the seat of Government. Go away and work out a plan for how we can continue to operate on this eight-acre site.” I can guarantee that they would have come up with a proposal had they been given that option.

10.31 am

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate on behalf of the Scottish National party and with you in the Chair, Mr Ffello. I wish all hon. Members present and everyone else a happy Burns day.

It is customary to acknowledge and congratulate those who secure debates in Westminster Hall, but today is slightly different. I cannot merely offer ordinary congratulations to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). After all, he has managed to do what the Government failed to do—bring about a debate on the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster. As the bard said:

“The best laid schemes o’ Mice an’ Men,  
Gang aft agley”.

I will touch on the delay shortly, but in the meantime I tip my hat to the hon. Gentleman, a colleague on the R and R Joint Committee.

Today’s debate has been interesting, and I shall reflect briefly on what has been said. The hon. Member for Rhondda set out very well many of the issues that have arisen following decades of neglect—first by Governments at the time when they were responsible through the Ministry of Public Building and Works, and then by Parliament itself. Cheekily, I will mention the poll this week that the hon. Gentleman cited: 25% of those polled would happily see the place bulldozed. However, I feel that that is more an indictment of its incumbents than of the building itself. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman made a very good speech to set out his case. He did that very well.

The right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst), a colleague on the Finance Committee, was absolutely right: being elected is about doing a job, not about doing it in a particular building. He made a very good speech, as did the hon. Member for Walsall

North (Mr Winnick), who made a very salient point: the work is not for us. We can be sceptical about the project and criticise elements of it, but we must be clear—this work is not for us; we are merely tenants of the building. I say again that at the present time I am campaigning for my eviction—I will leave that one hanging.

The hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), another colleague from the Finance Committee, highlighted the decades-long neglect of the building and its appalling disabled access—he was absolutely right to place that on the record. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), a colleague from the R and R Committee, made a typically witty speech and a very powerful case for his position. That is on the record very strongly.

The hon. Members for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) and for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara) put forward their case. I disagree with it, but they have put their points across and I am sure that they will also do so when the matter comes to the Floor of the House, whenever that may be.

For me, today’s debate is not about the rights or wrongs of the project. The hon. Member for Rhondda will, I am sure, acknowledge that despite my early stated scepticism about the project, I did my best to be constructive in my role on the Joint Committee. I helped to secure a public consultation and some significant improving amendments to the text of the report. There is no doubt in my mind that if the two Houses vote for the project to go ahead, the recommended full decant is the best way to proceed.

For me, a sceptic about the project, and for the hon. Member for Rhondda, a champion of the project, the situation is clear: delaying the debate and the vote does not help anyone. I struggle to understand why the Government have been delaying it. First, we were told that there would be a debate and a vote before Christmas; then it was to be yesterday. Are the Government so concerned about the objections being raised by Conservative Members who are coalescing around the idea that somehow MPs could remain in the Palace while the works are going on?

Some hon. Members are worried that if Parliament does not sit in the Palace for a time, it will not return; others are concerned that customs may be replaced. It is an idea built purely on sentiment. The right hon. Member for Saffron Walden called it romance. It is a romance and sentimentality about a building. The idea does not make engineering or financial sense, as was explained so well by the hon. Member for Rhondda. Working around Parliament sitting in the Palace would add considerable time, cost and risk to the project. The savings from not building a temporary Chamber in Richmond House would be outweighed by the added time to get the work done, the added engineering complexity and the considerable added risk. It is now just shy of five months since our report was published. I say to the Government: get on with the debate and get on with the vote.

**Robert Ffello (in the Chair):** The hon. Gentleman may wish to know that I had a bowl of porridge oats in deference to the bard this morning.

10.36 am

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under you as Chair, Mr Ffello. So did I. It is very good for us, I understand.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and the other members of the Joint Committee, who worked very hard in the lead-up to this debate. I also congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Hon. Members will know what my hon. Friend is like: he is blustering and blarneying and very frustrated about this, so it is great that he has had the opportunity to secure the debate. He is right to do that, because the report was published in September 2016.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have been talking to me, and it goes without saying that all hon. Members are concerned about the immediacy and urgency of the work. They are also concerned about costs, and they note that other events and priorities may be occupying the Government's mind. However, we come to this debate with a background of reports. We have the very good report from the hon. Members who served on the Joint Committee, and the Public Accounts Committee is also considering this matter, although it may not report until March. We also have the Treasury Committee report. Without doubt, whether for engineers, architects or whatever, the costings from September will be different even from the costings now. The hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara) is right to be concerned about that issue. My view is that the debate will clarify all that. The important issue for our side is that hon. Members have a say. That is the key thing. All these questions and concerns can be aired with new information—against the background of the information from all those reports.

The right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) mentioned Canada. I had the opportunity, with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, to visit Canada. Quite by chance, we were taken to the mock chamber that the parliamentarians there had and, in the best tradition of “Blue Peter”, I have here one that I made earlier—a picture of it. Obviously, it cannot be read into *Hansard*, but it does give a nice flavour of what can be done, if hon. Members want to see it later. It is a beautiful chamber. All of us may feel very comfortable debating in this Chamber now, but if we were given a chamber in the Department of Health that had desks, we would realise how good it would be to debate like a proper, modern Parliament and we might even not want to come back to the old Chamber. Canada's temporary chamber is not just in a courtyard. It is a beautiful building and, engineering-wise, it shows what can be done—a visit to Canada might be in order.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda always reminds me that there are no options; he says, “Don't tell people there are options. There is only one option.” The main thing is that Members should have a say. I am pleased to hear that some of the work has already been done. I was going to raise the issue of asbestos in the Chamber; again, not sitting in September might be an option to deal with that. The subject of fire has been constantly raised.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. The House has a register of known asbestos, but a large body of evidence suggests that asbestos is riddled throughout the work that has

been done. There are 98 risers in this building and all are thought to hold asbestos. The health and safety and fire aspects of why we should decant are compelling to me. The fact is that we are allowing the general public and our staff to work where there is a chance of asbestos and silica dust. If anybody has seen someone die of mesothelioma, they will know that it is not a pretty sight. We have no option, on those grounds alone.

**Valerie Vaz:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I have to say, gently, that it is the tradition to be in the room at the start of the debate, but I take on board that, particularly given her previous role, she understands the medical reasons—I have a cough today and it is difficult to breathe—and she mentioned the terrible condition of mesothelioma.

I want to knock another myth on the head. Again, I am not an architect or an engineer but Members should understand that although we may be moving out of the building, we will not actually be moving off the estate. We will still be around and will not be leaving the parliamentary estate. I am pleased that the work on the cast-iron roof is also being done.

The Joint Committee was tasked to look at this, and has fulfilled its remit, but Members are right to be concerned about costs. We had the same debate when the Labour Government decided they wanted to put money into the Olympics and there was a lot of chuntering that it was going to be too costly. In the end, sadly, there was a change of Government and we did not get the benefit of how brilliant the Olympics were and how, under the Olympic Delivery Authority, everything was done to time and, to a certain extent, cost. The hiccup, as the Deputy Leader knows, was the security—we finally had to get public service in, rather than G4S. We need to be careful that Members are not excluded from the delivery authority. The key point for me is that Members should decide and the only way they can do that is if we have the debate. The one main thing I would ask the Deputy Leader is that we have the debate as soon as possible, based on the information that the other Committees are looking at.

A building is only a building with people in it. It is nothing without people in it. Whatever we decide to do, and if there is only one option, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda suggests, we need to take that decision. However, we need to take an informed decision because, in the end, MPs are always blamed when things go wrong and, rightly, we will take responsibility for that. We need to do this on an informed basis, with everybody abiding by the result.

10.43 am

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Michael Ellis):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Ffello, and to close this debate. There have been powerful contributions, if I may say so, from all Members who spoke today. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on securing the debate and on his service on the Joint Committee. I also commend the service of all the other Members—most of them are here—who served on it. The House owes a debt of gratitude to the members of that Committee for the intensiveness and seriousness of their work. It was,

I believe, a year of hard work. I know that the hon. Gentleman in particular enjoys the history of this place and has written about it.

As has already been said, this is one of the most recognisable and renowned buildings in the world. That is in part because of its architecture—the grandeur of Victorian Britain combined with the historical depth and resonance of Westminster Hall. In part, it is because of what this place represents. The United Kingdom Parliament is for everyone in this country, and it is precisely because Parliament and the Palace of Westminster belong to the British people that we as parliamentarians have a responsibility to ensure that it is preserved for future generations. It is also an edifice that sends a powerful message around the world representing, as it does, the strength of democracy. We are ultimately its custodians for generations to come. People love this building, hence, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) mentioned, it is visited by nearly 1 million people a year. It is one of the few structures around the world that is recognised the world over. Our generation must accept responsibility for the active steps that are needed to preserve it.

We have reached a point where make-do-and-mend is simply not an option. That approach has already been taken and has led to decades of under-investment, which we are now forced to confront. Much of our infrastructure is well past, and in some cases decades past, its life expectancy for its planned working life. Most of the systems put in place in the post-war refurbishment, which was the last time there was a major renovation, were meant to last only a few decades and have now lasted twice as long. Since then, the backlog of maintenance has steadily grown, in part because those working on the structure cannot be entirely sure where all the pipes and wires lead. It will no doubt surprise some, particularly perhaps those outside this Chamber, to know that in some instances the authorities here have to cut a wire and wait to see who complains that the electricity has gone off, or block a pipe and see where there is a later complaint. We do not know, necessarily, where everything leads.

In a sense, Parliament's maintenance team have been so good at their work that they have been victims of their own success. Members have tended not to be troubled by the headaches that the team face on a daily basis that are mostly hidden in basements, voids or the vertical risers, which have been referred to and of which there are nearly 100 spread across the building. Often, we see only a small proportion of the true scale of the work that takes place every day to keep this Palace going. Again, that is testament to the dedication with which those workers work in difficult, and sometimes dangerous, conditions, particularly because of the presence of asbestos in so many locations around the building.

Yet the task is steadily becoming too great even for those make-do-and-mend measures and the ongoing renovation measures that have been happening for so long. Decades of under-investment mean that the risk of a major fire, flood or other catastrophic failures increase every year. For example, parts of the sewerage system were installed in 1888 and are still in use. The costs of avoiding the inevitable eventual calamity or major emergency, if we do nothing, are also rising. As the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick)

mentioned, we are facing rising ongoing annual maintenance costs, which reached almost £50 million last year.

**Jo Churchill:** Will the Minister give way?

**Robert Ffello (in the Chair):** Order. With the greatest respect to the hon Lady, you really cannot come into a debate while the wind-ups are taking place and expect to take part.

**Michael Ellis:** We need to cover the issue that the ongoing maintenance cost the taxpayer £50 million last year. All told, some 40% of the mechanical and engineering systems will be at an unacceptably high risk of failure by 2020, and five years after that the figure will have risen to 50%. In other words, we are just eight years away from being in a situation in which half the Palace's systems are so dilapidated that they could cause a major emergency that stops Parliament's work and forces our evacuation without warning, perhaps overnight. For all those reasons, it is clear that we cannot pass the buck any longer.

**Mr Vara:** The Minister has emphasised how urgent it is that we get the work done. Does he therefore agree that the work should commence immediately, rather than waiting for six years, as page 91 of the report says? It states that a full decant will take place in six years' time.

**Michael Ellis:** It is fair to point out, as was mentioned, that a great deal of work is ongoing while Parliament sits, including, for example, repairs to the roof and other essential items of maintenance. That is a monumental undertaking, and a great deal of work undoubtedly needs to be done in order to set that into train.

We have heard what the Joint Committee has recommended: that a full decant is the cheapest, quickest and lowest-risk option. It also proposes the establishment of a delivery authority, overseen by a sponsor board, which would first be established in shadow form to draw up budgets and a business case, before a final vote in both Houses to approve the plans.

The Government have undertaken to provide time for a full debate and vote in due course on the Committee's report. The hon. Member for Rhondda will recollect from his duties in this place that time is always at a premium for business managers, particularly so the moment.

**Chris Bryant:** That is all very well, but to be honest, "in due course" is the kind of phrase that weasels use. It means that someone does not really intend to do something in any expeditious way. Nearly 20 weeks have now passed. We have been told that, every year we delay, the project costs an extra £85 million. The finger will be pointing at the Minister if something goes wrong, as he has just described—so get on with it man!

**Michael Ellis:** Shall we put it this way? It will happen if not in due course, then as soon as is reasonably practicable.

**Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op):** I am not sure about weasels, but this sounds like a sketch from "Yes, Minister"—Sir Humphrey Appleby's next line would be "at the appropriate juncture". My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said that each year we delay costs £85 million. We have heard how the public support the decant and improvements to the

[Chris Elmore]

House, but the longer we delay, there is a risk that we will lose public support, so I encourage the Minister to get on with it. He seems to be putting forward a case for a full decant, which many of us support, but we need to get on with it.

**Michael Ellis:** What we decide to do is a matter for the House. I reiterate that we aim to bring the matter to a vote as soon as possible. We have to take the time—and have taken the time—to consider very carefully the details of the proposed recommendations and their implications. It is not simply a question of reading a report that has taken a year to prepare. We want to consider those recommendations and their implications carefully. We have taken advice on a range of technical and governance issues made by the Joint Committee report by, for example, consulting with the Infrastructure and Projects Authority. It is only right, too, that Members consider the report of the Joint Committee carefully. I urge all of them to read it in full if they have not done so already.

**Mr Winnick:** The House rises for the Easter recess on 30 March. Is there a reasonable chance that we will have the debate before then?

**Michael Ellis:** We aim to bring the matter to a vote as soon as is reasonably practicable. As has been made clear this morning, in recent weeks colleagues have suggested a number of alternative proposals, some of which the House authorities have commissioned additional research on. Those also need to be considered, and that includes the proposals made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough, which have been analysed in detail. A copy of the House's report will be placed in the Library later today and is available electronically now.

The House authorities have been keen to engage with Members, most recently through two well-attended drop-in sessions—we organised those—with the programme team. Members are also encouraged to arrange to be taken on a tour of the basement areas. It is not compulsory to go with the hon. Member for Rhondda—

**Chris Bryant:** But it is available.

**Michael Ellis:** It is available, but other tours can be organised.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I have listened carefully to the Minister's speech. With great candour and great respect, I say to him that I think he is making excuses on the Government's behalf. We need to have this debate and to establish a shadow authority as soon as possible, so that the work can be scoped and costed accurately, and we know how to move forward.

**Michael Ellis:** My hon. Friend knows that time is always a precious commodity in this House. Business managers are always under time pressure, now more than ever, but the matter is being given very careful consideration.

**Mr Vara:** The Minister is being generous with his limited time. He said that alternative proposals are being considered by officials. Given that the report took

a considerable amount of time to produce, has huge caveats in it and says that professional advice is still needed for costing purposes, I put on record that, whatever decisions the officials come to, it is assumed that they will have the usual caveats and that we will not be able to rely on those figures to the extent that it is hoped.

**Michael Ellis:** Once an initial decision has been taken in response to the Joint Committee's recommendations, focus will shift to the details of developing plans for how the work should be done. However, it is hard for detailed scrutiny to take place now because line-by-line budgets have not been prepared, and cannot be yet. That can happen only when the delivery authority has completed its necessary preparation work.

The Joint Committee was clear that it could not provide detailed budgets. Only establishing a shadow delivery authority will allow a true picture of the costs to emerge, before Members of Parliament and peers of the realm have the final say. The Committee's headline figures for the cost of the three options under consideration range from £3.52 billion to £5.67 billion—a difference of £2.15 billion—but everyone following the debate should be clear that those are preliminary estimates and not guaranteed costs.

Whatever the differences in approach, clearly no one disputes that we must act to preserve this historic building. On that we have no choice. As part of a UNESCO world heritage site, the Palace simply cannot be allowed to fall into terminal disrepair. Doing nothing is not an option. What happens is up to the House, and ultimately it will be for Members of both Houses to decide on the right way forward. The large sums of money involved and the importance of this building to our nation's prestige mean great care is needed when weighing up the options.

It is clear from the speeches we have heard that the responsibility of getting the decision right as custodians of this place weighs heavily on all Members of the House. The Government, for our part, will work with Parliament to ensure that whatever is decided is delivered in the right way to preserve this place for the country and for future generations.

10.58 am

**Chris Bryant:** It has been enlightening to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Ffello. We have heard very good speeches. I particularly congratulate the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) on his very important contribution.

I take a completely different lesson from the fire at Windsor than the hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara). I take the lesson that there will be a fire in this building. It could take a wing or the whole of the building down, which is why we need to act. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) talked about sitting in the House of Lords. He should listen to Winston Churchill, who said in 1943 that there would be a real problem with the House of Commons sitting in the House of Lords, because the Division Lobbies were not big enough. During the war only 20 or 30 Members sat in the House of Lords or in the House of Commons every day, so their experience was completely different.

The most important thing we have to do is take issue with the Government, because the Minister made a wonderful speech on why we should do what the Joint Committee advised, then issued a whole load of waffly platitudes, as though he was speaking on Her Majesty's behalf. They were excuses for doing nothing, as the hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) said. We have to get on with it. We must have the debate so that we can hear the opposing views and thrash it all out, and it should be before the February recess. Let us just get on with it so that we can make a decision.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Photonics Industry

11 am

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the photonics industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Ffello.

The usual reaction to any comment about photonics is, "What's photonics?" It is worth pointing out that photonics is nothing to do with fold-down sofas and that it is not the study of protons. Photonics comes from the word "photon" and is the science of light.

Scotland has a great tradition in science, with figures such as Lord Kelvin, James Watt and Thomas Graham featuring strongly. The most famous physicist in the photonics field, although he is probably much less well-known than those other figures, is James Clerk Maxwell. Maxwell was born in Edinburgh in 1831 and brought up in rural Kirkcudbright, before moving back to study at Edinburgh University. A brilliant mathematician and physicist, he moved to Cambridge at the age of 19. On arrival, he was given a list of rules and told that the 6 am Sunday church service was mandatory. Reportedly, Maxwell paused before replying, "Aye, I think I can stay up that late."

Maxwell's most notable work was formulating the classical theory of electromagnetism, which for the first time brought together electricity, magnetism and light. His development of the Maxwell equations, which describe a wave as having an electric and magnetic component, are fundamental when describing the propagation of light. Many argue that Maxwell's contribution to physics is on a par with those of Newton or Einstein. Indeed, Einstein himself said:

"The special theory of relativity owes its origins to Maxwell's equations of the electromagnetic field."

Those equations changed the world forever and are the bedrock of photonics. In recognition, 2015 was designated the international year of light, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Maxwell's electromagnetic theory of light, thus marking his contribution as the father of photonics.

I knew none of that when I was considering university courses. I chose my course—laser physics and optoelectronics—because I enjoyed physics and, frankly, because the name sounded impressive. As a 17-year-old, I had no idea that Strathclyde University was one of the UK's leading institutions for photonics. I want to make special mention of Professor Robbie Stewart, whose enthusiasm for and expertise in photonics was matched by his burning desire to see every young person—even those who were sometimes reluctant students, such as myself—achieve success in physics.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a very interesting speech, although I suspect that she will be too modest to say that she has a PhD in photonics—

**Carol Monaghan:** It is not a PhD.

**Joanna Cherry:** Well, a postgraduate qualification in photonics.

[Joanna Cherry]

My hon. Friend mentioned Strathclyde University. She will also be aware that Heriot-Watt University, which is in my constituency, is a centre for the study of photonics and quantum science. I have been very privileged to meet Professor Duncan Hand and other researchers and staff there, who showed me that photonics applies in a variety of practical fields, including cyber-security, cancer treatment and the protection of civilians in war zones.

**Carol Monaghan:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, and I will talk later about some of the applications of photonics. As she suggests, the central belt of Scotland is a hotbed for photonics, from Glasgow and Strathclyde in the west to Heriot-Watt and Edinburgh in the east.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** First, I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this matter to Westminster Hall for consideration. Whenever we did research on this issue, one point that emerged was that UK photonics companies export between 75% and 90% of their products, so their importance to the UK economy is immense, even though it is not well known and often overlooked. Does she agree that if the photonics industry across the UK is going to continue to succeed, it needs to be supported, which is something the Minister should consider?

**Carol Monaghan:** The hon. Gentleman makes some really important points and I will come on to some of the challenges that the photonics industry faces. Of course, one of them is that it is a relatively unknown area of the economy.

In Scotland, the presence of a number of major multinationals, combined with the outstanding research base, has enabled the central belt to become a world leader in the design, development and manufacture of high-value lasers. Laser sales are in excess of £200 million per annum and 90% of those sales are exports, bringing significant wealth to the region.

Scottish companies in the laser sector currently provide employment for around 3,000 people. The largest industrial players in Scotland are Thales, which is based in Glasgow, and Selex, which is based in Edinburgh, but other small and medium-sized enterprises are doing excellent work.

Another renowned company, Coherent Scotland, has gone from strength to strength in the last decade. It is not in my constituency but in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). It manufactures lasers for industrial environments, such as the semiconductor market, as well as focusing on microscopy and micromachining. In the same area, we also have M Squared Lasers, which has won a string of awards for its innovative work in sensing.

**Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and I join her in paying tribute to those two outstanding companies, which are based in my constituency. It has been a real delight to welcome representatives of M Squared to the House of Commons on several occasions.

My hon. Friend has spoken about both the importance of the research base—Glasgow University, which is in both of our constituencies, is important to that research

—and the significance of exports. Does she share my concern about the potential impact of Brexit on both the research base and the opportunities for exports?

**Carol Monaghan:** Brexit is one of the biggest challenges that the photonics industry faces just now, and we need some clear answers about how the industry will be supported through the Brexit process. I will come back to that point later in my speech.

The strength of the Scottish photonics industry is underlined by the fact that when the UK Government invited the Fraunhofer Society of Germany—Europe's largest research and development provider—to work with the UK, the first centre was established in photonics and was in Scotland at the University of Strathclyde. Of course, photonics features in every part of the UK and there are other major photonics clusters around the UK—Southampton also has a high photonics concentration.

I will give some facts and figures about the UK photonics industry. It is a growth sector, with 1,500 companies employing more than 70,000 people. Its economic impact is impressive, with a sustained growth of 6% to 8% per year over the last three decades, and an annual output of £10.5 billion. That is comparable to the pharmaceutical industry, but of course photonics is far less well-known, partly due to a lack of public understanding, but also to the industry's high number of businesses, including SMEs. In order to give the industry a voice, the Photonics Leadership Group was set up, with John Lincoln at the helm, and I was delighted that he was able to be present at the inaugural meeting of the all-party group on photonics in October.

A key point about the photonics industry is that it enables other industries to be competitive, with 10% of overall UK jobs depending on it. Photonics is a key enabling technology, encompassing everything from lasers and cameras to lighting and touch screen displays. Photonics is also critical to increasing manufacturing productivity, delivering efficient healthcare, and keeping us digitally connected and secure.

The range and depth of the photonics field is vast, but I will highlight a couple of examples. The first is sensing systems in autonomous vehicles. Those cars navigate using radar, lasers and cameras linked to a computer. A horizontal laser can send out pulses, and by measuring the time taken for the pulse to return, the distance to obstacles can be established, in much the same way as bats use echolocation, so the cars can detect hazards and slow or halt as appropriate.

Lighting and displays are one of the most visible expressions of photonics as an enabling technology. Light emitting diode—LED—lighting is progressively replacing traditional fluorescent bulbs and is finding its way into new areas including signage, illumination, consumer electronics and even clothing. LED technology is projected to become the dominant lighting technology before the end of the decade. By 2020, more than 95% of lighting turnover will be based on the technology.

Another area where photonics has been revolutionary is in the detection of counterfeit goods, which are estimated to cost businesses £3.5 billion per annum. A technique has been developed by the National Physical Laboratory in Teddington to determine whether items of clothing are fake. The technology involves terahertz

radiation. When a fabric sample is placed within the beam, the composition and structure can be ascertained, as different types of materials give rise to varying rates of scattering and absorption. The fabric's unique signature will indicate whether it is genuine or a clever copy.

In healthcare, we are all aware of laser eye surgery and endoscopy technologies, but the photonics impact in that area is massive. A new technology known as photodynamic therapy, or PDT, uses light-activated drugs to kill cancerous cells. Plasters embedded with LEDs developed by the Scottish firm Ambicare Health are being used to treat skin cancer in combination with light-sensitive drugs. PDT is simple to operate and portable, meaning that patients can go about their daily routine while receiving it.

The timing of this debate is particularly useful, coming off the back of Monday's industrial strategy Green Paper. While the 10 pillars of the strategy have the potential to support the continued development of photonics, the vital role of enabling technologies, such as photonics, needs to be fully recognised. They provide the competitive edge in product performance and manufacturing.

**Joanna Cherry:** My hon. Friend has spoken much about entrepreneurship and SMEs in the area of photonics. Does she agree that universities such as Heriot-Watt in my constituency are important engines in entrepreneurship and innovation in photonics? For example, in the past five years alone, three spin-off companies have come out of the institute at Heriot-Watt.

**Carol Monaghan:** I thank my hon. and learned Friend for her intervention. What we see with a lot of these industry-facing universities is great and rich partnerships between industry and research that allow SMEs to flourish.

Less than 5% of the value of high-technology goods, from mobile phones to aircraft, is in the final assembly. Most value is in the design, the critical components, which are often photonics such as cameras, screens, sensors, and the manufacturing equipment, which is also often photonics, such as laser marking or cutting. Manufacturing strategy must therefore be refined to ensure support for the research, design, development and manufacture of the hidden technologies that will secure a productive future. The UK has globally leading photonics research and a strong export-driven photonics industry, but as a global industry, photonics is sensitive to changes in international trade. Care is needed to ensure we continue to develop and manufacture this enabling technology in the UK.

As with many other industries, the shortage in science, technology, engineering and maths skills poses a threat to the photonics industry. Those shortages are well recognised, but still they persist. Difficulties in the recruitment and retention of STEM teachers only add to the problem. What practical steps are the Government taking to address those shortages? What role does the Minister see enabling technologies taking in the industrial strategy?

The biggest concern for the photonics industry, as has already been mentioned, is Brexit. Access to the single market and to skilled and experienced staff is vital to many photonics companies. With the Government driving on towards an increasingly hard Brexit, what

steps are being taken to ensure that this key part of the economy is secure? Why is there no chief scientific adviser in the Department for Exiting the European Union? Photonics is one of the key industries for the future. I encourage all Members to find out how photonics affects their lives and how photonics is on a path to making the 21st century the century of the photon.

11.16 am

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson):** I start by thanking fellow Members, including the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), and the hon. Members for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for their passion for this under-appreciated sector. In particular, I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for calling the debate. As she mentioned, it is particularly timely, given the launch of the Government's industrial strategy Green Paper by the Prime Minister earlier this week. I congratulate her on her initiative in setting up the first all-party group on this exciting sector.

Too often, the photonics sector is unfairly and unwisely overlooked. We have heard this morning that it is a fascinating field and a great example of the types of sector that we are focusing on in our industrial strategy. It also makes a great and tangible contribution to all parts of the United Kingdom, including Scotland and Northern Ireland. As an enabling technology, it underpins a wide range of sectors and applications, including aerospace, eye surgery, LED lighting, counterfeit detecting and all the other important examples that the hon. Lady gave. There are more than 1,500 photonics manufacturing companies in the UK, together employing more than 70,000 people. They generate an economic output of £10.5 billion. Our industrial strategy looks to build on that kind of success, further strengthening our science and research base while helping to bring new goods and services to the market more simply and more rapidly.

The photonics industry has been built on the UK's outstanding expertise. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West mentioned that it was particularly evident in industry-facing institutions such as Heriot-Watt. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council maintains a significant portfolio of photonics research spanning across multiple themes such as ICT, physical sciences and manufacturing. The total portfolio exceeds £170 million in value, and its significant investments include £10.2 million in the national hub in high value photonic manufacturing at the University of Southampton; £7.2 million awarded to University College London for the photonics systems development project; £5.6 million to the University of Sheffield to research semiconductor quantum photonics; and £4.9 million to Heriot-Watt University in the hon. Lady's constituency for its industrial doctorate centre on optics and photonics technologies.

**Joanna Cherry:** I thank the Minister for making an interesting and detailed speech and talking about the success of the university sector, particularly Heriot-Watt in my constituency. However, he will be aware that academics in centres such as the institute in my constituency are worried as a result of the Brexit vote about two things: funding and the international pool of academic and postgraduate talent on which they draw. They are

[Joanna Cherry]

looking for assurance beyond 2020 that the sources of funding and international brain power will not be lost to them.

**Joseph Johnson:** We are sensitive to such concerns, which is why the Prime Minister in her speech a week last Monday made clear statements as to her objectives for our Brexit negotiations. She detailed the importance that she puts on continued collaboration with our European research partners, and on continued access to the brightest and the best—the people who make such a difference to the success of our scientific endeavour in this country. As she underscored in her powerful speech, we are leaving the European Union, but we are not leaving Europe and we remain an outward-looking and globally focused country committed to being the global go-to centre for science and research.

The Government recognise the importance of research to the UK, which is why, at the spending review in 2015—the spending review before last—we protected the science resource budget in real terms at its 2015-16 level of £4.7 billion for the rest of this Parliament, and pledged to increase the science capital budget to £1.1 billion in 2015-16, which will rise with inflation to a total of £6.9 billion over the period 2015-21. At this year's autumn statement we made the significant announcement that we would make an additional investment in research and development of £2 billion a year by 2020-21. As I have been at pains to say on many occasions, that is the biggest single increase in investment in R and D in this country since 1979.

**Carol Monaghan:** The funding is very welcome and much needed, but we also need certainty over what people can do now and how able they will be to travel in future.

**Joseph Johnson:** We certainly recognise that concern. That is why, to refer back to the Prime Minister's speech a week last Monday, she again repeated her desire to be able to guarantee as quickly as possible the rights of EU nationals residing in the UK. If other countries across the European Union are able to offer the same assurances to our nationals living in their countries, we will be able to put those uncertainties to rest.

As I have mentioned, it is important to ensure that the excellent research carried out in the UK can be successfully commercialised where appropriate. This is why we provide support to that effect through Innovate UK. Photonics is one of Innovate UK's enabling technology areas. Companies can apply for funding for photonics projects in all the so-called emerging and enabling technology calls, as well as calls related to the application of photonics in healthcare, manufacturing and elsewhere. Over the past six years, typical spend has been in the range of £5 million to £10 million per annum, with most funding going to SMEs working in collaboration with research organisations and larger companies. More than £3 million has already been invested in projects in the Glasgow-based firm, M Squared Lasers, since 2008, helping the company to reach an annual turnover that now exceeds £10 million.

Up to £500,000 has been invested in innovative research and development projects through the north Wales photonics launchpad. At the Fraunhofer Centre for Applied Photonics in Glasgow, Innovate UK has funded 20 projects for the centre to collaborate with UK companies.

We have an edge in photonics, but we are not taking that for granted. Our economy has great strengths, but while many people, places and businesses are thriving, opportunities and growth are still spread too unevenly around the country. That is why it is so important that a modern industrial strategy delivers a high-skilled, competitive economy that spreads benefits and opportunities to people throughout the UK.

The Green Paper that we published on Monday marks the beginning of a dialogue to develop a strategy that will also ensure the UK remains one of the best places in the world to innovate, do business and create jobs. We acknowledge the challenges we face. Growth has not been even. Prospects and opportunities for businesses and people vary too much. We have world class businesses and sectors, but some are not yet achieving their potential. Now is the time to face up to the challenges with an industrial strategy that ensures we have a resilient economy for the future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.25 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## UK-West Africa Relations

[STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK relations with West African countries.

Before diving into the substance of the debate, I bring Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The reason for the debate was to probe the Government on their reaction to the recent election in Ghana, but in my mind, and I suspect in the minds of other hon. Members, the debate has somewhat morphed into a veritable tour de force of pan-regional issues. I hope it will be an opportunity for Members to delve into specific countries and highlight specific thematic trends and general trajectories across west Africa and the UK's relationship with that region.

I start with Ghana, which I had the privilege of visiting relatively recently, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) in his role as the prime ministerial trade envoy to Ghana. That was a very interesting time. It preceded the election and built on the relationship I already had with a number of Ghanaian politicians, including Hannah Tetteh, the ex-Foreign Minister, on whom I heap praise for her work across the region. I felt a measure of sadness about the transition of people with whom I was used to doing business, but equally I am optimistic about the new Government, which is perhaps ideologically slightly more closely aligned to the Conservative party.

The new President, President Nana, has a strong team but does not have the benefit of Short money, as we would have here. I would urge the Minister to see what we can do to help the structure of Government in Ghana and addressing that country's challenges.

One challenge is that of customs, with goods going in and out. There was a horrendous amount of corruption throughout the 20 processes. I did jokingly ask the excellent high commissioner Jon Benjamin to put in the diplomatic telegram that I had suggested at a number of points taking the head of customs to one side and shooting him by way of example. Clearly, that is not something that I would literally encourage, but such was the need for shock therapy in Ghana. I hope the new Government of Ghana will take the opportunity to engage in that challenge.

I saw a number of good companies, including Blue Skies, which provides fruit to the UK. As well as praising my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor in his trade role, and praising the ex-Foreign Minister for Ghana, and Jon Benjamin the high commissioner, I thank the high commissioner here, Victor, who was very good in exposing issues around the region and introducing me to west African colleagues based in the United Kingdom. I wish him well in his future.

Perhaps the view from the Foreign Office and the Minister is that Morocco is part of north Africa, but it looks towards west Africa more and more. Only this January there was a Ghanaian-Moroccan economic summit in Accra to look at how they could do business. The King of Morocco has reached out to west Africa

over a number of years for trading relationships. I note that Morocco was reported in the African press as having the numbers to formally enter the European Union—sorry, not the European Union! That was a Freudian slip. I meant to say that it has the numbers to enter the African Union, which I think would plug a gap that has far too long been an anomaly in the African Union, notwithstanding Western Sahara.

One of the advantages of the Minister's new role is that, for the first time in recent times, north Africa has been linked up with the rest of Africa. Over the past 20 years, our UK Government ministerial response to Africa has been disjointed and spread, wrongly, across a number of Departments. Sometimes that was for good reason and sometimes it was just for historical reasons. The reunification in the Foreign Office of Africa is positive, and I will come on to describe other trends and changes that I would like to encourage in the Foreign Office in relation to the structure of Government. The role carried out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps) for a number of years is probably the right role in terms of Government structure, with Ministers operating across the Department for International Development and the Foreign Office wholly dedicated to the African continent.

It would be odd not to mention in a debate on west Africa the topical issue of Gambia. I particularly praise the Minister for going down and visiting the crisis centre and also for the way in which he let everyone know about it. I compliment him on his Twitter feed, which showed a video of him giving a speech praising the excellent work that they do in the basement of the Foreign Office, looking after British citizens when there is an international crisis. That is excellent work and it is brilliant that he could visit and publicise it.

West Africa is not often in the popular press, but Gambia started to hit the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*. I was uncomfortable with some of the things that I read and the characterisation of the new President as the "ex-Argos security man". There was more than a whiff of colonial snobbery to that. No one has ever described me as the guy who used to stack the shelves at Bejam's, which preceded Iceland, but I am indeed the same person. Simply because of the nature of people's view of Africa, that is how they described the new President, an entrepreneur whom I am sure will make a great President. Gambia cannot go the way of Mali with security and migration, which the prime ministerial envoy to the Sahel so ably dealt with. That role has sadly not been refilled, but it is very difficult to find someone of the skillset of Stephen O'Brien.

I note that Nigeria is offering refuge to the retiring, or ousted, President of Gambia. That is difficult and somewhat distasteful, but it is the practical and effective thing to do. I ask Members to reflect on providing soft landings to other leaders as and when it comes about. By no stretch of the imagination can one consider Zimbabwe part of west Africa, but there are parallels, not only for Nigeria but for other countries, in relation to soft landings for exiting world leaders.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. While he is on the issue of the various nations in west Africa and the leaders and incoming leaders, does he agree that one of the best things we can do is encourage active participation by Governments in west Africa on

[Mr Gregory Campbell]

corruption to try to ensure that those nation states and their citizens benefit from the assistance that we in the UK offer them, and that it is not siphoned off, as has been so often the case in many instances in Africa?

**James Duddridge:** The point is well made. I had the privilege of being alongside David Cameron when he held the corruption summit with the recently elected President Buhari of Nigeria and others. Tackling corruption right from the top is very effective, but I think more of the Africa of opportunities rather than the Africa of downsides. Corruption is not an African issue—it is a global issue—but it does flair up more in specific countries.

There is a massive opportunity in Nigeria. I cannot remember whether Lagos is referred to as little London or Nigerians in London refer to London as little Lagos, but there is a strong connection, a strong diaspora connection and a massive opportunity. By 2050 a quarter of the world's population will be in Africa, and a quarter of them in Nigeria. Clearly it would be foolish to ignore such a massive opportunity.

I commend the work of PricewaterhouseCoopers in Nigeria, in Lagos with the governor, on improving the ease of doing business, which is a catalyst for getting more money into the system. I also praise President Buhari for taking the tough decision to float the naira, which will be a catalyst for greater investment in the longer term and which removes a previous deterrent to investment.

Francophone Africa is anchored in west Africa. As a result, with the Commonwealth countries, we think more of southern and east Africa rather than west Africa as our natural bedfellows, but we should not do so. We can do more in west Africa. I have worked in Ivory Coast and travelled to places such as Senegal. We need a bespoke operation in francophone west Africa. The Foreign Office and the Department for International Trade need to co-ordinate to get people whose first language is French, or who are properly bilingual, and to have them travelling to Accra and Abidjan, rather than on a traditional trade mission that might have a stop in Ghana and then a francophone country. We need to be using that sort of bloc of people—the City is pretty full of very competent French bankers who are attracted to the United Kingdom and some of our values. Using some of those French bankers or City workers on transactions in French west Africa would be a good idea.

I mentioned that I used to work in Ivory Coast, which is a beacon of opportunity and growth in west Africa. President Ouattara is forward-thinking. I am particularly impressed that, despite the tendency to extend presidential terms that so blights Africa, he has said he will step down in 2020. Since I worked in Ivory Coast, there has been a long civil war, a recovery and a subsequent significant increase in GDP per capita.

The country is not without its problems. Only a few weeks ago there were what we might euphemistically describe as some problems—the head of the police and of the army were summarily sacked as a result—but stability was restored. Generally Ivory Coast is a beacon for growth in the area and shows what can be done. I have had the privilege of returning to Grand Bassam, where I used to go for a Sunday beer and lunch and

where that terrible incident of tourists and Ivorians being killed coming in off the beach was. It was good to show solidarity and I encourage people to return to Grand Bassam and not to let terrorists get us down. People should go back there as a tourist and a business area.

In Guinea-Conakry, one of the biggest private sector investments, Simandou, was proposed, but almost immediately we found ourselves fighting Ebola, which I will come to later. I am interested in any update from the Minister on the project and, in particular, on Chinese involvement. My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor has a degree of knowledge about that and, off the back of his work as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Ghana, the President of Guinea was keen on him playing a similar role in his country, but I will leave it to my hon. Friend to update us—I am not sure where that ended.

Continuing our tour of countries, I very much commend the counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics works in Senegal. I also commend to British business the opportunities as the airport moves out of the capital—that big tract of prime land is available for development, commercialisation and businesses to generate tax that will grow the country out of poverty.

In a bizarre segue from Senegal, I will talk briefly about the soft power of the United Kingdom. Go anywhere and people are very interested in, first, the Queen, then premiership football and, tailing off, lots of other things depending on their view of the United Kingdom. There is a battle for influence in Africa and, interestingly, it is not only French and English but, for example, American—the National Basketball Association has just set up a college in Senegal. All those things are soft power, and I encourage the Minister to look even more than we have done previously with the British Council and the premier league at how we project British values, whether through football, the monarchy or business. Other countries including America are certainly doing those things.

I am interested in the role of the Economic Community of West African States and in an update on its activities. I have always found that the region is a stronger building block than the African Union as a whole, but it will be interesting to see what happens in the next couple of days at the African Union meeting, presumably in Addis, where I very hope that Amina Mohamed, who was the Kenyan Foreign Minister, will get elected. I am sure Her Majesty's Government would not want to take a proactive position and will work with whomever replaces Madam Dlamini-Zuma, but if Amina Mohamed wins the election, it would be very positive for the African Union building out and going forward.

We need to do much more business. Only yesterday I was with a group of African businessmen and an excellent prospective Foreign Office prosperity team. The question was asked: how well are the British Government doing at connecting with business? I was quite self-critical and said that we were doing about four out of 10. Of the others, most people were around six or seven out of 10, but I said—I will use this language, although I am not sure whether it is orderly—that our performance historically had been pretty crap. Compared with other countries and their interaction, I feel that we are not very good. In summarising, one ex-Foreign Office official—bless him—said that he appreciated my comments, and that I was

“much less crap” than many of the other Ministers. I am sure he was not referring to the Minister present today, but was making an historical reference. I was hoping for something more complimentary from former colleagues, but there we go. We take praise where we can find it.

Understanding the Brexit deal for Africa and looking at a post-Brexit economic partnership arena, Brexit might be an opportunity to look towards a continental free trade agreement in the African continent. I was positive about and pushed EPAs, or economic partnership agreements, as a liberalisation of trade in Africa and with the European Union, but Carlos Lopes previously of the United Nations and now of the AU was critical of my position, because he felt, rather as we felt that Britain should not just look towards the European Union, that Africa should not be focused on dividing itself into four blocs that refer back to the European Union, which is a relatively stagnant body for future trade.

I am interested in what we can do to leverage bilateral negotiations with African countries to allow them to buy into trading with one another. I do not know whether it is even possible under World Trade Organisation rules for lesser developed countries to trade quite freely. There are some significant middle-income countries, but I am not quite sure whether we can get one deal that fits all or how things would happen.

I am fascinated to find out more about the Commonwealth Trade Ministers meeting in February or March, which could be really good for building blocs for Brexit. We need a Commonwealth strategy, a non-Commonwealth strategy and a strategy for the Department for International Development and the countries in which it operates.

I said I would mention Ebola. I do not want Ebola to fall off the table, as it were. I compliment HMG on what they did in Sierra Leone. One of my proudest moments in the Foreign Office was handing out Ebola medals, including to a lady who works in my private office, Rachel Chetham. She had gone to Sierra Leone and put herself in harm's way to help those people. I was very proud of what she did specifically and what the Foreign Office and HMG did overall.

Looking back on the Ebola crisis, we should learn some lessons. In that one year of crisis alone the international community spent 15 times more than had been spent in all three of the Ebola countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in the previous 15 years. If we can invest early in the resilience of the health system, that would be incredibly positive. That point was made to me by Results UK about Ebola.

**Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He makes a good point about what lessons can be learned. We should all be proud of how the Foreign Office, the Government and the national health service responded to the Ebola crisis and the support they provided. In that context, does he believe that there are opportunities to forge stronger links between the NHS, and indeed our universities and medical schools, and many west African countries?

**James Duddridge**: I have great respect for my hon. Friend's views on health, and he hits the nail on the head. It is ludicrous for DFID to promote health when

there is vast expertise in the Department of Health that we should leverage. The same goes for the Department for Education. We can do a lot more. We must also support parliamentarians. I recently met the Sierra Leonean Select Committee on health through the good offices of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. It was clear that it was not getting the leverage in its Parliament to move things forward and propose changes.

I have recently started engaging on tuberculosis, which I had really associated only with being a by-product of HIV. The World Health Organisation estimates that more than 800,000 people in west Africa fell ill with TB in 2015, and nearly 300,000 people died. The mortality rate in west Africa for TB is around 36%, which is double the global average. I am keen to work with the Global TB Caucus, and I encourage other hon. Members to do so. Parliamentarians can play a great part in dealing with TB, and that caucus mobilises parliamentarians from across Africa. Will the Minister see whether his good offices in west Africa—ambassadors and high commissioners—can be used alongside the Global TB Caucus to encourage parliamentarians of those nation states to get more involved and collectively work with us to deal with this issue?

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning TB, which is absolutely vital. Does he agree that tremendous progress has been made in west Africa in the past 15 years in reducing both the incidence of malaria and mortality from it, not least given the support from DFID and the UK Government more generally? There is a real issue in the Sahel with intermittent malaria, which DFID is trying to tackle. As Nigeria is one of the two countries in the world where malaria is most prevalent, it is vital that we continue that support.

**James Duddridge**: My hon. Friend has a great reputation on those issues and on international development more generally. He is entirely right gently to reprimand me and say that we must look at the successes as well as the problems. The successes show that the aid budget works and that we should do more of it—they do not show that there are so many problems even after we have done all that work. Aid works and we should do more of it.

I turn to the perennial subject of Donald Trump—he pervades even a debate about west Africa. Will the Prime Minister raise the subject of Africa when she meets Donald Trump? I think she should. We should find out his views about Africa and aid in Africa. We have heard his views about family planning, and there may be a vacuum that the UK and other countries will need to step into, but what is his view of AFRICOM, the US's African command? What is his view about stepping in if things deteriorate in places such as Burundi, where the Americans would have been well placed to offer support if regional forces did not? Will the Americans be prepared to step up? What discussions has the Minister had with his French and American counterparts about the global effort if there is a need to surge forces into Africa?

There were many places that I did not get to visit. I encourage the Minister to travel the road less trodden and visit the likes of Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger. I wish I had gone to Gambia. If one has visited some of those smaller countries, when things kick off—for

[James Duddridge]

want of a better word—and there is a problem, one sometimes has a rough idea and can pick up the phone and speak to people. The UK Government's understanding, knowledge and penetration of Africa means that they are able to do that.

I have taken far too long—I apologise to Members—but in summary, I ask the Minister to do three things: help Nana in Ghana, look to set up a Francophone group of businesspeople, and lobby for structure of government changes so that Africa is better represented by HMG here in the United Kingdom.

2.55 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) on securing the debate and thank him for raising many important issues, on which I hope to comment.

The Department for International Development currently spends nearly £307 million in Nigeria, making it DFID's third largest country project budget. I had the pleasure of visiting Nigeria in 2015 with the International Development Committee to see the fantastic work that is being undertaken there, particularly on girls' education. That visit followed the distressing abduction of the Chibok girls, which people around the world heard about and which left an indelible impression on me as a parent of two girls. Parents sent their children to school one day and then got the news that they had been abducted, purely because they valued education—and education for girls. That must have been a traumatic experience for anyone affected. That trauma continues to this day, as most of the girls remain missing. I met the “Bring Back Our Girls” campaigners who campaign every single day outside the Nigerian Parliament for those girls' return. We also met Government officials who have pledged to return the girls and fight Boko Haram's extremism with all that they have. Will the Minister continue to assist with that? We must never let prevail extremists who wish to suppress women and girls, their education and their liberty.

I read with absolute disgust on Monday that Boko Haram has taken to sending female suicide bombers into Government and civilian territory with infants strapped to their backs. Such atrocities and such a lack of concern for human beings—especially the children who are sent to their deaths—are barely understandable. What are the UK Government doing to counter extremism and support the Government of Nigeria in dealing with Boko Haram? It is also important that DFID provides all the support it can to help the girls who are returned to reintegrate. I have read reports in newspapers that girls who have returned may be being stigmatised and ostracised by local communities, but given all that they have been through, they need all the support they can get.

On transparency, as a member of the International Development Committee, I believe that DFID must apply stringent criteria to its aid. Corruption has been rife right to the top of the Nigerian Government. I commend President Buhari for his stance that no one should be above the law, and for investing in anti-corruption measures.

What are the United Kingdom Government doing to support him? Jobs and livelihoods will be extremely important in both countering extremism and providing alternative opportunities and hope for a population that has seen great inequity for as long as it can remember. When I was in Nigeria, people were reluctant to take money from me via credit or debit card, even at the airport. The society appears to be cash based, and little of that cash is accounted for. I therefore expect that little cash makes its way into the Government's coffers. Helping Nigeria to integrate technology for mobile phone transfers and banking will be an important step forward in making cash count for the whole of its society and helping tax collection initiatives.

I also briefly visited Senegal and was impressed by the British industry there. I met representatives from Cairn Energy, a Scottish energy company that has invested in drilling for oil there. I believe there are important trade opportunities for the UK across Africa, but I would like to see that being sustainable trade that involves all strands of society and that offers jobs to local people, once again reducing inequality. I would be pleased to hear an update from the Minister on trade relations—explicitly on sustainable trade, and how that will complement DFID's strategy to reduce poverty.

I also believe it is important to briefly mention the Committee's work on the Ebola crisis. I commend all of those involved during the crisis for their work, including Pauline Cafferkey—a nurse who is based locally to me. The Committee heard evidence last year that one of the lessons to be learned from that crisis was the lack of ability to act swiftly enough on the ground by engaging with small, community-based interventions at the frontline. Further work must be done to enable DFID to do that.

The Committee also heard evidence that HIV/AIDS continues to be endemic in Africa, and we know it is one of the biggest killers of adolescents. An HIV/AIDS strategy is required, and I was extremely disheartened to learn that DFID does not currently have one. Those are some of the issues that I believe we must continue to raise and take forward. The Government are perhaps not ready to develop their own strategy across Africa, meaning that the withdrawal of aid money from middle-income countries is a pertinent issue that should be looked at across Government. If we withdraw too quickly, there is a real concern that we may not be able to meet our global goal of eradicating HIV/AIDS by 2030.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** The hon. Lady is making a powerful and important point on how Government funding is allocated in order to provide support for countries across Africa. It is important that that funding does not dry up before good results are able to embed themselves and last in perpetuity. That is why we have introduced the prosperity fund, which allows us to move away from DFID funding per se—which is more humanitarian-focused—to what can actually help to build economies and support people in the longer term.

**Dr Cameron:** I thank the Minister for that helpful intervention; I am pleased to hear it. As I say, I believe that jobs, livelihoods and trade will provide an excellent way forward for people by giving them alternative opportunities, thereby driving them away from extremism in their local areas. However, DFID's work should include developing an HIV/AIDS strategy. The Government

should take that seriously, because great strides have been made on that issue, and I would not like to see transmission rates increase as we withdraw from middle-income countries that are not ready to develop their own policies.

There is a balance of aid work, sustainability, jobs and livelihoods and trade opportunities across west Africa. It would be helpful to hear an update from the Minister, and I look forward to his giving one.

3.3 pm

**Adam Afriyie** (Windsor) (Con): I am delighted to be able to make a short contribution to the debate. I will primarily focus on Ghana, as I am the Prime Minister's trade envoy to that country. Many people need to be thanked for both the development that has taken place in Ghana and the development that is about to.

First, I thank the outgoing Africa Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), for calling the debate, for the fantastic work he did there, and for the great time that we had when we were last in Ghana together. His legacy lives on among the Ghanaians, and his contribution is very much valued. Secondly, I thank the high commissioner, Jon Benjamin, and the staff at the high commission in Ghana. The tremendous team includes Gavin Cook, Sharon Ganney, Elorm, Selasi and many others. They are an interactive and energetic team, and they prepare the ground very well for when Ministers visit and for when I arrive to try to negotiate trade arrangements.

Thirdly, I thank the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish people in general. There is a great presence from companies such as Subsea 7 and all sorts of oil and gas exploration companies. All the expertise in Aberdeen and other parts of Scotland is certainly bearing fruit in Ghana, in helping in the oil extraction and transportation industries and in improving the expertise and the jobs available to Ghanaians. Fourthly, I thank the Minister, who is a long-time friend of mine, not only for his dedication to his role as Minister for Africa—I know it is now a very broad role and includes parts of the middle east—but for joining us on a visit in the not-too-distant future for the 60th anniversary of Ghanaian independence.

Fifthly, I thank not only the current Government but previous Governments for the support they have given to Ghana, in particular, over the years. Some £80 million from DFID was given in the last year, with plenty earmarked for the current year. The Government have also provided support for Ghana's regulatory regime and governance. As the Minister mentioned, the prosperity fund is a real opportunity not only to provide aid and support to Ghanaians in difficulty and for issues that we in the United Kingdom care about, but to ensure that Ghanaians are not just dependent on aid—trade helps to lift all boats.

Sixthly, I have to thank British businesses. We have £1.3 billion of international trade with Ghana, as of a year or two ago, of which half is contributed by UK companies, including Scottish companies, that have taken the step of investing and working in Ghana. That brings not only foreign exchange and benefits to UK businesses, but expertise, benefits and employment to Ghanaian citizens. In many ways, it is those trading and business relationships that really make the difference in developing nations.

Finally, I have to thank the Ghanaian people. There has just been a peaceful transition of power in Ghana, which was one of many consecutive peaceful transitions. The outgoing President Mahama needs to be thanked for gracefully accepting defeat at the election and, above all, Nana Akufo-Addo needs to be thanked for his magnanimous victory. He made an immediate commitment in his first speech to ensuring that opaque business practices—corruption—are brought under control, which bodes very well for our relationship in the years to come.

However, there is no doubt that Ghana—and the whole of west Africa—faces challenges, including opaque business practices; a lack of transparency in the tax and investment regimes; and sometimes a lack of consistency in the application of the law across the country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East pointed out, there are huge challenges around customs. If the first experience of a business, or a country such as the United Kingdom, coming into Ghana or west Africa involves huge challenges in just getting its goods and services through the port, it can act as a massive deterrent. I am glad that the incoming Administration will focus on resolving that. There is also an issue if one cannot be confident of one's intellectual property rights or ownership rights of land. That has been a challenge in Ghana, and I hope it will be tackled, with some support from the UK Government, in the not-too-distant future.

I do not want to be down in this debate; I actually smile when I think about the Ghanaian election result. A peaceful transition of power—not even a wobble—in an African state is a tremendous achievement. The chair of the Electoral Commission of Ghana must be thanked for declaring the result as soon as it became clear, as must all participating parties. The UK played a role in helping to make sure that the election ran smoothly, and all of the international observers during the transition should also be thanked.

Let us look at the opportunities. There is no doubt that a stable, democratic set-up creates business stability, and an environment in which UK and other overseas businesses are prepared to trade, with the certainty that no sudden change in leadership will occur. So we have huge opportunities on national security and opportunities to continue to work with the Ghanaian people on visa fraud and issues that relate to visas. We also have an opportunity to support Ghana in its transition to becoming a more accountable state for its people and more transparent and visible in its business practices and institutions. Above all, we have a huge opportunity—putting our selfish hat on—to massively boost and increase our trade with Ghana.

Ghanaians are completely open to us. They are English-speaking. They have the same language and the same common law legal system. They are anglophiles. Almost every Ghanaian President has been educated in and has strong connections with Britain. It was very clear from the incoming President's inaugural speech that he fully intends to work with the United Kingdom on trade. Furthermore, we were pretty much the only country to have an audience with the President on his first day in office. That says a lot about the relationship and good will that we enjoy between our countries and it says a lot about the opportunities in Ghana and the certainty with which British companies can operate there.

[Adam Afriyie]

UK Export Finance made its first direct loan to GE Oil & Gas for 100 MW of electricity generation. Lonrho in the UK has a major interest in the Atuabo free port. If the free port proceeds, which I very much hope it does—I am pushing for it—it will be one of the most magnificent, effective and efficient free ports in the whole of Africa. It can revolutionise how the whole of west Africa works, including the way in which goods and services are accessed and oil and gas transported.

We have huge interests in hospitals, but I want to highlight one area: professional services. Often in Ghana there may be a lack of capital to invest in partnerships in Ghanaian businesses and also sometimes a lack of the professional expertise that is required for Ghanaians to help themselves by starting their own businesses and making a success of them. That is where Britain comes into play, because we have tremendous experience in financial technology services and in banking, professional, legal, consulting, mining and bridge-building services. We are well placed to assist Ghana in its development in the new dawn of its existence. Also, we could assist ourselves in terms of our export goals and the connections we wish to make around the world.

It strikes me that Ghana is a prime opportunity for the United Kingdom's new outward-looking international profile, which looks to be integrated with the rest of the world as we begin to adapt our relationship with the European Union. Ghana should be right at the top of the list when it comes to looking at free trade arrangements. There is an open door there. The Ghanaian people are very comfortable with Britain: so comfortable that perhaps up to 500,000 of the Ghanaian diaspora are British citizens now. There is a depth of good will on which to draw between the two nations.

When I was appointed as the trade envoy to Ghana by the Prime Minister, I was delighted because I feel I embody the relationship with Ghana. Having a father from Ghana and a mother from Britain, it is as though our relationship is embodied within my very soul. We have a great opportunity to really get ahead in striking free trade arrangements and working out our new relationships with developing nations once we are free of the customs union and European Union strictures.

I have visited many other parts of west Africa, including Guinea, and I will make an observation to back up what my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East has said. We often say that the francophone countries, the ex-French colonies, play second fiddle when it comes to dealing with the United Kingdom. From my experience of speaking to the President of Guinea and several other leaders in west Africa, it is exactly the opposite. We have a huge opportunity with French-speaking countries. Let me put it this way. Their detachment from the colonial past with France means that they are very keen to get rid of that history and to join in the English-speaking world, the anglosphere. So I put it to the Minister that we should make efforts to reach out to ex-French colonies across Africa because they are so keen to ensure that they create that relationship with the United Kingdom. They recognise that English is the international language of business and they really want to connect with us. Often in my conversations—quite unguarded among some African leaders—many of them are clear that they want to make English their official language. They get upset

when ministerial visits are paid to English-speaking African countries and French-speaking countries often play second fiddle. So there is a huge opportunity there as well to form strong and deep connections with former French colonies.

There are also opportunities in terms of charitable activities and skills, training and transfers to Ghana and other parts of west Africa. A fantastic organisation called Field Ready sets up schemes in technical colleges and universities in Africa, primarily in Ghana, through which 10, 20 or 30 highly skilled Ghanaian students are given placements in the oil and gas industry. Not only are they thankful and warm towards the United Kingdom when they take up the placements, but they ensure a deep well of good will on which to draw in future. Putting down indigenous roots where students and young people are friendly with the United Kingdom in some of the most important industries in which we operate, particularly the oil and gas industry in Scotland, is a really solid part of providing not aid, but trade, skills and training that enable Ghanaians to lift their own living standards with our support.

I thank the Minister for agreeing to come to Ghana in the not-too-distant future for the 60th anniversary. I have two asks: please let us put Ghana and west African states at the top of the free trade agenda in negotiations, and let us welcome those nations as proper partners and allies in the fight against terror and in the pursuit of national security. Let us welcome them as equals in our outlook on the world, which now recognises that it is trade and business that lift all the boats, not just aid. Finally, the Ghanaian President has said he does not want Ghana to be seen as an aid recipient. He wants it to be seen as a trade recipient, and that is something we must focus on.

3.17 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) on presenting an excellent debate for us all to participate in. Excellent speeches have already been made. It is great to make a contribution, especially in the light of my role as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief. As the Minister and shadow Minister know, I take a human and moral standpoint when it comes to foreign aid, especially when it comes to religious freedom and religious liberties, issues that are regularly in my postbag in my constituency. Other Members I have spoken to tell me the same.

It is well documented that UK relations with west African countries are different with each individual country. Our influence waxes and wanes, so policies and aid vary according to the needs of the people who live there. As different and multicultural as they are, they all have one thing in common: they rely on our aid, support and assistance. We must ask ourselves whether we are effectively exerting our influence to bring substantial and lasting change to those nations, or simply handing out plasters in a situation that calls for surgery at the highest level.

Hon. Members have asked how our foreign aid will be affected by Brexit. How will it impact on our efforts with economic development and clean water? Some of the churches in my constituency of Strangford are directly involved in such aid. How will Brexit impact on

stability in west Africa? How much protection and assistance will the Christian Church get from the UK Government in countries threatened with Islamic extremism and persecution?

One of the main west African recipients of aid in the financial year 2016-17 is Nigeria, which is getting some £306 million. It has a population of 160 million, more than 100 million of whom live on less than £1 a day. The main aims of our Government are to provide help with better services—education and health care—and we do some excellent work. The Library background information outlines some of what we do. Another aim is the establishment of an enabling Government who tackle corruption and enhance transparency and accountability. Corruption is a key issue, to which the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East referred. How many of the aims have not been reached? Recently UNICEF researchers and workers in northern Nigeria have spoken of the worst situation of hunger in the world. We cannot ignore that.

More than 3 million people in the region have been forced out of their homes, and aid agencies can reach many of the refugee camps only by helicopter. Oxfam workers accuse the army of doing nothing instead of securing access roads for aid agencies. As to Ministry of Defence and British forces assistance to the Nigerian army, we clearly have a commitment through the MOD and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The RAF regiment is also there assisting the army in training. However, we must ask why the roads are not being cleared and made accessible for aid. If 3 million people are starving, why is the Nigerian army not doing what it is tasked to do, and what it has been trained to do by our Army? Are we doing enough to provide for the people there? Is there any way to get the Nigerian Government to do more?

There have been small successes since Muhammadu Buhari became president in 2015, with Boko Haram being pushed back from occupied territories in northern parts, but despite his intention to fight Boko Haram, he has seemed reluctant to respond to continued violence against the Christian population in the middle belt of Nigeria. In October more than 40 people were massacred in cold blood by Fulani herdsmen, for no other reason than that they were Christians. There is something seriously wrong when those things become small print in the papers, or we do not know about them at all. What advice or assistance has the Minister been able to give Nigeria with a view to helping our brethren? If he is not able to outline that in his response, I should be more than happy to have a letter from him to confirm that. It pains me as a Christian to hear that more than 12,000 Christians have been murdered, and more than 2,000 churches destroyed, by Islamic terrorism. It appears that little has been done to influence Nigeria by our Government or international bodies. The question must be asked: what are we doing? Is it enough, and are we doing it in the right way? Is our influence starting to take effect?

Islamic terrorism is not confined to Nigeria. There have been instances in other west African countries, such as Mali. Like other west African states, it has a poor standard of living, with 50% of its people living on less than £1.50 a day. To put that in perspective, that is less than we would unthinkingly spend on a cup of coffee. We do not give as much funding to Mali, but

there is a need for that, especially given the threat of Islamic extremism. The 2012 Tuareg rebellion in the north severely weakened civil liberties and restricted the political rights of many people in the country. After the joint French and Malian military intervention the country has looked more stable; however, the small Christian population is still living in fear in Mali. What are we doing to assist them and give them succour?

We can see at first hand the destruction and the violent nature of radical Islam. Last week a bomb attack by al-Qaeda in the city of Gao killed 77 people and injured hundreds more. Were Members aware of that? It is a reflection on us all—including myself—if we do not know about such things taking place, and about what is happening in Mali. As to its relationship with France, will there now be a joint effort to support France in ridding Mali of al-Qaeda influence and stabilising the country?

I want to congratulate the aid workers, charities, churches, doctors and nurses and everyone involved in making Sierra Leone Ebola-free as of January 2016. What good news that was, and what a response there was from our Government as part of the plan. The country has a population of only 5.75 million, and more than half of the people live on less than £1.50 a day. With the state completely ravaged by Ebola, we know that a lot of work is needed to begin to get the country back on its feet socially and financially. As the Minister knows, British Army personnel have been there, as have aid workers; and we have given direct assistance. The Library note explains what has been done practically, and it is good news.

Our aim is to improve the education system, especially by giving more encouragement to girls, children with disabilities and the most marginalised in society; to support the private sector, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises—again in practical ways; and to help to tackle corruption through the innovative “pay no bribe” programme. Such practical changes are good steps forward. However, in the past week the news has been released that millions of dollars in funds to fight the Ebola virus have not been accounted for. Where did that money go? I would like to know what the Government have done about requesting an independent inquiry into where the funds we allocated have gone. How many lives could have been saved with the money that went missing? We need to get feet on the ground to source the misappropriated money, and help the relevant state institutions to hold those who were involved to account.

I want to mention the question of Yahya Jammeh, the former leader of Gambia—whose name probably sounds wrong pronounced in my Ulster Scots accent. Although he has finally been disposed of—boy, is that good news—after losing the election to Adama Barrow, I believe that there should be an international investigation into the war crimes of Mr Jammeh. After 22 years of holding office he has left the country in controversial circumstances, with accusations of embezzling some £8.8 million, which equates to what the country requires to pay for the civil service for a year. The hon. Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) said that he has gone to Nigeria, although I am not sure whether that is true.

**Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): Last week I met some London-based members of the United Democratic party of Gambia. They were desperately worried about what would happen: would the inauguration

[Anne McLaughlin]

go ahead; would the new president be able to come to Gambia at all? They said they expected some bloodshed, but there was not any. We should pay tribute to African leaders, people and politicians, for sorting things out for themselves. Often other countries come into such situations; yes, they do it to help, but the situation is seen as one where the people cannot do it themselves. However, in this case they have done it themselves. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in wishing them all the best for a peaceful transition to democracy?

**Jim Shannon:** Yes, I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Lady and I think that everyone in the House would subscribe to the change that has taken place; it is tremendously good news that Gambians did that themselves.

Mr Jammeh has been accused of human rights abuses such as torture, disappearances, unlawful imprisonments and massacres, and it seems that he thinks he can get off by disappearing. I plead with the Government to join forces with the UN and hold Mr Jammeh accountable for his crimes. The Economic Community of West African States has been a successful project to improve the finances and infrastructure of west African countries. As a developed state we need to encourage and develop ECOWAS so that in the future it can develop those countries; they can then lead the way for other African states, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) said in her intervention.

I hope that in response to today's debate the Government will see the need not only to protect the people of west Africa from radical Islam but to give them the impetus to develop their nations socially, financially and politically. It will be a positive move forward if we can engender that; if we can enable them to do it, and encourage them. Those nations can then give themselves the future they want and deserve. The old adage applies, about giving a man a fish or a net. I want to be sure that we are providing nets—I am sure that the Minister will respond that we are—and that they are being used to provide a future for the people of the countries in question rather than hammocks for a corrupt leadership. Let us hope that we can make that change.

We must do what we can, and ensure that what we do is used for the correct purpose. I believe that the FCO, embassies and ambassadors, and the Minister in particular, have a major role to play, and that that has a bearing on the influence of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and on our role in effecting change in the western region of Africa. It has been a pleasure to speak in the debate; it was an opportunity to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.

3.29 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) on securing this timely and consensual debate, which is perhaps appropriate on Burns night when we celebrate Scotland's great humanitarian. He was an opponent of the slave trade on the west coast of Africa, which was an historic centre of that trade. In "The Slave's Lament", he wrote:

"It was in sweet Senegal that my foes did me enthrall,  
For the lands of Virginia—ginia, O:

Torn from that lovely shore and must never see it more;

And alas! I am weary, weary O."

**Anne McLaughlin:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Patrick Grady:** My hon. Friend may feel free to interrupt Robbie Burns.

**Anne McLaughlin:** I was interrupting only to say that—as you will know, as a Scot, Mr McCabe—it is better to sing it if my hon. Friend wants to.

**Patrick Grady:** Fortunately, and to the benefit of the House, I would be ruled out of order if I attempted to sing.

My point is that the slave in Burns's poem had no choice but to be weary. On the other hand, we have to choose not to be, seize ourselves of the injustices that still exist in that part of the world and do what we can to challenge them. As the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East said, that region does not always get the attention it deserves for a range of historical reasons, so it is good that we have had this opportunity. As has happened in other recent debates about other regions of Africa, the definition always stretches a little when Members want to mention specific countries. I want to reflect on some of the countries that have been mentioned and then some of the regional challenges and opportunities that the Government can respond to.

Ghana was the clear focus of the hon. Members for Rochford and Southend East and for Windsor (Adam Afriyie). Like everyone else, we welcomed the peaceful transition of power and congratulate President Nana Akufo-Addo on his election and John Mahama on standing down. There is sometimes an issue across the continent with big-man politics, but the real measure of a man in such situations should be the willingness to accept the result of a democratic election and to hand over the baton with good grace.

I always associate Ghana with fair trade chocolate. Trade, customs and so on were raised by both hon. Gentlemen and the countries' economic potential came through clearly in their speeches. Free trade is important and, hopefully, will allow countries to become less dependent on aid, but free trade must also be fair trade; the principles behind the fair trade movement are exceptionally important.

The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East touched on Morocco and its access to the African Union. I may say a bit more about the AU and the Côte d'Ivoire as a beacon for growth.

Gambia has been in the news a lot recently, as we heard from all hon. Members. It was a bit of a rollercoaster: when I first saw that this debate had been scheduled, I thought we would be calling for action and asking what we could do, but there now seems to have been a peaceful transition. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) said, people are experiencing some hope, although there are concerns about Jammeh's legacy, not least the reported theft of cash and goods.

The situation in Nigeria was touched on powerfully by my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). The size of

the country and its challenges are vast, but so too are the opportunities. The ongoing instability in the north-east and the continuing threats from Boko Haram need to be addressed in any way we can. The “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign continues after two years.

I pay tribute to all the expat and diaspora communities from west Africa that enrich and enliven so many of our cities and towns, not least in Glasgow. There is a large contingent of Nigerian priests in Glasgow; I remember attending a service to pray for girls who had been kidnapped. Every name was read out by Father Thaddeus Umaru, who was one of my parish priests at the time. It was incredibly moving, and to think that those girls are still imprisoned and displaced is dreadfully worrying.

Displacement continues across the country. Over 2 million people have been displaced; the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke about the level of hunger. That shows the challenge to middle income countries and the real inequalities that can exist, which is why making sure the appropriate support is provided in a range of different ways, whether through the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or different sorts of trade, is important.

That brings me to issues ranging across the whole region and the continent as a whole. The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) touched on health in his intervention and the former Minister, the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), raised the challenge of TB, malaria and other neglected diseases.

In the transition to middle income status, Nigeria, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are all listed by the World Bank as lower middle income countries, but that is perhaps the most precarious situation because of the risk of backsliding. That is why the role for regional co-operation is so important. Both the regional blocs and ECOWAS, as has been mentioned a couple of times, have played important roles in intervening in the different instabilities we have heard about.

The African Union as a whole is where there may be a bit of divergence because we have taken quite a step by choosing not to be part of the European Union and that diplomatic bloc. I am not sure quite what message that sends out. We must be sure that regional bodies do not encourage countries sometimes to hold their neighbours to a slightly higher standard than they want. It would be interesting to hear some of the Minister's reflections on that. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East was right to talk about the importance of the UK's diplomatic influence and the various different kinds of soft power.

DFID's role was discussed recently in a debate in the main Chamber about the Great Lakes region; I was pleased to hear the Minister commit so strongly to the 0.7% target. It is important to reiterate that at every opportunity. It is ultimately in our own interests to halt flows of people. If we want to improve stability in these countries, it makes sense to invest in stability and civil society. The hon. Member for Strangford has a debate here tomorrow on civil society, when we can explore some of the issues in more detail.

Finally, the impact of Brexit and trade deals have been a big focus of the debate and are important. As I said at the beginning, they must be fair trade deals as well as free trade deals. It is important that any deals

reflect the range of human rights commitments that the UK and, hopefully, many of these countries are signed up to and that they take account of climate change and emissions reduction.

When preparing for the debate, I read an interesting piece about regional co-operation to reduce the harmful emissions of diesel that is sold into many west African countries. Action is being taken to tackle climate change, but we must also tackle the pollution of air quality and the impact on health on many people's day-to-day lives. Again, it is encouraging to see such developments. I hope the Government will commit to continuing to take them forward.

The slave in Burns's lament had no choice but to be weary, but we cannot allow ourselves to be. Much of the situation in west Africa and the continent is the result not just of historical decisions, but of present day ones made in this part of the world. If we can continue to show the compassion and solidarity that Burns promoted, perhaps there will be less lamenting and more cause for celebration the world over.

3.38 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I thank the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) for raising the debate, and for his excellent and wide-ranging introduction to the subject. I know this area is of great interest to him, given his previous role in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) and to sum up in this debate, which has covered a wide range of issues. We have spoken about DFID and our aid, notably mentioned by the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). We have talked about healthcare, touching on malaria, TB and Ebola. We have also discussed elections, democracy, Governments and corruption. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East—or, as I will always think of him now, the guy who stocked the shelves at Bejam—spoke at length about the various elections, notably the successful election in Gambia. I will move on to discuss that country. We also had an excellent talk on business and trade, with specific reference to Ghana, from the hon. Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie). I look forward to hearing the Minister's responses to those discussions.

A major issue in the region of west Africa is terrorism, which some hon. Members touched on. West Africa has seen a rise in radical activity. Boko Haram is seen as the biggest threat to security and peace in the region—mainly in the Lake Chad Basin region, including Nigeria and Niger, although its presence has recently reached into Senegal. Boko Haram is estimated to be linked to more than 150 deaths from direct violent activity since the beginning of 2016. It has also contributed to a rise in food insecurity, with threats to the security of agricultural land and livelihoods, displacement of farmers and reduced productivity.

The United Nations reported only last month that 400,000 children were on the brink of starvation owing to Boko Haram's actions. Even worse, it said that 75,000 of them could die from hunger within the next few months. Last week, the United Nations called on “the international community to immediately support the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance”.

[Liz McInnes]

The region also has an al-Qaeda presence in the Islamic Maghreb. It launched an attack in Mali last November and attacks in Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast just this month.

Earlier this month, the Secretary of State for Defence announced the training of UK armed forces alongside Sierra Leonean troops. That is in addition to the more than 350 British troops deployed to Nigeria in 2016 to train Nigerian armed forces fighting Boko Haram. Are the Government in further talks with west African nations to deploy troops in that region? If so, could the Minister tell us where and how many?

Other factors, outside terrorism, have cost thousands of lives in previous years. The region's resilience was tested during the outbreak of Ebola that began in 2013. The Ebola virus swept across Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, claiming tens of thousands of lives. That could have been a pandemic, but the international community's action and contributions, including £427 million provided by the UK, stopped the escalation.

I recently visited Sierra Leone myself and saw a country that was struggling, although it was declared Ebola-free on 17 March 2016. I must praise the UK Government's response and contribution to helping to ensure that that was possible. That highlights the importance of retaining our commitment to spend 0.7% of our gross national income on aid every year and our substantial contribution to the European development fund. Can the Minister outline whether the UK will contribute an amount equivalent to that which we currently give the region through the EDF once we have left the European Union?

Given the severity of a disease such as Ebola and the pace at which it can spread, I want to press the Minister on what the Government have learned from the Ebola crisis. What additional measures and apparatus do the Government need to put in place so that, should another outbreak like that occur, they would be better equipped to deal with the emergency?

Last week, as many hon. Members have said, President Adama Barrow was sworn in as President of Gambia. I am sure that the whole House welcomes his succession. Yesterday, we also welcomed his vice-president, Fatoumata Tambajang, to her role in the new Administration. I am pleased to see a woman in such an important role. However, it seems that objections are now being raised because Fatoumata is 67 years old. Apparently, in Gambia, that is two years over the legal maximum for serving in the post. I can only say that it is fortunate for us in the UK that we do not have such a rule here—we would be having several by-elections.

There are obviously issues still to be resolved in Gambia, but what has just happened there has been seen as a huge success story for Africa, and it could be a turning point for Gambia itself. This is the first time since becoming independent, which happened only in 1965, that Gambia has changed its Government through the election system. That continues on from successful and peaceful elections and the transfer of power in Ghana last December and in Nigeria and Burkina Faso in 2015, showing progress and hope for democracies across the continent.

In Gambia, not only has democracy prevailed but the intervention of neighbouring and international organisations has helped to install President Barrow in

high office. The African Union, historically hesitant to criticise its own members on human rights issues and abuses, worked tirelessly, hand in hand with the Economic Community of West African States, to ensure that the election results were upheld. Both the AU and ECOWAS are to be commended for their diplomatic handling of the situation and the eventual military commitment and pressure to force the removal of Yahya Jammeh.

The work of the UN, its Security Council, the United States, the European Union and the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation has also played an integral role in condemning the former President to exile. Jammeh was a dictator: he had ruled, repressed and brutalised his people for 22 years, after seizing power in a military coup in 1994. His time in power saw constant human rights abuses, including thousands of forced disappearances, and arbitrary detention and torture for any political dissenters. However, the time for reconciliation has begun, with President Barrow's commitment to release all political prisoners.

President Barrow has also been working with the Senegalese authorities to repatriate the 45,000 Gambian refugees who fled in the wake of the troubles. I ask the Minister whether there will be additional assistance for those wishing to resettle in their homeland, given the unique circumstances and the need to help reunification to happen.

As many will know, President Barrow lived, worked and studied here in the UK. That presents the UK with a distinctive opportunity. Over the weekend, President Barrow stated:

“There is a strong tie with Britain and Gambia”.

He also stated that he wanted a return for Gambia to the International Criminal Court and the Commonwealth. The Labour party strongly supports that, and I hope that it has cross-party support as well.

With regard to a future trade agreement, the President could not be any clearer, stating:

“Any aspects that's going on in Gambia, Britain will be our number one partner in terms of trade, in terms of democracy, in terms of good governance. They will be our partners.”

I know that the Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs have spoken directly to President Barrow, but could the hon. Gentleman inform the House of when the first UK representative from Her Majesty's Government will go to Gambia to meet the new Administration?

That brings me to the Prime Minister's trade envoys. I accept that this does not fall directly within the Foreign Office's remit, but it will play an integral part in our future relations with the region, diplomatically and economically, now and post Brexit. There is currently only one trade envoy programme to the west African region, which is to Ghana and is headed by the hon. Member for Windsor, who visited earlier this month. Will the Minister outline the current and future plan for that particular programme and whether the Government will commit more envoys to the region to strengthen our ties with it, given the importance that it will have in the upcoming years? That is important, given our historic links and aid contribution. The ECOWAS commission represents 350 million citizens and is moving towards further regional integration through a common political, security and socioeconomic agenda.

Although the news from Gambia is welcome, the region still faces many challenges, including security challenges, inherent poverty, terrorism, the refugee crisis, lack of sustainable healthcare, famine, piracy off its shores, female genital mutilation and human and drug trafficking, plus other transnational organised crimes. Many of those issues have been highlighted here today.

Progress can be slow, yet Britain can continue to work together and towards strengthening the institutions that we take for granted, through our commitment to aid, opening markets by way of trade and using our soft power of diplomacy—not to mention our premiership football teams—which will contribute to working towards strong and lasting ties between the UK and a peaceful and economically prosperous western Africa.

3.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** It is a pleasure to work under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I join others in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) on a commanding performance. When I first saw that I was going to take over the responsibility he looked after so well, I realised that I had big shoes to fill. He has reflected that in his articulation, understanding and grasp of the matters not only in west Africa but right across that amazing continent. I thank him for his contribution today, and thank other hon. Members. This has been a comprehensive, wide-ranging and very useful debate. As usual, I have a few minutes in which to answer a deluge of questions. I am simply not going to be able to do justice to hon. Members and will write to them with more details if I am not able to cover those points in my closing remarks.

First, to focus on my hon. Friend's opening remarks, he praised the work of the posts—of our high commissions and embassies—not only across Africa but across the piece in the Foreign Office. We certainly punch above our weight. I pay tribute to them and join him, and all hon. Members in the Chamber today, in praising the leadership that is shown in representing Britain not only from a trade and diplomatic perspective, but from a security and military perspective. We are very proud of what they do. They are the unsung heroes. I hope any delegation that goes out, or any parliamentary visit that takes place, will benefit from the knowledge, experience and friendship that is bestowed at our posts across the world and in Africa.

My hon. Friend stressed the importance of the crisis centre. I thank him very much indeed for complimenting me on my Twitter feed. I hope, simply because of the number of people who watch Westminster Hall debates, that the number of followers I have will double after his congratulations. The work of the crisis centre is critical in ensuring that we look after Britons abroad when there is uncertainty in any part of the world. For those who are unfamiliar with it, it is a huge area in the basement of the Foreign Office that gets taken over with all sorts of important feeds, linking into other organisations and posts so that we can keep track, provide relevant information and, not least, communicate with the travel authorities. We can provide important information so that, if there is a requirement for repatriation or health issues or others, we can deal with them with a sense of urgency. It was used in regards to Sousse and other events, and was mobilised for the Gambian political dilemma as well.

My hon. Friend underlined the importance of Africa as a nation. It is envisaged that, in 2050, it will be one quarter of the world's population, so the continent is important to us. As many hon. Members have outlined, we have a history and relationship with it; we have connections and we should certainly take advantage of them. The World Bank states that Africa as a whole will need to create 18 million jobs every single year. We need to be part of that story, and we have a very good part to play. Other connections have been made such as cultural links and connections with the diasporas in this country. Soft power was mentioned, and we can take advantage of that in developing the important bonds that will help the continent, and certainly west Africa, as it takes important steps to an improved democratic space.

My hon. Friend mentioned the opportunities of Brexit. As the Prime Minister has articulated, it is not us looking inward but quite the opposite. It is us saying that we do not have to go through the prism of working with 27 nations in Brussels, but can have direct relationships and direct trade opportunities with countries, including those in west Africa.

My hon. Friend and others praised the work we did for the continent in tackling Ebola. That is a great example, stepping outside the EU, of how a coalition of the willing—a coalition of those countries that are able and committed to doing something good—stepped forward and helped a part of Africa that needed our support. It is absolutely right to praise all those involved, as the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), the spokeswoman for Labour, did in heaping praise on what we did there. Yes, there are lessons to be learned, because this is likely to reoccur again—we need to be prepared for some form of illness or plague.

My hon. Friend asked about the importance of the Commonwealth meeting. It is a great trading opportunity. He knows that we will host the next event in spring. It is a great opportunity for us to embark on and enhance the trading relationships we have with our African friends.

My hon. Friend asked about the Trump Administration. We are all asking that question. What I can say is that the deputy Secretary of State, Tom Shannon, had the job under the previous Administration. He had responsibility for Africa and the middle east, mimicking my entire footprint, and continues in that role. Terrorism is a huge concern in Africa, not least with Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in Somalia. Brett McGurk will continue to lead the counter-Daesh coalition, which will expand its work to look at how it can use the experience it has gained to help countries tackle terrorism in Africa.

Boko Haram was mentioned by the hon. Members for Heywood and Middleton, for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). When I visited Nigeria, I had the opportunity to meet people from the "Bring Back Our Girls" campaign. There is no doubt that the impact of Boko Haram cannot be over-exaggerated. We estimate that, since 2009, 20,000 people have been killed, more than 2.2 million people have been displaced and more than 15 million people have been affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. The problem is that, in the north-east of the country, access is very limited, the roads are very poor and security is very difficult to enforce. Some of the programmes we are looking at are to improve the

[Mr Tobias Ellwood]

infrastructure so that the security can work there. We have more than 350 personnel training intelligence and helping military forces, so that the Nigerians can provide better security for that area. The humanitarian disaster is huge, which is why we have a number of DFID programmes working to try to help the situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) articulated very powerfully his knowledge and passion for Ghana and his role of trade envoy. I thank him and others for the important role that envoys play. They provide continuity and a steady drumbeat of visits, which Ministers cannot always get out to do. I thank him for the work he has done in Ghana and am pleased to be joining him to visit the country very soon.

My hon. Friend stressed the role of business. It is absolutely right that we work to ensure that Ministers not only go out, but take businesses with us as well. He also talked about the connections and diasporas in Britain, and touched on the Francophone countries. It is important that we do not simply see the region as the French domain, but as one that we can go into. The British Council does amazing work teaching English—there is desire for that right across Africa, regardless of the historical connections.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), the spokesperson for the Scottish National party, spoke about the importance of continuing that commitment of 0.7% in our aid budget. I confirm again that that is certainly our intention and is very important indeed. He touched on something that is not perhaps particularly appreciated: the impact of climate change on Africa in causing what we might call environmental refugee movements—people are having to move because they can no longer grow crops in certain areas because the climate has changed and it is no longer sustainable. We need to focus on that, too.

In the short time I have left, I should say that we are seeing a slight change in west Africa in places such as the Gambia and Ghana, where elections have taken place. There is a recognition that constitutions must be honoured. No longer is it the case—this is not just in Africa but around the world, although there are many examples in Africa—that, when a leader gets used to power, they find reason, cause and excuse to alter the constitution so that they can continue in perpetuity, until such time that they get tired and work out a way of getting their son or daughter to take over. What we saw in the Gambia and neighbouring nations—this point was made in a fairly lengthy, but pertinent intervention—was them saying that they were looking to solve their own problems. We wish President Barrow every success. I was pleased to be able to make that phone call, although I have to say that was prior to President Jammeh saying that he was not going to recognise him. I am pleased that we already have that bond with the country and look forward to visiting.

I am not even going to touch on some of the other countries, but will certainly write to hon. Members with more details on their specific questions. I will simply end by saying that west Africa is a huge and diverse region. People are enjoying stability and growing prosperity, but in other countries, leaders continue to face considerable challenges. What we see right across the whole region is the enormous potential of those countries and their people. It is in our interests and theirs that we work together and help them to realise that potential. That is why we continue to support west African countries' efforts to deliver peace, stability and democracy.

4 pm

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

## Milton Keynes: 50th Anniversary

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

4.11 pm

**Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the 50th anniversary of the new city of Milton Keynes.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen.

I am grateful for the opportunity to mark the golden anniversary of the place that the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster), and I are so proud to represent. I am also very pleased that he is able to respond to this debate as the Minister.

The new city of Milton Keynes came into being in this place on 23 January 1967, through an Order in Council, so it is right that we mark the milestone in this place, too. It was also the year that the first North sea gas was piped ashore, the year that the Boeing 737 took its maiden flight, the year of the six-day war, the year the first automated cash machine was introduced, and the year that Sandie Shaw entered Eurovision for the UK.

**Mr Andrew Smith** (Oxford East) (Lab): And there was a very good Government.

**Iain Stewart**: I make no comment on that.

Nineteen sixty-seven was also the year when a round of preparatory negotiations started for the UK to join the European Economic Community. It was also the year when a bold decision was taken to construct a new city in north Buckinghamshire, with a vision of a population of around 250,000 souls. That is not to say that nobody lived in the area that is now Milton Keynes prior to its designation as a new city. Far from it—Milton Keynes was built around long-established towns, such as Stony Stratford, Wolverton, Newport Pagnell, Bletchley, Fenny Stratford, Woburn Sands and Olney, together with a patchwork of rural north Buckinghamshire villages. Indeed, there is archaeological evidence of permanent settlement in the area that is now Milton Keynes dating back to the bronze age.

The name Milton Keynes is not new, either. Some people mistakenly believe that the name was made up, perhaps an amalgam of two 20th-century economists, Milton Friedman and John Maynard Keynes. In fact, the new city took its name from the village of Milton Keynes, which is in the heart of the borough and dates from the 11th century.

Part of the motivation behind the creation of Milton Keynes was to take overspill housing from existing large cities, principally London. Bletchley, prior to the designation of Milton Keynes as a new town, had taken such population since the 1950s. But the ambition for Milton Keynes was for so much more than that. Milton Keynes is equidistant from London, Birmingham, Leicester, Oxford and Cambridge, and has good transport links through the M1 and the west coast main line, so the intention was to create a dynamic regional centre in its own right, rather than a dormitory town for other places.

I contend that we have more than fulfilled that ambition and that we have been the most successful of the new towns. The raw socio-economic data show that we have exceeded all targets for population, physical space and economic growth. We have regularly topped league tables for job creation and business start-ups, although that poses some challenges and opportunities for the future—I will touch on those a little later in my speech.

**Mr Andrew Smith**: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this welcome debate; I extend best wishes from the historic city of Oxford to Milton Keynes; and I look forward to the improved rail and road links between us, which we hope are on the way. May I also pass on the best wishes of his predecessor, my good friend Phyllis Starkey, who remains a firm friend of Milton Keynes and an advocate of its achievement and potential?

**Iain Stewart**: I am very grateful to the right hon. Member for Oxford East for that intervention and I shall certainly relay his kind good wishes to Milton Keynes. I will touch on the improved infrastructure links between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge, if I am allowed to refer to the “other place”, a little later in my speech.

I am very happy to pay tribute to my predecessor, Dr Starkey. We contested quite a number of elections over the years. She was victorious in the first two; I was victorious later on. Although Milton Keynes certainly has political competition at local authority level and parliamentary level, just like anywhere else, it always strikes me that, whatever our party political differences, politicians in Milton Keynes share a passion for the place and want to make it better. That is a very important political culture to have, and so I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for mentioning my predecessor.

I will also mention my hon. Friend the Minister’s predecessor, Brian White, who sadly passed away last year. As a Member of Parliament, as a councillor and—for a year—as the mayor of Milton Keynes, he did an incredible amount of work to promote Milton Keynes and secure its growth.

As I was saying, if we look at the raw data we see that Milton Keynes has been an outstanding success, but at the heart of that success is something more significant than just the raw numbers. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister, my constituency neighbour, will agree that each weekend that we spend out in our constituencies meeting the charities, clubs and community groups, we find a real tangible passion for and pride in Milton Keynes, as well as strong aspirations for our future. Over the last couple of weeks in central Milton Keynes shopping centre, there has been an exhibition documenting our history and development. Talking to residents old and new at that exhibition, I found a deep and palpable sense of belonging and spirit.

I was not even a twinkle in my father’s eye when Milton Keynes came into being. However, having looked at the old films about Milton Keynes and its creation on social media, I know that if we look past the slightly questionable hair styles and clothing fashion of the age, we can see a real sense of excitement and hope among the first residents who moved in, particularly those who had moved from substandard accommodation in London. There was a real sense of optimism about the wonderful new housing that they were able to move into.

[Iain Stewart]

People feel incredibly loyal to Milton Keynes. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) is in his place, because his father, Bill Benyon, was an exemplar of that loyalty. He is another of my predecessors and he represented Milton Keynes for more than 20 years. When he was first elected, it was to the old Buckingham constituency, which at that time included all of Milton Keynes. When population growth meant that the constituency was divided in two, which I think was for the 1983 election, Bill Benyon had the option of standing for the Buckingham seat, which is a very safe Conservative seat with a majority of more than 20,000, or Milton Keynes, which has a much more volatile political colouring. To his credit, he chose Milton Keynes, because he was so passionate about the place and had personally contributed to many of its projects. I was at the silver jubilee of the Christ the Cornerstone church just a couple of weeks ago, and I understand that Bill Benyon personally contributed to that church, helping to get it built. More than 25 years after he retired, I still meet constituents who fondly remember him and the incredible work he did. That is just one example of the passion and loyalty that Milton Keynes develops in its representatives and inhabitants.

At its core, I argue that the strong sense of community in Milton Keynes is born from the spirit of innovation that has always characterised the place. Milton Keynes was a new design, unlike any place before it. It brought together new concepts in urban planning and architecture. It was ahead of its time and drew on the garden cities tradition. It is a place of open green spaces and natural habitats. Often, in the heart of urban Milton Keynes, people enter a wood, park, meadow or a riverbank and find it hard to believe they are in the middle of a place with a population of more than 250,000 people.

Milton Keynes has also been home to pioneering new concepts, such as the first eco-houses and new models of education. One of the institutions in my constituency that I am most proud of is the Open University, which has innovated lifelong learning and is cherished the world over. It is not quite as old as Milton Keynes itself; it celebrates its golden anniversary in a couple of years' time. It was founded in 1969, but the development of the Open University and Milton Keynes have gone hand in hand.

People have moved to Milton Keynes from all over the United Kingdom and all over the world. I came to Milton Keynes after university. My first job was there. When I decided on a political career as my aspiration, it was a natural place to seek election. It took me a few goes, as I mentioned in answer to the right hon. Member for Oxford East, but I chose to stand my ground. I could not think of anywhere else that I really wanted to represent.

Wherever people have come from, they share a sense of ownership of the new city. It is their place; they want to be part of building it up, and they have a passion for its future. We have a rich tapestry of cultures and faiths. While we must never be complacent, we do not have the same tensions between communities in Milton Keynes that sadly can exist in other towns and cities in the UK. Admittedly, we have our detractors. There are people who say that Milton Keynes is a dull, boring place, devoid of character and culture. My experience is that

such comments usually come from people who have never visited or, if they have visited, have not taken a proper look at what we have to offer.

A place with no character and culture—really? Milton Keynes is rich in its creative and cultural dynamism, from grassroots art communities to historic Bletchley Park; from the UK's most popular theatre outside London to Milton Keynes City Orchestra, which attracts world-renowned soloists such as the pianist Ji Liu, who will perform there in March; and from the drama of the rugby world cup, held at stadium mk, to the biennial international festival, which attracts performers and audiences from around the globe. We have more than 7,000 arts and heritage events held in Milton Keynes each year. We have stories of international cultural and historic importance, including code-breaking at Bletchley Park and John Newton writing "Amazing Grace" when he was a curate at Olney. We have music venues including The Stables and the National Bowl, which hosts once-in-a-generation performances from world leaders in music.

We are home to the Formula 1 team Red Bull Racing and are fast becoming a centre of excellence in the motorsport industry. In technology, we innovate some of the very latest ideas in intelligent mobility through the transport systems Catapult and the smart cities project, working in tandem with the Open University. We welcome delegations from around the world who want to learn about our story. Economically, we have a diverse and vibrant economy, from financial services to logistics and distribution and from high-quality engineering to rail industry management.

We have certainly had a vibrant and successful first half century, but what of the future? Having realised the original vision of Milton Keynes in its physical footprint and population size, what comes next? I believe we can enjoy an equally successful next half century, but only if we plan it properly. We cannot just rest on our laurels. Other parts of the country, such as the northern powerhouse and the midlands engine, are upping their game. Projects such as High Speed 2 will change the economic geography of the country, and we must be similarly ambitious for our future. We cannot just allow Milton Keynes to expand in an unplanned way, with more housing developments around our periphery. That would place too much strain on our infrastructure and public services and compromise the core design principles that have proven so successful. We must abide by our city motto: "By knowledge, design and understanding". We have to plan properly with our neighbours.

**Alistair Burt** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing forward this debate. As a near neighbour—I live in Wootton, so Milton Keynes is within touching distance and my family and I use it often—I bring the good wishes of Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council to the debate and to Milton Keynes. On looking forward and not losing sight of the original concept, does he agree that the environment in which Milton Keynes is set is very special? My wife and I had the pleasure of dinner some years ago with Evelyn de Rothschild, who was the vice-chairman of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation. We asked him what his greatest legacy was, and he said, "The trees." The trees make the environment in which this vibrant city can look forward with great optimism.

**Iain Stewart:** I am grateful for that intervention from my right hon. Friend and near neighbour. I thank him for the good wishes from the people of Bedfordshire. He is absolutely right: the environmental benefits of Milton Keynes are enormous. I think I am right in saying that we have more trees per head of population than anywhere else in the country. That was one of the great foresights of the city's founding fathers.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend intervened, because it leads me neatly on to talking about what I see as the next stage of Milton Keynes development. That includes the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor that the National Infrastructure Commission is looking at and projects such as the east-west rail line, which the right hon. Member for Oxford East mentioned, and the Oxford-Cambridge expressway. I believe they will unlock considerable economic and housing development.

If that development is done in the right way—using the smart city and transport technology that we are innovating locally to develop new types of village communities that people want and not the massive urban sprawl that they fear—we will respect and improve on the basis on which Milton Keynes was founded. In doing so, we need to find a way to develop a new partnership between Milton Keynes and neighbouring authorities, such as Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council, to develop joint planning and delivery mechanisms. I know that my right hon. Friend is setting up an all-party group to look at the creation of the England economic heartland body, which will do a lot of important work in that space.

Last year in Milton Keynes we had the publication of the “MK Futures 2050” report, which was chaired by Sir Peter Gregson of Cranfield University. It presented a bold vision for our future, including the creation of MK:IT, a technical university modelled on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States. That absolutely fits with the NIC's plans and the Government's industrial strategy, which was outlined earlier this week and will develop our skills base for the future. All those debates and initiatives are live, and I look forward to playing my part in shaping them. We have an incredibly bright future and many opportunities, but I conclude today simply by wishing my fellow residents in Milton Keynes a very happy birthday. I am proud to represent such a wonderful place, and I look forward to playing a part in its next half century.

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** I remind the Minister that the debate will finish at 4.41 pm. I offer my congratulations to Milton Keynes.

4.28 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster):** It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I start by congratulating my fellow MP for Milton Keynes, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), on securing this debate at a timely point in the city's development. I make it clear that I am speaking in this debate on behalf of the Government with the consent of my ministerial colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government, and that decisions on matters relating to Milton Keynes will be taken by others. I am, however, delighted to be present today to celebrate our successful new town, as a city, reaching its 50th anniversary.

I underline the praise by paying tribute to my predecessor as an MP, Brian White, who sadly died last year, and to the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), Sir Bill Benyon, who did so much in the early years of the creation of Milton Keynes. Milton Keynes has had some colourful MPs: Aidan Crawley was elected in 1945 as a Labour MP, but subsequently became a Conservative; Frank Markham followed him in 1951, another former Labour MP who became a Conservative; and, following them, the famous Robert Maxwell who, though elected as a Labour MP, did not become a Conservative.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South and I both know, Milton Keynes continues to be one of Britain's fastest-growing cities. It has produced exceptional talent, including London 2012 Olympic gold medallist Greg Rutherford; it set up the Open University in 1971, making higher education more accessible to everyone, regardless of geography; and it is the centre for transport technology in England, with the first trials of driverless cars taking place on Milton Keynes's streets, and as the home of the transport Catapult centre.

Fifty years ago, permission was given to transform 8,500 hectares of villages and farmland into a town of 250,000 people, a new town. Milton Keynes has since become one of the most successful new towns in England. It has already reached its original target of 250,000 people, but it will not stop there. Provided we continue to follow Milton Keynes's motto, “By knowledge, design and understanding”, which my hon. Friend cited, the future is bright.

Milton Keynes's future will be as exciting as its past has been. In March 2016, the then Chancellor asked the National Infrastructure Commission to lead an inquiry into the potential of the arc from Oxford through Milton Keynes to Cambridge, as highlighted by my hon. Friend and the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith). That corridor would support the already flourishing knowledge-intensive industries that exist in the area. The commission's interim report was published last autumn, confirming the opportunity for prosperity and a high quality of life in the area.

My hon. Friend mentioned the commission that recently produced “MK Futures 2050”, which was chaired by Sir Peter Gregson. It worked with local partners to shape an ambitious vision and plan for Milton Keynes's future. The plan seeks to drive growth and prosperity for Milton Keynes's existing and future residents. The council is reflecting on how to bring the recommendations to life to the advantage of the city and its residents.

I am delighted that Milton Keynes remains a centre for growth. The Government have made it clear that an important part of their intention will be to increase housing supply for the next generation. We absolutely recognise that that needs to be done in a way that works for everyone and with the support of local residents. One of the ways in which the Government are doing that is by making significant changes. For example, planning policy has been radically streamlined and the planning system is now faster and more efficient, and we have given local people a much bigger say over new development in their area. Milton Keynes has a lot to offer in helping us to improve our systems and to ensure effective delivery, and it would not be right for the Government to do things alone.

[*Mark Lancaster*]

The Government's ambition is to work with all players—local authorities, residents and developers—to cement strong partnerships with clear roles and responsibilities in order to deliver more homes. It is important that we look at the lessons of the past. Milton Keynes has developed collaboratively and has a strong community base and mixed architecture to provide a city for the present and the future. We want more co-operation and shared intentions, so that local partners work more strategically with their neighbours to ensure that together they can meet the housing and community needs of their combined areas.

Milton Keynes is perhaps the pre-eminent example of what can be achieved by a development corporation with strong local leadership and a clear sense of purpose. Many students at school and university today will be studying the success of the city. My hon. Friend and I are, rightly, both very proud of that.

The “MK Futures 2050” report proposed six big new projects for Milton Keynes, the first of which was to be the hub of the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford arc, which we have already touched on, and to realise the arc's full economic potential as a single knowledge-intensive cluster. Secondly, MK:IT, which my hon. Friend also touched on, will provide lifelong learning opportunities at a new university to promote research, teaching and practice, and realistic solutions to the problems facing fast-growing cities everywhere. Thirdly, “Learning 2050” could ensure that the city provides, and is known for providing, world-class education for all its young people. Fourthly, by harnessing the flexibility of the city's roads, the “Smart, shared, sustainable mobility” project will allow everyone who lives, works, studies or does business in the city to move freely and on demand. Milton Keynes is very much a city built for the car. Fifthly, the “Renaissance” project in central Milton Keynes will recreate a city centre fit for the 21st century. Finally, the “Creative and cultured city” project will harness the energy and motivation of the city's people.

As well as a growing population, strong economic growth is critical to the future success of our communities. My hon. Friend and I have both consistently argued that “i before e”—or “infrastructure before expansion”—and economic growth should be the drivers for our local growth in Milton Keynes. Just this week, the Prime Minister launched our industrial strategy Green Paper, which sets out our approach to developing a modern industrial strategy that improves living standards and economic growth by increasing productivity and driving growth across the whole country. We aim to establish an industrial policy for the long term and provide a policy framework against which major public and private sector investment decisions can be made with confidence, ensuring that our country's success is accessible to everyone.

Having published our Green Paper, the Government want to hear from every part of the country, every sector of industry, businesses of every size, and the people who work in and use them. Milton Keynes can already celebrate successful businesses, including manufacturers

such as the Coca-Cola Company and WD-40. The recipe for the latter is known by only six people. Milton Keynes is also the centre of the motor industry. The headquarters of Mercedes and Volkswagen are there, and much of the motor racing industry, including great racing teams such as Red Bull, is based in the city. There are many other businesses in the area, and long may that continue. I therefore ask everyone, both in Milton Keynes and beyond, to engage in this extremely important debate.

Significant investment is already being made to support growth across the country. More than £200 million of the local growth fund has been prioritised to date to support growth across the south-east midlands, and the Government expect to announce further investment in the area through the local growth fund shortly. Projects such as Bletchley station and the A421 improvements have also been supported by that fund. As a runner for European city of culture 2023—I am sure my hon. Friend and I would both very much like that to happen—the city is working with the local enterprise partnership to extend the wonderful MK Gallery, which he mentioned.

In autumn 2016, the National Infrastructure Commission published its interim report about the Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge corridor. Its core finding was that housing supply is the main constraint on maximising the corridor's growth potential. The Government supported all the recommendations in the report and announced £137 million of additional or accelerated funding to ensure the delivery of the east-west rail project and the Oxford to Cambridge expressway road. The Government are now working with partners across the corridor to ensure that the ambitions in the commission's report are achieved with the most effective solutions. It is vital that all partners work collaboratively to secure the best future for the area.

In closing, I will touch on some of my hon. Friend's remarks. Those who are unaware of Milton Keynes probably perceive it as simply a modern city. That is simply not the case. Some 75% of the borough of Milton Keynes is actually rural, and some 30,000 residents live in those rural areas, mainly in my constituency of Milton Keynes North. There is enormous heritage there, not only in the corner towns that my hon. Friend mentioned—Wolverton, Newport Pagnell, Bletchley and Stony Stratford—and my own home town of Olney, which was home to the original pancake race in 1415 and is the former home of William Cowper, the famous poet, and John Newton, the abolitionist and author of “Amazing Grace”, but in other great towns such as Hanslope, where the Church of St James has the tallest spire in Buckinghamshire, Castlethorpe, Emberton Park and Moulsoe, to name just a few. The great county town of Newport Pagnell, which was so key in the civil war, was of course the home of George Walters, one of our great residents, who won his Victoria Cross in the Crimean war.

As we celebrate 50 years of Milton Keynes and look forward to a bright future, it is worth remembering that there is tremendous heritage in the area, too. I congratulate my hon. Friend once again on securing this timely debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Green Investment Bank

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** As a result of the vote, I remind Members that the debate is an hour long and will finish at 5.41 pm. I shall call the Front-Bench speakers, beginning with the Scottish National party—I believe it is Ms Cherry—at 5.21 pm, for five minutes only, followed by Dr Whitehead, the Labour spokesperson, at 5.26 pm. At 5.31 pm, I shall call the Minister, who may want to give Ms Thomson a couple of minutes to finish.

4.41 pm

**Michelle Thomson (Edinburgh West) (Ind):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the sale of the Green Investment Bank.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen; I have not done so previously. I have sought the debate as an independent MP—independent as to party and mind—in the light of considerable concerns raised about the proposed sale of the Green Investment Bank. I must signal my thanks to Macquarie and to the Minister for recent meetings. I look forward to another meeting with the Green Investment Bank tomorrow, and then another with the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee in the near future. Thanks are also due to the Environmental Audit Committee for the report of December 2015; to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who tabled an urgent question; and to members of the quality press, such as Aimee Donnellan, for ensuring that the matter gets the scrutiny it deserves.

The Green Investment Bank is one of our success stories and has supported 30 green energy infrastructure projects up to the end of 2015-16. Profits were up to £9.9 million in the last year, and the bank committed £770 million to transactions during the 12 months of 2015-16, taking the total capital committed to £2.6 billion. The imperative of a green agenda remains, and our resolve must be increased in the light of President Trump's threat to step back from previous Paris climate change commitments. Our ambition associated with a green agenda is high, particularly within the Scottish Government, but can the Minister confirm that Macquarie is the preferred bidder, or will he continue with the ridiculous pretence that he cannot mention its name?

Why sell, and why now? I want to make it clear that given my business background I understand why privatisation can be attractive to a business in terms of access to capital and to provide certainty as to future funding. I can also see why being released from state aid rules may be perceived as a benefit. On the other hand, I was struck when a Tory Member commented to me, while the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) was Chancellor of the Exchequer, "If it isn't screwed down, sell it." I am also struck by the fact that the Green Investment Bank does not expect to need to borrow until 2018-19. The report of the Environmental Audit Committee quotes evidence from E3G that

"the Government has failed to make a compelling case explaining the rationale behind, or consequences of its decision to sell a majority share of the GIB".

So why now?

I would like the Minister to confirm whether any financial rewards will be given to the board, executive or senior team on a successful sale of the GIB. Will the

chair, Lord Smith of Kelvin, remain in his post after the sale and, if so, for how long? The model of packaging up elements of a business for sale to release capital is well understood—I regard the use of the term "asset stripping" as somewhat emotive in this case—but the real point is that the UK taxpayer has provided the funds to bring it to where it is today, but it will not be the UK taxpayer who gets the return on investment.

It is clear from other privatisations that the UK taxpayer did not receive the value they should have done; I therefore question whether that can happen with the Green Investment Bank. The New Economics Foundation in its report "We Own It" notes concerns about future profits versus short-term cash in the continued great British sell-off, whether it is a question of losses incurred as a result of the Royal Mail privatisation or Eurostar. Can the Minister confirm whether full value will be obtained for the UK taxpayer on the sale?

I move on to some more specific considerations. The headquarters is currently located in Edinburgh, but it is not just the location of the brass plaque that marks the HQ—it is the functions of governance, legal services, risk and compliance, comms, finance and business development that really determine where that crucial control lies. The jobs associated with those functions tend to be higher quality. I will be monitoring closely to see whether jobs will be maintained and also whether the number will grow and their quality is maintained. Will the Minister confirm what guarantees he has obtained that the HQ will remain in Edinburgh? What assessment has he made of any proposed new structure and any potential impact on the quality of jobs and functions retained in Edinburgh?

State aid rules—the so-called additionality considerations—disallow projects that could be funded under conventional routes. That means that the projects funded tend to carry more risk but, if successful, more reward. I am concerned about the risk appetite of the bank after sale. A business that focuses purely on the bottom line will tend to gravitate towards more vanilla projects, which are easier to package and sell for financial churn but are a loss to the sort of research and innovation that, we are told, the UK Government want to ensure more of with their new industrial strategy Green Paper. The Minister notes in answers to written questions that the market failure that the inception of the GIB sought to address has now been corrected, but market failure in all areas will not be addressed if encouraging innovation is not at the heart of what the GIB does.

Scale is also a consideration. Will a privatised GIB support smaller projects, such as the specially designed loan to finance a switch to low-energy street lighting in Glasgow? Will Macquarie back that type of small-scale investment? It is only £6.3 million, but will save more than 18,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over the next 18 years.

What considerations have the UK Government given to an altered risk appetite after sale? Have the UK Government made any assessment of the potential impact?

I would like to consider the issue of protecting the green purpose of the bank. Responding to criticism, and acknowledging that criticism, the UK Government have put in place a so-called golden share with a worthy and notable set of trustees. In theory, that should give us a level of comfort, in that the trustees must agree to any change of purpose as defined by the five green

[Michelle Thomson]

purposes—but the very purposes themselves carry risk. They are extraordinarily high-level; the question has already been asked whether fracking—yes, fracking—could be carried out while still ostensibly meeting the green purpose tests.

I would now like to briefly consider UK control. The GIB has already undertaken a number of its transactions via private equity-type funds.

**Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Notwithstanding some of the excellent work that the GIB has undertaken, is the hon. Lady concerned, as I am, about the use and involvement of limited liability partnerships? They are currently the subject of a review and have been involved in criminality in many parts of the world. It is not only the GIB—there are some instances where it is alleged that Macquarie has been involved in projects that have used them.

**Michelle Thomson:** I am happy to support my hon. Friend on that point. I also note the valuable work he is doing around Scottish limited partnerships. I hope he has great success in that.

The limited liability partnerships used to date by the GIB may indeed be UK-domiciled and registered for tax purposes, but the point is—we cannot forget this—that if the underlying funds or owners are controlled offshore, the UK taxpayer loses the benefit of that tax take. What level of UK control and benefit will there be after sale? What will be UK-based in the wider supply chain? To what extent will the project management and/or technical experience be based in and benefit the UK?

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. In the context of Brexit, and the very likely loss of funding from the European Investment Bank, would she agree that now it makes less sense than ever to be selling off the Green Investment Bank, because it is precisely that kind of bank that can give us the additional benefit of full UK control and fill the gap that will be left by the likely loss of EIB funding?

**Michelle Thomson:** I am extremely happy to acknowledge that point, and I agree; I suspect the hon. Lady may have read the next section of my speech. She has absolutely hit the nail on the head.

I was discussing what reinvestment would be made in the UK economy after any asset sales. How much influence fundamentally would the so-called golden share have if much of the activity is controlled outwith the UK? I am not expecting the Minister to answer all those questions, but they are part of wider consideration of what we are doing when we invest our UK taxpayers' precious money and build the bank, then sell it without looking under the covers at what is happening as part of the commercial process.

Finally, on the preferred bidder, there are justifiable concerns about the company's intentions. Concerns have been raised about its approach to refinancing and debt, particularly in former public companies such as Thames Water. Jonathan Maxwell, the chief executive of Sustainable

Development Capital, makes a case for his consortium, which includes the state-backed Pension Protection Fund, as the best alternative to meet the Government's goals for the GIB. Would that be a better fit for our wider concerns about the green agenda and to encourage the growth of green, particularly in the light of the threat that Brexit poses to the wider economy?

The UK Government have used a smokescreen of commercial confidentiality, so that proper scrutiny by this Parliament cannot take place. However, it is the UK taxpayer who provided the capital to set up the bank and who could lose out in a sale, without proper scrutiny. We, the UK taxpayers, currently own the GIB and we, the hon. Members from across the House who represent our constituencies, need to assure ourselves that the sale represents real value at present.

The concerns were succinctly summed up by Nils Pratley, writing for *The Guardian*:

“But what if Macquarie thinks GIB is worth more dead than alive? What if it pays £2bn for GIB, liquidates most of the assets at a handsome profit and then decides the capital is better deployed elsewhere?”

What assessment has the Minister made of a sale making it more likely for the UK to meet its Paris climate change obligations? If he has made that assessment, will he make it available?

**Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate; her last point was key. Under the Paris climate change agreement, a pan-European solution was being looked at for this country to meet our climate change commitments and reduce our carbon footprint. Given the consequences of Brexit, is it not all the more important that we preserve the assets in this country that will help us independently to meet the commitments under the Paris and previous climate change agreements?

**Michelle Thomson:** I absolutely agree, and I sum up by asking: is this the right time for a sale to anybody in the light of Brexit, when the focus fundamentally must be on innovation and positioning ourselves to take advantage of key growth sectors?

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** Order. Three Back Benchers have indicated that they wish to speak; I remind them that I will call the Front Benchers to speak at 5.21 pm, so that works out at about seven minutes each. I call Peter Aldous.

4.53 pm

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) on securing the debate; her timing is spot on. I entirely support the principle of privatising the Green Investment Bank, but that needs to take place on terms that are in the whole country's best interests, and on a basis that will maximise the leveraging of investment in this very important sector.

The Green Investment Bank is a success story. Since its launch in 2013, it has leveraged £10 billion-worth of projects from a £2.8 billion public stake, playing a particularly important role in the offshore wind sector.

It successfully kick-started the Galloper wind farm off the Suffolk coast, securing external investment for a project that will bring jobs both to Waveney and across East Anglia.

Since the sale process started a year ago, times have changed. We are now in a very different world and it is appropriate to pause and to consider whether the sale is taking place on terms that are in the best national interest. Brexit has led to a refocus on the UK's industrial strategy, with the publication on Monday of the Government's Green Paper. The pillars of the strategy include the need to upgrade infrastructure; to deliver affordable energy and clean growth; to drive growth throughout the country; and to rebalance the economy. The Green Investment Bank has played a leading role in all those areas, and it is important that it continues to do so, in particular as complementary investment from the European Investment Bank is, as we heard, almost certain to disappear completely.

When the Government circulated the bid documents last year, two possible options were suggested: a full privatisation and the retention of a 25% stake. The latter course should be pursued, because it would be more valuable for the bank, for UK plc and for the taxpayer. The stake would help to target important infrastructure spending; it would enable the Government to hold the bank to its mission of mobilising investment in the UK's green economy and of maximising its green impacts; and, moreover, that sector of the economy is dynamic and entrepreneurial, so the stake is highly likely to increase in value. In summary—I have been very brief—in a short period of two years the Green Investment Bank has brought great benefits to the UK, and it is vital to the future of the country as a whole that it continues to do so.

4.56 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) not only for securing the debate but for her sterling work on the Green Investment Bank, to which she has applied her usual business acumen and forensic skills. I rise to speak because the bank is headquartered in my constituency and, among other things, I am concerned about the 55 people employed there. The Minister has therefore kindly agreed to meet me to discuss the issue.

I want to say something about the background to the setting up of the Green Investment Bank which, across the group, employs more than 130 people, including renewables investment professionals and technical experts. The Business Secretary at the time, Vince Cable, chose Edinburgh as the headquarters for good reason. Edinburgh came top of a financial and technical assessment, as one might expect of the second most important financial centre in the United Kingdom and, when the bank was set up in 2012, he said:

“Edinburgh has a lot going for it, both in terms of its asset management and finance sectors...also its proximity to green energy activity”,

which—in my words, not Vince Cable's—has been encouraged by the Scottish Government.

Interestingly, Vince Cable went on to say that choosing Edinburgh as the headquarters of the bank supported what he described as the “wider narrative” of binding Scotland into the United Kingdom in the run-up to the

independence referendum. I am anxious therefore that the promises made by the Business Secretary in the coalition Government are delivered on for Edinburgh and that my constituents and those working in my constituency do not lose their jobs.

As my hon. Friend said, the Green Investment Bank is successful. In 2016 it started to make a profit. It is likely to deliver an annual return of 10%. The exercise of asset-stripping the bank, were that to happen, would result in a significant profit for any buyer at the expense of the United Kingdom taxpayer and of green investment throughout the United Kingdom.

The bank offers very real and attractive investment opportunities. It manages the world's first offshore wind fund, with assets of more than £1.2 billion. Offshore wind is very much a huge part of Scotland's future for energy production, and the fund attracts investors such as local authority pension fund managers, due to its long-term and stable investment. Five local government pension funds in the UK are investors in the fund, including Strathclyde Pension Fund, which is one of the two biggest local government pension funds. The chairman of Strathclyde Pension Fund has said:

“When you consider that when Pension Funds mature we are always looking to reduce our risk we do that by investing in our asset base with long term stable investments. We are convinced that”

the GIB

“invest in the right infrastructure assets which will lead to a stronger and greener UK economy.”

As I am sure the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) will discuss, the Green Investment Bank supports innovative energy efficacy projects in partnership with local authorities across the United Kingdom. It is a really useful bank, it is a modern bank, it is a successful bank and it is a bank that was established in Edinburgh as part of the project of binding Scotland into the United Kingdom. So let us make sure that it stays a successful bank, that we honour the UK taxpayers' investment that has been made in it and that we protect the jobs it supports.

5 pm

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) for securing this important debate. Like her, I am deeply concerned by the way in which the Government are proposing to sell off the Green Investment Bank. It is widely known that the Government's preferred bidder is the Australia-based firm Macquarie. As has now been well documented, there are serious concerns about Macquarie's corporate record and its commitment to the GIB's environmental goals.

Macquarie has admitted rigging the Malaysian foreign exchange markets. It has settled charges in the US for violating underwriting laws related to a China-based coal company. It is currently facing legal action in the US for rigging Australian interest rates. In a separate investigation, it was found to have breached market integrity rules in Australia and to have “systemic deficiencies” in its compliance with financial services laws. Closer to home, its ownership of Thames Water has also been deeply controversial, with £10 billion of offshore debt loaded on the company and a £250 million pension deficit allowed to accumulate while profits were extracted.

[Caroline Lucas]

Macquarie also has an appalling environmental record, funding fossil fuel extraction projects across the world. From open-cast coal mines in China to fracking here in the UK, it has a track record of supporting climate-wrecking projects. By any measure, Macquarie is unfit to be custodian of the UK Green Investment Bank; if anything, there is a very clear risk that it will destroy it.

The Government have so far refused to respond to those concerns. Instead, we see ample evidence that the Government are not only willing to allow an asset strip, but may have actually helped to facilitate it. With the support of Treasury-owned UK Government investment, 11 subsidiary companies of the GIB were set up presumably to allow Macquarie to asset-strip the UK's Green Investment Bank. The Minister passed on the opportunity to deny Macquarie's involvement in those changes in response to a written question I tabled last week.

Meanwhile, the Government continue to point to the creation of a special share as the answer to all our concerns. That is simply not true, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh West set out—we know that the special share will not protect the green purposes of the GIB under an owner such as Macquarie. In response to another written question I tabled, the Government made it clear that the special share will not ensure that individual investments are low-carbon. The special share will not stop asset stripping, will not ensure adequate capital is available for future investment and will not ensure an investment focus here in the UK. To protect the GIB as an enduring institution that is investing here in the UK, we ultimately and simply need the Government to stop this sell-off.

**Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way, and add my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) for her contribution in securing this debate. The whole basis behind the privatisation is that the market failure has been corrected. I simply do not agree with that. We may have seen progress in the power sector, but in transport and heat we are lagging way behind what we need to be doing to meet our carbon reduction targets. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Green Investment Bank can play a critical role in addressing the market failure that continues to exist in those sectors?

**Caroline Lucas:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his very informed contribution. He will not be surprised to hear that I entirely agree with him. Anybody who thinks that market failures have been corrected is being extraordinarily complacent. Just a quick scan of the way in which we are not meeting the targets that we have—our climate, environmental and energy-efficiency commitments—would lead people to conclude that market failure remains, and therefore that the need for the Green Investment Bank to be in the public domain remains.

I believe that Ministers have it within their power to cancel the sale and pursue a different path. For the GIB to be properly protected, it should remain wholly owned by the UK Government. That is my bottom line, but if Ministers refuse to do that, various other options are available to them. We know that there was and still is on the table an alternative bid—it is the one that lost out to Macquarie. That bid would help to keep the GIB British, green and growing, so why are Ministers not pursuing it if they do not want to keep the GIB in the public domain?

**Roger Mullin:** Is the hon. Lady aware of, and as concerned as I am about, potential conflicts of interest involved in the Macquarie bid? Macquarie has used PricewaterhouseCoopers both as advisers and as auditors for many years. The senior independent director of the GIB is Tony Poulter, who at the same time is a partner at PWC and the head of PWC's global infrastructure advisory unit. Does she agree that that is an obvious conflict of interest?

**Caroline Lucas:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I was not aware of that, but as he has now put it on the table, I find yet another reason to be deeply concerned about the Government's proposals. I thank him for adding that piece to the jigsaw.

There were plenty of options for the Government other than going down the route of flogging the GIB off to Macquarie. I mentioned the other bidder, but the Government could also allow citizens to buy into the Green Investment Bank through green bonds—allowing people up and down the country to own part of this important and dynamic institution. Indeed, there were press reports over the weekend, as the hon. Gentleman will know, about the possibility of an initial public offering. That would at least offer greater protection to the aims of the GIB than the Government's current plan. Any sense that the sale is the only option on the table must be challenged. There is a range of options on the table. The overriding question has to be why the Government would choose such a damaging option when there are clearly much better ones available.

The launch of the Government's industrial strategy on Monday gives Ministers another reason to halt the sale. This was the point made very clearly by the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous). With the UK set to miss its climate targets from the mid-2020s onwards, and renewables investment in the UK set to fall by a dramatic 95% over the next three years, the low-carbon economy should be at the heart of the industrial strategy.

The Department's welcome new focus on battery technology, energy storage and grid technology could all be supported through finance from the Green Investment Bank. That finance is more important now than ever. We have already discussed briefly how the likely loss of access to funds from the European Investment Bank makes that an even more important role that the GIB can play.

Together, the emissions reduction plan due later this year and the Government's more active approach to supporting the UK economy mean that it is time for Ministers to ditch the sale and embrace the Green Investment Bank as an important ally in a green industrial strategy. Ministers have rightly been applauded for passing into law the fifth carbon budget and for ratifying the Paris agreement. They would be similarly congratulated and applauded for putting an end to the flogging off of the Green Investment Bank.

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** We are in the unusual position of having run out of Back Benchers when I thought that we were going to run over our time. That gives the—

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab) *rose*—

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** Order. That would be really pushing it. I say to the Front Benchers that they can divvy up the time and, if they wish to take an intervention from the hon. Lady, I will allow that.

5.9 pm

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): It is, as ever, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I join colleagues on both sides of the Chamber in commending the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) for securing the debate. I underline the fact that she is a well known entrepreneur in Scotland. She speaks not as someone who is simply anti-market, but as someone who has worked very hard in her own right to make markets work in Scotland. It is on that basis that I wish to ask some questions of the Minister.

I agree with most of what has been said so far, but there is one issue we need to take a bit further. Perhaps the Minister in his summing up could explain a bit more the Government's reasoning. The Green Investment Bank was set up to deal with a very specific form of market failure. I am interested in the subject because when a green investment bank was first mooted, I was a senior journalist on *The Scotsman* in Edinburgh, which is celebrating its 200th birthday today. We organised a campaign, which I was very much involved in, to bring the headquarters of the Green Investment Bank to Edinburgh, and we were successful.

The perceived market failure is obviously to do with the funding of environmental projects. Some of us, though—I do not say this to make a cheap point—believe that the rush to sell the Green Investment Bank, only two years after it really started being in operation, was a product of the wish of the previous Chancellor to raise capital to meet his target to balance the books and abolish the deficit. That is understood. Now that the Government have given way on the ex-Chancellor's 2020 target to get into surplus, and given that in some sense his colleagues seem less happy with his activities, so much so that he is not the Chancellor any more, it might be a chance to look more at the nuts and bolts of whether market failure is being addressed, rather than simply to try to raise capital.

The market failure being addressed was not a lack of capital in general, but a much more specific form of market failure. Most large infrastructure projects are funded by consortiums of banks and investment houses, because the projects are usually too large for any one undertaking to take all the risk. The failure in the past decade in the UK has been getting the consortiums together. That was partly exacerbated by the fall in investment appetite and risk appetite after the 2008 banking crisis.

The Green Investment Bank does not put its own money in per se; it puts together the consortium of the banks. It puts up a little money to underwrite some of the risk and show that the risks have been properly looked at, and it brings other people in. That model is growing and has proved successful on a small scale. It would be worth while leaving the model in place until we see at the end of a decade whether it has enabled significant consortiums to be put together for major projects, rather than simply considering the small projects that the Green Investment Bank has been involved in to date. If the Government abandon the GIB now, they have to prove that it will continue under private ownership to address that specific market failure.

When the Minister responded to the urgent question tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), he seemed to suggest that the proof that market

failure had now been addressed systemically was that private sector interests were prepared to buy the bank. I challenge that assertion. I know the Minister will not mention Macquarie, but I will. I do not do that to stand by some of the criticisms of Macquarie. I want to address Macquarie's business model, because it or a company like it may become the owner of the Green Investment Bank.

Macquarie puts together consortiums of investors, but it does that to buy existing infrastructure projects that earn a capital return. In December, it put together a consortium and bought the gas pipeline business of the National Grid. That is understood. It is a very sensible long-term model, and it is very profitable for Macquarie, which might explain why it is known in Australia as the billionaires' bank—it has made many billionaires. The problem is that buying existing assets is easy, but that is not where the market failure is. The UK capital market is more than able to address that problem. The market failure is in building new asset classes. The Government have admitted in their new industrial strategy that the problem is that we somehow under-invest in infrastructure, despite having a huge capital market in comparison with other countries.

The Treasury Committee is undertaking an investigation and we have uncovered one of the major issues. When an infrastructure project is built, it is not retained in ownership by the people who built it. It is passed on ultimately to the ownership of pension funds and insurance companies. They use it as a long-term investment to pay annuities and long-term pensions. The insurance companies are crying out for regulatory change because they say they are unable—my second question to the Minister is to ask him to look at this—to invest capital in new infrastructure, and the new environmental projects they are desperate to invest in and own, because the regulatory and capital requirements are too onerous. The result is that British insurance companies find it easier to buy into American new infrastructure projects than into British ones. If Donald Trump turns on the spending tap in the United States and spends \$1 trillion on investment in new infrastructure in America, inevitably in the present regulated climate, British pension funds and insurance companies will underwrite that investment rather than investing here.

My point for the Minister is that the market failure is still there. Using the sale of the Green Investment Bank to Macquarie or any company like it will simply be using it as a cash cow rather than underwriting risk for a future infrastructure investment. That will not resolve the problem. The Government must prove to Members on both sides of the House that the sale to any company will solve the underlying market failure. The sale to Macquarie, given its business model, will not solve that problem.

One question is whether Macquarie is a fit and proper company to own the Green Investment Bank. The Minister will probably avoid answering that question and will not mention the Macquarie name but, in the most systemic way, can he prove to us that the sale of the Green Investment Bank in such a short period to another owner will resolve the market risk of having a player—the Green Investment Bank—as the referee that brings the consortium together from the rest of the capital market? In the absence of that, the Green Investment Bank must be left in place and we must question why the British

[George Kerevan]

capital markets as a whole do not fund infrastructure investment and have not done so successfully for several decades. That is a regulatory issue and the ball is in the Government's court.

5.17 pm

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): The Opposition's position on the sale of the Green Investment Bank is that it should not be sold. The reason for that is at the heart of what the Green Investment Bank is. It is, of course, not a bank. It does not have the full lending and borrowing facilities we would expect in a bank. Indeed, hon. Members may remember that after it was formed the Chancellor imposed conditions on when it might become a bank. It is not a bank: it can be better described as a public policy instrument. That is what it has always been. It is a public policy instrument that, as hon. Members have said, has a particular purpose of using state-backed intervention to overcome market failure, particularly in green investment.

We know that the market failure issue has not been resolved and that green investment, particularly because of the requirement for patient capital and long-term investment as it attempts to ride a number of waves at the same time, continues to be difficult as we hear from reports coming into this country. We also know that investment is essential if we are to move to the next stage of low-carbon investment. The Green Investment Bank, as the public policy instrument to ensure that happens, has been a remarkable success. It continues to be a remarkable success and to do very well what it originally set out to do, which, as hon. Members have said, is not to give grants out to anybody or take companies over but to pull capital in from elsewhere with the back-up of capital from the Green Investment Bank, which is backed in the first place by Government, to immensely enhance the value of the investments that have been secured. In so doing, the Green Investment Bank has, as we know, secured more than £10 billion of capital investment with an input of just over £2 billion of Government-backed money via the Green Investment Bank's instruments. It does not seem a very wise course of action to sell that public policy instrument, with all the consequences that may arise from that now and for the strategy that we need to adopt for green investment.

The Government have not only decided to sell the Green Investment Bank, but they have decided to make the preferred bidder for the bank a company that does not have anything like that model in its investment arrangements. As hon. Members have mentioned, that particular company appears to have been involved in specific amendments to the arrangements of the Green Investment Bank so that it would be possible to make that bank work in an entirely different way—setting up, in November and December, 10 companies, which would fit neatly in at least four of the major investments that the Green Investment Bank has been involved in—the Galloper, Rampion and Westermost Rough fields, and GIB offshore wind collectively, amounting to a Green Investment Bank total investment of about £1 billion. It would not be a bad start—to be able to take the Green Investment Bank over, flog off half of the assets that have been taken over, get £1 billion back and then move on to the next stage. To the casual observer, that has the

potential to be a pretty scandalous forward move to do to the Green Investment Bank exactly what we fear would happen were it to be privatised in that way.

I personally do not go along with Donald Trump's view of the press, particularly the quality press and the *Financial Times* and *The Sunday Times*. This weekend, the statement in *The Sunday Times* was simply this:

“Ministers are poised to scrap a planned sale of the Green Investment Bank...to Australian investment firm Macquarie, pushing instead for a £3.8bn stock market listing.”

I understand that the Minister cannot and will not mention the word Macquarie, but I wonder whether he would enlighten us by using a different formulation, such as, “No, the Government are not poised to scrap a planned sale of the Green Investment Bank to a preferred bidder, and no, they are not pushing instead for a £3.8 billion stock market listing.” That would be a suitable statement for the Minister to make this afternoon in response to speculation in the press. I would take silence on that formulation as an indication that the Government may be having second thoughts. If they are, I would fully support them, because they would start to be coming into line with the issues that hon. Members have raised this afternoon and at other times.

If those second thoughts included, for example, an initial public offering that was a minority sale of shares, or even a majority sale of shares with a controlling share retained by Government, that would easily overcome the issue that hon. Members have also raised—the arrangements that we know will be inadequate to stop asset-stripping in the way that appears to be lined up for the bank at the moment. Those arrangements are very narrowly based on the memorandum and articles of association of the company, not on the asset possessions of the company, and would have no real effect in the way that I think hon. Members would want.

If the Government were to decide to float shares in an IPO, I guess that would take about two years. That would give the bank a substantial amount of time to do its work, particularly in view of the likely withdrawal of the European Investment Bank, which other hon. Members have mentioned. We ought to remember that the European Investment Bank has actually invested twice as much as the Green Investment Bank over the past few years in green projects that are difficult to invest in. Upon Brexit, the EIB's investment is likely to fall to between 10% and 0% of its current investment. That is a further reason why the Green Investment Bank is so important to making investments right now.

I have on previous occasions asked the Minister to wink in the Opposition's direction if he has had a change of heart. Perhaps nothing as flamboyant as that is necessary today, but it would be helpful if he could indicate whether a different route is being considered for the Green Investment Bank so we can discuss its future in a rather less negative way.

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** The Minister has a little extra time to respond to the debate. I remind him that if he wishes, he can leave Ms Thomson a couple of minutes to sum up.

5.26 pm

**The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Mr Nick Hurd):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I sincerely congratulate the

hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson), who represents her constituency in a robustly independent way, on securing the debate. She drew on her clear business experience to frame the debate, set it up in the right way and built on the exchange that we had on the urgent question last week.

However, I must say that when the hon. Lady dismisses commercial confidentiality as a smokescreen, she lapses into political rather than business matters. She knows the reality of the situation, however frustrating that is for the House—and, frankly, for me. I will not be drawn into any discussion about the character or values of any potential preferred bidder, or any of the more sensitive aspects of what is a commercial negotiation that has not concluded. I think she knows that, but let me make that quite clear.

**Mary Creagh:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Hurd:** May I make a little more progress?

This has been a good, well informed debate. There is clearly disagreement about whether it is right to sell the GIB, and I respect that, but there is clearly common ground—this is worth restating—that the GIB has been a fantastic success story. In fact, exactly that language has been used by Members on both sides of the House. That success has been achieved in very short order by a relatively small group of people who were given a very challenging mandate. That is genuinely impressive. The Government are therefore keen, as I am sure the House is, to place on the record our appreciation of the work of not just the GIB's senior management team but everyone who works in that organisation. It is particularly important to show our appreciation for the professional approach of the GIB's staff, because as those who have been in the commercial world know, these kinds of transactions drag on and create uncertainty and anxiety.

The GIB has been a success story. It was set up to accelerate private investment in green infrastructure. It has a fantastic success record of turning every £1 of public money committed into £3 of matched private sector commitments. It has achieved a series of firsts—not least the first ever offshore wind fund, which has now reached final close having raised more than £1 billion of capital, making it the UK's largest renewable energy fund. There is also agreement that if we do sell the bank—there is disagreement about that—the Government will be responsible for securing best value for taxpayers and getting a deal that we can justify to the public, whose money has been invested in this institution. It is important that Parliament holds the Government firmly to account for that.

I think something has been missed in this debate. There has been a lot of assertion about the motives of any potential preferred bidder or even the motivations of the Government. There has even been the suggestion that this sale represents a sapping of green ambition on the part of the UK Government, but that could not be further from the truth. I meant what I said on the Floor of the House yesterday.

I will come on to the criteria, which we will be very robust in sticking to when it comes to reviewing any proposal before us. However, one of the things that we are looking at most closely when considering a proposal from a preferred bidder is their forward commitment, not only to people—particularly in Edinburgh, which I

hope will reassure the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), in whose constituency the HQ of the bank is located—and to an ongoing institution with a clear identity in the future, but, critically, to forward investment. That is because hon. Members are right: we need more funding and we need more private capital coming into our green infrastructure. That is obvious; every country needs that.

Part of our starting premise, which has not been reflected in this debate at all, and part of the motive for privatisation, is to confront the reality that the GIB, however successful it has been, is constrained at the moment by the framework in which it operates. I do not think that people get up in the morning thinking, “Thank God I'm working for an instrument of public policy”—I do not think that is quite how people see things—but they are constrained in what they can do by state aid rules and the number of restrictions that come from being a public sector organisation. We feel that this organisation, when liberated from all that, can do more and we want it to do more. We need to be reassured by any future owner that they share that vision, are committed to it and are prepared to back up that commitment. That will not be just the evaluation of Ministers or officials in Government—

**George Kerevan:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Hurd:** I will just finish this point. I want to reassure Scottish Members of Parliament, and I have already told the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West this in our meeting, that when it comes to making any final judgment we will be led by the judgment of the chairman—Lord Smith of Kelvin, who is highly respected—and the board about the credibility and integrity of future commitments made by a bidder, and the degree to which they can be bound into contractual arrangements.

**George Kerevan:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Hurd:** I will just finish. That is a dimension to this transaction that has been completely absent from this debate, which has been bogged down a bit by a lot of assertion and prejudice about the character and values of a preferred bidder.

**Mary Creagh** *rose*—

**Mr Hurd:** The hon. Lady has been very patient; I will give way to her and then I will give way to the hon. Gentleman who represents the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan).

**Mary Creagh:** I thank the Minister for his generosity in giving way and I apologise to colleagues and to you, Mr Owen, for turning up late; I was anxious to listen to the opening speeches in the education debate.

I echo what the Minister has said about the patience of the staff, who have been undergoing this process for 18 months amid considerable uncertainty. Am I right to infer from the point that he has just made about the good will of the potential purchaser that there are potentially some issues around that? Can he say when he became aware of the fact that these various other new companies had been set up by the GIB just before Christmas? There has been a little bit of confusion,

[Mary Creagh]

with Ministers first saying that they did not know about those new companies and then saying that they had been established to “facilitate the privatisation” of the bank. Is that normal behaviour? It does not strike me as normal at all.

**Mr Hurd:** Regarding the first point, the conversations with the preferred bidder about their future commitment are ongoing. That just reflects the fact that we take that matter very seriously. This is not a case, as I think was suggested, of the Government simply wanting to raise some money, getting the bank off the balance sheet and then off into the hills we go. The issue of the future commitment of any new owner to future investment that will help us to move further and faster along in the transition to the low-carbon economy—a transition that is central to the industrial strategy—is a very important part of the consideration of the bid. That is why, working through Lord Smith and the board, we are taking time to look each other in the eye and say, “Is this enough?” That is the situation we are in.

On restructuring, I think I was pretty clear when answering the last parliamentary question. We agreed some reorganisation in partnership with the GIB to facilitate private capital into certain assets. I make the point—which, again, is a point of principle and needs to be asserted—that there was almost a suggestion during the urgent question debate that the GIB should somehow not be free to sell anything or to bring in private capital. That is completely wrong, particularly when the evidence is that there are buyers for assets that are reaching some maturity. Given what the GIB was set up to do, I do not think that it should be in the business of competing with private capital to invest in assets. It serves no policy purpose to hold on to assets that are valuable to others if that money can be recycled into new investments. That is the critical thing.

Lots of assertions have been made about asset stripping. The Government have no interest in selling to an asset stripper. We want to know about investment in the future; it is okay to sell, so long as there is a commitment to reinvest in future. The GIB portfolio—under any ownership, including public ownership—should not be preserved in aspic forever. It has to be a dynamic organisation, and it should be free to realise capital from packaging assets and to do things that a nimble entrepreneurial organisation, which is what it is, should be free to do.

**Michelle Thomson** *rose*—

**Mr Hurd:** Out of courtesy, I give way to the sponsor of the debate.

**Michelle Thomson:** I thank the Minister for his comments, but I need to press him on my specific comment about the risk appetite and the nature and type of projects. I fully accept and understand increased access to capital, but I made a specific point about the risk appetite that I hope the Minister will move on to.

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** Order. Before the Minister responds, I should say that we only have a few minutes remaining. If interventions are long, we will not get as much as we want out of the Minister.

**Mr Hurd:** I am happy to address that point, because it is important. The hon. Lady needs to reflect on the motivation of anyone wanting to buy the GIB. It is a special organisation; there are other vehicles that people can buy if they simply want to invest in clean energy or strip assets. The GIB was set up for a special purpose. We put in place governance frameworks—the hon. Lady calls it the golden share; we call it the green share—that we think are robust and that Parliament approved.

Why bother if the only intention is to do easy stuff? The GIB has proven that it can do difficult stuff and make a return. We therefore come back to the motivation of a bidder, and to our doing our job in making sure that we test any proposal against the criteria we have set. One of those criteria is about not just the volume of future investment commitment to the UK, but the degree to which any buyer buys into the ethos and purpose of the organisation.

To draw things to a close, the central point is that the Government set out our case for privatisation and set out the criteria—value for money, declassification, but also a desire to see a credible commitment to the ongoing organisation and to increased levels of investment in the UK’s low carbon economy. We ran a competitive process, we received a proposal from a preferred bidder and we are now evaluating that against those criteria. No decision has yet been taken, because this is a very serious decision.

The debate, and the urgent question debate, have been very helpful—not only in sending a message about the importance of getting this right, which had already been received by Government, but, critically, in sending a message to anyone looking to buy the organisation about the importance that Members from both sides attach to getting the transaction right: it must be seen to deliver value for money, but also show a commitment to the ongoing organisation.

**Dr Whitehead** *rose*—

**Mr Hurd:** I am happy to give way, if time allows.

**Dr Whitehead:** The Minister has been very generous in giving way. Before he concludes, will he briefly categorically deny that the story in the *Financial Times* has any truth in it at all?

**Mr Hurd:** I am confused about what story the hon. Gentleman is referring to; there have been so many stories. I can say that the Government continue to evaluate a proposal from a preferred bidder and that no decision has been taken.

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** The hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) has one minute to sum up.

5.40 pm

**Michelle Thomson:** I can do that quickly, Mr Owen. I thank hon. Members for their contributions, including the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who always adds depth to our debates. I also thank the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead). I make particular reference to the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan) and

his key points—I gently suggest they have not been addressed—on dealing with market failure and systemic issues with infrastructure investment. He made a very clear and compelling point.

I also note that the Minister conceded that he is being led by Lord Smith, who is a worthy gentleman and chair of the board. The Minister, however, is ultimately

responsible and accountable for ensuring value for the UK taxpayer and the wider framework of the all-important green agenda—

5.41 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).*

# Written Statement

*Wednesday 25 January 2017*

## CABINET OFFICE

### **Conduct Guidance: Northern Ireland Election**

**The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Ben Gummer):** As is normal ahead of an election, guidance has today been issued for civil servants

in UK Government Departments and those working in arm's-length bodies, on the principles that they should observe in relation to the conduct of Government business in the run-up to the forthcoming elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 2 March 2017.

The guidance sets out the need to maintain the political impartiality of the civil service and the need to ensure that public resources are not used for party political purposes during this period. The period of sensitivity begins with immediate effect.

Copies of the guidance have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and on the Cabinet Office website at: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

[HCWS435]



# ORAL ANSWERS

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