

**Tuesday
7 March 2017**

**Volume 622
No. 120**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 7 March 2017

House of Commons

Tuesday 7 March 2017

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

NEW SOUTHGATE CEMETERY BILL [LORDS]

Third Reading opposed and deferred until Tuesday 18 April (Standing Order No.20).

Oral Answers to Questions

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Reoffending Rates

1. **Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the potential (a) financial and (b) social benefits of reducing reoffending rates. [909086]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): Almost half the people leaving our prisons will reoffend within a year, with a cost to the economy of £15 billion, and countless costs to victims and society. We are giving prison governors the power to be able to turn people's lives around, to reduce that level of reoffending.

Mr Baker: Prison should be a place of transformation and renewed hope. What steps has the Secretary of State taken to ensure that prisons are places of reform and rehabilitation?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to ensure that prison governors have all the tools at their disposal to get people the education they may not have had—almost half of prisoners do not have basic English and maths—to get them into jobs and training, so that they can go into work and lead a lawful life when they leave prison.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Following the transforming rehabilitation reforms, there has been a 57% increase in the number of offenders being recalled as a result of failure to keep in touch during supervision after short sentences. What action are the Government taking to address this rise in the number of people being recalled to prison, and why is such failure being seen as a result of the reforms?

Elizabeth Truss: It is, of course, important that we recall people who pose a danger to society, but we need to ensure that we are recalling the right people. We are looking at that issue and at wider probation reforms to ensure that we turn people's lives around not just while they are in prison, but while they are under community supervision.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): One particularly stubborn area of concern has been the above-average reoffending rate of those serving sentences of 12 months or less. Does not that give rise to the need to look again at the effectiveness and use of short sentences as opposed to community penalties, and to look carefully at the way in which the Through the Gate programme operates? There is a real concern that there is not adequate follow-up for people who are released under these circumstances.

Elizabeth Truss: The Chair of the Select Committee on Justice is right that we need to get better at intervening before people commit crimes that lead to custody. As well as announcing a review of probation and the way in which it operates, we are looking at community sentences. We are ensuring that good community sentences are in place and that there is a higher use of mental health treatment orders and drugs desistance orders, which reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): What steps is the Secretary of State taking to reduce reoffending by domestic violence perpetrators in prisons and in communities?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that, as we have got better at dealing with issues of domestic violence, there is more we can do. That is why I am leading a joint taskforce with the Home Secretary to look at the law around domestic violence. We are also ensuring that domestic violence victims are protected in the family court. Under the Prisons and Courts Bill, abusers will no longer be able to cross-examine domestic violence victims, and that is an important step forward.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I am sure the Secretary of State will welcome the fact that companies such as Boots, Barclays, Carillion, Land Securities, Ricoh and many others have "banned the box" to improve the chances of ex-offenders getting jobs. However, does she share my concern that some quite big household names have not yet stepped up to the plate? Will she do her bit to get them over the line alongside those other good employers?

Elizabeth Truss: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he did to get more employers involved in this when he was a Minister. We are following on from his good work by setting up an organisation called the New Futures Network, which will comprise businesses and charities. The network will encourage more employers to take on ex-offenders, who are often very loyal and hard-working employees, and who can help to address some of the skills shortages we face.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): Reoffending now costs us £15 billion annually, as the Secretary of State just said. A recent report by Her Majesty's inspectorate

of probation noted that not enough is being done to help prisoners to prepare for life outside prison, due to a

“combination of unmanageable caseloads, inexperienced officers, extremely poor oversight”.

The service was rated as four-star before privatisation. What will the Secretary of State do to address this?

Elizabeth Truss: As I have said, it is important that people are supported to get into jobs once they leave prison. Just as we are establishing metrics for governors, showing how many people are employed once they leave prison, we want to use similar metrics to hold probation operators to account to make sure that they are focused on getting people into homes and into work, which we know leads to a reduction in reoffending.

Youth Justice System

2. **Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): What progress her Department has made on reforming the youth justice system. [909087]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): On 24 February, we announced changes to improve governance of the youth justice system. We are creating a new youth custody service headed by a dedicated, experienced director who will lead on operational delivery, and we have appointed Charlie Taylor as the new chair of the Youth Justice Board.

Mr Burrowes: Young people in custody now have more complex needs, and more than three quarters of them have been excluded from school. How will we put high-quality education at the heart of the youth justice system, so that young people can have a second chance of getting the skills they need to break the cycle of reoffending?

Dr Lee: My hon. Friend is, as ever, spot on with regards to the importance of education. We are bringing forward plans on secure schools, and we are going to put health and education at the centre of that. I strongly believe that when people leave the youth justice system, they should be fit in body, fit in mind and fit to play a positive part in society.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Has the Minister had a chance to see this morning's damning report on G4S's performance at Oakhill training centre? Has he yet made a decision on whether he plans to allow G4S to flog off the centre to an American buyer?

Dr Lee: Yes, I have seen the report. In fact, it confirmed what I encountered myself on a recent visit to Oakhill. We are aware of the difficulties there, and we are also aware that G4S is in the process of trying to sell the youth justice arm of its business. I am keeping a close eye on that process, and rule nothing out when it comes to looking after the children and indeed the broader security of society.

21. [909107] **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the appointment of Charlie Taylor as the new chairman of the Youth Justice Board. I warmly welcome the new figures showing that fewer young people than ever are

entering the youth justice system in the first place, but reoffending rates remain stubbornly high, especially for those young people sentenced to a period in custody. What more can the Minister do to improve those rates and stop our young people reoffending?

Dr Lee: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), the Government strongly believe that we need to create an environment in which young people can learn and be rehabilitated, so that they can play a more positive part in society. Our plans for secure schools—one in the north-west of England and one in the south-east of England—will build on that in the future.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Is overcrowding or understaffing the biggest problem in our youth justice system?

Dr Lee: No, it is not. [*Interruption.*] The problem is not overcrowding. There are some issues around staffing, which is why we have brought forward our plans on creating a new role for the youth justice officer. Those individuals are going to be attracted to work specifically with children. We are also developing the youth custody service as part of our plans around Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, because we believe that there should be a distinct service to deal with children in the criminal justice system.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Youth reoffending rates are among the highest of all prisoners, and we have just heard that reoffending costs this country a total of £15 billion a year. Surely the obvious answer is to make sure that all prisoners serve their time in jail in full before they are released out into the public.

Dr Lee: Specifically in the youth justice system, I believe that the most important thing is to ensure that when young people are in custody, we take every opportunity to treat them if they have mental health problems and to provide the necessary education for future employment prospects, so that when they leave the institution, they are less likely to reoffend.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): It has been reported that Working Links, an outsourcing company criticised for its handling of probation services, including for failures in Wales and the south-west, is the company that it is in talks to buy Oakhill secure training centre from G4S. Is it part of the Justice Secretary's reforms to youth justice to allow private companies with no experience in youth justice to run our youth custody centres?

Dr Lee: It is not about ruling out whether private or public organisations should provide care in the youth justice system. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that the original contract for Oakhill was signed in 2005, and the terms of the contract were set then.

Insurance Premiums

3. **John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): What assessment the Government have made of the effect of recent changes in the discount rate for compensation for accident victims on the level of insurance premiums. [909088]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): As Lord Chancellor, I made a decision to lower the discount rate. Not to have done so would have been unlawful. Under the law, I may only consider the impact on victims, not defendants. As I have said, the system needs to be reformed, because I do not think it is right that a discount rate is set on an ad hoc basis by the Lord Chancellor.

John Pugh: Another organisation affected, to the tune of £1 billion, is the NHS. What discussions has the Lord Chancellor had with the NHS Litigation Authority on this topic?

Elizabeth Truss: I have spoken to my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary to discuss the implications for the NHS. As I said, under legislation the Lord Chancellor must only consider the impact on the victim. I do not think the procedure works in the right way, which is why I will shortly bring forward a consultation on a better way to set the discount rate.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): There seems to be some element of confusion in the minds of the public. The insurance industry says that car insurance premiums will go up because of the fall in the discount rate, while the Government, quite rightly, say that insurance premiums should come down because of the proposed changes in the Prisons and Courts Bill. Is this a question of netting off, with no change to premiums at all, or can the Lord Chancellor be slightly more scientific?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes the point that there are different issues around the discount rate and whiplash. The measures on whiplash in the Prisons and Courts Bill should reduce insurance premiums by, on average, £40. The issue about the discount rate is very different: it is an independent decision that the Lord Chancellor has to make. I am saying that we need to review the way that decision is made, and I will be bringing forward a consultation on that very shortly.

Whiplash Claims

4. **Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con):** What progress has been made on ensuring that only legitimate whiplash claims are successful. [909089]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): Measures to disincentivise minor, exaggerated and fraudulent whiplash claims are being taken forward in the Prisons and Courts Bill and through changes to reduce the cost of litigation by increasing the small claims limit.

Luke Hall: Whiplash claims have increased by 50% over the past decade, at a time when cars are becoming safer and the number of road traffic accidents is falling. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is time for reform? Can he confirm the extent to which consumers will benefit through lower car insurance premiums, and how does he intend to hold insurance companies to their side of the bargain?

Sir Oliver Heald: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point to the fact that as cars have become safer there have been fewer road traffic accidents. It is shocking that whiplash cases have gone up by over 50% in the past 10 years. The reforms I mentioned will, taken

together as a package, ensure that the genuinely injured receive compensation, and fraudulent and exaggerated claims are tackled.

22. [909109] **Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab):** Six thousand vulnerable road users—pedestrians and cyclists—responded to the Justice Department’s consultation on the reforms, expressing concerns that cyclists and pedestrians would be disproportionately affected by any increase in the small claims limit. Will the Minister discuss the proposals with officials and consider excluding vulnerable road user claims from the increase, as discussed yesterday by Cycling UK?

Sir Oliver Heald: I pay tribute to the work of the all-party parliamentary cycling group, which the hon. Lady co-chairs. We have taken account of the overall effect of the measures and looked at the representations made. She will have noticed that some of the original proposals have not been taken forward, and the ones we have taken forward we believe are proportionate.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Obviously, none of us wants fraudulent claims for damages, but have the Government made any assessment of the effect the changes proposed in the Prisons and Courts Bill will have on the numbers of litigants in person?

Sir Oliver Heald: Yes. The Government are keen to change the way in which the courts work to make them not just the best in the world but the most modern. This involves new procedures that use online technology—virtual hearings for some small matters and so on. The overall effect is to improve access to justice and improve life for litigants in person. We also have a special strategy for litigants in person, which helps them.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is very important that we keep insurance premium payments low. However, there is also a need for a framework that ensures there is adequate compensation for serious accidents. How can a balance be struck?

Sir Oliver Heald: It is important for that balance to be struck. The whiplash proposals relate to the most minor claims—cases in which the pain and suffering lasts for up to two years. Even then, there is provision for judges, in exceptional cases, to award more than the tariff that is proposed. When serious injuries are involved, however, the system will continue as it is now. It will still be designed to recompense people properly for the injuries that they have suffered.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): A few years ago, I was shunted up the backside—my car was, I mean. Although I was perfectly well, I received a phone call from someone who asked me whether I had whiplash. I said, “No, I do not have whiplash.” The person said, “Oh, go on! Say that you do have whiplash.” I did not do that, because I am an honourable person. My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right to reduce the number of bogus claims.

Mr Speaker: I am very sorry that the hon. Gentleman is so accident-prone. I remember serving on a Bill Committee with him many years ago, and receiving the

distressing news that he had been bitten in a sensitive place in the course of an excursion overseas. He really does seem to suffer a disproportionate share of ill fate.

Sir Oliver Heald: In those circumstances, my hon. Friend showed the strength of character that I would have expected of him. It was, of course, shocking to hear from colleagues, during our Westminster Hall debate, of the experiences that they and their constituents had had of this dreadful cold calling. People are being begged to start proceedings when they have not had an injury.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): The Minister claims that there is a compensation culture surrounding whiplash when, in reality, the number of claims has been falling for five years. Even if that were true, however, I should like to know why he is penalising workers throughout the country by increasing the personal injury limit to £2,000, rather than focusing solely on whiplash.

Sir Oliver Heald: I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman—with his background as a personal injury lawyer—raising those concerns. [*Laughter.*] I see another one behind him, waiting to ask a question.

The simple answer is that it was right to increase the personal injury small claims limit to £2,000. That just reflects inflation. The last increase was in 1991, so it is time for another. As for the whiplash cases, I stand by the £5,000 limit, which I think will get rid of the exaggerated claims.

Richard Burgon: The Minister has mentioned inflation. In his 2009 review of civil litigation costs, Lord Justice Jackson opposed any increase in the small claims limit until inflation justified an increase to £1,500. The Government now propose to increase it to £5,000. Can the Minister explain, here and now, precisely how that specific figure was arrived at?

Sir Oliver Heald: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are plagued by a series of minor, exaggerated and fraudulent whiplash claims, and we want to tackle that. We believe that the combination of no settlement of claims without a medical report, the tariffs in the Bill, and the raising of the small claims threshold will disincentivise those claims. The hon. Gentleman should also bear in mind that the limit for ordinary money small claims is £10,000.

Personal Independence Payments: Inverclyde

5. **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): What proportion of appeals against personal independence payment awards in Inverclyde were successful in (a) 2015 and (b) 2016. [909090]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): In 2015, 52% of appeals against personal independence payment awards heard in Greenock were successful. Between January and September 2016, the latest period for which data are available, the proportion was 57%.

Ronnie Cowan: I thank the Minister for that catch-up on Greenock.

It is clear that a rapidly increasing number of constituents are losing their benefits, and subsequently winning their appeals. My constituents inform me daily that they are without benefit entitlements for eight to 10 weeks, and many are losing their Motability cars as well. Does the Minister agree that sanctions should not be enforced until the appeals process has been exhausted?

Sir Oliver Heald: I think that the hon. Gentleman should view the position in context. The Government are spending £50 billion a year on supporting people with disabilities and health conditions, and the new PIP arrangements mean that 65% of PIP recipients with mental health conditions are receiving the highest rate; the proportion used to be only 22%. Overall, the system works, and the fact that there are appeals and they succeed shows that it works.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. The question is about Inverclyde, from which New Forest West, North Swindon and Wrexham are a considerable distance away.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Well, all right—if the right hon. Gentleman can focus exclusively on Inverclyde.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Indeed, Mr Speaker. The successful proportion would not matter nearly so much if the Minister could arrange for those appeals to happen a hell of a lot quicker, and if he can fix it in Inverclyde—well, I need not spell it out, Mr Speaker.

Sir Oliver Heald: My right hon. Friend makes the important point that justice delayed is justice denied, and it is important that cases are brought on quickly. We monitor them very carefully and provide extra days to tribunals as required, so he can be assured that we are not complacent about this.

Mental Health Problems: Prisoners

6. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What steps she is taking to ensure that prisoners receive appropriate treatment for mental health problems. [909091]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): Prisoners are far more likely to suffer from mental health issues than the general population. From April, we will introduce a co-commissioning approach into prisons in England, with governors making decisions about prison healthcare alongside local NHS commissioners. As I am sure the right hon. Gentleman knows, these matters are devolved in Scotland.

Mr Carmichael: Indeed, although the Howard League tells us that 2016 was the worst year ever recorded for suicides in prison, with one prisoner every three days across the UK taking his or her life. Does the Minister accept that the earliest diagnosis—and the best diagnosis—will not make much difference if we continue to house prisoners in overcrowded prisons, with the most vulnerable being locked up 23 hours a day?

Dr Lee: Each of those cases is a tragedy and my condolences go to the family concerned. The right hon. Gentleman is right that it is important to hold prisoners in appropriate circumstances. We are working hard to improve the mental health training of staff, and we are in lengthy discussions with the Department of Health about the broader provision of mental health care.

18. [909103] **James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): What analysis has the Department done on people going into prison with mental health problems, as opposed to acquiring mental health problems in prison?

Dr Lee: We are working hard on continuity of care in the transmission of notes from the community into the custodial estate, so that we can improve our pick-up of mental health problems when prisoners arrive. There is ongoing training of staff, so that if mental health symptoms develop within prison they can be spotted and the appropriate care provided.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): When inmates become so acutely unwell that the prison is not equipped to care for them, they should receive appropriate treatment under the Mental Health Acts. In the outside world, this happens within 24 hours; in prisons, the guidelines recommend 14 days. An answer I received to a parliamentary question last year showed that, of 1,141 prisoners, three in four waited more than that two-week window. What action is the Secretary of State taking to rectify this urgent situation?

Dr Lee: The hon. Lady is right that access to secure accommodation can be challenging—not only within the prison system but within the community for those who have not committed offences, who cannot always access it within 24 hours. We are in lengthy discussions with the Department of Health on this, because access to secure accommodation in the circumstances the hon. Lady outlines is very important.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): Last year, 2016, was the worst recorded for suicide in prisons. The Secretary of State introduced the Prisons and Courts Bill, but it contains nothing to address mental health issues. Why has the Justice Secretary missed this valuable opportunity to enshrine in law the way in which we treat prisoners with mental health problems?

Dr Lee: Last year's prison White Paper contained something on healthcare, giving governors input into the commissioning of services, so that if there is an issue with mental health provision the governor can say so.

Legal Advice

7. **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): What progress has been made on making access to affordable or pro bono legal advice more widely available. [909092]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): The Government's court programme aims to deliver a justice system that is more accessible. Legal support needs to reflect the new way in which the justice system will work, so a Green Paper is proposed for early next

year. I recently addressed the Civil Justice Council and was able to pay tribute to the work of Mr Justice Knowles and the tireless work of everyone in the pro bono sector that does so much for our country.

Jason McCartney: Will the Minister join me in thanking law students from Huddersfield University law school and local law practices for their excellent work in providing a fantastic Huddersfield legal advice clinic in the Packhorse centre? Does he agree that as constituency MPs we must make sure that we can direct our constituents not only to pro bono legal advice but to affordable and accessible legal advice?

Sir Oliver Heald: Huddersfield University is known as a beacon in this area, and it has done tremendous work. I was pleased to meet some of the students during pro bono week last year. I pay tribute to them and to all the universities and other bodies that set aside time to help people with their legal work.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will know that much good pro bono work is going on in the legal profession, but does it balance all the crooked, bent solicitors in the insurance industry who are practising in our towns and cities and who are behind the conspiracy over whiplash?

Sir Oliver Heald: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the improper behaviour that occurs in some cases. It is right that the Solicitors Regulation Authority and disciplinary tribunals take a tough line on that. We have seen some recent examples of that.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Barristers and solicitors across the country are making a remarkable pro bono contribution worth around £600 million per annum, but they cannot do it all. Does the Minister agree that pro bono must be an adjunct to, and not a replacement for, a properly resourced legal aid system?

Sir Oliver Heald: I do agree with that, but with the caveat that we are changing the way in which the justice system works, so that it is simpler and more accessible. We are also using modern technology. We should look at how legal support dovetails with all that. So, yes—but we are moving forward with our plans.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): In a report called "Cuts that hurt", Amnesty International highlights the devastating impact of legal aid cuts on vulnerable groups in England. Amnesty concluded that the cuts had decimated access to justice. What steps is the Minister taking to review the impact of the Government's cuts to legal aid in England and Wales?

Sir Oliver Heald: When I addressed the all-party parliamentary group on legal aid, I was pleased to meet members of Amnesty International to discuss their concerns about particular areas of law. We have announced our timetable for the review of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, which involves delivering a full memorandum to the Justice Committee by May and holding a full review going through into early next year, at which point there will be a Green Paper on legal support.

Joanna Cherry: Since 2013, legal aid funding has not been available in England and Wales for many immigration cases, including family reunion cases. Unaccompanied or separated children making applications to stay in the UK have to do so on their own, without legal assistance. Given Amnesty's findings, will the Minister follow the example of the Scottish Government and provide legal advice and assistance to vulnerable individuals such as those children, who have to navigate a very complex immigration system?

Mr Speaker: Justice questions would be a lot shorter if we did not have quite so many lawyers. They are very clever and eloquent, but they do take up a lot of the time.

Sir Oliver Heald: I am not going to make my declaration about that now, Mr Speaker. This is a complex issue. There is a role for the local authorities to play, and there is some legal aid available, but I am in correspondence with Amnesty and am looking into the matter in detail.

Court Proceedings: Media Reports

8. **Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the extent to which local media report on court proceedings. [909093]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): We are committed to upholding and strengthening the principle of open justice, in which local reporters play an important role.

Mr Whittingdale: Does my right hon. and learned Friend share my concern that more than half of local newspaper editors have said that they think the courts are no longer being reported properly? Does he agree that justice needs not only to be done but to be seen to be done and that the decline of local media represents a real threat to that principle? What more can be done to address this issue?

Sir Oliver Heald: Yes, I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend. This is an important area. We are committed to upholding open justice, and local reporting of court proceedings is a key part of that. Under our reforms, we will publish lists of forthcoming criminal cases and their outcomes. We will also allow access to virtual hearings via video screens in local courts, so that reporters can see those proceedings anywhere in the country. We hope that that will make a contribution to the important principle that my right hon. Friend highlights

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Does the Minister support the BBC's proposals to work with local newspapers and local websites such as the excellent Wrexham.com to improve the coverage of court proceedings and local coverage generally?

Sir Oliver Heald: In fact, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) was the initiator of that scheme, which we do support.

Prison Officers: Recruitment and Retention

9. **Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase recruitment and retention of prison officers. [909094]

15. **Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): What progress the Government have made on recruiting more prison staff. [909100]

16. **Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase recruitment and retention of prison officers. [909101]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): In November, we announced a £100 million investment to increase prison officer numbers by 2,500. We are on target with that recruitment, and I can tell the hon. Lady today that 700 officers are currently in training—a record number.

Dr Blackman-Woods: An inspection report on Durham prison published this morning shows that 60% of prisoners report feeling unsafe—up from 37% in 2013. At the same time, the number of staff has reduced from 190 to 159. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is harder for prison staff to keep themselves and prisoners safe when numbers have been so reduced? What is she going to do to improve prisoner safety now?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is absolutely right about the concerning report on HMP Durham. We are addressing issues of recruitment in that prison and in prisons across the country. We have created 2,000 new positions at a more senior grade for experienced officers with mental health training and other types of training. Those positions will be available in Durham, which will help us to retain some of our experienced and valued staff.

Graham Evans: Retaining and recruiting experienced staff is crucial to the success of any organisation. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to keep experienced prison officers, particularly in the north of England?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are creating an additional 2,000 positions, which will be paid around £30,000. They will be available in his local area and in Durham, because it is vital not only that we ensure that we have enough staff—we are recruiting 2,500 prison officers—but that we retain our highly valued existing staff right across the country.

Tom Blenkinsop: I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Research by the Community union found that the main barrier to retention was not pay but safety. Prison officers in both private and public prisons feel unprepared, isolated and undermined. Will the Government conduct a complete review of the training, support and development given to prison officers and act on Community's call for a set of adequate minimum safety standards?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct that prison officers have raised concerns about safety. We are employing more prison officers, so that one officer will have a case load of six offenders, which will help to keep prisons safe and, importantly, turn people's lives around. We are reviewing training and the career structure for prison officers, ensuring that there are opportunities for promotion and to take on leadership roles.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Government are closing down old, ineffective prisons and replacing them with modern prisons. In fact, they are building capacity for 10,000 new places on the basis of old for new. Will that not help to retain prison officers?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right. I was delighted that we were able to say that Wellingborough will have one of those new prisons. We have just opened HMP Berwyn in Wrexham, which is operating well already and will help us to deal with overcrowding. The new prisons will also ensure that we are able to attract and retain prison officers in places where offenders can be reformed.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I rise to speak as chair of the cross-party justice unions parliamentary group. As the Secretary of State mentioned, HMP Berwyn opened its doors and accepted its first men last week, but how can she condone paying newly recruited prison officers in north Wales £8,000 less than new recruits in south-east England?

Elizabeth Truss: I am determined to ensure that we recruit the right number of officers right across the country. In the south-east, where costs are high and where there is much competition for highly skilled individuals, we have specific issues with recruiting and retaining people. However, the 2,000 new more senior roles that I mentioned are available right across the country, and people in HMP Berwyn will be able to apply for them with that extra training and get that extra pay.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): There are now 6,000 fewer prison officers on the frontline than in 2010, and they are dealing with more prisoners. The Secretary of State wants 2,500 extra officers by 2017, but officers are leaving the service faster than she can recruit them. When will she come up with an effective plan to turn around that expanding exodus?

Elizabeth Truss: I am afraid that there were two factual errors in the hon. Lady's question. First, the prison population is exactly the same as it was in 2010—it has not gone up. Secondly, we are recruiting people at a record rate and have a record number of officers in training.

Court System

10. **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): What progress the Government have made on modernising the court system. [909095]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): We are investing £1 billion to reform and take paper out of our courts, and the Prisons and Courts Bill underpins those reforms.

Wendy Morton: The Prisons and Courts Bill clearly underpins the Government's vision to modernise our court system, but I am particularly interested in the measures to allow victims and vulnerable witnesses to

avoid the risk of coming face to face with their assailant. Will my right hon. and learned Friend update me, please?

Sir Oliver Heald: We will obviously have physical measures, such as the use of screens in courts, but we also intend to maximise the use of video links in criminal court proceedings, to roll out pre-recorded evidence and to make greater use of prison-to-court video links. The Bill also helps to protect vulnerable witnesses in family cases by banning cross-examination by perpetrators in certain circumstances, including where there has been domestic abuse.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): The Victims' Commissioner's review of children's entitlements in the victims code found that the justice system is failing to meet a child's right to receive information and for that information to be communicated in a timely way. Why does the much-needed update to the young witness pack remain incomplete? When will every child giving evidence get accurate and updated information about the process?

Sir Oliver Heald: We are talking against a background where improvements are being made for victims all the time. I accept that more needs to be done for children, and the hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We are looking to produce further measures for victims in due course, and I will make sure that that is considered.

Prison Service Pay Award

11. **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Which organisations she consulted on the prison service pay award announced by her Department on 19 February 2017. [909096]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): We have announced that, in prisons where recruitment and retention are most difficult, we will offer a combination of higher starting pay and an additional allowance of up to £5,000 a year, taking the salary of officers in those jails to up to £30,000. The relevant trade unions were advised in advance.

Mr Cunningham: Good management suggests that we lift up the lower paid in the Prison Service, which will help with recruitment and, more importantly, lift morale.

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We want to make sure that our hard-working prison officers are well rewarded. Our announcement on 19 February, to which he refers, was specifically designed to tackle jails where it is very hard to recruit because of the high cost of living in their particular market. This year's pay award for all prison staff is a matter for the independent pay review body, to which we will submit evidence shortly.

Imprisonment for Public Protection: Sentences

12. **Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): How many people are serving sentences of imprisonment for public protection which have lasted for more than twice the length of their original sentence. [909097]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): As at 31 December 2016, there were 2,006 unreleased prisoners serving a sentence of imprisonment for public protection who had served more than twice their original tariff.

Mr Chope: I thank my hon. Friend for that depressing statistic. My constituent has served not twice but five times the length of his original sentence. Having been sentenced to two and a half years for actual bodily harm, he has been in prison for 12 and a half years. When is he going to be released?

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Gentleman is obviously aware that the IPP tariff was introduced by the last Labour Government, and abolished by the Conservative Administration in 2012. Our efforts are now focused on giving IPP prisoners the support, opportunities and motivation to progress more quickly so that, when they are reviewed by the parole board, they have the best possible prospect of securing release. We are tackling delays in the system and have identified what more needs to be done. A specific unit is looking at individual cases in order to progress them as quickly as possible.

Prison Work

13. **Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to ensure that prisoners work and earn while they serve their sentences. [909098]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): We are launching new performance metrics that will measure not only the amount of work taking place in prisons but the percentage of prisoners who secure employment on release, and we will use those measurements to hold governors to account. We are also creating new apprenticeships in areas where there are skill shortages, such as construction, retail, catering, logistics and digital, so that prisoners can go into relevant roles.

Huw Merriman: We know that paid work transforms lives. Rather than provide purely menial work or training, will the Lord Chancellor require prisoners to pay their way via skilled employment, which can continue when their sentences end?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is correct. We are taking an outside-in approach: we are finding employers who have jobs to offer on the outside, and they then start to deliver training on the inside, so that the individual goes straight into an apprenticeship or employment on release. We already have a very successful scheme involving Land Securities and Halfords, and we are building up the number of employers that are part of that arrangement.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): There are many great examples of prison enterprises, such as the Freedom Bakery, which is a social enterprise artisan bakery that operates in the Scottish Prison Service at HMP Low Moss near Glasgow. What measures are the Government taking to encourage such initiatives south of the border?

Elizabeth Truss: That is an important initiative. We have several initiatives in our prisons, including the Clink Restaurant and the Bad Boys' Bakery, which does

excellent baked goods—I think I mentioned it last time. There are huge opportunities in catering and cheffing, in which we have skill shortages. We can do a great deal with apprenticeships to make sure that people are trained up to take on those roles on release.

Concerted Indiscipline: Prison Response

14. **Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op):** What steps she is taking to review the capability of (a) HM Prison Service and (b) contracted-out prisons to respond to incidents of concerted indiscipline.

[909099]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): All prisons, both private and public, face the same challenges to safety and security. We are continually reviewing and supporting prisons across the estate to mitigate and manage serious threats and incidents.

Mr Shuker: On how many occasions in the past year have private prisons required the support of the public Prison Service to deal with prison indiscipline?

Mr Gyimah: Mutual assistance across both sectors is in place in the event of an incident to provide immediate support to those prisons in need. Private sector prisons can therefore provide support to public sector prisons—and vice versa—in the event of a serious threat or incident.

Prison Safety and Security

17. **Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to make prisons safer and more secure. [909102]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): We are taking urgent action to improve prison safety and security, alongside reforms to overhaul the system to focus on the rehabilitation of offenders. This includes tackling the supply and demand of drugs, drones and phones, which drive prison violence and undermine safety, and redoubling our efforts to address the record levels of suicide and self-harm.

Amanda Solloway: I am the rapporteur to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which is conducting an inquiry into mental health and deaths in prisons. Last week, we took evidence from four serving prisoners, including on the issue of safety. One young man told us that he had received only two days' advance notice of when he was due to be released, causing him great anxiety about accommodation and having a sufficient support network. Will the Minister undertake to look at the resettlement problem?

Mr Gyimah: I would be surprised if the gentleman my hon. Friend mentions was informed of his release only two days in advance, but I would of course be happy to look into the situation in more detail.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): When the Minister replied to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Mr Shuker) about safety in prisons, he forgot to supply my hon. Friend with the number. What is the number?

Mr Gyimah: The answer is very straightforward: mutual assistance exists for prisons to support each other in both the private and public sectors.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Staff morale is very important to safety and security in prisons, so I wish to ask the Minister again about the flexibilities that I understand governors will have on pay increases from 1 April. Will that mean that we could end up with prison officers in Hull being paid less than prison officers down the road in Leeds? How will that affect morale?

Mr Gyimah: No. As I said in my answer to a previous question, the matter of Prison Service pay will be decided nationally. The independent pay review body will also submit evidence throughout this year. That will still be the case where we have governor freedoms, but, in giving governors their budgets, they will be able to decide on the mix of staff and how to deploy them.

Foreign National Offenders: Legal Aid

19. **Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): What proportion of legal aid is allocated to cases of foreign nationals convicted in the UK who are appealing against deportation. [909104]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): It is not possible to isolate cases of that type using the data recorded by the Legal Aid Agency.

Simon Danczuk: Just as McCloskey condemned lawyers from Burton & Burton, which represented members of the Rochdale grooming gang, for gaming the system, he also said that Government should investigate that and other examples. What steps is the Minister taking to look at the bad use of legal aid?

Sir Oliver Heald: As the hon. Gentleman may know, the Legal Aid Agency does investigate cases that are brought to its attention, and there have been recent examples where contracts have been removed. It is also important to make the point that, even where there is the possibility of legal aid and representation for foreign national offenders, it is limited to cases involving the refugee convention or articles 2 or 3.

Prison Estate: Isle of Wight

20. **Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What her plans are for unused land on the prison estate on the Isle of Wight. [909105]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): We are working on potentially transferring the former Camp Hill site to the Homes and Communities Agency. This is an opportunity to develop the site, build new homes and regenerate the local area.

Mr Turner: That is most impressive. Will the Secretary of State meet me and Councillor Richard Hollis to discuss the possibility of a car park near Albany prison?

Elizabeth Truss: I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend, as indeed would my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

As I have said, we are seeking to transfer the site to the Homes and Communities Agency. Yesterday, I had a meeting with officials to urge them to get on with it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Finally, I call Owen Thompson. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris) keeps chuntering “Bingo” from a sedentary position. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) must be accommodated.

Leaving the UK: Human Rights

23. **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): What her policy is on the protection of human rights after the UK leaves the EU. [909110]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): Human rights have been protected in the UK since long before our membership of the EU, and leaving the EU will not change that.

Owen Thompson: What assurances can the Minister give that any future trade deal that is agreed by the UK Government and the EU during negotiations will contain a commitment to human rights?

Sir Oliver Heald: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Joint Committee on Human Rights is looking at that issue. The Department for International Trade has given evidence on this, saying that it is constructing its approach to such agreements at the moment. This country has always been a strong supporter of human rights, and I cannot see that changing.

Topical Questions

T1. [909111] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): Last month, we introduced the Prisons and Courts Bill. For the first time, as well as punishing offenders by depriving them of their liberty, a key purpose of prison will be reforming offenders. There will be a new framework and a clear system of accountability. I will account to Parliament for progress. We are also putting in a strengthened inspectorate and an ombudsman for sharper external scrutiny. We are modernising our courts system and ensuring that vulnerable victims and witnesses are no longer cross-examined by their alleged abusers in the family court.

Bob Blackman: My Homelessness Reduction Bill reaches its Committee stage in the House of Lords on Friday. One provision is to ensure that prison governors prepare prisoners so that they are not homeless when they leave prison. What action has my right hon. Friend taken to ensure that prison governors are aware of their responsibilities under the new law?

Elizabeth Truss: First, I can tell my hon. Friend that we are making sure that we measure how successful prison governors are at getting people into accommodation once they leave prison. The public will be able to see

that information, as it will be publicly available. I am also speaking to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and working with him on his homelessness plan, and helping ex-offenders get into homes is a key part of that.

T2. [909112] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): The Secretary of State for Scotland indicated that sweeping powers would be devolved to Edinburgh following Brexit. However, when asked for clarification, he promised criminal justice powers, which are already devolved. Will the Justice Secretary confirm what that will entail, or is double devolution just a cover for a post-Brexit power grab?

Elizabeth Truss: As the hon. Gentleman knows, those issues are being discussed by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland. It is important that we get a deal that is good for the entire United Kingdom.

T4. [909114] **James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Mobile phones in prisons allow criminals to deal drugs, intimidate their victims and continue criminality from within their prison cell. Will my hon. Friend say how the powers in the Prisons and Courts Bill will help to address the scourge of mobile phones in prisons once and for all?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): The measures in the Prisons and Courts Bill will allow the Secretary of State to authorise mobile network operators to block illicit mobile phone signals across entire prison sites. That will allow industry experts to work more creatively and effectively to block signals, which means that we will not require a court order to stop the illicit and harmful use of mobile phones in prison.

T3. [909113] **Mr Douglas Carswell** (Clacton) (UKIP): Obviously, we do not want to follow the United States in politicising the judiciary. However, to ensure some degree of public accountability when appointing Supreme Court judges, might the Minister consider allowing the Chair of the Justice Committee to sit on the relevant appointment panel?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his thoughts on this issue. I point out that there is currently an open competition for Supreme Court justices. I want to encourage as many qualified candidates as possible to come forward. The closing date is the 10th, so if any are listening, I want them to apply for the role. It is very important to distinguish between the situation in the US, where there is a written constitution, and here, where we have a sovereign Parliament and the role of the Court is to interpret legislation. The Select Committee absolutely has a role to play, post-appointment, in making sure that it is holding the Supreme Court justices to account, but I think that it would be dangerous to muddy the water with pre-appointment hearings.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman looks cruelly let down, but we will have to cope.

T5. [909115] **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): Some of my constituents who work in Winchester prison have highlighted directly with me the challenges that they

have at work, locally and nationally. As the Lord Chancellor is keenly aware, there are rising challenges around extremism in prisons. Will she update the House on the progress of the new directorate for security, order and counter-terrorism?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: extremism is a worry in our prisons. That is why we set up the new security and counter terrorism unit in the Ministry of Justice. That unit is progressing with implementing the recommendations of the Acheson review that the Department adopted last summer.

T6. [909116] **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Government sensibly introduced section 67 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 to allow the police to arrest paedophiles for sending sexual communications to children, rather than waiting until they actually meet. However, the power cannot be used until the commencement order is passed. It is two years since the Act became law. Will the Secretary of State say how much longer the police will have to wait until they can keep our children safe?

Elizabeth Truss: I am looking at this to get on with it imminently.

T8. [909118] **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): I have been raising the issue of false and exaggerated whiplash claims ever since I was elected. Can the Lord Chancellor ensure that her plans for change in this area will be successful and result in real benefits, such as much lower premiums for law-abiding drivers?

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): May I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has done on the Transport Committee to highlight this important issue? We hope that every motorist will see a benefit of £40. We are certainly pressing hard on the issue.

T7. [909117] **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Police and voluntary services are being overwhelmed on the streets of Wrexham by incidents of the use of psychoactive substances. Will the Lord Chancellor please ask Her Majesty's prison Berwyn to share its specialist knowledge of the subject with agencies in Wrexham?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. We have expertise in dealing with psychoactive substances. We have rolled out tests across the prison estate, and we are working on prisoner education to deter people from that type of drug abuse. I am very happy to facilitate a meeting with the Prison Service and the hon. Gentleman, so that we can make progress together.

T9. [909119] **Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State share my concern at the content of the answer to my earlier question? Will she get a grip on this important issue, and will she follow the lead of my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) in saying that prisoners such as the one I mentioned earlier should be released immediately?

Elizabeth Truss: First, I am very happy to make sure we look into the case my hon. Friend raises. We do have to remember that public protection must always be our priority, so while we are keen to see people get the

training and re-education they need to secure a successful parole hearing, we must always make sure the public are kept safe.

T10. [909120] Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Rather than curtailing access to justice for those with legitimate personal injury compensation claims, why are Ministers not cracking down on the cowboy aggressive marketing of claims management companies?

Sir Oliver Heald: It is important to do both, and we have a package of measures that achieves that, so I do not think the hon. Lady need concern herself that we are not taking this forward.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): As the Secretary of State mentioned, the Supreme Court judges application process ends on Friday. In circumstances where around 20% of Court of Appeal judges and 20% of High Court judges are female, what is she doing to ensure we get more diversity in our highest courts?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. We have never had a female Lord Chief Justice or a female Master of the Rolls. Out of 11 Supreme Court justices, only one is a woman, and that is not good enough in modern Britain. What we need to do is make sure it is easier for highly talented solicitors to apply to go on the bench, and Lord Kakkar is looking at that. We are creating direct entry into the High Court for talented individuals, and we are also creating the 100 top recorders competition to encourage more entrants from among good individuals.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Given the 30% cut in prison officer numbers since 2010, and given the poor retention rates among new recruits, at what point will the number of officers reach the appropriate level?

Mr Gyimah: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in answer to an earlier question, we are investing £100 million to add 2,500 prison officers, and we have more officers in training than we have ever had before.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): The vast majority of successful personal independence payment appeals succeed because of late additional submitted evidence. What discussions has the Minister had with colleagues in the Department of Health to automatically share supportive medical evidence at the beginning of the process?

Sir Oliver Heald: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the way in which the process should work, and it has been the aim of the reforms to achieve that, but I am happy to discuss the issue further with him.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Does the Secretary of State recognise that current human rights legislation adheres minimally to the provisions contained in the Good Friday agreement for Northern Ireland and therefore that the Human Rights Act 1998 should be retained?

Sir Oliver Heald: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that. As she knows, we have made an announcement that there will not be an imminent change, because,

although we have a mandate for that, we want to find out what the outcome of the Brexit negotiations is, and that is, in itself, a major constitutional change.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Developing skills in prison is crucial to successful rehabilitation, but it is important that those skills translate into the real world. What consideration are Ministers giving to ensuring that skills development in prison dovetails with the needs in the industrial strategy?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I know he is a big supporter of the new Wellingborough prison. In that prison, as well as in others across country, we are looking at areas where there are skills shortages—whether it is in construction or catering—and making sure that we start apprenticeships in prison that can then be completed on the outside, so that we can bring new, skilled people to important industries.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): There are reports today of children being held in solitary confinement in prisons in this country, which is shocking, immoral and probably unlawful. Surely, the Secretary of State understands that, whatever chance these young people have of turning their lives around, they will not find it if they are locked in a cell for 23 hours a day. Will she commit now to ordering an end to this practice?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): I am aware of the reports from the Howard League. The safety and welfare of young people held in custody is our highest priority. I would stress, though, that these cases are extremely difficult. Some of these young individuals are extremely difficult to manage, and governors on the ground have to make decisions that are in the interests of the broader community in prison and the wider security of society.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Given the disturbing revelations this morning relating to Facebook and the use of sexualised images of children online, are we doing enough to protect our children, online and offline?

Elizabeth Truss: I am working on this subject very closely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. We need to ensure that more people are brought to justice—in fact, there has been an increase of 140% in those brought to justice for sexual offences—but we also need to make sure that internet companies are doing their bit to crack down on this practice.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. If the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) can be as brief as she is illustrious, the House will be blessed.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Ministers have praised the Corston report on women in the criminal justice system and yet are currently planning, I hear, to open specialist units for women as adjuncts to men's prisons, going in the opposite direction to the Corston report. Can they reassure me that I am wrong?

Elizabeth Truss: I can reassure the right hon. Lady that she is wrong and we are not doing that. In fact, I will be giving a speech this afternoon on the 10th anniversary of the Corston report, and she is very welcome to come along.

Mr Speaker: Put a copy in the Library of the House and we will all be blessed.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Ministry has released figures showing that the number of incidents of drugs being found in prison more than quadrupled from 2,500 in 2015 to 10,400-plus in 2016, yet the National Offender Management Service does not keep a central register of cell searches, which is where many of these drugs are found. Will that change?

Mr Gyimah: I thank the Chairman of the Select Committee for that question. We will take every action necessary to make sure that we deal with the scourge of drugs in our prisons.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): After a constituent of mine residing in HMP Lindholme was seriously assaulted when other inmates had access to keys to their cells while he did not, is it not abundantly clear that the people who are in charge of our prisons are not governors, and certainly not the Secretary of State, but the prisoners?

Mr Gyimah: That is certainly not the case. We do recognise, however, that by recruiting more staff and strengthening the frontline we will make it much easier for staff to challenge and support prisoners. That is why we have announced new investment to recruit 2,500 new officers for our jails, and we are also enabling a caseload of one prison officer per six prisoners, so that they can support our prisoners in the efforts to rehabilitate them.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): While significant progress is being made on foreign national offenders being returned, what analysis is there of foreign national offenders coming into the system—and, crucially, do we monitor whether there is a net reduction in foreign national offenders on the estate?

Mr Gyimah: The number of foreign nationals entering our prisons is monitored by the Ministry of Justice. Our figures indicate that between 30 June 2008—the highest point—and 30 June 2016, there was a 14% decrease in

the total foreign national prisoner population. This is good progress, but I acknowledge that there is still a lot more to be done.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Extreme brevity, please.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): Despite the Government's attempt to recruit more prison officers, staff rolls at many prisons continue to fall—High Down's went down by 30. Is this recruitment drive working, or are demoralised prison officers leaving before they can recruit more?

Elizabeth Truss: We have launched a very important prison officer recruitment programme, and we have a record number of officers currently in training. However, we need to recognise that it takes time to recruit and train these officers. That is why we are also making sure that we pay our experienced officers at the right level and creating new, more senior roles for experienced officers as well as getting new recruits in.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Let us hear from Members who have not so far been heard.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I am afraid that the Secretary of State's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) was simply not good enough. Can she explain why, after two years, she still has not commenced the law to protect our children from sexual predators?

Elizabeth Truss: I assure the hon. Lady, as I assured the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), that this is imminent.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): With cuts to local government funding and other sources, access to advice on civil matters is being squeezed harder than ever. There are cuts of 50% in York. What is the Justice Secretary doing about this?

Sir Oliver Heald: As I explained earlier, we are re-engineering the system, so that it is much easier to access for members of the public, and we are also reviewing legal aid.

Housing Benefits (18 to 21-year-olds)

12.39 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister if she will make a statement on the impact on homelessness of the Government's plans to remove automatic entitlement to housing benefit for 18 to 21-year-olds.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes): From 1 April, automatic entitlement to housing costs will be removed for some 18 to 21-year-olds. This is a Conservative manifesto commitment and it was formally announced as a Government measure in summer Budget 2015.

This policy removes a perverse incentive for young adults to leave the family home and pass the cost on to the taxpayer. This is about stopping young people slipping straight into a life on benefits, and it brings parity with young people who are in work but who may not be able to leave the family home, while an unemployed young person can do so.

We have always been clear that this policy will have a comprehensive set of exemptions, to make sure that the most vulnerable continue to have the housing support that they need, so the policy will affect only those who have no barriers to work and who are unable to return safely to their parental home. In addition, there is a time-limited exemption for those who have recently been in work. The policy will apply only to those in universal credit full service areas who make new claims or whose earnings drop below the in-work threshold after that date.

The policy will be implemented at the same time as the new youth obligation, an intensive package of labour market support for young people from day one of their claim. With new support available under the youth obligation, more young adults will move into work, significantly improving their current living standards and future prospects.

John Healey: My urgent question—this concern is shared by Members on both sides of the House—was: what assessment has been done of the impact of the cuts on homelessness? With respect to the Minister, she has made a statement but she could have given a one-word answer, which is “none”. No impact assessment was published with the regulations on Friday. Why not? How many young people will now be denied all help with housing benefit? There are 1,741 18 to 21-year-olds in the Minister's county of Hampshire claiming housing benefit. How many of them will still get help next month, and how many will get nothing?

The Minister may not have done an assessment, but the charities that work day in, day out to help the homeless in all our constituencies have done so. Centrepoint says that 9,000 young people will be put at risk of homelessness. Shelter says that

“there is no way this isn't going to lead to an increase in rough sleeping.”

Crisis, which drafted the very important Homelessness Reduction Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), says that the policy “runs entirely counter” to the aims of that Bill, and that it

“could spell disaster for the many vulnerable young people rightly entitled to help.”

Surely the Minister does not think that those charities are wrong. If she knows they are right, surely the Government are not going to go ahead with these cruel and counterproductive cuts.

Members on both sides of the House have deeply held concerns about the rapidly rising level of homelessness in our country. Will the Minister accept that none of the arguments that she has made today or previously really stack up? She says that this is about levelling the playing field, but these young people, who are old enough to marry, work, pay taxes and fight for our country, will now be denied the same right as other British adults to basic help with housing costs.

Ministers have said that the exemptions will protect the vulnerable, but the National Landlords Association declares:

“Never mind the nuances, all landlords will hear is that 18-21 year olds are no longer entitled to housing benefit...they just won't consider them as a tenant.”

Ministers have said that this will save money, but once the knock-on costs to other services are taken into account the saving will fall to only £3.3 million.

The Minister talked about the manifesto; it contained a commitment to remove the “automatic” entitlement. Claimants already have to pass multiple checks and tests, so there really is nothing automatic about young people getting housing benefit. Will the Minister recognise that the Government have the opportunity in tomorrow's Budget to reverse this counterproductive policy? Will she leave the House this afternoon and tell the Chancellor that if he does so, he will have the fullest support not just from Opposition Members but, I suspect, from Members across the House?

Caroline Nokes: The right hon. Gentleman raised the issue of those across the country—he specifically mentioned Hampshire—who are already in receipt of housing benefit. They will have transitional protections and will not be affected. So when he asks how many in the county of Hampshire will have their housing benefit withdrawn, the answer is none, the same as for every county. He also raised the case of those who are serving in the armed forces, of taxpayers and of couples who have children. If he looked at the list of exemptions that was published on Friday, he would see that those are all included.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that in the light of all the exemptions, we are actually talking not about the children, but about the responsibilities of the parents? Are we not seeing here a reassertion, rightly, of the responsibilities of parents for unemployed young people under the age of 21?

Caroline Nokes: My right hon. Friend makes a really important point. This is about encouraging family responsibility. It is about enabling and helping young people who have the choice to remain at home to stay there. For those who cannot stay at home, a very significant exemption is written in; those for whom it is inappropriate to stay in the family home will be exempted from this policy.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Yesterday, SNP MPs joined others to try to annul this ludicrous legislation. The Government seem to be working on the incorrect assumption that young people can simply stay at home, when parents have no obligation to house their adult children. The SNP has consistently opposed the withdrawal of housing benefit for 18 to 21-year-olds, but under the current powers of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government cannot reverse the cut or provide an exemption for Scotland. Does the Minister agree that it is simply ridiculous that young people should suffer purely because the Government are obsessed with imposing austerity? Can she tell us how many young people will be affected who do not qualify for an exemption? Does she think that an unemployed young adult is more likely to get a job if they have a stable address, or if they are living in a hostel or sleeping on the streets? Will the UK Government exempt Scottish young people from the impact of the regulations and allow the Scottish Government to provide the housing support on their behalf?

Caroline Nokes: The Scottish Government already have a wide range of powers that would enable them to alleviate the proposed changes. Our Government are committed to working with the Scottish Government on a whole range of issues in the DWP portfolio, to make sure that they have the power and the strength to implement those powers.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): What are the Government doing to ensure that this policy supports young people who are in work?

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend is right to mention young people who are in work. Anybody who is working 16 hours a week or more at the national minimum wage equivalent will be exempt.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I think we should call this what it is: a nasty, vindictive policy that will make injustice worse, from a Government who said that they would tackle burning injustice. Will the Minister now answer the question that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) asked? No impact assessment has been published for the measure—inexplicably, in my view. Will she tell the House what advice she has received from her officials about the impact on homelessness of this proposal?

Caroline Nokes: The Department has, of course, met all its requirements under the public sector equality duty. Equality assessment information has been received and shared with the Social Security Advisory Committee, which chose not to consult on this.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Young people in their first jobs cannot afford their own accommodation, so they share with other young people or they stay at home. Why should it be different for people who are out of work?

Caroline Nokes: My right hon. Friend makes exactly the point that underpins this policy. We want young people in work and young people out of work to be making the same choices about where they are going to live.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I think that anyone listening to this urgent question would, frankly, be appalled by the responses that we have had thus far from the Minister. She has not answered any of the questions that were rightly asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey). Will she tell us why the equality impact assessment has not been published and when she will bring it forward, so that we can all see exactly the rationale behind this ridiculous policy?

Caroline Nokes: I think I have answered that. The Department has engaged extensively at ministerial and official level with stakeholders. We announced this measure in the summer Budget. There is no duty on us to share the impact assessment with the House, but we did share it with the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that care leavers will not be affected by these changes?

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend makes a really important point about care leavers. Absolutely, they are exempt from this policy.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): One of the exemptions in the regulations where housing benefit can still be paid is if

“in the opinion of the Secretary of State it is inappropriate for the renter to live with each of their parents”.

Does the Secretary of State assume that this exemption will automatically apply where the parents refuse to have their child living with them?

Caroline Nokes: Absolutely. That is a point. A very important exemption is included, so where that is inappropriate—where a parent cannot or will not accommodate their child—such people will be exempt from the policy.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): The key point is that nipping the dependency culture in the bud at the earliest opportunity is very important, because once it takes hold it can be very damaging to the interests of those concerned. I must say one thing, however: young people may well think this is fair, but when we do this and protect every single penny going to pensioners, including the winter fuel allowance for millionaires in mortgage-free mansions just because they are over 65, they can be forgiven for thinking that we are not playing fairly by everybody. That would be my observation.

Caroline Nokes: We are trying to play fairly by young people who are in work but have to make the decision that they simply cannot afford to leave the family home and stay living with their parents.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Will the Minister explain the rationale for denying young adults access to housing and support, while providing it for older adults? On the face of it, and from the Minister's comments so far, it appears to be nothing other than the demonisation of young people.

Caroline Nokes: This is not about the demonisation of young people; it is about encouraging young people to make sensible and rational choices about where they are going to live, whether or not they are in work.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): As a parent of two children between 18 and 21, I would be appalled if I felt that they had left home to live a life on housing benefits while they still have a bed in my house. Will the Minister confirm that support will be made available for those who are vulnerable or have complex needs?

Caroline Nokes: I thank my hon. Friend for that, and absolutely yes. Those who cannot live with their parents and those in receipt of the main disability benefits will be exempt from this policy.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Further to the question from the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), will the Minister confirm what I believe she said earlier, which is that the only thing necessary for a young person to demonstrate before being entitled to the housing element of universal credit is that their parent has said that they cannot live at home?

Caroline Nokes: Yes, and I think I have made that very clear. If it is inappropriate for a young person to live at home with their parents, they will be exempt from this policy.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): The YMCA tells me that, from April, it may not be able to house young people with the most complex needs, those with addictions and mental health conditions, those who may not be able to learn or earn, and those who cannot or will not stay at home or, indeed, access temporary accommodation. In relation to supported housing for vulnerable people, which is at stake, will the Minister clarify the scope of the exemption in regulation 4B(e), and defer the application of the impact on those at most risk of homelessness until we know the outcome of the supported housing review?

Caroline Nokes: The YMCA has been involved in the consultation process. As I believe I said at an event downstairs last night, it is always a trusted adviser that provides excellent advice and information. Absolutely: those with complex needs and mental health conditions will be exempt from this policy.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Will the Minister tell me whether she has made any assessment of the impact of these changes on excellent small charities, such as Doorstep in my constituency, that help young people who find themselves unable to continue to live at home?

Caroline Nokes: I have received a great deal of information from and had roundtables with a number of providers and charities, including some of the smaller ones. We have been very clear: those for whom it is inappropriate to live at home will be exempt from this policy.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The principal reason why young people become homeless is a relationship breakdown with their family. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that decisions will be taken by the Secretary of State, not by local decision makers who may discriminate against young people when they cannot live with their family?

Caroline Nokes: I commend my hon. Friend for his excellent work on the Homelessness Reduction Bill. Absolutely: it is a question of young people informing a work coach, somebody in the local authority or a trusted medical professional of their inability to live at home because their relationship with their parent has broken down, and in those cases they will receive the exemption.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Given that the Minister has conceded that there is an impact assessment—she said that she has not published it because she does not need to—and in view of the concern that exists, would she care to think again and publish the impact assessment?

Caroline Nokes: We looked very carefully, under the public sector equality duty, at the impact this policy would have and we have shared that information with the Social Security Advisory Committee. I am under no obligation to publish it.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): Will the Minister explain how the policy will apply to young people on apprenticeships, who may be earning below the national living wage?

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend makes a really important point in apprenticeship week. Absolutely: apprentices will be exempt from this policy.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab): Last Thursday, as part of the work I am doing on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) on homelessness in Greater Manchester, I went around the streets of the city centre of Manchester and was shocked to see the risk that young people face from the dealing of psychoactive substances and the threat that they face from violence. Does the hon. Lady not understand that this will force significantly more young people in our country into rough sleeping and make them increasingly vulnerable? Is this not the personification of the return of the nasty party?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman makes the assumption that this will increase homelessness. In fact, we expect there to be behavioural change and that young people will, where they can, stay living with their parents. Where they cannot stay living with their parents, they will be exempt from this policy.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): At a time when the public is increasingly fed up with politicians who do not do what they say they will do at election time, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on the audacity of sticking to a Conservative manifesto commitment? Will she confirm that youth unemployment actually continues to fall and that, week by week, more and more young people have the security and dignity of taking a wage back home?

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend is right to point out that there are 197,000 more young people in work than there were in 2010. He is right: this policy was a manifesto commitment and it was in the summer Budget of 2015, and we are delivering on that commitment.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The vast majority of my young constituents who need to access housing benefit are doing so in the private rented sector, which means that they already face crippling costs and great insecurity. Why can the Minister not see that, across the board for young people, this policy simply makes precarious situations more precarious, stigmatises young people and is nothing short of a kick in the teeth? Why are the Government ignoring the overwhelming evidence from those who work with young people showing that this policy will make homelessness worse, and why will she not drop it?

Caroline Nokes: As the hon. Lady will have heard, we have put in place a long list of exemptions to protect those who are most vulnerable and to enable those who need the support to continue to receive it. She makes the really important point that we are there to support the most vulnerable and also to ensure that there is an even playing field between those in work and those who are not. One of the most straightforward ways in which to be exempt from this policy is to be working for 16 hours or more a week.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): Like the Minister, I am a great supporter of the YMCA. Will she confirm what impact the measures will have on all these young people, who benefit in so many amazing ways from organisations such as the YMCA?

Caroline Nokes: The YMCA is among the best and leading training providers in the country, and it is also a significant housing provider. We are determined to work with such stakeholders to make sure that young people who are exempt from the policy receive that exemption and are still supported to make sure they are in training, so that they can move into the work they need.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): My constituency has full service before most other constituencies. The Highland Council's temporary homeless accommodation framework is £175 a week. Before universal credit, my constituent Gavin was awarded £168 a week, leaving £7 extra to find from other entitlements. Now, it is £60, meaning £115 extra, which is much more than he gets, even before he pays for his food, light, heat or anything else. How is that fair?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman did not say how old his constituent is. It is really important that we are focusing support on those who need it most. When it comes to young people, we are obliging them to make the same sort of choices that his constituents who are in work for 16 hours or more a week are making.

Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that the Government are doing everything possible to prepare young people for the world of work, so that fewer young people are at risk of falling into a life on benefits?

Caroline Nokes: The Government are bringing forward the youth obligation in April, which is about making sure that young people who are not in work are undertaking the appropriate training or apprenticeship they need to put them in the best position to move into work.

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): May I return to the definition of "inappropriate to return"? Would that include a case that I have heard about: a young man who was kicked out by his stepfather for being gay, but was told he could return home if he denied his sexuality?

Caroline Nokes: Yes. We have been very clear about that. If a young person would find it impossible and inappropriate to return home, they would receive the exemption. The situation outlined by the hon. Lady is absolutely one that we have considered.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Drilling down into the exemptions, who will make the decisions about cases such as the one raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue)? Similar exemptions exist for victims of domestic violence to access legal aid—they need a letter from a doctor or from a specialist agency—but 37% of women still report that they are not able to access legal aid. How does the Minister propose that the policy will work, how much will it cost and how much will it save?

Caroline Nokes: The anticipation is that the policy will save in the region of £105 million over the period of this Parliament. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that victims of domestic violence are exempt from the policy. We recognise the impact on young women who have been victims of domestic violence and the importance of supporting them.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): The young people the Minister describes bear no resemblance to the young people I used to work with at the youth homelessness charity Centrepunt, many of whom had experienced horrendous physical, mental and emotional abuse, which meant that they understandably no longer had a relationship with their families. How does she expect those young people to prove that they cannot return home? They cannot simply pick up the phone to their parents, and they should not be forced to recount to a stranger again and again the stories of what had happened to them. What will the Minister do to make sure that young people are not subjected to reliving the horrendous abuse that they have already suffered?

Caroline Nokes: Those who have reported abuse to a stakeholder or a trusted professional will be exempt from the policy. It is our intention to ensure that we establish a long list of stakeholders who can take on that reporting. It should, of course, be the case that they should only have to report it once.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Yet again, for ideological reasons the Tories have identified a problem that does not really exist. Less than 1% of 18 to 21-year-olds claim jobseeker's allowance and housing benefit at the same time. We have heard that the policy will only save £105 million if it actually works as planned. Will the Minister tell me one non-Government stakeholder that agrees that it will help young people into long-term, stable work?

Caroline Nokes: We put the policy in our manifesto for the 2015 election and included it in the summer Budget 2015. We have been really clear that it is about

providing fairness for those who are in work as well as those who are out of work, and ensuring that young people have the same decisions to make about the affordability of their housing.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): There has been a war on young people by this Government for seven years, and this is the most shameful policy they have brought forward affecting the most vulnerable. Not to produce an impact statement is an absolutely disgrace. The Minister talks about getting people back into work, so let us talk about what the Government have done for young people's wages. An apprentice wage is £3.50 an hour. How on earth can that person get to work if they are denied the assistance they need for housing and they cannot work near their home?

Caroline Nokes: As I said earlier in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), apprentices will be exempt.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I have come across many reasons that 18 to 21-year-olds have left home, but I have never seen claiming housing benefit as an incentive. Given the long list of exemptions, would it not just be easier for the Minister to scrap the policy altogether?

Caroline Nokes: The Government included this as a manifesto commitment, and we are determined to deliver it.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The Minister talks about an even playing field. If she is so confident that the policy is fair, why will she not publish the impact assessment? What does she have to hide?

Caroline Nokes: There is absolutely nothing to hide. I have considered my public sector equality duty carefully. As I said, the assessment was shared with the Social Security Advisory Committee, which chose not to consult on this.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I would like to help the Minister. She is almost there. She said that this policy will save £105 million. We can work out how many people will be affected when we leave the Chamber, but will she confirm whether it is in the region of 10,000? Is the figure higher or lower than that?

Caroline Nokes: The policy is expected to affect 5,000 young people in the first year, and 10,000 a year in steady state.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Given that the number of people rough sleeping has more than doubled since 2010, does the Minister think that the policy, which singles out young adults, will make that shameful statistic better or worse?

Caroline Nokes: As I have said repeatedly, we have put in place a long list of exemptions precisely to prevent homelessness. Those who are unable to return to the family home will be exempt from the policy, so we do not expect it to increase homelessness.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The lack of a published impact assessment is simply scandalous. Will the Minister tell us the measured impact on a vulnerable young person who has had to leave home because of difficulties or abuse, and who is now being asked to prove that abuse just so they can get the housing support they need to live away from their family?

Caroline Nokes: A vulnerable young person who has had to leave home because of abuse will, of course, be exempt.

Queen's Sapphire Jubilee

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

1.5 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for a national public holiday marking the Queen's Sapphire Jubilee in 2017 and to establish a framework to ensure that the United Kingdom, its overseas territories and Crown dependencies appropriately commemorate this occasion; and for connected purposes.

The 65th anniversary of Her Majesty the Queen's accession to the throne was marked on 6 February this year. This is a truly remarkable milestone for the longest-serving monarch in the history of our proud nation and peoples. Her Majesty the Queen's sapphire jubilee must surely be a cause for great celebration across the British Isles, in all corners of the kingdom and, indeed, throughout Her Majesty's overseas territories and Crown dependencies, her other realms and across the Commonwealth of nations.

During Her Majesty's reign, there have been three royal jubilees: the silver jubilee of 1977, the golden jubilee of 2002 and the diamond jubilee of 2012. In each case, the British people paid tribute to Her Majesty for her service to the nation with spectacular events in counties, cities, towns and villages throughout these islands. There were parades, street parties, church services, fêtes, cultural events and school assemblies, and beacons were lit up and down the land.

National celebrations took place, usually in June, with services of thanksgiving at St Paul's Cathedral, combined with military parades through the streets of London and, for the diamond jubilee, a flotilla along the River Thames. Her Majesty, the Duke of Edinburgh and other members of the royal family have appeared on the balcony of Buckingham Palace while the spectacle of a fly-past by the Royal Air Force and the Red Arrows took place. Indeed, in the case of the golden jubilee, Concorde flew overhead. Millions of people filled the streets of London, gathering on the Mall to cheer the Queen, celebrating with flags, singing and dancing. On each occasion, the nation's spirits were lifted. Come rain or shine, the people rose to the occasion the length and breadth of the nation.

The silver, golden and diamond jubilees brought the entire country together in nationwide displays of affection for the Queen, and the sapphire jubilee must surely do so again this year, reminding us of our rich heritage and cultural identity as part of a Great British family, sharing a union of the Crowns unbroken since 1603. Whether we consider ourselves to be English, Scottish, Ulstermen, Irish, Welsh, Manx, Jerseymen, Guernseymen, Gibraltarians, Falkland Islanders, Bermudian, Montserratian, Caymanian or, indeed, whichever identity within the British family we happen to call our own, the celebration of the Queen's sapphire jubilee must be a cause that brings each and every one of us together in honour of Queen and country.

We only need to look around the world today to see politicians as Presidents, Prime Ministers and leaders of nations who come and go, but how fortunate we are here in the United Kingdom to have such a dedicated, neutral head of state as a constitutional monarch who

defends our laws, upholds our democracy and is the guardian of our constitution, providing the foundations for stable and accountable government.

Just as previous jubilees have been celebrated far and wide, it must surely be right that the sapphire jubilee is, too. In fact, Her Majesty's sapphire jubilee should be the greatest of all, as no other monarch has reached 65 years on the throne, and it is inconceivable that any other future king or queen will accomplish such an achievement for centuries to come. We must not allow this year to pass by without a celebration befitting the occasion, saluting Her Majesty for all she has done for our nation and the wider Commonwealth, but also to prove to ourselves once again that what unites our country and people is much greater than what divides us.

Her Majesty the Queen is undoubtedly the most unifying figure of our nation; indeed, she is the fundamental component of our common British identity. As a people, we share common beliefs, principles and obligations, so let us cherish our common heritage, and in so doing ensure our common destiny.

It is my fervent belief that the Queen exemplifies all that is great and good about our nation and represents the continuity that our forebears did so much to hand to us, most especially the freedom of our island home that we cherish so much today. As our queen and sovereign, Her Majesty brings steadfastness and stability to our constitution, our parliamentary democracy and throughout our society. The importance of this steadfastness cannot be understated. Her Majesty is the single greatest flagbearer of stability and continuity.

The Queen's sapphire jubilee must be a time for everyone to celebrate this great milestone in the history of our island people, whether they be from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales, the Crown dependencies of Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, Sark or the Isle of Man, the sixteen overseas territories or in the communities of people of British ancestry scattered across the globe.

The United Kingdom, in taking the lead, will also encourage Her Majesty's other realms to celebrate the sapphire jubilee—after all the Queen is also Queen of Antigua and Barbuda; Australia; the Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; Canada; Grenada; Jamaica; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; the Solomon Islands; and Tuvalu. Our friends in these nations must also have the chance to celebrate, as the sapphire jubilee is as much their celebration as it is one for the British Isles.

My Bill will ensure that all the people of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the British overseas territories and Crown dependencies will be able to mark the occasion of the Queen's sapphire jubilee with a celebration that such a significant landmark deserves. It will give councils the authority to make plans now for local celebrations, providing for street parties, carnivals and special events to take place without the tiresome bureaucracy that can so often get in the way.

One weekend in June could be designated "sapphire jubilee weekend" with an additional bank holiday immediately afterwards, which could be a national day for a thanksgiving service. The "weekend of trooping the colour" might also be an option for the official

sapphire jubilee celebrations. As this is first ever sapphire jubilee of a reigning British monarch, we cannot allow this great occasion to go uncelebrated. On the contrary, Her Majesty's 65th anniversary as our sovereign and Head of State must be an opportunity to unite all British people, together with those of other nationalities who have made Britain their home and who might also wish to celebrate with pride and patriotism.

In presenting the Bill today, my hope is that it will draw attention to this highly significant event. Time may be short to arrange celebrations for June, but I believe the spirit of our nation will inspire the people to make Her Majesty the Queen's sapphire jubilee a spectacular occasion that will be remembered for generations to come, as we demonstrate our heartfelt thanks to Her Majesty for what she has done for our country and for what continues to be a truly glorious reign. I commend the Bill to the House.

1.15 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Although I have no objection whatever to the people of the United Kingdom, and those more widely, celebrating the Queen's sapphire jubilee, I feel that, as with most proposals, the devil is in the detail. That is why I am forced to speak against this Bill.

I would like to press for greater detail so that we may learn from the problems created for UK workers from the most recent extra public holidays, which were held on 29 April 2011 to celebrate the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, and on 5 June 2012 to celebrate the Queen's diamond jubilee. On both those occasions, I was working for the NHS and I was also an elected workplace trade union rep for Unite the union. As I am sure all Members will appreciate, not everyone in the NHS was able to enjoy those public holidays. Essential public services still have to be provided and many staff were required to remain in work on those days, to provide emergency and urgent care.

Problems arose with how these staff were to be remunerated, because NHS terms and conditions under "Agenda for Change" specify that staff are entitled to eight bank holidays per year, and those extra holidays counted as the ninth bank holiday. My NHS trust refused to pay staff who were working on those days at the bank holiday rate and instead paid them at the normal daily rate. I was trying to negotiate a better rate of pay for these staff, my union members, but I came up against a blanket refusal from management to recognise those days as bank or public holidays that would therefore qualify for the higher rate of pay. Before the diamond jubilee holiday, I even wrote to the then Prime Minister, David Cameron. His reply, unfortunately, was unhelpful, merely re-stating the NHS management view. We were left with a situation in which hard-working, dedicated NHS staff who gave up their days off to provide a vital service were not adequately remunerated—and I do not want to see that happen again under this Bill.

Unite revealed that 113 NHS employers in the UK treated the diamond jubilee as a normal working day, denying staff the normal bank holiday pay and time-off-

in-lieu arrangements. Unite had even written to the Queen on behalf of its 100,000 members in the health service on this issue—alas, to no avail.

Additionally, in April 2011, prior to the royal wedding, the *Daily Mail* reported that, according to a poll by the Chartered Institute of Payroll Professionals, more than a tenth of employers said that they would not be giving their workers a paid day off. Employment law experts said that workers were the victims of a lottery that depended entirely on the wording in their contract. For example, if a contract states that the employee is entitled to 28 days' holiday, including all bank and public holidays, the worker would be entitled to paid time off. However, if the contract stated that the worker was entitled to 28 days' holiday including eight bank and public holidays, that would not confer the right to be off, because the royal wedding constituted a ninth bank holiday.

On that day in 2011, all 163 Debenhams stores were open, but the staff did not receive extra pay. Conversely, and showing better practice, Tesco stores said that staff who worked the public holiday would be paid at up to three times their normal rate. Following the royal wedding holiday where some employers failed to give their staff the day off, the TUC wrote to the Government to add a provision to holiday entitlement to take account of any special bank or public holidays, but sadly no such provision was made.

With that in mind, one way to avoid the situation arising every time an extra public holiday is announced would be to increase the number of bank holidays from eight to nine per year, with the extra bank holiday to be used to celebrate a significant occasion that year—the occasion to be determined by Parliament.

As I stated when I rose to speak, it is right that we should celebrate the Queen's record of an amazing 65 years' long service, but I ask for more clarity to enable employers and employees to reach a better understanding of the practicalities of arranging an extra public holiday, most importantly the rates of remuneration for the emergency workers who give up their time, so that others may enjoy the day off and the celebrations.

I will conclude by asking three questions. Will the Bill specify how the holiday should be characterised and the rates of pay for those who have to work on the day? How will the Bill ensure that all employers participate and give staff the day off without resorting to the use of loopholes? Will the Government now take heed of the TUC recommendation that provision should be made for workers' holiday entitlement to take account of additional public holidays?

Question put (Standing Order No. 23) and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Andrew Rosindell, Sir Julian Brazier, Mr Douglas Carswell, Tom Elliott, Michael Gove, Kate Hoey, Daniel Kawczynski, Norman Lamb, Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil, Albert Owen, Gavin Robinson and Michael Tomlinson present the Bill.

Andrew Rosindell accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March 2017, and to be printed (Bill 151).

Points of Order

1.22 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Ah, the day would not be complete without points of order.

Luciana Berger: I would like to raise my concern that Ministers of both the Department of Health and the Ministry of Justice appear to be evading my very serious named day questions. As colleagues well know, it is intended that named day questions receive an answer within three sitting days, yet I can recite countless recent examples where that timeframe has not been observed—and often completely disregarded.

I am particularly troubled by an answer I received from the Secretary of State for Health to one question. Last year, I submitted a question to ask how often the transfer time for prisoners experiencing an acute mental health crisis exceeded the two-week guidance period. I found that in 2015-16 three out of four cases took longer than two weeks. When I submitted an identical question last month, to get hold of the most recent figures for 2016-17 to date, I was told that the data are not held in the requested format. When I tabled a subsequent question to inquire whether the data collection had changed, I was told that it had not.

I have started to receive a number of answers from the two Departments stating that the data are not held in the requested format. How can the Department of Health possibly defend avoiding answering these questions and withholding vital information it clearly has access to?

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order. My response is as follows. First, as has been said on innumerable occasions, there is a responsibility on Ministers to provide answers to parliamentary questions that are both timely and substantive. I cannot comment on the question whether the material the hon. Lady sought is held in the form she had in mind, but the central point is that Ministers are supposed to attend to both the letter and the spirit of the inquiry from an hon. Member and to seek to accommodate that Member by providing, as I have said, a timely and substantive response.

Secondly, over a period of years, as Members on both sides of the House will be keenly conscious, it has become commonplace for the record of individual Government Departments on these matters to be published. It seems to me to show very considerable discredit on the part of a Government Department persistently to fail, in a timely and substantive way, to respond to hon. Members' questions. The hon. Lady's point of order will have been heard on the Treasury Bench.

The Leader of the House has traditionally seen it as part of his or her duty to persuade Ministers to up their game in these matters. My clear understanding is that the Leader of the House of Commons, the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington) recognises his

responsibility in these matters. I hope it will not be necessary for this matter to be raised continually on the Floor of the House. An improvement is required.

My final observation is that if this problem persists I urge the hon. Lady to write to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), the Chair of the Procedure Committee, who, on behalf of the House, will, I think, be only too happy to chase progress in this matter.

If I may, perhaps on behalf of the House, I would like to offer good wishes to the hon. Lady for her own health and progress in the next few days. We all wish her well and we look forward to seeing her return to her place in due course.

Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."

1.26 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will be aware that, for the past two years, Members of this House have been in correspondence with the trustees of the parliamentary pension fund, raising concerns about its investment approach, especially on the long-term financial risks associated with fossil fuel assets, as well as on the fund becoming more transparent and open with Members and former Members of this House. In its 2016 annual report, published just last week, we learned that the fund invested in tobacco, fossil fuels and large-scale tax avoidance, raising a reputational risk for Parliament.

Mr Speaker, can you clarify what MPs might do, using proper procedure, to take this matter forward with the trustees who have so far refused to meet Members? Might you also help to allay the concerns of many Members, perhaps through the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, that the pension fund is leaving this House open to reputational damage and legal challenge?

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for notice of what I hope she will forgive me as describing as her attempted point of order. Unfortunately, the fact of that notice, which is extremely courteous of her, does not of itself convert the attempt into an actual point of order. However, I do not in any sense mean to be dismissive. This is a very important matter, even if it is not principally a matter for the Chair. The Chair has, frankly, no responsibility for the parliamentary contributory pension fund, let alone the investment policies its trustees pursue. That said, I acknowledge that the hon. Lady and all colleagues, as well as retired Members, have a legitimate interest in this subject. They are, as she indicates, properly pursued with the trustees. I am sure the ever-alert secretariat of the fund will be reading our proceedings—they certainly should be.

My concluding observation for the hon. Lady is that, although there is no ministerial responsibility for this matter, she might wish to bear in mind the interest of the Leader of the House in the subject. I was somewhat perturbed to hear the hon. Lady say that her pursuit of meetings has so far been unsuccessful. I have come to know the hon. Lady over the past seven years and she is, in the very best sense of the term, an extremely persistent Member. People who think that if they forever and a day refuse to meet the hon. Lady she will go away and drop her point of concern are probably guilty of a triumph of optimism over reality.

CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WORK BILL [*LORDS*] (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That the Order of 5 December 2016 (Children and Social Work Bill [*Lords*] (Programme)) be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the order shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings on Consideration shall be taken as shown in the following Table and in the order so shown.

(3) Each part of the proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on the day on which those proceedings are commenced, at the time specified in relation to it in the second column of the Table.

Table

Proceedings	Time for conclusion of proceeding
New Clauses and new Schedules relating to the welfare of children, except any relating to the subject-matter of Chapter 3 of Part 1; amendments to Part 1, except any relating to Chapter 3 of that Part.	One and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.
New Clauses and new Schedules relating to the subject-matter of Chapter 3 of Part 1; amendments to Chapter 3 of Part 1; remaining proceedings on Consideration.	Three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(4) Proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion four hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

Children and Social Work Bill [*Lords*]

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 15

EDUCATION RELATING TO RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision requiring—

(a) relationships education to be provided to pupils of compulsory school age receiving primary education at schools in England;

(2) The regulations must include provision—

(a) requiring the Secretary of State to give guidance to proprietors of schools in relation to the provision of the education and to review the guidance from time to time;

(b) requiring proprietors of schools to have regard to the guidance;

(c) requiring proprietors of schools to make statements of policy in relation to the education to be provided, and to make the statements available to parents or other persons;

(3) The regulations must provide that guidance given by virtue of subsection (2)(a) is to be given with a view to ensuring that when relationships education or relationships and sex education is given—

(a) the pupils learn about—

(i) safety in forming and maintaining relationships,

(ii) the characteristics of healthy relationships, and

(iii) how relationships may affect physical and mental health and well-being, and

(b) the education is appropriate having regard to the age and the religious background of the pupils.

(4) The regulations may make further provision in connection with the provision of relationships education, or relationships and sex education.

(5) Before making the regulations, the Secretary of State must consult such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(6) The regulations may amend any provision (including provision conferring powers) that is made by or under—

(a) section 342 of the Education Act 1996;

(b) Chapter 4 of Part 5 of the Education Act 1996;

(c) Schedule 1 to the Education Act 1996;

(d) Part 6 of the Education Act 2002;

(e) Chapter 1 of Part 4 of the Education and Skills Act 2008;

(f) the Academies Act 2010.

(7) Any duty to make provision by regulations under subsection (1) may be discharged by making that provision by regulations under another Act, so long as the Secretary of State consults such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate before making the regulations under that Act.

(8) The provision that may be made by regulations under subsection (1) by virtue of section 70 includes, in particular, provision amending, repealing or revoking any provision made by or under any Act or any other instrument or document (whenever passed or made).

(9) Regulations under subsection (1) which amend provision made by or under an Act are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

(10) Other regulations under subsection (1) are subject to the negative resolution procedure.

(11) Expressions used in this section, where listed in the left-hand column of the table in section 580 of the Education Act 1996, are to be interpreted in accordance with the provisions of that Act listed in the right-hand column in relation to those expressions.”—(*Edward Timpson.*)

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to make regulations requiring relationships education to be taught in primary schools in England and requiring relationships and sex education to be taught in secondary schools in England. The duties would apply in relation to Academy schools and independent schools as well as maintained schools.

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.29 pm

The Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families (Edward Timpson): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment (b) to new clause 15, in subsection (2), leave out “from time to time” and insert “at least once in every three year period”.

Amendment (a) to new clause 15, in subsection (2), leave out paragraph (d) and insert—

“(d) to allow a parent of any pupil receiving relationships education or relationships and sex education to request that the pupil be wholly or partly excused from receiving that education and for the pupil to be so excused.”

Amendment (c) to new clause 15, in subsection (2), at end insert—

“(e) about arrangements for inspecting the quality of teaching of relationships and sex education at schools in England.”

Amendment (d) to new clause 15, in subsection (4), at end insert—

“(4A) The Secretary of State must review the regulations at least three years after they come into force and once in every three year period thereafter.”

Amendment (e), to new clause 15 in subsection (4), at end insert—

“(4A) The Secretary of State must review the regulations from time to time.”

Government new clause 16—*Other personal, social, health and economic education.*

New clause 1—*Safeguarding: provision of personal, social and health education—*

“(1) For the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children a local authority in England must ensure that pupils educated in their area receive appropriate personal, social and health education.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) “personal, social and health education” must include but shall not be restricted to—

- (a) sex and relationships education,
- (b) same-sex relationships,
- (c) sexual consent,
- (d) sexual violence,
- (e) online and offline personal safety, and
- (f) domestic violence and forms of abuse.

(3) Targeted inspections carried out by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 shall include an assessment of the provision of personal, social and health education under subsection (1), including whether the information provided to pupils is—

- (a) accurate and balanced,
- (b) age-appropriate,
- (c) inclusive,
- (d) factual, and
- (e) religiously diverse.

(4) Assessments made under subsection (3) must include an evaluation of any arrangements for pupils of sufficient maturity to request to be wholly or partly excused from participating in personal, social and health education.

(5) For the purpose of subsection (4) “sufficient maturity” shall be defined in guidance by the Secretary of State.

(6) Withdrawal from personal, social and health education by pupils under subsection (4) shall not be considered a breach of the safeguarding duties of a local authority.

(7) This section comes into force at the end of the period of twelve months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.”

New clause 3—*Sibling contact for looked after children—*

“(1) In section 34(1) of the Children Act 1989, after paragraph (d) insert—

“(e) his siblings (whether of the whole or half blood).”

(2) In paragraph 15(1) of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989, after paragraph (c) insert—

“(d) his siblings (whether of the whole or half blood).”

This new clause would ensure that children in care are allowed reasonable contact with their siblings.

New clause 4—*Placing children in secure accommodation elsewhere in Great Britain—*

“(1) Schedule (Placing children in secure accommodation elsewhere in Great Britain) ends at the end of the period of two years beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.”

This new clause would revoke provisions in the Bill that enable local authorities in England and Wales to place children in secure accommodation in Scotland, and vice versa, two years after the Act comes into force.

New clause 7—*Post-removal counselling for parents and legal guardians who are themselves looked after children or care leavers—*

“Where a child is permanently removed from the care of a birth parent or a guardian further to any order made pursuant to—

- (a) section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (care and supervision orders),
- (b) section 22 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (placement orders),
- (c) section 46 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (adoption orders), or
- (d) section 14A of the Children Act 1989 (special guardianship order)

a local authority must, so far as is reasonably practicable, provide a counselling service and commission specialist therapeutic support for the parent or guardian where—

- (i) the parent or guardian is a looked after child, or
- (ii) the parent or guardian is a care leaver.”

This new clause would provide post-removal support for parents who are themselves a looked after child or care leaver.

New clause 8—*Former relevant children: provision of sufficient suitable accommodation—*

“In the Children Act 1989, after section 23C insert—

“23CA Duty on local authorities to secure sufficient accommodation for former relevant children

(1) It is the duty of a local authority to take reasonable steps to secure sufficient suitable accommodation (whether or not provided by them) within their area to meet the needs of former relevant children, where “former relevant children” has the same meaning as in section 23C(1) of this Act.

(2) In taking steps to secure the outcome in subsection (1), the local authority must—

- (a) produce, and make available to all former relevant children, information about the providers of accommodation and the types of accommodation they provide,

- (b) be aware of the current and expected future demand for such accommodation and consider how providers might meet that demand, and
- (c) have regard to—
 - (i) the need to ensure the sustainability of the housing market, and
 - (ii) the need to encourage providers to innovate and continuously improve the quality of such accommodation and the efficiency and effectiveness with which it is provided.”

Local authorities already have a duty to ensure that sufficient accommodation is available for looked after children in their area. This new clause would introduce a similar duty on local authorities to ensure sufficient, suitable accommodation is made available for all care leavers up the age of 21.

New clause 10—Benefit sanctions for care leavers—

“(1) The Universal Credit Regulations 2013 are amended as follows—

- (a) in regulation 102(2)—
 - (i) in paragraph (a) after “18 or over” insert “and paragraph (b) does not apply”;
 - (ii) in paragraph (b) after “16 or 17” insert “or is a care leaver within the meaning given by section 2(7) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and is under the age of 25”;
- (b) in regulation 103(2)—
 - (i) in paragraph (a) after “18 or over” insert “and paragraph (b) does not apply”;
 - (ii) in paragraph (b) after “16 or 17” insert “or is a care leaver within the meaning given by section 2(7) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and is under the age of 25”;
- (c) in regulation 104(2) after “18 or over” insert “and section (3) does not apply”.
- (d) in regulation 104(3) after “16 or 17” insert “or is a care leaver within the meaning given by section 2(7) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and is under the age of 25.”

This new clause will ensure that the maximum sanction for a care leaver under the age of 25 can be no more than four weeks whilst under the age of 25, in line with 16 and 17 year olds.

New clause 11—National offer for care leavers—

“(1) The table in regulation 36 of the Universal Credit Regulations 2013 is amended as follows—

- (a) in column one after “single claimant aged 25 or over” insert—

“or former relevant child as defined under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 aged under 25”

- (b) in column one after “joint claimants where either is aged 25 or over” insert—

“or either are a former relevant child as defined under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 aged under 25”

(2) The Secretary of State will make provisions for bursaries to be available to all care leavers, who are undertaking their first year of a statutory apprenticeship, as defined in the Enterprise Act 2016 (the “care leaver apprenticeship bursary”)—

- (a) in this section “care leavers” has the same meaning as section 2(7) of this Act.
- (b) The bursary will be administered by local authorities on behalf of the Secretary of State in line with their corporate parenting responsibilities defined in section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- (c) The value of the bursary will be of equivalent value to the Higher Education Bursary outlined in The Children Act 1989 (Higher Education Bursary) (England) Regulations 2009.
- (d) Bursaries under this section will be disregarded for the purposes of calculating a claimant’s Universal Credit entitlements.

(3) The Housing Benefit Regulations 2009 are amended as follows—

- (a) in regulation 2, in the definition of “young individual”, in each of paragraphs (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f), for “22 years” substitute “25 years”.

(4) A statutory instrument containing regulations under this section may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.”

The National Offer will uprate the financial support available to care leavers under the age of 25 by: (1) extending the over 25 rate of standard allowance of Universal Credit to all care leavers under the age of 25; (2) placing a duty on the Secretary of State to make provisions for all care leavers under the age of 25 and in the first year of an apprenticeship to be paid a £2,000 bursary, which will be distributed by local authorities on her behalf; and (3) delaying the transition onto the Shared Accommodation rate of Local Housing Allowance until the age of 25.

New clause 12—Duty to maintain and report a local safeguarding and welfare capacity register—

“After section 16(E) of the Children Act 2004 (inserted by section 16 of this Act) insert—

“Duty to maintain and report a local safeguarding and welfare capacity register

(1) The safeguarding partners for a local authority area in England must assess, and maintain a register of, capacity to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the area.

(2) The assessment must include, but shall not be restricted to, an assessment of the number of additional children, including unaccompanied refugee children, that could be fully supported by children’s social care services in the area.

(3) At least once in every twelve month period—

- (a) the safeguarding partners must report the capacity assessment for that period to the Secretary of State, and
- (b) the Secretary of State must publish and lay before Parliament a single report setting out the information provided under paragraph (a) and any relevant information that may be provided by the devolved administrations.”

This new clause would require local safeguarding partners to assess their capacity to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area. This assessment must include the number of additional children the area could support, including unaccompanied refugee children. Local safeguarding partners would be required to report this information to the Secretary of State annually, who in turn would publish and lay before Parliament a single report, which may include any relevant information received from the devolved administrations.

New clause 13—Strategy for safeguarding of unaccompanied refugee children—

“(1) Within six months of this Act coming into force, the Secretary of State must develop and publish a strategy for the safeguarding of unaccompanied refugee children living in the United Kingdom (“the strategy”).

(2) The Secretary of State must publish a report on the progress of the strategy’s development at least once in every four week period prior to publication of the strategy.

(3) The strategy must include, but shall not be restricted to—

- (a) information clarifying the roles and responsibilities towards unaccompanied refugee children of any public agency the Secretary of State considers relevant, including in particular—
 - (i) the European Asylum Support Office,
 - (ii) local government service providers, and
 - (iii) the Children’s Commissioner;
- (b) information clarifying how safeguarding practices should differ for those children covered by the strategy who—

- (i) have family members in the United Kingdom, and
- (ii) do not have family members in the United Kingdom; and
- (c) recommendations on how to ensure full cost reimbursement to public agencies required to provide services under the strategy.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to develop and publish a strategy for safeguarding unaccompanied refugee children.

Amendment (a) to new clause 13, at end insert—

“(4) The Secretary of State must consult with devolved administrations before publishing the strategy.”

New clause 14—Local arrangements for reporting on capacity to provide children’s safeguarding and welfare services—

“After section 16E of the Children Act 2004 (inserted by section 16 of this Act) insert—

“Local arrangements for reporting on capacity to provide children’s safeguarding and welfare provision services

(1) At least once in every 12 month period, the safeguarding partners for a local authority area in England must report to the Secretary of State on their capacity to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

(2) The report must include, but shall not be restricted to, identification of capacity to provide safeguarding and welfare services to children who could be resettled in the area, including unaccompanied refugee children who could be transferred to the area from abroad including those with existing or current applications for transfer.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament the information received under subsection (1) in a single report.””

This new clause would require the local safeguarding partners in an area to report annually to the Secretary of State on what capacity they have to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in that area. This includes what capacity they have to resettle children, including unaccompanied refugee children, in the area. The Secretary of State would be required to lay before Parliament the information received from local authorities in a single report.

Amendment (a) to new clause 14, after “(1)” insert—

“and any relevant information that may be provided by the devolved administrations”.

New clause 20—Review of access to education for care leavers—

“(1) The Secretary of State must carry out an annual review on access for care leavers to—

- (a) apprenticeships,
- (b) further education, and
- (c) higher education.

(2) The first review must take place by the end of the period of one year beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(3) A report produced following a review under subsection (1) must include, in particular, an assessment of the impact on care leavers’ access to education of—

- (a) fee waivers,
- (b) grants, and
- (c) reduced costs of accommodation.

The report must be made publicly available.”

Amendment 12, in clause 12, page 10, line 30, at end insert—

“(3A) At least one member of the panel appointed by the Secretary of State under subsection (3) must—

- (a) be independent from Government, and
- (b) have relevant specialist expertise in tackling domestic abuse.”

This amendment would require that at least one member of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has specialist expertise in tackling domestic abuse.

Amendment 1, in clause 16, page 13, line 34, at end insert—

“, including unaccompanied refugee children once placed in the area, and unaccompanied refugee children who have been identified for resettlement in the area.”

Amendment 3, page 13, line 34, at end insert—

“(1A) The safeguarding partners for a local authority area in England must conduct and publish a review of the steps taken by that local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children since 1 June 2010, including an assessment of the impact of Government policies since that date.

(1B) The Government policies to be considered under subsection (1A) are those deemed by the safeguarding partners to be relevant to the safeguarding and welfare of children.”

This amendment would require the safeguarding partners for a local authority area in England to conduct a review of steps they have taken to safeguard and promote the welfare of children since 1 June 2010, including an assessment of the impact of Government policies since that date.

Amendment 2, in clause 22, page 17, line 30, at end insert—

“(3) Guidance given by the Secretary of State in connection with functions conferred by section 16E in relation to unaccompanied refugee children must be developed in accordance with the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

Edward Timpson: I shall deal first with new clauses 15 and 16, which relate to relationships and sex education and personal, social, health and economic education. I shall then respond to key points raised in other new clauses and amendments. I shall ensure that they are covered within the time that is available under the now agreed programme motion, as I am conscious that many other Members wish to speak.

Many Members on both sides of the House have worked hard for some years to increase awareness of the issues to which new clauses 15 and 16 refer and the case for statutory underpinning of relationships and sex education and PSHE, and I thank them for their efforts. My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), along with the Chairs of the Health, Education, Home Affairs and Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committees and the hon. Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), have been particularly strong supporters of that approach.

Relationships education, RSE and PSHE can help to ensure that pupils are given the knowledge and skills that they will need to stay safe and develop healthy, supportive relationships. That is particularly important when they are navigating the new challenges of growing up in an online world. Parents, of course, are the primary educators and guides of their children, and we should not forget that: they play a central role both in helping their children to grow up into successful adults and in protecting them from harm. However, parents are telling us that they want schools to help them to deal with what are complex and fast-moving issues to ensure that their children grow up equipped with the knowledge and skills that they need to be safe and successful. Our proposals to make these subjects compulsory are supported by professionals working in the field, by parents and carers, and, importantly, by children and young people themselves.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I warmly welcome these vital and long overdue new clauses, but it would be helpful if the Minister could provide some reassurance that relationship education in primary schools will not exclude key age-appropriate information that relates to physical health, wellbeing and the safety of children, because that is an area of concern that is still outstanding. I am thinking of, for instance, the difference between safe and unsafe touch, and the naming of body parts that are private.

Edward Timpson: I can reassure the hon. Lady that the whole purpose of bringing relationships education into primary schools is to start creating the all-important building blocks that will make children resilient enough to deal with the pressures and risks that the modern world throws at them. The new clauses are intended to allow a period after the Bill has gone through both Houses during which we can draw on the greatest possible expertise to establish how we should go about teaching these subjects in an age-appropriate way, so that by the time the children leave school they have all the knowledge and skills that they need to make good choices in their lives as they grow up.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

Edward Timpson: I will, but I should make it clear to Members that I do not want to curtail the opportunities for others to have their say, and I want to deal with other aspects of the Bill as well.

Mr Sheerman: The Minister will remember what we discussed in those happy days when we served together on the Education Committee. It is all very well to have an obligation, and this is a real step forward, but the fact is that if we do not give the people in the schools real professional training, it will not work.

Edward Timpson: We served on that Committee such a while ago that it was then called the Children, Schools and Families Committee. In 2013, Ofsted acknowledged that the teaching of these subjects was still not as good as it should be. We shall be working with teachers and schools so that they understand how to develop their understanding of and ability to teach these subjects, so that there is consistency throughout the education system.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Will the Minister include the Church of England in his list of organisations that support the Government's proposals? Despite its support, the Church seeks reassurance that relationships education will be respectful of the ethos of the schools where it is taught.

Edward Timpson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that clear indication of the Church of England's support for the step that we are taking. Having engaged with the Church and with representatives of other faiths throughout the process, I am aware of that support. The religious faith that brings many people into the education system will be respected as it has been in the past: that is reflected in the Bill, and will be reflected in the regulations and statutory guidance that will follow.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Edward Timpson: I will give way briefly, but then I want to try to make some progress.

Dr Lewis: New clause 15 draws a distinction between relationships education provided for primary school children and relationships and sex education provided for secondary school children. Can the Minister confirm that that does not mean that sex education will be smuggled into primary schools under the label "relationships education"?

Edward Timpson: A clear distinction is drawn by the very name of each of those subjects. The new clause makes plain that sex education will not be a statutory part of primary school teaching. Of course, if primary schools choose to teach sex education in an age-appropriate way, as they can now, they will be able to do so, but the right to withdraw from that will still apply, as it does in secondary schools.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con) *rose*—

Edward Timpson: I will give way to my hon. Friend, but then I must make some more progress.

Dr Poulter: I congratulate my hon. Friend and the Secretary of State on new clause 15, which is long overdue, but may I ask a specific question about faith schools and other schools of that type? New clause 15(3)(b) states that it must be ensured that

"the education is appropriate having regard to the age and the religious background of the pupils."

Will my hon. Friend confirm that that will not allow faith schools to avoid providing such education because they consider it to be inappropriate?

Edward Timpson: The education will become a statutory part of the curriculum, so schools will have to provide it. The duty and the power that we are creating will enable schools to teach the new subjects in an age-appropriate way that is commensurate with their religious faith and will best suit their pupils in the setting in which they happen to be, but what my hon. Friend has said is absolutely correct.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Edward Timpson: I will, but I shall then impose a moratorium on any further interventions.

Sir Gerald Howarth: Who will decide what is age-appropriate, and where is there any reference in any of these provisions to the moral dimension of this very important issue?

Edward Timpson: The moral aspect is already covered by British values and the teaching of citizenship, and that is in no way curtailed by these provisions. As for the question of what is age appropriate, the concept already exists in the current system. I repeat that the Bill will be underpinned by regulations and statutory guidance,

[Edward Timpson]

which will set out in more detail exactly how it will be translated into reality. That is a strong and consistent approach, which we think will strike the right balance between enabling children to develop the resilience and skills that they need and ensuring that that is done in an age-appropriate way.

We know that many schools are already teaching these subjects, and that some are doing so very well, but we believe that it is right for us to do all we can both to provide universal coverage for all pupils and to improve quality. Given the increasing concerns about child sexual abuse and exploitation, and the increased risks associated with growing up in a digital world, there is a particularly compelling case for action in relation to pupil safety. New clause 15 places a duty on the Secretary of State to make relationships education in primary schools and relationships and sex education in secondary schools statutory by means of regulations. We believe that that is the right approach because it will allow us time to engage with a wide range of interests and expertise. The outcome of that engagement will feed into the legislative process for making these subjects statutory, as well as the guidance that will help schools to deliver high-quality, inclusive relationships education and RSE.

New clause 16 creates a regulation-making power to enable the Secretary of State to make PSHE statutory. We are aware that the most pressing safeguarding concerns relate to relationships and RSE, but it is evident that wider concerns about child safety and wellbeing relate to the life skills that the subject can cover, such as an understanding of the risks of drugs and alcohol and the need to safeguard physical and mental health. We therefore believe that it is important that we are able to make PSHE, or elements of it, statutory as well, and have the time to consider carefully the fit between the content of relationships education and RSE and what might be included in the PSHE curriculum. The work to consider content will begin this spring, and we expect that it will result in draft regulations and guidance for consultation this autumn. Following consultation, regulations will be laid in the House, alongside final draft guidance, allowing for full and considered debate, and we expect that statutory guidance will be published in early 2018, once the regulations have been passed and at least one full year before the academic year 2019-20.

We do not think it is right to specify in primary legislation the exact content of the subjects, as this would be too prescriptive and would remove freedom from schools and run the risk of the legislation quickly becoming out of date as the world changes ever more quickly. The Department's external engagement will determine subject content, working with a wide range of experts and interested parties. We will ensure through careful review and consultation that our work results in a clear understanding about the full set of knowledge and skills that relationships education, RSE and PSHE should provide.

Our proposed legislation is also clear that subject content will be age appropriate. We expect the new subject of relationships education for primary schools to focus on themes such as friendships, different types of family relationships, bullying, and respect for other people. We see this as vitally important in laying the foundations for RSE at secondary school.

Across relationships education and RSE, we expect to cover in an age-appropriate way how to recognise and build healthy relationships, and how they affect health and wellbeing and safety online. This can include dealing with strangers, respect, bullying and peer pressure, commitment and tolerance, and appropriate boundaries. I want to emphasise again to hon. Members that our priority will be to ensure that content is always age appropriate. In RSE at secondary school, content would also include sex and sexual health, all set firmly within the context of healthy relationships. In relation to online issues, internet safety is a cross-Government agenda, so these plans are closely aligned to the internet safety Green Paper due later this year.

In addition to relationships education and RSE, we acknowledge that pupils need to access other key knowledge and skills for adult life, and those are generally covered in PSHE. For PSHE, we want to take the time to consult widely, as I said, on what the subject content could best look like, respecting what our engagement process determines as the right content for relationships education and RSE. We will be looking at what might be needed under the broad pillars of healthy bodies and lifestyles, healthy minds, economic wellbeing, and making a positive contribution to society. We would expect this to include issues such as keeping safe, puberty, drugs and alcohol education, mental health and resilience, and careers education.

Schools will, of course, continue to teach in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the public sector equality duty. This means that schools can consider how best to teach subject content taking into account the age and religious backgrounds of their pupils and any other relevant factors, but not whether to teach the content.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Given that 45% of primary school children have experienced, or are aware of, homophobic bullying, can the Minister clarify how that fits into the curriculum at that age?

Edward Timpson: I have indicated that we expect bullying to be covered in primary school, and of course we have to cover all facets of bullying, as it comes in many forms. Of course, it will be a matter for the school to make sure that that is age appropriate, and it will start to put in place the building blocks of the development of that child's understanding, ensuring that by the time they move on to secondary school they are well placed to move on to the next level of subject matter that they will need to understand.

Schools will need to ensure that RSE is inclusive and meets the needs of all young people.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am yet another Select Committee Chair who very much welcomes this development and the courage with which the Government are putting it forward, but there is a point to be made about what is allowed to be taught in primary schools and the fact that children's experiences start well before they leave primary school. They are learning about these things and asking questions about them long before they leave primary school, and there is nothing in this Bill that will prevent teachers from responding to curiosity and dealing with these issues as they arise in the normal course of any other part of their education.

Edward Timpson: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's indication as a Select Committee Chair that he joins the club of Chairmen who support this important move. He is right that there is scope within these measures for schools to tailor their response to this subject matter in a way that best meets the needs of their pupils. There is already some excellent material available from the likes of the PSHE Association that sets out how they can do that in an age-appropriate way and in a way that meets the challenges that we know the modern world throws at children at an ever more tender age.

1.45 pm

The regulations and guidance we produce will make very clear the expectation that schools will have the flexibility to teach subjects in accordance with their ethos and pupils' religious backgrounds. The Secretary of State must give schools guidance on how to deliver this, and this provision enables faith schools to teach their subjects according to the tenets of their faith, while still being consistent with the requirements of the Equality Act.

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, chairman of the Catholic Education Service, said in support of these proposals:

"We welcome the Government's commitment to improving Relationship and Sex Education in all schools. Catholic schools already teach age-appropriate Relationship and Sex Education in both primary and secondary schools."

Nigel Genders, the Church of England's chief education officer, said:

"With one million children being educated in Church of England schools, we are all too well aware of the pressing need to equip children for the world in which they are growing up. . . . We therefore welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to putting Relationships and Sex Education on a statutory footing."

We have committed to retain a right to withdraw from sex education in RSE, because parents should have the right, if they wish, to teach sex education themselves in a way that is consistent with their values. We do not propose a right to withdraw from relationships education at primary level, because that will focus, as I said, on themes such as friendships, family relationships and dealing with strangers, not sex education.

Pupils will learn about the characteristics of healthy relationships that we can all agree on, such as respect, commitment, tolerance and proper boundaries. Knowing and understanding these characteristics, including how to build such healthy relationships, will help children be happy and, crucially, safe from others, such as in situations where they might try to exploit a lack of clarity about what is and is not acceptable.

Schools will continue to be required to publish policies on these subjects for parents, and statutory guidance will continue to set out that schools should consult parents on those policies to ensure they are feeding in their views. For those parents who still prefer to provide this education themselves, we absolutely intend to retain a right to withdraw from sex education. We will, as part of this, need to amend the current right to withdraw to make sure it remains in line with case law, and we will consult further to clarify the age at which a young person may have the right to make their own decisions about whether or not to withdraw from that aspect of their education. I want to assure Members that the outcome will be set out in regulations, which will be subject to consultation and debate.

It is important to note that relationship and sex education falls within the scope of school inspection. Inspections will check to see that a school is providing the full statutory curriculum, and these issues can also be considered within the context of assessing the school's leadership, the quality of teaching, pupil safety and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Key elements are already covered in Ofsted's school inspection handbook, and Her Majesty's chief inspector will take full account of the new requirements in determining future school inspection arrangements. Ofsted is already seeking to appoint an HMI lead for citizenship and PSHE, whose role will be to keep abreast of developments in this area and oversee the training of inspectors in light of the new expectations on schools. Independent schools will also be held to account through inspectors reporting against the independent school standards.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): The Minister is making a strong case, but is he not asking us to enter into an incongruous position, as we do not yet know what the regulations will be in respect of relationship education, but at the same time he is asking the House to support removing the capacity of parents to remove their children from relationship education in primary schools? He is asking us to support something although we do not know the true details therein.

Edward Timpson: What I am asking the House to do is support these new clauses that maintain the right to withdraw from sex education that currently pertains, but the House will also have an opportunity under the regulatory process to scrutinise, and take part in addressing, what those regulations should look like and approve them or not, and I am sure my hon. Friend will want to play a part in doing just that.

We will commit to reviewing the statutory guidance on RSE within three years of its publication, and to a regular timetable after that, set out following our engagement process. This will help to ensure that it stays relevant as the world changes. We will also ensure that the regulations are regularly reviewed to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose. Specifying the timetable for review on the face of the Bill is not necessary as we are already under a public law duty to review the powers we take in legislation, but I can assure hon. Members, and particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), that the statutory guidance will make clear how regularly this guidance will be reviewed, balancing continuity for schools with the crucial need to keep content up to date.

I recognise the deep concern in the House about the safety and welfare of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children. I should emphasise, however, that my ministerial responsibility extends only to children who are in England. The new local safeguarding arrangements that will be established through the Bill will apply to England only. I accept that other jurisdictions ought to pay equal attention to the safeguarding of children who reside within their borders, and I accept that we should share details of our plans and best practice.

The Government have committed to publishing a safeguarding strategy for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children by 1 May 2017 by virtue of the

[*Edward Timpson*]

written ministerial statement that I laid on 1 November last year. As part of this, we have been consulting local authorities about their capacity and we will set out plans to boost capacity for foster carers and supported lodgings in that strategy. We will continue to consult local authorities about their capacity to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children, to help us to identify those authorities that are most able to support unaccompanied children and those needing support through the national transfer scheme. To that end, we are happy to commit to updating Parliament annually on delivery against the safeguarding strategy and to publishing regular updates on the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children transferred to or resettled in the UK, by country of transfer.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Minister is making a powerful case. On that specific point, it is necessary to record not only how many children go into local authority care but how many are retained there and how much they keep in contact. If we put children into care and they are subsequently trafficked, we are not protecting them.

Edward Timpson: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and we have worked hard to try to improve how we manage, understand and curtail the number of children who go missing while in care. Some of them have come from overseas, including France, and many are from our own country. We should use the Bill as an opportunity to improve the data so that we have as contemporaneous a picture as possible of where those children are, not only to inform us of the capacity in the system but to allow us to help them better.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): It has occurred to me as the Minister has been talking that we already have 3,000 or so unaccompanied asylum-seeking children coming to the United Kingdom and that the burden of caring for those children is falling disproportionately on a few local authorities. Is he planning to say a little bit about how the information that he will publish on local authorities throughout the country will help the national transfer scheme to operate to enable that burden to be more fairly distributed across our constituencies?

Edward Timpson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. He touches on a key part of how we can improve the system through the national transfer scheme. We know that Kent and Croydon in particular have taken a disproportionate number of children, and we have been working with local authorities to find a better way of ensuring that we find a safe, stable home for them while more effectively starting to spread them across the country.

In making the commitment I have just given, it is important to note that local areas already have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): It is welcome that the Minister will publish information on each local authority. Will he publish the

number that each one will be prepared to take from abroad, including from Europe? That is the content of new clause 14, which refers to

“unaccompanied refugee children who could be transferred to the area from abroad”.

Does this also mean that the Government will continue to take children under the Dubs scheme after the 350 that they have specified? Yes or no?

Edward Timpson: The Home Secretary has set out the Government’s position in relation to the Dubs scheme. What we are trying to do is look at the overall capacity within local authorities, not just for specific groups of children but for all children, whatever route they have used to come into England and across the United Kingdom. Yesterday, I sent the first quarterly update on progress on the development of the strategy to all the UK children’s commissioners. Last Friday, the Department published for consultation draft statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and trafficked children. I believe that these actions demonstrate our continued commitment to those children, and we want to carry on working with local authorities and all those who work with them to ensure that we can give every child who comes to these shores a safe and stable home.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Building on the question from the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), I appreciate that my hon. Friend is an Education Minister, but will he consider extending the safeguarding strategy—which sounds very attractive, as does the regular consultation with local authorities, which should be available to Parliament—beyond the Syrian region, beyond children arriving on trucks and beyond children who are already in the UK care system? Would he consider extending these services to children coming from Europe?

Edward Timpson: We have made it clear how, through the national transfer scheme, we want to ensure that we help the children we have identified as requiring help the most, including those who fall out of the Dublin scheme. We are trying to understand exactly what the capacity is in the system. I am not in a position to say any more than the Home Secretary has already said about the Government’s commitments, but we have clearly made a strong commitment to utilising any latent capacity in local authority children’s services, so that we do not miss an opportunity to help the children who need it.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Would the Minister accept that many local authorities in Wales are anxious to play their part in helping refugees, and indeed have been doing so for a number of years? They include Plaid Cymru-led Ceredigion. It is important that the Government are aware of the capacity that exists outside the usually recognised areas.

Edward Timpson: My understanding is that Wales took part in the consultation and, as I said a few moments ago, I have written to the Children’s Commissioner for Wales to update her on the progress we are making. Of course we want to work with local authorities to ensure that as many children as possible can benefit, through our combined efforts.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I welcome what the Minister is saying, but I am struggling to find anything in it that is inconsistent with new clause 14. Can he point it out to me?

Edward Timpson: The hon. Gentleman is going to have to be more specific about what his objection is. I would be happy to take it up with him at another time, but I am not in a position to answer a question that has not been formulated in a way that allows me to provide an answer.

I want to turn briefly to the question of sibling contact for looked-after children. I am sorry that the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) is not here today, and I am sure that the whole House will send her their best wishes. We both agree that allowing reasonable contact between looked-after children and their siblings is absolutely right, where that is in the best interests of the children involved. This is reflected in the current law. However, the hon. Lady has helpfully pointed out an anomaly in the current legislation whereby the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 provide for sibling contact with a sibling who is also looked after but do not refer to contact with siblings who are not looked after. I will therefore ask my officials to start the work needed to amend the regulations to address that question, and I will happily keep the hon. Lady informed of progress.

Finally, I should like to mention the support provided to care leavers who have their own children removed from them. Hon. Members are right to emphasise how important it is to support young parents who have had a child taken into care. They need the right kind of intervention to help them to cope with this challenging situation, so that they can be effective parents to any children they might have in the future. Statutory guidance is already clear about the arrangements that must be followed to ensure that the needs of children in care and care leavers are assessed and that appropriate support is put in place. The statutory guidance includes the need for comprehensive assessment of a young person's needs in relation to their emotional and mental health, including whether they need access to specialist health and therapeutic services. So, given the existing statutory guidance, I do not believe that it is necessary or appropriate to incorporate the proposed new clause into the Bill. I do, however, understand the importance of the issue, and I can confirm that I will ensure that the statutory guidance is strengthened to make clear the importance of providing appropriate support in the specific circumstances when a looked-after child or care leaver has a child of their own taken into care.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): I have never seen the House so crowded to discuss amendments, which shows the importance that we attach to the Bill. I fear that we may not get to my amendment about the welfare of all children, so may I come and talk to the Minister at some point? It deals with compelling local authorities to carry out an audit of all their policies and of Government policies on the welfare of children.

Edward Timpson: I am happy to commit to meet the right hon. Gentleman to see what we can do on that.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I appreciate the Minister's comments on new clause 7, which has cross-party support. There is welcome investment

from the Department in Pause and other programmes that provide support to vulnerable young women, but I want to check that the statutory guidance will ensure that such schemes get further cover. Those who have lost a child and are at risk due to vulnerabilities need therapeutic care support, so will this extra statutory guidance ensure that they get it?

2 pm

Edward Timpson: I can give my hon. Friend that reassurance. We want to ensure that every care leaver, whatever their circumstances, gets the support that they need. That particular group is often very vulnerable, and we must respond to that in the best possible way.

I am grateful to hon. Members for raising important issues, and I look forward to hearing more from them during the debate. If I get the opportunity at the end—I fear I will not—I will respond more fully, but I am always open for business if anyone wants to speak to me after the debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), I will point out what is demonstrably obvious: more than 10 Members wish to speak. The programme motion that the House has passed—it is not a matter for the Chair—is extremely tight, but I want Back Benchers to be heard. The Minister has set out the Government's position and the hon. Lady will set out the Opposition's position, but Back Benchers must be heard.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Let me reiterate that point and say how disappointing it is that the Government have allocated just 90 minutes to discuss all the issues relating to the welfare of the most vulnerable children, particularly when Back Benchers on both sides of the House contributed so much to the Bill.

Edward Timpson: I am sorry to have to rise again, Mr Speaker, but I should point out that the programme motion was agreed across the House, so it should not be a surprise to the Opposition.

Angela Rayner: I thank the Minister for that point, but there was dialogue about that before we came to the House, so he knows exactly where we stand.

I thank the Minister for his comments about my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck). She cannot be here today because she is on compassionate leave, but she put in a tremendous amount of work to take the Bill through the Committee. I will try to be brief and will put a limit on the interventions that I take.

First, and most importantly, I want to make it clear that we will support new clause 14, tabled by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen). My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields and I were happy to add our names to it and will add our votes to any Division on it. It is similar to our new clause 12, so I would like the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire to clarify whether "capacity" in her amendment has the same intention as it does in ours: an assessment of the

[Angela Rayner]

extra numbers that a council would take. New clause 13 complements those new clauses by ensuring that the Minister reflects those numbers in the national strategy. The Government have committed to provide that, but new clause 13 puts it on a statutory footing. It also provides for progress updates in the meantime, and I understand that some of those who should have received quarterly updates from the Government have yet to receive them. If the Minister is not prepared to accept the new clause, I hope that he will commit to come back with an update. However, I reserve my right to press our amendments to a vote if the Minister does not address those concerns.

Given the time available, I will not rehearse the issues at length, but I echo the points made in recent days by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). I hope that we will hear from them in today's debate. Our care for child refugees says something about us as a country. I hope that we take a lead from the example set in the debate in the other place and can hold our heads up high at the end of today.

I turn now to our amendments about vulnerable children already in our care, who should not be overlooked in this debate. New clause 3 requires local authorities to allow children in care reasonable contact with their siblings, and I welcome the Minister's commitment to future dialogue on that. New clause 4 has arisen because, quite simply, we have been sending our most vulnerable looked after children to Scotland due to the lack of specialist provision closer to their homes, families, schools, and local services. New clause 4 gives Ministers two years to sort out secure accommodation in England and Wales, so that any future secure placements in Scotland are made through choice, not constraint.

Section 25 of the Children Act 1989 was changed in Committee so that children looked after by English or Welsh local authorities can be detained in secure accommodation in Scotland. As the Minister said, that was a recognition that it is already happening. Vulnerable children are being sent to a different country, with different legal and education systems, because we have failed to provide for them close to their homes and communities. Changes in Committee also removed the requirement to obtain the consent of the parents and the child. Is it right not to get a child's consent before they are moved to Scotland? They will also lose their right to independent periodic review, and I have yet to hear a convincing argument from the Minister as to why. The High Court suggested a joint review by the Law Commission, which would surely be better than a fix behind closed doors, and I hope the Minister will consider it.

We offer our support to the hon. Members on both sides who tabled new clause 7, a version of which my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields tabled in Committee. I hope the Minister will indicate that he will take up the issue through statutory guidance if he cannot accept the new clause.

New clause 8 would establish a clear statutory duty on local authorities to secure sufficient, suitable accommodation for all care leavers up to age 21. I am sure that I do not need to tell the Minister why that is

important, but Government figures show that too many care leavers are in unsuitable or unknown accommodation. All of us who are parents of young adults are aware of the modern challenges they face and of the fact that they need support beyond their teenage years. In Committee, the Minister referred to the care leavers accommodation and support framework developed by Barnardo's and St Basil's, but funding for that ends next month. He referred to care leavers as a priority group for social housing, but that is not the same as a legal duty and does not mean that it happens in practice. If he cannot accept new clause 8, perhaps he will agree to meet to discuss how we can achieve its basic aim.

New clause 10 seeks to reduce to four weeks the maximum level of sanctioning for care leavers on universal credit. The Minister will be aware of the shockingly high rate of sanctioning experienced by care leavers and will know that care leavers are three times more likely to receive a sanction than a member of the general population. They are also less likely to challenge sanctions, but they are more likely to have them overturned. When a care leaver sits down with a work coach for the first time, will the Minister tell us what steps he is taking to ensure that their status is known and that they are treated accordingly? The Children's Society told me that they worked with a care leaver who was sanctioned over Christmas and had to choose between feeding himself or his pregnant girlfriend. That is not the behaviour of a good corporate parent, and I hope we can hear more about what the Minister will do about that.

In line with other elements of the Bill, new clause 11 seeks to promote the financial stability of care leavers up to the age of 25. It would support care leavers into work and apprenticeships and would protect their finances when living in private rented accommodation. Young people under the age of 25 receive a lower rate of universal credit, but care leavers tend to take on more responsibility earlier. New clause 11 would extend the higher rate to care leavers under the age of 25. At about £780 a year, the difference for a low income individual would be significant. Care leavers will receive a £2,000 bursary when entering higher education, but they are not entitled to an equivalent when engaging in apprenticeships. Given the Government's emphasis on skills, I hope they will consider such a measure.

Care leavers in private rented accommodation also experience a cut of some £50 a week to their housing benefit when they turn 22. The Minister has asked the Children's Society for case studies, which it has provided to the Department. Perhaps the Minister could respond.

We estimate the cost of the new clause to be some £32.9 million, which is not a significant sum of money when we consider the ultimate cost to the state of failing properly to support care leavers. The Bill provides an opportunity for the Government to take responsibility for some of the financial difficulties experienced by care leavers, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

New clause 20 calls for an annual review of care leavers' access to education and for the Government to produce a report of the impact of that access. If my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) presses her amendments to a vote, we will support her.

The Department's own statistics show that only 6% of care leavers go to university, compared with 38% of all young people. Almost a third of children in care leave school with no GCSEs or GNVQs. That is not their

failure but ours. I urge everyone in the Chamber today to reflect on that. We are failing these children and young adults, and it is our duty to turn those numbers around.

Finally, one issue on which we can congratulate all concerned is the progress we have made on sex and relationships education. A great deal of work has gone into getting to this stage, for which I thank my Front-Bench colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Walthamstow, for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), in whose names new clause 1 stands.

I also acknowledge the work of the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes). I will support the amendment that they and the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) have tabled to new clause 15. I hope the Minister will be able to address the point without division, in either sense of the word.

Caroline Lucas: Does the hon. Lady agree that, on the question of the right contained in new clause 15 for parents to withdraw their children from sex education lessons, we need to ask challenging questions on whether it can ever be right to deny a child their entitlement to vital education through good, age-appropriate information, not least because we know how important that is to keeping them safe?

Angela Rayner: I take on board the hon. Lady's point. There has to be balance, and there has been considerable movement in that direction. I pay tribute to the Government for moving on that issue. Hopefully we can tease that out as we go through the finer details.

However, I seek clarification from the Minister on certain points of new clause 15. First, the coalition Government withdrew funding for the personal, social and health and economic education continuing professional development programme. That policy made it much more difficult for teachers to access the necessary training, thus lowering quality. Will the Government commit to any new resources for teacher training and continuing professional development, to ensure that relationships and sex education provision is of high quality?

I reiterate the earlier contributions to this debate that, at first glance, there is no explicit mention of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues in new clause 15. We have evidence from Stonewall and others that excluding LGBT children and the issues they encounter daily from existing relationships and sex education has a damaging impact on their health, wellbeing and attainment at school. Do the Government commit to ensuring that the new statutory guidance is inclusive of LGBT issues in an age-appropriate way? Will the Government consult expert organisations in doing so?

We know that the nature of relationships and sex education will change, which means changes to statutory guidance.

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

Angela Rayner: The hon. Gentleman had loads of time to seek to intervene when the Minister was speaking.

Will the Government convene an expert group to ensure that, as the statutory guidance is updated, it covers the broad depth of topics required in RSE? Which organisations will be part of that group? On that issue at least, the House has spoken and the Government have listened. I urge the Government to do the same again on the other amendments before the House today. Many of the most vulnerable children depend on us, and we must not let them down.

2.15 pm

Heidi Allen: I rise to speak to new clause 14, which is in my name. My interest in the Bill is born out of the refugee crisis sweeping across Europe. I am interested in how the Bill might apply to safeguarding children in our care. The Government have a tremendous record in the Syria region, but, for me and for many in the House, there remains a big issue in Europe that has still not been addressed. How we safeguard children who might come to us from Europe is a matter close to all our hearts.

Let us get the elephant out there. For many of us, this debate is about the Dubs amendment and whether we can bring it back to life. The heart of the amendment is about consulting local authorities on their capacity. Why is that of interest to us? It specifically interests me because since the Government announced that the Dubs scheme would be closed, local authorities across the country have stepped forward to say that they can do more. If there is that capacity, we must have a safeguarding strategy and something that extracts such information from local authorities on a regular basis, rather than just once up to the end of this financial year. That is powerful information, and we must know it.

What I am interested to hear from the Minister, and I still have not heard it—this will affect how I feel about pressing new clause 14 to a vote—is to whom the safeguarding strategy, which is the subject of ongoing consultation with local authorities, will apply. Will it be children in Europe who may potentially come to us as refugees or asylum seekers? Is it just for children in Syria and the region, or is it just for those arriving under their own steam following dangerous but hard-fought journeys by truck and train?

This refugee crisis will not end neatly at the end of this financial year, so our ability to consult local authorities to understand their capacity must not end neatly at the end of this financial year, either. The timescale of the strategies we are debating today—for consulting local authorities and caring for children in our care and for unaccompanied children who come to us as refugees or asylum seekers—must be maintained over and beyond the end of this financial year.

I remind the House that Lewisham asked for 23 children but has so far been sent one. Bristol has been sent zero out of 10. Gloucestershire would like 10 but has been sent only two. Those small numbers add up. Small gestures of individual generosity collectively make us leaders.

Mr Harper: My hon. Friend mentions my local authority, Gloucestershire, which I am pleased has been able to play a part in this process. What is her response to the point that the Minister made, and that I made to the Minister, about significant numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children already coming to the United

[*Mr Harper*]

Kingdom? The burden of caring for those children falls disproportionately, so if councils such as Lewisham and others have some capacity, should they not be helping to support councils like Croydon and Kent that are bearing a significant burden? Importing yet more children is drawing more children to undertake dangerous journeys to Europe that may lead them to their death.

Heidi Allen: That is the strength of a decent consultation. I and many of us in this House believe that we can do both. The new clause allows us to spread the burden. It is tough, as some councils have borne a disproportionate burden of responsibility on their shoulders. Those councils have done amazingly, and it is time that other local authorities that have capacity share some of that burden. Guess what? If we consult as well as I think we can, I sense that we will find that we have capacity to manage both.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I declare my interest. My hon. Friend knows that I put my name to the amendment and that I support her. I do not want to get hung up on any particular scheme, Dubs or otherwise, because the Government have done an awful lot across many schemes, as the Home Affairs Committee has seen. Many authorities have come forward, and my concern is that we need to know exactly what capacity they realistically have to care for refugee children without there being a detriment to indigenous children, for whom there is a crisis in the number of foster care and residential children's home places. The amendment might achieve that, whatever she might think.

Heidi Allen: Absolutely, and not least because of the refugee crisis. This is good housekeeping. It is good for us to have transparent data so that we can understand the capacity of our local authorities and our care system, which has to help children who are already in the UK care system.

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that local authorities are already reviewing capacity on a week-by-week basis? That is evident in the number of referrals coming out of London to look after our own British children. Does she accept that local authorities do this every day of the week?

Heidi Allen: I do, absolutely. For me, this debate is born out of the fact that some local authorities have stepped forward and said they are struggling incredibly, while others have stepped forward and said they do have capacity. Somewhere, we are not joining those two conversations together. I know there is further capacity out there for the betterment of the children in care in the UK and the refugee children.

Mr Burrowes: What the Minister said from the Dispatch Box did not seem too far away from what new clause 14 is seeking, which is to ensure that we recognise exactly what the capacity is for all children, including unaccompanied children. Is not the call for transparency the very call referred to in the Home Affairs Committee report, in which the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner said he would welcome greater transparency? He was charged with the duty of going there independently to find the answer, and he wants transparency.

Heidi Allen: Absolutely. The fact that not only Members of this House but individuals such as the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner are asking for this tells me that we need to do it.

Dame Caroline Spelman: Does my hon. Friend agree that capacity is constantly changing? In supporting the intention of the Dubs amendment, the Church of England made it clear that it would appeal for additional foster carers to come forward, not only for the children currently in the system but so that we could accommodate newcomers. If we are going to call for that, we have to provide the extra capacity that local authorities need.

Heidi Allen: Absolutely. I am so grateful for all the interventions, but I shall try to wrap up my speech.

The point is that the refugee crisis—indeed, the care crisis in our own country; we do not have enough foster carers—is an opportunity for us to do some decent housekeeping on the systems and to find out what capacity we have and where local authorities can step forward and do more. There is of course a debate to be had about funding. I know that some councils have said they are stretched, and the capacity conversation will draw out the argument about whether the funding is sufficient.

The majority of councils do not care where the children come from. I care that we take our fair share and help our neighbours in Europe, and I know that many other Members do, too. So that I am reassured by the Minister and do not press my new clause to a vote, I ask again: will the safeguarding strategy extend beyond the UK—that is, might it take into account refugees who may come here from Europe and further afield? Will the consultation results be made open to Parliament?

Yvette Cooper: I welcome the Government's measures on compulsory sex and relationship education and pay tribute to those on both sides of the House who have campaigned for it at a time when we know that violence in teen relationships is increasing and teenagers are exposed to so much more than we were as children.

In the short time available, I wish to confine my remarks to new clause 14, following on from the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen). Yesterday, the Home Affairs Committee published a report that was limited in its recommendations because it was an interim report. We called for the Government to clarify and publish local authorities' capacity to take children, including those from Europe under the Dubs scheme, and their further capacity in the next financial year. We also called on the Government to seek the views of the Anti-slavery Commissioner before making any changes to the Dubs scheme or closing it.

We made those recommendations because of the evidence we heard. First, on council capacity, Ministers have said that councils had only 350 places to provide for children coming from Europe under the Dubs scheme. We heard from councils that said they had not been properly consulted; that many of them, including Hammersmith and Fulham, Lewisham, Birmingham and Bristol, had more capacity; and that they could potentially deliver thousands more places, if they were properly funded. That is why new clause 14 is so sensible.

Mr Harper: The right hon. Lady is leaping to a potential solution, but without thinking through the Government's argument about why it would be a mistake. The whole point about providing capacity is that if one accepts the argument—I know she does not—that taking more children from Europe will mean that more will make dangerous journeys, on which many will die, it is fundamentally a mistake. She is leaping to a fundamentally mistaken solution to a very grave crisis.

Yvette Cooper: I understand the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes, but his view is rather different from the one taken by the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, who was appointed by the Government to champion action against modern slavery. I pay tribute to the Prime Minister and the Government for leading the way on a lot of work against modern slavery—they are right to do that—but the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner has described the Dubs scheme as a “safe and legal route” that has protected children who were being exploited. We have also heard from UNICEF that the

“cancellation of the Dubs scheme is a good win for people traffickers—there is money to be made, because children will try to get to their families or to places of safety one way or another.”

The point of the Dubs scheme was to prevent slavery. Surely the minimum the Government should do is to seek the further advice of the expert anti-slavery commissioner before they make any changes or close the scheme. If they want to persist in their view, they should at least test it against the evidence, not to mention listen to the many organisations and charities that have been arguing so strongly on the basis of the work they are doing with children and young people throughout Europe and other places who are at risk of being trafficked and being sucked into exploitation and sexual abuse. Children and teenagers have already come to Britain under the Dubs scheme who have been trafficked, sexually abused, raped and exploited. Now they are safe, thanks to Britain—thanks to the work that Britain has done as a result of the Dubs and Dublin schemes.

Mr Bone: I am listening carefully to the right hon. Lady. On that particular point, can she absolutely assure the House that the children we have taken into this country who have been trafficked have not been re-trafficked after coming here?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point. He and I have both raised the need to ensure that once children are here they do not fall prey to the same trafficking gangs, which will sometimes go to children's homes to seek them out. We know that, as a result of the Dubs scheme so far—in the mere six months for which it has been running—many children and teenagers are now safe with foster carers or in children's homes. They are now back in school—somewhere they had often not been for years because of the exploitation, trafficking and abuse they have suffered.

We also know that, as we speak, there are in Greece more than 2,000 unaccompanied child refugees or those seeking asylum, only half of whom have places in children's homes or foster care because the Greek system is overstretched. The Dubs scheme simply allows all countries to do their bit. It allows Britain to do its bit in a very small, modest way, given the scale of the refugee crisis. I pay tribute to the work done by Britain and the British Government on other aspects of the refugee

crisis, but the Dubs scheme is an important part of Britain being able to do its bits to help those who are most vulnerable of all—children.

Ministers have said they will continue to consult, but only as part of the national transfer scheme and, as I understand it, only for those children who have already arrived in the country. That is important, but it is not a substitute for also consulting on children who could come here under the Dubs scheme. It is not an either/or.

Kelly Tolhurst: In an immigration debate last year, I asked the right hon. Lady about the capacity of local authorities to come forward to help councils such as Kent to look after the significant numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers that the council has had to look after over this period. Will she clarify that the point she is making is that there is a will to support children coming from Europe, but an unwillingness to support councils like Kent?

Yvette Cooper: No, I am saying the opposite—that we have to do both. Kent does need support from all over the country; so, too, do Hillingdon and Croydon. Some councils have done most to take the strain and to provide support. There has to be a national transfer scheme; I have supported it, when the Government have proposed it, every step of the way, and it needs to do more.

It is interesting that when the Select Committee took evidence, the Local Government Association told us that if there was further funding, councils throughout the country would be able to meet that 0.07% target set by the Government, and that that would allow councils to provide around 4,000 additional places. That is more than enough to take far more of the children who are currently being supported in Kent to other places across the country and to do our bit to help a small number of additional child refugees from Europe to prevent trafficking. The reason why the Government should focus on those coming from Europe as well as those who have arrived on their own is that if we provide help only to those who make the dangerous and illegal journey on lorries and trucks and often with traffickers and not to those who take the safe legal route, all we do is drive more people into the arms of the traffickers and on to the dangerous routes.

2.30 pm

When the Calais camp was cleared in the autumn and the Dubs and the fast-track Dublin schemes were put in place, we were told that the number of children arriving via these very dangerous routes began to drop. Can the Government clarify whether those two schemes did in fact prevent some of those dangerous journeys and some of the challenges that Kent has faced?

Let me refer now to the spirit of the amendment. The Dubs amendment said not that we should consult on a national transfer scheme and then pretend that it is a Dubs scheme, but that we should consult specifically on the Dubs scheme. This is about enabling Britain to do its bit to prevent modern slavery, as the Prime Minister has rightly said that we should do. It is about supporting the Dubs scheme that was in place only for six months. It had huge cross-party support because, rightly, we believed in Britain doing its bit and in supporting children who have described themselves as being traded like cattle and being sexually abused and raped.

Yesterday, President Trump reintroduced his travel ban and his Muslim ban which include stopping all refugees. For generations, the US has helped the persecuted, but now it has decided to stop doing so. We in Britain continually say, “We don’t do that; that is not us.” Let us now prove it by saying that we will carry on helping the most vulnerable, that we will carry on with the Dubs scheme and that we will carry on doing our bit, just as we have done for generations.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and I decided to withdraw new clause 5, which had the support of 46 Members of Parliament, including the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) and many others, because we feel very strongly that new clauses 15 and 16 do exactly what we wanted, which is to make statutory lessons available for all children in all schools. I applaud my hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families, for everything that he has done to make that happen. He has demonstrated what can be achieved when there is a collaborative view in this House.

Three Select Committees have called for statutory lessons in this area, and that is a good way forward. Millions of children will benefit as a result of what my hon. Friend the Minister has announced today. High-quality relationship and sex education can play an important part in preventing child sexual abuse and exploitation. It teaches children from an early age about fundamental issues such as consent, healthy relationships and how to have respect for themselves and their peer group. It is important that we put such lessons in place and that we do so right now. This call could not be more timely, especially in the light of today’s BBC’s report about Facebook’s failure to remove illegal images of children from its social media platform. The whole House will deplore the fact that Facebook is failing in its duties.

Today’s amendments to this Bill will be an important first step in safeguarding our children, but the work cannot stop there. I urge the Minister to work with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that there is a statutory code in place for social media. We do not want to have a situation in which internationally known corporations such as Facebook can host illegal child abuse images, including those that explicitly focus on men with a sexual interest in children.

Dr Julian Lewis: I am sure that almost all of us agree that sex education in secondary schools is a good thing, particularly as parents will still be guaranteed the right to withdraw their children. What one is concerned about is that parents will not have the right to withdraw their children from relationship education in primary school. What is there to prevent sex education aspects from being smuggled in under that label?

Mrs Miller: I urge my right hon. Friend to talk to some of the teachers in his constituency who are already touching on issues of sex education in primary schools, because it is possible to do that in an age-appropriate manner. There is nothing in this Bill that would concern parents about further sex education being taught in

primary schools—quite the contrary. According to research, three quarters of all parents, if not a little more than that, welcome these measures. Perhaps it is because they understand the safeguarding issues that can be very well covered by relationship education, even at an early age. I am talking about issues around consent in particular. I hope that my right hon. Friend can support these measures, because they are important not only for the future development of our children, but for keeping them safe and for giving them the ability to call out for help if and when they need it.

Philip Davies: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs Miller: Will my hon. Friend forgive me if I make just a bit more progress? I do not want to fall foul of Mr Speaker.

I thank the Minister for responding to the amendments that I have tabled with the support of my hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, Southgate and for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin). I am talking about proposed amendments (b), (c), (d) and (e) to Government new clause 15. I note the reference of my hon. Friend the Minister to a public law duty that obliges the Government to keep content in this area up to date. I can understand his argument, but it has not really worked so far, has it? It has taken about 17 years to get the guidance on sex and relationship education even on the agenda. Surely that public law duty on the Government has been there for the past decade and a half. None the less, I welcome his confirmation at the Dispatch Box, which will be recorded in *Hansard*, that he understands the intent behind proposed amendments (b) and (d) to undertake reviews every three years.

Governments of all complexions have, frankly, regularly sidestepped and ducked the issue of relationship and sex education, using a whole host of excuses to this House as to why it was not possible. What my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate and I have shown is that there is a cross-party desire to get this matter sorted and that the Government should not duck this issue from this point in.

In response to proposed amendment (c) to Government new clause 15 that relationship and sex education will be central to any assessment of schools, I am really reassured that there will be a lead in this area from Her Majesty’s inspectorate of education. I am sure that the Minister with his infinite influence could encourage Ofsted to go a little further on this and to consider redoing its report that so clearly showed that a large proportion of schools were failing in their delivery of sex and relationship education as it currently stands. It would be good to show that that has changed, that progress is being made and that a further report could be done.

I would also welcome it if the Minister reiterated the fact that newly drawn up regulations and guidance will be shaped by experts and not by prejudice or preconceptions in this area and that there will also be support for expert teaching of the subject. Given the news headlines on Facebook today, perhaps he might consider a levy on social media organisations that flout common decency and standards, so that they can be held accountable and perhaps pay the bills for some of the problems that they create by allowing our children to be exposed to inappropriate material.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs Miller: Will my hon. Friend forgive me if I do not? I can see that I am getting into trouble with the Speaker.

The Minister is right to resist amendment (a) to Government new clause 15; as I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), it risks undermining important safeguarding for children in primary schools. The Minister is also right to resist new clause 1, which would not provide the sort of comprehensive relationship and sex education that I know he wants. For 17 years, Governments have sidestepped the issue. This Government should be applauded for the action that they are taking.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I would like to accommodate more colleagues, so extreme brevity would be hugely helpful.

Stella Creasy: In the light of your request for brevity, Mr Speaker, let me be clear that there is a common thread through my points and the amendments that I have tabled: inclusivity, which Members across the House probably support in principle, but in practice, the devil is in the detail of the amendments, and that is why I want to speak.

First, on sex and relationship education, I welcome the moves being made by the Government. It has taken seven years, but finally we will right the wrong whereby while composting and compound interest are on the curriculum, consent is not. I ask the Minister to look at the wording of new clause 1, its explicit reference to same-sex relationships and the importance of being clear during the consultation that we will make sure that children are able to talk about every relationship that they have or may come across in life, and be taught to value them equally. That matters, because 95% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children say that they were not talked to at school about same-sex relationships. When that is so much part of the modern world, it is important that we include it in the modern training that we give our children.

Not least, I want to raise the concerns of teachers from Walthamstow, who said to me that they still live under the spectre of section 28 and the idea that there are things that they cannot talk to children about. The Minister knows my concern that use of the word “appropriate” in his legislation may raise that worry for teachers, so today I look for him to say explicitly that he expects same-sex relationships to be part of the curriculum; that he expects that when bullying is talked about in schools, homophobic bullying will be addressed, at both primary and secondary level; and that we will find a sensitive and religiously inclusive way to cover issues around same-sex relationships, in line with the Equality Act 2010. We should not trade off making progress on some areas of society—through bringing in an ability to talk about consent and domestic abuse—against not making progress on gay rights in other sections of our society. The Minister will point to the 1996 wording that the legislation echoes, but we had section 28 in 1996; this is 2017. Let us make sure that when we make progressive legislation, it is truly progressive.

It is important that we have inclusivity when it comes to child refugees. That is why I want to raise amendment 1 and speak in support of new clause 14 and amendment 2. In October, I asked the Prime Minister to tell us what had happened to the 178 children of whom her Government had been notified who would qualify, under the Dubs amendment, to come to our country but had gone missing from France. Six months on, I am still waiting for a response, but those 178 children are just a fraction of the 10,000 children who have been reported missing in Europe over the refugee crisis. Some 120,000 unaccompanied children—orphans—have come to Europe since 2015. The Dubs amendment is designed to help those children. We agreed as a House that we would do our bit for them, but what kind of a “bit” are we doing? We are talking about 350 children, which equates to 0.002% of all unaccompanied child refugees in Europe. When we debated Dubs, we talked about 3,000 children, which would be just 0.025% of them.

It is right that people should be concerned about what other countries are doing and that we hold the French, Greeks and Italians accountable for their treatment of these children, but Turkey alone is taking 2.8 million Syrian refugees; how can we hold our heads high if we do not do our bit as well? The Dubs scheme is about us doing our bit.

New clause 14 is explicit about safeguarding the children who have applications for transfer—the children in the camps now. I agree with Members who talk about pull factors; the pull factor is safety. We are talking about Afghan children running from the Taliban, Sudanese children running from rape and murder, and Oromo children running from political persecution. They are pulled to our shore for safety. Closing the Dubs scheme will not stop that pull factor, but it will make the traffickers the most attractive proposition those children have. Crucially, amendment 1 and new clause 14 identify our responsibility for involvement in the safeguarding process; we should involve not just the Home Office but the Department for Education. That is where amendment 2 comes from.

2.45 pm

How can we hold our heads high as a country when the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child repeatedly tells us that we are not doing our duty by asylum-seeking children and explicitly says that the Department for Education should play a stronger role with regard to them, and if we do not have agreement in law that the UN convention on the rights of the child covers not just children in this country, but every child we seek to safeguard, including those in camps who were identified in the statement made by the Minister in November? Without that agreement, we are creating a two-tier system for some of the most vulnerable children in the world. I ask Government Members, who I know share our concern to do the right thing by these children, to think about what it says about us as a country if we think that some children, who are not old enough to be accountable for the horrors in their country, are less worthy than others of our help.

Yes, this is messy; yes, it is difficult; and yes, times are tough, but Britain at its best has always stood up to the world, held its head high and said, “We will play our part.” The Dubs scheme was us playing our part. Closing it prematurely when our councils are saying that they

want to help, and when there are children who are safe in this country as a direct result of it, speaks ill of our character as a nation. I hope that Government Members will reflect on that and will vote to send a strong message to the Government that we must help those children. Not helping them will not stop them coming; it will simply leave them rotting in the mud in Calais, Italy or Greece, still on all our consciences.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: We will hear from a few more contributors, I hope.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I shall speak to my amendment (a) to new clause 15, which would give all parents a chance to withdraw their children from relationships education. As you know, Mr Speaker, there is already a right, long enshrined in our laws, for parents to withdraw children from sex education. I want to ask the Government why parents are to be allowed to continue to withdraw their children from sex education, but not from relationship education. It is an important point. The Supreme Court, in answer to the desire of the Scottish Government to impose itself between children and their families, ruled:

“The first thing that a totalitarian regime tries to do is to get to the children, to distance them from the subversive, varied influences of their families, and indoctrinate them in their rulers’ view of the world. Within limits, factories must be left to bring up their children in their own way.”

Those of us who support the amendment believe that parents have the primary duty, and of course a desire, to bring up their children and educate them in their own values. The state should not impose its values on parents.

Frankly, the Government’s thinking on the matter is confused. Their policy statement says:

“We have committed to retain parents’ right to withdraw their child from sex education within RSE (other than sex education in the National Curriculum as part of science), as currently, but not from relationships education at primary. This is because parents should have the right to teach this themselves in a way which is consistent with their values.”

That document rightly justifies the right to withdrawal from sex education, but offers no justification whatever for the inconsistent and aberrant decision not to extend that right to relationships education.

Sir Gerald Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Leigh: I must finish. If we respect the rights of parents over sex education, why trample all over their rights when it comes to relationships education? It is understandable that some will view this as a state takeover bid for parenting.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman concluded his speech with commendable succinctness, which allows me to call Angela Smith.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I rise to speak on amendment 12, which is in my name. It seeks to ensure that the proposed child safeguarding practice review panel includes an independent domestic abuse expert.

The recent Women’s Aid report “Nineteen Child Homicides” outlined the depth of the challenge of child protection in families where one parent is abusive. It identified strong evidence that, when arrangements for

child contact are being made where there is a history of domestic violence, the current workings of the family justice system support a pro-contact approach, which can undermine the best interests of the child or children.

On average, only 1% of applications for contact are refused, but domestic abuse is identified as an issue in up to 70% of family proceedings cases. In three quarters of cases where courts have ordered contact with an abusive parent, the children have suffered further abuse. Clearly, therefore, significant safeguarding concerns result from the management of child contact arrangements. Indeed, the report I referred to highlighted the cases of 19 children in 12 families who were killed by perpetrators of domestic abuse in circumstances related to unsafe contact.

Research has identified a range of key lessons for the child protection system in relation to child contact in families where one parent is abusive. Those lessons are critical to the Bill’s aim of improving local safeguarding. In particular, understanding abusive partners’ coercive control of women and children is critical to improving child safeguarding.

On the proposed role of the child safeguarding practice review panel, my amendment would ensure that the concerns I have outlined are heard, by making sure the panel included at least one recognised independent specialist domestic abuse expert. In Committee, the Minister seemed to agree with that proposal when he stated that the panel would bring a more systematic and comprehensive approach to pulling together knowledge and understanding for cases involving an issue of national importance and relevance, and as far as I am concerned, domestic violence is an issue of national importance. By putting such an expert on the panel, the Government would also address their stated desire for it to provide social work practitioners with specialist advice and the best available research and evidence on domestic abuse and children.

I will push the issue to a vote if you allow me to, Mr Speaker, because the Government could act on it very easily and very quickly, and it would benefit women and children up and down the country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), I emphasise that I would like to call the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) from the Scottish National party as well, so extreme brevity is required.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I rise to speak in warm support of new clause 15 and to congratulate the Government. The Minister will remember that I served on the Public Bill Committee and spoke in support of the then new clause, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy). I very much welcome the two safeguards in the new clause—on age-appropriateness and parental rights to withdraw—which I think address the points that have been raised.

This is a new clause—a 21st-century clause—for a 21st-century education system and for the world in which we live, and it reflects the deep need to provide our young people with the education and skills they

require to meet challenges that many of us on the Conservative Benches did not face when we were their age.

Many people rail against the rates of divorce, abortion, teenage pregnancy and the like, and I am absolutely convinced that there must be a causal link between those statistics and the very patchy and relatively poor levels of sex and relationship education we have had in this country hitherto.

The new clause appears to have garnered the support of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, of which I am a member, as well as of Barnardo's, the Terrence Higgins Trust and others. I would therefore suggest to right hon. and hon. Members that the Government are clearly on to something and are approaching it in the right way.

We do nothing that could be described as moral if we leave our young people unprepared to meet the challenges of relationships and modern life. I certainly support the fact—I raised this in the Adjournment debate brought by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller)—that the clause covers academies and free schools. Given the direction of travel in the education environment, that seems entirely appropriate, and I support the new clause.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I wish to speak to the amendments in my name to new clauses 13 and 14. Let me say in passing that new clauses 12 and 11, on universal credit and local housing allowance, both have our full support. On new clause 4, while we sympathise with the sentiment behind it, the method of progression is not the correct one, and we could not give the new clause our support.

Let me turn to new clauses 12 to 14 and to my two amendments. New clause 13 would put the strategy for the safeguarding of unaccompanied refugee children on a statutory footing, and that has our support. Given that many of the laws and services that will be involved are devolved, I have suggested that the new clause be amended to require consultation with the devolved Administrations before the strategy is published.

New clauses 12 and 14 require assessment of the capacity to provide safeguarding and welfare services, including to unaccompanied child refugees. I welcome the cross-party support new clause 14 has attracted, and the Scottish National party fully intends to give it our support. My small amendment to it simply borrows the wording of new clause 12 in relation to the devolved Administrations. It is appropriate to include the devolved Administrations, because, as we have heard, the key driver behind new clause 14 is to force the Government to rethink their move to wind the Dubs scheme down. This was a UK-wide scheme, and Scotland was and is absolutely willing to play its part in it.

With the rationale for closing Dubs falling to pieces, the Government have belatedly come to the Dispatch Box to make a concession. However, in making that concession, they have actually made the case for new clause 14, rather than giving an explanation of why we should reject it, so I see no reason why we should not proceed with it. If it comes to a vote, the SNP will absolutely support new clause 14, whether amended or not.

Mr Burrows: I rise to support many of the proposals, not least those in my name, which the Minister has supported from the Dispatch Box.

On new clause 7, statutory guidance will spread good practice, which is all too limited in relation to those who need therapeutic support, such as those who are at risk—not least those who have come from a care background—of repeat pregnancies. There is a duty of care in this Bill not only to children but to vulnerable adults, and I appreciate that that will now come within statutory guidance, so I will not need to press the new clause. However, I pay particular tribute to the Family Rights Group and the other organisations supporting it.

I very much support new clause 15, and our earlier new clauses 5 and 6 paved the way towards it. The thrust of it is very welcome. We should recognise the support from all sides of the argument. Previously, there was a stalemate, and we were looking simply at when we would make sex education compulsory. Now, we are focused on relationships and building the resilience in relationships that vulnerable children—particularly those who do not have any sight or sound of healthy relationships—do not have. I welcome that and the reassurance on age-appropriateness and the religious background of pupils.

The Government's position on new clause 14 is welcome in focusing on safeguarding. This is not a re-run of Dubs or of those earlier arguments. This is about safeguarding. Whether we are talking about children in the UK or children coming from abroad, all children need safeguarding, and I welcome the commitment that has been made on that. However, as a result of this debate, the Government need to be more transparent about keeping the Dubs process open, so that we can do all we can for children here and elsewhere.

2.58 pm

One and a half hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration, the debate was interrupted (Programme Order, 5 December and this day).

The Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83E), That the clause be read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

New clause 15 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

The Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

New Clause 16

OTHER PERSONAL, SOCIAL, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION

'(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision requiring personal, social, health and economic education (beyond that required by virtue of section [Education relating to relationships and sex]) to be provided—

- (a) to pupils of compulsory school age receiving primary education at schools in England;
- (b) to pupils receiving secondary education at schools in England.

- (2) The regulations may include—
- provision requiring the Secretary of State to give guidance to proprietors of schools in relation to the provision of the education;
 - provision requiring proprietors of schools to have regard to that guidance;
 - provision requiring proprietors of schools to make statements of policy in relation to the education to be provided, and to make the statements available to parents or other persons;
 - further provision in connection with the provision of the education.

(3) Before making the regulations, the Secretary of State must consult such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(4) The regulations may amend any provision (including provision conferring powers) that is made by or under—

- section 342 of the Education Act 1996;
- Chapter 4 of Part 5 of the Education Act 1996;
- Schedule 1 to the Education Act 1996;
- Part 6 of the Education Act 2002;
- Chapter 1 of Part 4 of the Education and Skills Act 2008;
- the Academies Act 2010.

(5) The provision that may be made by regulations under subsection (1) by virtue of section 70 includes, in particular, provision amending, repealing or revoking any provision made by or under any Act or any other instrument or document (whenever passed or made).

(6) Regulations under subsection (1) which amend provision made by or under an Act are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

(7) Other regulations under subsection (1) are subject to the negative resolution procedure.

(8) Expressions used in this section, where listed in the left-hand column of the table in section 580 of the Education Act 1996, are to be interpreted in accordance with the provisions of that Act listed in the right-hand column in relation to those expressions.

(9) A power to make provision under this section does not limit any power to make provision of the same kind under another Act.”

This new clause would enable the Secretary of State to make regulations requiring personal, social, health and economic education to be provided at schools in England. The power could be exercised in relation to all schools, or just in relation to schools of a particular kind, for example Academy schools and maintained schools.—(Edward Timpson.)

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 14

LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR REPORTING ON CAPACITY TO PROVIDE CHILDREN’S SAFEGUARDING AND WELFARE SERVICES

After section 16E of the Children Act 2004 (inserted by section 16 of this Act) insert—

“Local arrangements for reporting on capacity to provide children’s safeguarding and welfare provision services

“(1) At least once in every 12 month period, the safeguarding partners for a local authority area in England must report to the Secretary of State on their capacity to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

(2) The report must include, but shall not be restricted to, identification of capacity to provide safeguarding and welfare services to children who could be resettled in the area, including unaccompanied refugee children who could be transferred to the area from abroad including those with existing or current applications for transfer.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament the information received under subsection (1) in a single report.””

This new clause would require the local safeguarding partners in an area to report annually to the Secretary of State on what capacity they have to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in that area. This includes what capacity they have to resettle children, including unaccompanied refugee children, in the area. The Secretary of State would be required to lay before Parliament the information received from local authorities in a single report.—(Heidi Allen.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

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

The House divided: Ayes 267, Noes 287.

Division No. 173]

[2.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Creasy, Stella
Abrahams, Debbie	Cruddas, Jon
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Cryer, John
Alexander, Heidi	Cummins, Judith
Ali, Rushanara	Cunningham, Alex
Allen, Heidi	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Dakin, Nic
Anderson, Mr David	Danczuk, Simon
Arkless, Richard	David, Wayne
Ashworth, Jonathan	Davies, Geraint
Austin, Ian	Day, Martyn
Bailey, Mr Adrian	De Piero, Gloria
Bardell, Hannah	Debbonaire, Thangam
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Benn, rh Hilary	Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Berger, Luciana	Doughty, Stephen
Betts, Mr Clive	Dowd, Jim
Black, Mhairi	Dowd, Peter
Blackford, Ian	Dromey, Jack
Blackman, Kirsty	Durkan, Mark
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Eagle, Ms Angela
Blenkinsop, Tom	Eagle, Maria
Blomfield, Paul	Edwards, Jonathan
Boswell, Philip	Efford, Clive
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Elliott, Tom
Brake, rh Tom	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Brennan, Kevin	Esterson, Bill
Brock, Deidre	Evans, Chris
Brown, Alan	Farrelly, Paul
Brown, Lyn	Farron, Tim
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Ferrier, Margaret
Bryant, Chris	Field, rh Frank
Buck, Ms Karen	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Burden, Richard	Fiello, Robert
Burgon, Richard	Fletcher, Colleen
Butler, Dawn	Flint, rh Caroline
Cadbury, Ruth	Flynn, Paul
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Fovargue, Yvonne
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Foxcroft, Vicky
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Furniss, Gill
Champion, Sarah	Gapes, Mike
Chapman, Douglas	Gardiner, Barry
Chapman, Jenny	Gethins, Stephen
Cherry, Joanna	Glass, Pat
Clegg, rh Mr Nick	Glindon, Mary
Clwyd, rh Ann	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Coffey, Ann	Goodman, Helen
Cooper, Julie	Grady, Patrick
Cooper, Rosie	Grant, Peter
Cooper, rh Yvette	Gray, Neil
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Green, Kate
Cowan, Ronnie	Gwynne, Andrew
Coyle, Neil	Haigh, Louise
Creagh, Mary	Hanson, rh Mr David

Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinahan, Danny
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewis, Clive
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul

Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie

Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil

Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Nick Smith and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 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
 Benyon, rh 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
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conon
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Courts, Robert
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinéage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan

Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 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
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Evans, Graham
 Evennett, rh David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Franco, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, 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
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 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
 Howell, John
 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
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 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
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie

Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela

Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
Graham Stuart and
Steve Brine

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 12

CHILD SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE REVIEW PANEL

Amendment proposed: 12, page 10, line 30, at end insert—

“(3A) At least one member of the panel appointed by the Secretary of State under subsection (3) must—

- (a) be independent from Government, and
- (b) have relevant specialist expertise in tackling domestic abuse.”—(*Angela Smith.*)

This amendment would require that at least one member of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has specialist expertise in tackling domestic abuse.—(Angela Smith.)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 271, Noes 299.

Division No. 174]

[3.15 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Anderson, Mr David
 Arkless, Richard
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin

Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinahan, Danny

Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewis, Clive
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paisley, Ian
 Paterson, Steven
 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
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark

Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

Jeff Smith and
 Nick Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 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, rh 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
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory

Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Elphicke, Charlie

Evans, Graham
 Evennett, rh David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, 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
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 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
 Howell, John
 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
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert

Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher

Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Sturdy, Julian

Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 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
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
 Graham Stuart and
 Steve Brine

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 32

POWER TO TEST DIFFERENT WAYS OF WORKING

Amendment made: 4, page 20, line 23, leave out clause 32.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

Clause 33

DURATION

Amendment made: 5, page 21, line 33, leave out clause 33.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

Clause 34

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

Amendment made: 6, page 22, line 3, leave out clause 34.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

Clause 35

CONSULTATION BY LOCAL AUTHORITY

Amendment made: 7, page 22, line 27, leave out clause 35.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

Clause 36

CONSULTATION BY SECRETARY OF STATE

Amendment made: 8, page 22, line 36, leave out clause 36.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

Clause 37

GUIDANCE

Amendment made: 9, page 23, line 16, leave out clause 37.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

Clause 38

ANNUAL REPORT

Amendment made: 10, page 23, line 31, leave out clause 38.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

Clause 39

INTERPRETATION

Amendment made: 11, page 23, line 36, leave out clause 39.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

New Clause 17

ENSURING ADEQUATE PROVISION OF SOCIAL WORK TRAINING

“(1) The Secretary of State may take such steps as the Secretary of State considers appropriate—

(a) to ensure that adequate provision is made for social work training, and

(2) The power under subsection (1) may, in particular, be used to provide financial or other assistance (subject to any conditions the Secretary of State thinks are appropriate)—

(a) for individuals resident in England to undertake social work training;

(b) for organisations providing social work training.

(3) Functions of the Secretary of State under this section may be exercised by any person, or by employees of any person, authorised to do so by the Secretary of State.

(4) For the purpose of determining—

(a) the terms and effect of an authorisation under subsection (3), and

(b) the effect of so much of any contract made between the Secretary of State and the authorised person as relates to the exercise of the function,

Part 2 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 has effect as if the authorisation were given by virtue of an order under section 69 of that Act; and in subsection (3) “employee” has the same meaning as in that Part.

(5) In this section “social work training” means education or training that is suitable for people who are or wish to become social workers in England.”—(*Edward Timpson.*)

This new clause is intended to replace the Secretary of State’s powers under section 67 of the Care Standards Act 2000 in respect of social workers.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 18EXERCISE BY SPECIAL HEALTH AUTHORITY OF FUNCTIONS UNDER SECTION (*ENSURING ADEQUATE PROVISION OF SOCIAL WORK TRAINING*)(1)(B)

“(1) The Secretary of State may direct a Special Health Authority to exercise functions under section (*Ensuring adequate provision of social workers*)(1)(b) so far as relating to the provision of financial or other assistance.

(2) The National Health Service Act 2006 has effect as if—

(a) any direction under subsection (1) were a direction under section 7 of that Act, and

(b) any functions exercisable by the Special Health Authority by virtue of a direction under subsection (1) were exercisable under that section.

(3) Directions under subsection (1)—

(a) must be given by an instrument in writing, and

(b) may be varied or revoked by subsequent directions.”—(*Edward Timpson.*)

This new clause is based on section 67A of the Care Standards Act 2000 and allows the Secretary of State to require a Special Health Authority to exercise the function of giving financial assistance to social workers.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 19

AMENDMENTS TO DO WITH THIS PART

“Schedule (*Amendments to do with Part 2*) contains further minor and consequential amendments relating to this Part.”—(*Edward Timpson.*)

This introduces NS1.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 65

REPEAL OF EXISTING POWERS TO REGULATE SOCIAL WORKERS

Amendments made: 14, page 36, line 20, leave out “after subsection (2ZE) insert” and insert “for subsection (2ZE) substitute”.

This adds a consequential amendment.

Amendment 15, page 36, line 27, at end insert—

“() in subsection (2A)(c), for “that section” substitute “section 60”;

This adds a consequential amendment.

Amendment 16, page 36, line 29, at end insert—

“() In Schedule 3 (regulation of health care and associated professions)—

(a) in paragraph 10, for the definitions of “social care work in England”, “social care workers in England” and “the social work profession in England” substitute—

““social care work in England” and “social care workers in England” have the meaning given by section 60.”;

(b) in paragraph 11(2A)(b), for “members of the social work profession in England” substitute “engaging in social work in England”.”—(*Edward Timpson.*)

This adds a consequential amendment.

Clause 66

INTERPRETATION OF PART 2

Amendment made: 17, page 37, line 11, after “England” insert “(but see subsection (2));”

“(2) A person who is a member of a profession to which section 60(2) of the Health Act 1999 applies is not to be treated as a social worker in England by reason only of carrying out work as an approved mental health professional.”—(*Edward Timpon.*)

The basic purpose of this amendment is to ensure that a person is not subject to regulation as a social worker in England simply because he or she is an approved mental health professional. Approved mental health professionals are often members of other regulated professions so the amendment avoids dual regulation.

New Schedule 1

AMENDMENTS TO DO WITH PART 2

“PART 1

GENERAL AMENDMENTS

London County Council (General Powers) Act 1920

1 In section 18(e) of the London County Council (General Powers) Act 1920, after “under the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001” insert “or section 45(1) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017”.

Medicines Act 1968

2 In section 58 of the Medicines Act 1968, omit subsection (1ZA).

Video Recordings Act 1984

3 In section 3 of the Video Recordings Act 1984, omit subsection (11A).

London Local Authorities Act 1991

4 In section 4 of the London Local Authorities Act 1991, in paragraph (c) of the definition of “establishment for special treatment”, after “under the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001” insert “or section 45(1) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017”.

Value Added Tax Act 1994

5 In Part 2 of Schedule 9 to the Value Added Tax Act 1994, in the Notes to Group 7, omit note (2ZA).

Data Protection Act 1998

6 In section 69(1) of the Data Protection Act 1998, in paragraph (h), omit the words from “, except in so far” to the end.

Care Standards Act 2000

7 The Care Standards Act 2000 is amended as follows.

8 (1) Section 55 is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2) as substituted by the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, omit paragraph (a).

(3) Until the coming into force of the substitution of subsection (2) by the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, the old version has effect as if in paragraph (a) after “social work” there were inserted “in Wales”.

(4) In subsection (3) as substituted by the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, omit paragraph (k).

9 (1) Section 67 is amended as follows.

(2) Omit subsection (1A).

(3) In subsection (2) as substituted by the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016—

(a) omit paragraph (a) (including the “and” at the end), and

(b) in paragraph (b), omit “other”.

(4) Until the coming into force of the substitution of subsection (2) by the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, the old version has effect as if the words from “courses”, in the first place it occurs, to “social workers” were omitted.

Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001

10 The Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001 (SI 2002/254) is amended as follows.

11 (1) Article 3 is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph (5)(b)—

(a) in paragraph (ii), after “registrants or” insert “other”;

(b) at end of paragraph (iv) insert “and”;

(c) omit paragraphs (vi) and (vii).

(3) Omit paragraph (5AA).

12 In article 6(3)(aa), omit “or social work”.

13 In article 7(4), omit “or social work”.

14 (1) Article 9 is amended as follows.

(2) Omit paragraph (3A).

(3) In paragraph (8), omit “or social work”.

15 (1) Article 10 is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph (6), omit “or social work”.

(3) Omit paragraph (7).

16 In article 11A, omit paragraph (11).

17 (1) Article 12 is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph (1)—

(a) at the end of sub-paragraph (b) insert “or”;

(b) omit sub-paragraph (d) and the “or” before it.

(3) In paragraph (2)—

(a) at the end of sub-paragraph (a) insert “and”;

(b) omit sub-paragraph (c) and the “and” before it.

18 (1) Article 13 is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph (1), omit “or (1B)”.

(3) Omit paragraph (1B).

19 For the heading of article 13A substitute “Visiting health professionals from relevant European States”.

20 Omit article 13B.

21 In article 19(2A)(b), omit “or social work”.

22 In article 20, omit the words from “; but the reference” to the end.

23 (1) Article 37 is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph (1)(aa), omit “or social work”.

(3) Omit paragraph (1B).

(4) In paragraph (5A)(a), omit the words from “or registered as a social worker” to the end of that sub-paragraph.

(5) In paragraph (8), omit “(other than a hearing on an appeal relating to a social worker in England)”.

(6) Omit paragraph (8A).

24 (1) Article 38 is amended as follows.

(2) Omit paragraph (1ZA).

(3) In paragraph (4), omit “(subject to paragraph (5))”.

(4) Omit paragraph (5).

25 In article 39, omit paragraph (1A).

26 In Schedule 1, in paragraph 1A(1)(b), omit paragraph (ia) (but not the “and” at the end).

27 (1) In Schedule 3, paragraph 1 is amended as follows.

(2) In the definition of “visiting health or social work professional from a relevant European state”, omit “or social work” in both places.

(3) In the definition of “relevant professions”, omit “social workers in England;”.

(4) Omit the definition of “social worker in England”.

Adoption and Children Act 2002

28 (1) In section 10 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, in subsection (2), omit “, one of the registers maintained under” substitute “—

- (a) the register of social workers in England maintained under section 45 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017,
- (b) any register of social care workers in England maintained under an Order in Council under section 60 of the Health Act 1999 or any register maintained under such an Order in Council so far as relating to social care workers in England, or
- (c) the register maintained under”.

(2) Until the coming into force of the amendment made by sub-paragraph (1), section 10(2) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 is to have effect as if the reference to the registers mentioned there included a reference to the part of the register maintained under article 5 of the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001 that relates to social workers in England.

Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Act 2003

29 In section 343(2) of the Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Act 2003, in paragraph 1 of the Table, after sub-paragraph (r) insert—

- “(s) the register of social workers in England kept under section 45(1) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.”

National Health Service Act 2006

30 In section 126 of the National Health Service Act 2006, for subsection (4A) substitute—

“(4A) Subsection (4)(h) does not apply to persons in so far as they are registered as social care workers in England (within the meaning of section 60 of the Health Act 1999).”

National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006

31 In section 80 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006, for subsection (4A) substitute—

“(4A) Subsection (4)(h) does not apply to persons in so far as they are registered as social care workers in England (within the meaning of section 60 of the Health Act 1999).”

Armed Forces Act 2006

32 In section 257(3) of the Armed Forces Act 2006, for paragraph (a) substitute—

- “(a) Social Work England;”.

Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006

33 The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 is amended as follows.

34 In section 41(7), in the table, after entry 10 insert—

<p>“11 The register of social workers in England kept under section 45(1) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017</p>	<p>The registrar appointed under section 45(3)(a) Children and Social Work Act 2017 or, in the absence of such an appointment, Social Work England”</p>
--	---

35 In Schedule 3, in paragraph 16(4), after paragraph (l) insert—
(m) Social Work England.”

Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 (asp 14)

36 In section 30A(6) of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007—

- (a) omit “the social work profession in England or”;
- (b) for “each of those expressions having the same meaning as in” substitute “within the meaning of”.

Children and Young Persons Act 2008

37 (1) In section 2 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, in subsection (6), for paragraph (a) substitute—

- “(a) in the register maintained by Social Work England under section 45(1) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017;”.

(2) Until the coming into force of the amendment made by sub-paragraph (1), section 2(6)(a) of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 is to have effect as if the reference to the register mentioned there were to a register maintained under article 5 of the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001.

Health and Social Care Act 2012

38 In the Health and Social Care Act 2012 omit sections 213, 215 and 216.

Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (anaw 2)

39 The Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 is amended as follows.

40 In section 111(4)(b)—

- (a) in the Welsh text, for “Cyngor y Proffesiynau Iechyd a Gofal” substitute “Gwaith Cymdeithasol Lloegr”;
- (b) in the English text, for “the Health and Care Professions Council” substitute “Social Work England”.

41 In section 117(4)(a)—

- (a) in the Welsh text, after “Gofal” insert “neu Waith Cymdeithasol Lloegr”;
- (b) in the English text, after “Council” insert “or Social Work England”.

42 In section 119(4)(a)(ii)—

- (a) in the Welsh text, for “y Cyngor Proffesiynau Iechyd a Gofal” substitute “Gwaith Cymdeithasol Lloegr”;
- (b) in the English text, for “the Health and Care Professions Council” substitute “Social Work England”.

43 In section 125(5)(a)(ii)—

- (a) in the Welsh text, for “y Cyngor Proffesiynau Iechyd a Gofal” substitute “Gwaith Cymdeithasol Lloegr”;
- (b) in the English text, for “the Health and Care Professions Council” substitute “Social Work England”.

44 In section 174(5)(a)(ii)—

- (a) in the Welsh text, for “Cyngor y Proffesiynau Iechyd a Gofal” substitute “Gwaith Cymdeithasol Lloegr”;
- (b) in the English text, for “the Health and Care Professions Council” substitute “Social Work England”.

PART 2

RENAMING OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK
PROFESSIONS ORDER 2001

45 For the title to the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001 (SI 2002/254) substitute “Health Professions Order 2001”.

46 In article 1(1) of that Order (citation), for “the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001” substitute “the Health Professions Order 2001”.

47 In the following provisions, for “the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001” substitute “the Health Professions Order 2001”—

- (a) section 18(e) of the London County Council (General Powers) Act 1920;
- (b) section 3(11) of the Video Recordings Act 1984;
- (c) 114ZA(4) of the Mental Health Act 1983;
- (d) paragraph (E) in the entry for the London County Council (General Powers) Act 1920 in Schedule 2 to the Greater London Council (General Powers) Act 1984;
- (e) paragraph (c) of the definition of “establishment for special treatment” in section 4 of the London Local Authorities Act 1991;
- (f) item 1(c) in Group 7, in Part 2 of Schedule 9 to the Value Added Tax Act 1994;
- (g) section 69(1)(h) of the Data Protection Act 1998;
- (h) section 60(2)(c) of the Health Act 1999;
- (i) sections 25C(8)(h) and 29(1)(j) of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002;

- (j) section 126(4)(a) of the National Health Service Act 2006;
- (k) section 80(4)(a) of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006;
- (l) entry 10 in the table in section 41(7) of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006.

48 In the definition of “registered psychologist” in each of the following provisions, for “the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001” substitute “the Health Professions Order 2001”—

- (a) section 307(1) of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995;
- (b) section 207(6) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003;
- (c) section 21(2)(b) of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003;
- (d) section 25 of the Gender Recognition Act 2004.”—
(*Edward Timpson.*)

This Schedule contains amendments to do with Part 2 of the Bill (social workers etc in England).

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Mr Speaker: We are making commendable progress—even greater progress, if that is imaginable, than I had anticipated, as may be apparent to colleagues.

Schedule 4

OVERSIGHT BY THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AUTHORITY FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Amendments made: 18, page 47, line 26, leave out from beginning to “in” in line 27 and insert—

“() Section 25 (the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care) is amended as follows.

() .”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 19.

Amendment 19, page 47, line 29, at end insert—

“() For subsection (3A) substitute—

(3A) A reference in an enactment to a body mentioned in subsection (3) is not (unless there is express provision to the contrary) to be read as including—

- (a) a reference to Social Work England, or
- (b) a reference to the Health and Care Professions Council, or a regulatory body within subsection (3)(j), so far as it has functions relating to social care workers in England.”

() In subsection (3B) for the definition of “the social work profession in England” and “social care workers in England” substitute—

““social care workers in England” has the meaning given in section 60 of the 1999 Act.”—(*Edward Timpson.*)

This ensures that references in legislation to a regulatory body mentioned in section 25(3) of the National Health Service Reform and Health and Care Professions Act 2002 do not generally include a reference to Social Work England.

Mr Speaker: Consideration completed. I will now suspend the House for no more than five minutes to make a decision about certification. The Division bells will be rung two minutes before the House resumes. Following my certification, the Government will table the appropriate consent motions, copies of which will be available shortly in the Vote Office and will be distributed by the Doorkeepers. I know they will be of very consuming

interest to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who is greatly seized of the importance and content of these matters.

3.35 pm

Sitting suspended.

3.46 pm

On resuming—

Mr Speaker: I can now inform the House of my decision about certification. For the purposes of Standing Order No. 83L(2), I have certified the following provisions of the Children and Social Work Bill [*Lords*] as relating exclusively to England and Wales and within devolved legislative competence: clauses 8 and 9.

I have certified the following provisions of the Children and Social Work Bill [*Lords*] as relating exclusively to England and within devolved legislative competence: clauses 1 to 7, 11 to 31 and 41 to 67, new clauses 15 to 18 added to the Bill on Report and schedules 2 to 4.

For the purposes of Standing Order No. 83L(4), I have certified the following amendment made to the Bill since Second Reading as relating exclusively to England and Wales: amendment 13 to clause 62, made in the Public Bill Committee.

Copies of my certificate are available in the Vote Office. Under Standing Order No. 83M, consent motions are therefore required for the Bill to proceed. Does the Minister intend to move the consent motions?

Edward Timpson *indicated assent.*

The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England and Wales) (Standing Order No. 83M).

[*NATASCHA ENGEL in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I remind hon. Members that if there are Divisions, only Members representing constituencies in England and Wales may vote on the consent motion for England and Wales, and only Members representing constituencies in England may vote on the consent motion for England.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83M(5)),

That the Committee consents to the following certified clauses of the Children and Social Work Bill [*Lords*] and the certified amendment made to the Bill—

Clauses certified under Standing Order No. 83L(2) as relating exclusively to England and Wales and being within devolved legislative competence

Clauses 8 and 9 of the Bill as amended in the Public Bill Committee.

Amendment certified under Standing Order No. 83L(4) as relating exclusively to England and Wales.

Amendment 13 made in the Public Bill Committee.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): Just a very short intervention, but I always think it is very useful for the Minister to have the opportunity to expand on an issue, rather than just touching the Dispatch Box and moving on.

The Minister and his Government colleagues will be well aware of the fact that we have just had the Assembly election in Northern Ireland. The results were in some quarters a surprise and in other quarters they were not a surprise at all. We now have a very short window of opportunity for the Northern Ireland Assembly to be restored. If the talks are not successful in the next three weeks, will the Minister and his Government colleagues consider extending some of the Bill's provisions to Northern Ireland? Parts of it are very valuable, and really ought to be extended in the event of a prolonged period of direct rule.

Edward Timpson: I hear what the hon. Lady says. Of course we are all looking very carefully at the situation in Northern Ireland and hope that we can achieve a resolution as soon as possible, but in relation to the Bill, we have been very clear about which provisions are appropriate in relation to devolution arrangements. Having said that, I should add that on certain aspects of the Bill, we want to co-operate across the whole United Kingdom. I shall take that up with whoever is in place in Northern Ireland in my reciprocal capacity, so that we can make progress throughout the country.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I was loth to speak in this debate, although I think that I am the main contributor to Legislative Grand Committee debates: I believe that I have spoken in them more than any other Member. However, I did not have a clue what was going on. One of my hon. Friends asked me, "What exactly did the Speaker rule in his statement about the certification of English-only business?" I should be interested to learn whether the Minister knows what it all meant, because my colleagues and I have not got a clue, and that goes to the heart of this nonsense about English votes for English laws. No one knows what is going on. The Constitution Unit examined it in detail, and concluded that it was opaque in the extreme.

No one has much of an idea about what we are actually discussing here. I think I heard something about a procedure requiring double consent. What comes first, the English-only vote or the whole-House vote? I know that I cannot take part in one of the votes, but which one is it? That has not been made clear to us today.

If we are to continue to have these Legislative Grand Committees, we shall need a little bit more than a Minister going to the Dispatch Box, touching it with his hands, and then sitting down again. The Mace goes up, goes down and then goes up again, and nothing is debated and discussed. We were told that English votes for English laws was just about the most important innovation in Parliament when it came to debates in the House, and it is not good enough for Members not to take advantage of these opportunities. I appeal to at least one English Member to stand up and speak about the English-only clauses. If they are so important that we suspend our business, surely they should be addressed.

I hope that in future I shall not have to speak about Legislative Grand Committee motions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] For once, I concur with Conservative Members. This procedure has reached a stage at which it is beyond a farce. It is bizarre; it is unnecessary; it disrupts the business of the House, and no one is even bothered about making a contribution.

Question agreed to.

The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England) (Standing Order No. 83M(4)(d)).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83M(4)(d)),

That the Committee consents to the following certified clauses and schedules of the Children and Social Work Bill [Lords]:

Clauses and schedules certified under Standing Order No. 83L(2) as relating exclusively to England and being within devolved legislative competence

Clauses 1 to 7, 11 to 31 and 41 to 67 of the Bill as amended in the Public Bill Committee including the amendments made on Report;

New clause 15, new clause 16, new clause 17 and new clause 18 added on Report; and

Schedules 2 to 4 to the Bill as amended in the Public Committee, including the amendments made on Report.—(*Edward Timpson.*)

Question agreed to.

The occupant of the Chair left the Chair to report the decisions of the Committees (Standing Order No. 83M(6)).

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair; decisions reported.

Third Reading

3.54 pm

Edward Timpson: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This Bill is fundamentally about improving the lives of vulnerable children. These are children who have often faced challenges that most of us can only imagine: they might have faced abuse and neglect; they might have been let down time and again by the people who are supposed to love and protect them; they might be being exploited by perpetrators preying on their vulnerability. So it is right and proper that Parliament should devote time and energy to improving their plight. To that end, I am very grateful to all those hon. Members who have engaged constructively with the passage of this Bill and demonstrated their shared commitment to these critical issues.

This Bill represents an important step forward for vulnerable children. It defines what good corporate parenting looks like and secures the involvement of the whole council in looking out for children in care or leaving care. It requires every local area to set out exactly what support they are offering to care leavers, making it easier for young people to access support. It extends the help of a personal adviser to all care leavers up to the age of 25. It introduces improved national arrangements for analysing serious incidents and learning from them and strengthened arrangements for local multi-agency co-ordination of safeguarding. It extends educational support to children leaving care via adoption or special guardianship. It creates the conditions for good placement decisions to be made for children coming into the care system. It introduces a new, bespoke regulator for social work that will be empowered to raise standards in social work and raise the status of this vital profession. It also paves the way for a new system of assessment and accreditation, which will give social workers opportunities to develop and progress in their profession.

In addition—again with thanks to the Members across this House who have supported the Government on this—the Bill now includes important measures on

[*Edward Timpson*]

relationships and sex education and PSHE. We need to recognise that the world in which children are growing up is changing rapidly. As policy makers and implementers, we need to keep pace with those changes and ensure that children are well equipped to cope with each new opportunity and challenge they are likely to face. I am delighted, therefore, that this House has supported the Government amendments to put age-appropriate relationships and sex education on a statutory footing. This will be a very significant step to promote the safeguarding of all children in England.

As I said earlier, the changes to be delivered through this Bill reflect my personal passion and commitment to improving the lives of vulnerable children and families. My pledge to the House is to implement these changes as expeditiously as possible when the Bill has completed its passage through Parliament and received Royal Assent. I thank all Members who have engaged with, and contributed to, this Bill, including the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck), who cannot be with us here today but shares that same passion.

Of course, we would not be where we are without the dedicated work of all the officials and Clerks of this House and the many officials in my Department who have worked tirelessly to make the Bill's passage as smooth as possible. I take this opportunity to thank them all, in particular the Bill team and my private office, and I commend the Bill to the House.

3.48 pm

Angela Rayner: I echo the thanks given by the Minister, particularly to my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck), who cannot be with us today. She did a tremendous amount of work on the Bill. I also thank the Committee members who contributed to the Bill and all Members from across the House who have made it a much better Bill. I commend the Government on the work they have done towards finding consensus within the House on the Bill. I also thank all the organisations that have contributed to the Bill throughout its passage.

We have had a fantastic debate. I am disappointed that we have not managed to add new clause 14 to the Bill, but I hope the Minister was listening in particular to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) when she talked about the model of good housekeeping in the amendment we voted on. I hope the Minister will look at that and see how we can make progress on it in later stages.

Lady Hermon: I voted in support of new clause 14. I should like to say again on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland and those in my constituency that we want to be able to welcome refugee children just as much as England, Wales and especially Scotland, which has already done so much. If the Minister is going to look at this issue, will he also remember that the people of Northern Ireland would like to have been included in new clause 14? The new clause was lost, but I know that the Minister has taken note of it.

Angela Rayner: I thank the hon. Lady for reminding us of the great contribution that Northern Ireland makes to this place.

I echo the Minister's points about the progress that has been made on relationships and sex education and on PSHE. This is a tremendous step forward, although there is still work to be done. Many of the Select Committee members who have taken part in the debates today have done a tremendous amount of work on this, and I commend them for that. I also welcome the Minister's earlier contribution on new clause 3, which dealt with sibling contact. That is going to make a massive difference to vulnerable people. On new clause 7, we know that a cycle of deprivation can be created among vulnerable children, who can grow up to become vulnerable adults. If nothing else, we should be trying to break those cycles. That is where the cross-party efforts in this place to achieve a true meritocracy come in.

I want to mention clauses 32 to 39, the so-called innovation clauses. There was huge resistance to those measures from care leavers, adult survivors of abuse, social workers, academics, children's rights campaigners and charities. The Together for Children coalition has 53 organisations, more than 160 individual experts and 108,000 signatures from concerned members of the public. On top of this, organisations as diverse as the Magistrates Association, the Law Society, the Family Law Bar Association, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the GMB trade union, which represents foster carers, as well as some of our oldest children's charities, including Action for Children and the NSPCC, warned of the grave dangers to our country's most vulnerable children and young people of allowing councils to opt out of their statutory duties. I therefore commend the Minister and the Secretary of State for accepting those arguments and removing the relevant chapters from the Bill.

On new clause 17, we have some concerns about the way in which the Secretary of State will decide to discharge her duties with respect to the registrar, and specifically about the extent to which Social Work England will be able to exercise the necessary independence with respect to accrediting the courses leading to registered social worker status. I hope the Minister will take note of those concerns.

I should like to end by echoing the comments of many Members throughout the passage of the Bill about the great unsung heroes who work in our children's services. The Minister has rightly said that social workers make an important positive contribution to our communities. I must add that my niece is a social work manager who looks after children, and she does a tremendous job, as do every single one of the workers in that field. They are at the forefront of helping children, families and disabled and older adults who are distressed, in difficulty and perhaps in danger. Most of their work goes unseen, without recognition or celebration, but they deserve our thanks for the major contribution that they make every single day.

4.4 pm

Mrs Miller: The Bill is groundbreaking in making sex and relationship education compulsory. The Government have listened to the evidence from Select Committees such as the Women and Equalities Committee, which I chair, and the Minister's team is to be congratulated. The Bill will benefit millions of children, three quarters of whom believe that they will feel safer as a result of our decision this afternoon to give sex and relationship

education a statutory basis. I thank the organisations that have supported and assisted the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and I have done—Barnardo’s, Plan UK and Girlguiding are but a few.

When the amendments go to the other place, I hope that careful consideration is given to the fact that the sex and relationship education amendments were made without the need for a vote in this place owing to the cross-party consensus. The Bill is important in many respects, but it will be often cited in this place because of the progress made in that area. I again put on the record my personal thanks to the Minister for the work that he has done over a long period of time. He must be a very pleased man indeed.

4.6 pm

Stuart C. McDonald: I congratulate everyone involved in the Bill’s progress. It is fair to say that I have come to it very late indeed, largely because my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) has other parliamentary duties to attend to today. I thank her for her contribution during the Bill’s passage. No one would argue with the Bill’s stated goals, but these issues are devolved matters, so I will leave it to Members from English constituencies to debate the extent to which those goals have been achieved.

There are two main clauses with implications for Scotland. The first is clause 10, which reinstates procedures to place children in secure accommodation in different parts of Great Britain. I agree with the shadow Minister that how those procedures operate in practice demands significant scrutiny. Transfers from one constituent part of Great Britain to another or placement in a secure unit should not be routine or the first option, but it is right that it should remain an option in appropriate circumstances.

The second is clause 40. Both the SNP here and the Scottish Government recognise the need for procedures to support staff in raising concerns to ensure a safe and secure environment in the children and social care sector. Any proposals that strengthen whistleblowing procedures and help to protect employees and service users across the public sector are welcome. We regret the missed opportunities for additional social security support for care leavers and for assessing the capacity of local authorities to safeguard children in new clause 14. However, I have no doubt that we will return to those issues in due course.

4.7 pm

Tim Loughton: I come in at the end of the Bill’s progress, having been in at the beginning on Second Reading, but I want to pay tribute to the hard work that has gone into the Bill and to crave your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, in talking about something that did not make it into the legislation.

Having had experience of children’s Bills over the past 15 years or so, I find it interesting that they have a propensity to be hijacked by things not present on Second Reading that then become the headline in the final stages. True to form, that has happened again with amendments about sex and relationship education, which I fully support—I added my name to that amendment—and about child refugees, which I also support but which did

not make it into the Bill in the form that some of us had hoped for. In many respects, that is a shame because it takes attention and focus away from the really important meat of the everyday experiences of vulnerable children, particularly those who find themselves in the care system through no fault of their own. Successive Governments have strived to do much and have achieved much for those children, but we still need to do much more. In welcoming the Bill, I draw the House’s attention to the really good things in it that we did not have much time to discuss today. They were perhaps the more important parts of the Bill as it went through its various stages.

I, too, welcome the addition of the sex and relationship education clauses. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) said, that is ground breaking. Some of us have banged our head against brick walls in various shadow ministerial and post-ministerial positions over many, many years, and the need for it is so screamingly obvious, yet, for all sorts of reasons that I have never quite understood, the measure fails to make it into legislation.

There is an increasing online threat to our children. Shockingly, they are being lured into many things with which we would never have been confronted in our teenage years—just a few years ago in your case, Madam Deputy Speaker, but slightly longer ago for others. Children are exposed to those threats on a daily basis, and the best way to give them defences against those threats must surely be, at an early age at school, to educate, inform, warn and support them against the hazards out in the wider world and the wider web.

By way of example, there was a shocking interview with a teenage girl on “Woman’s Hour” a few years ago. She had been in a relationship with a teenage boy—I think both were under the age of 16—and he had forced her to watch and act out violent pornographic videos, and she had gone along with it. It is shocking that, at her young age, she was under pressure to do that and that it was deemed to be common practice. What was really alarming is that, when the interviewer asked, “Why on earth didn’t you tell him to get lost and report him?” her response was, “Well, I didn’t think I had the right.” If sex and relationships education is anything, it is about giving confidence and empowering young people, particularly young women, that theirs is the choice to say yes or no, and theirs alone.

If we can develop what has now become part of the Bill into an empowerment exercise for our young people, so that they respect other young people and have the confidence to say no—with no meaning no—we will have done this generation of children and future generations a huge service. We have taken a major step forward with this Bill, although the step was not intended on Second Reading, but fortunately it made it in at the last moment with wide cross-party consensus, which is excellent.

The House of Lords is forming a habit of disagreeing with the House of Commons, but I hope that in this case it does not disagree with us. When Ministers formulate the important guidance that needs to go with this legislation, I urge them to be sensitive because this is a big move for many people that will need to be handled carefully and cautiously.

There are many other good things in the Bill, including the local offer for care leavers. In our debates on the Bill we have heard numerous times the figures on the poor outcomes for children in care and for care leavers. The

[*Tim Loughton*]

very small proportion who make it to university shows that we still have a long way to go. There is still a large gap in the educational achievement of children in care and others. The gap has narrowed a little, but we need to go so much further. The Government's support for children in care and adopted children through the pupil premium is a small part of trying to level the playing field.

I welcome the measures, some more controversial than others, on regulating social workers and the need for continuing professional development, but the problem remains that we have a growing shortage of experienced child protection social workers. Work by the all-party parliamentary group for children—I will allude to the study in a minute—shows huge divergences between the experiences in different local authorities. At its worst, one local authority has a 57% locum rate for child social workers. How on earth can we have continuity of care and empathy of care for deeply traumatised and vulnerable children when they are being looked after by non-permanent social workers? That is a huge challenge, and we still have a lot of work to do.

The refugee amendment did not make it into the Bill, but I hope that the spirit of that amendment, which had great support on both sides of the House and on which many undertakings were given by Ministers, will not be forgotten as the Bill's measures are turned into practice.

Clauses 32 to 39, on the so-called powers to test different ways of working, are no longer in the Bill. I congratulate the Government, because this is a good example of their listening to people from across various professions—academics, practitioners, children's charities, politicians and others, including me—who were seriously concerned about the huge principles that would have been at stake had the clauses passed into law. There are no parallels for allowing a local authority, or, indeed, other agencies to step outside primary or secondary legislation effectively at the whim of the Secretary of State of the day. That has not been tried with adults—there are no examples of parallels in the Care Act 2014, the Mental Health Act 2007 or the Mental Capacity Act 2005—so why on earth would the Government risk using vulnerable children as guinea pigs to experiment with a new model of working?

I am all in favour of innovation and of being creative in how we get better outcomes and better support for children who most need it, particularly in the care system, but I just do not think we need to remove primary and secondary legislation that has been built up since 1933, on a whim and without consultation. Whatever the safeguards we were promised, at the end of the day it would mean a postcode lottery for the rights of children and for the responsibilities towards those children of different local authorities, depending on when those children happened to be in care.

Back in 2010, one of the first things the coalition Government did in the Department for Education was to recruit Professor Eileen Munro and appoint her to head the complete overhaul of child protection social work. I was pleased and proud to be part of appointing her and implementing her recommendations. We reduced social work legislation from something like 760 pages in the "Working Together" manual, which had accrued over years and years during which the solution to better child protection was more legislation. In the end, that

got in the way of social workers being able to use their professionalism, instincts and training to do the right thing by the child. Instead, they had constantly to look at the rule book and over their shoulders.

It was right that we reduced that rule book and that manual and gave greater freedoms and flexibility to social workers, but at no point did that require us, or was it required of us, to remove any of the duties that make up the safety net of primary and secondary legislation. Professor Munro never asked for it; we never considered it; and it was never done. It would have been absolutely inappropriate to do it now, so it was completely appropriate that Professor Munro did not give her support to the Government's previous proposals. I am pleased that they have listened, and I am grateful to Lord Laming and Lord Mackay in the other place, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) today, for putting that message across to Ministers.

The Bill has to address the huge variations in practice and outcomes for vulnerable children in care throughout the country. The all-party group for children is about to produce a report on the state of children's social care. Last year, the average rate of referrals to children's services was 532 per 10,000 children in the local population. The lowest rate for a local authority was 187 and the highest was 753 per 10,000 children—that is a difference of nine times, just depending on where the child happened to be. Last year, the average national rate of children becoming subject to child protection plans was 54 per 10,000, but the lowest local authority rate was 16.5 and the highest was 180.5—a difference of 10 times. Our report highlights huge differences in experiences and outcomes for children in care, depending on what local authority they happen to live in. That is the biggest challenge that we face. We owe the same duty of care and responsibility to a vulnerable child in care regardless of whether he or she lives in Yorkshire, Sussex or Cornwall. Those clauses that are now no longer in the Bill would have just widened those differential experiences. The Government's priority now must be to narrow those gaps to make sure that we are doing an ever better job for every child in care in every part of the country.

In closing, may I say that I welcome this Bill? I also welcome the fact that the Government have listened, that the debate has contributed to a great strengthening of some of the measures in this Bill and that some additional measures have been included, but, at the end of the day, we owe our thanks, our respect and our regard to the social workers on the frontline who do an exceedingly challenging job in very challenging circumstances, often dealing with very challenged children and families. We owe a duty of care, thanks and respect to the many foster carers and, increasingly, adoptive parents coming forward to give those children a second chance of a safe, stable and loving home. If there is one upside from our debate on refugees and the publicity about refugees, it is that more people have come forward to offer themselves as foster carers and adoptive parents both for refugee children coming to the county and for the indigenous children for whom we still have a large shortage of places in foster care and for adoption. Those are the people on the frontline who make the difference to children's lives. We have a lot more to do. We owe much greater care to our vulnerable children, but this Bill is a very good step in making that achievable.

4.21 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). I very much agreed with the latter part of his remarks about the challenges, the so-called innovation clauses and the debt that we owe to social workers.

I realise that it is customary to make congratulatory remarks at this stage in the proceedings, but, to be perfectly honest, this is a good example of a piece of legislation that has really rather lost its way. As the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), who is no longer in his place, put it earlier, the Minister said nothing to indicate that he had a problem with new clause 14, but he still urged his colleagues to vote against it. He was left looking like a Minister vulnerable to senior colleagues at the Home Office rather than the Minister for Vulnerable Children. *[Interruption.]* There you go, Minister. Never mind they will look after you.

The Minister then proposed new clause 15; his colleagues warned him to guard against smuggling sexual education content into relationship education. I welcome the comments of the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), but surely the Minister either believes in such education to safeguard children in this day and age or he does not. I wonder whether new clause 16 will ever see the light of day or whether his more atavistic colleagues will have it kicked into the long grass before the election.

The Minister then formally deleted the entirety of what he was stoutly defending in Committee as the “innovation” clauses, but without a single word of explanation. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) was typically charitable and generous to the Minister, but I am really keen that the House should hear why he changed his mind. I would love it if the House had some explanation for why these clauses, which he claimed had so much support from so many notable experts just a few months ago and were so essential to new and innovative approaches to children’s social care legislation, had to go. The House would like to hear what happened. Was he wrong in Committee? Has something changed his mind? It would not do him any harm to offer the House an explanation. It is good to know that the Government listen, but we would like to know what they were listening to, and what had an impact on them.

May I clarify, at this late stage, whether the provisions on training in Government new clause 17 include—*[Interruption.]* Yes, this is Third Reading, which I understand allows me to speak on the entire contents of the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct: on Third Reading, he is perfectly entitled to debate anything in the Bill, but not anything that is not in the Bill; if he could restrict himself to the former, that would be great.

Steve McCabe: That is exactly what I am attempting to do, Madam Deputy Speaker; Government new clause 17 is in the Bill, and I want to ask whether it covers those doing initial training at higher education institutions, or whether the Government plan to exclude initial training from it.

I am sorry that this does not suit some Government Members, but if ever there was an example of the Government needing to prepare a bit more before rushing to legislate, it is the Bill. I do not for a second doubt the Minister’s good intentions, but it is absolutely clear, if one looks at the Bill from its start point to where we are now, that his Government are utterly confused in their objectives.

4.26 pm

Kelly Tolhurst: It is a pleasure to speak after my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton); with his expertise and knowledge in this area, he has been a great source of information and guidance to me.

I was elected two years ago, and I have had great involvement with some of the most vulnerable children in the country, and particularly in my area. When I was a local councillor, I saw some of the decisions taken around the cabinet table on looked-after children; my sister is a social worker; and I continue to be an independent visitor for a looked-after child. I am extremely proud that this Conservative Government have brought forward a Bill that seeks to improve outcomes for our looked-after children and children in need. I pay tribute to the Ministers; it is because of their dedication to improving outcomes for our looked-after children that the Bill is being championed.

I welcome the Minister’s comments on sibling contact, including when the children are not looked after, although I have not once met a social worker or foster carer who has denied a young person in care an opportunity for contact with their siblings. I have seen some of the damage done by contact with parents. Parents have legislative rights to contact with their children, and I have seen really damaging outcomes from forcing newly looked-after children to have such contact, which they do not always want; I hope that that is always taken into account and that the best interests of children are always to the fore when decisions are taken.

On Second Reading, I welcomed the introduction of the local offer in the Bill, and I continue to do so today. I also supported the amendment that was brought forward. The local offer should always be about more than just financial support, and it should be more than a box-ticking exercise. In my experience, young people need guidance and support during their transition from being looked after to going it alone. From what I have seen, local authorities, due to budget burdens, will only ever deliver what they are statutorily obliged to deliver. Therefore, as we evaluate the implementation of the Bill, I would like to see greater prescription of the services we would like local authorities to provide for care leavers, which will hopefully take into account accommodation, training and finance.

Investment in our young people will always pay off. From my experience, people leaving care sometimes lack the necessary experiences and training, because they have often been wrapped in a safety blanket—more so than people’s biological children—so it is important that we do enough for young people in care to make sure that they are prepared. In some of the cases I have seen, that has not always taken place, and I hope we now have an opportunity to further the local offer.

[*Kelly Tolhurst*]

I want to mention new clause 14 briefly. On Second Reading, one Opposition Back Bencher made a speech; I was pleased the Chamber was a lot fuller earlier, when we spoke about refugees, than it was on Second Reading. However, I would have liked to have seen a real championing of the need to find foster carers and social workers to look after the children we are already struggling to place in some parts of the country. We are not selling the fact that becoming a foster carer is an amazing thing to do. We also need an acceptance that when somebody becomes a foster carer, there is a mountain of assessment and training to go through before they are, quite rightly, qualified to look after young people. It is exactly the same in relation to unaccompanied young minors, and it is right that we have the same high standards for them. I therefore welcome what the Minister said about reporting to Parliament, but the way we look after refugees and our looked-after children must be on a par.

We have seen increased referrals, especially to independent fostering agencies. Speaking from my own experience, we often see large numbers of referrals in Kent of young people from London, and we have also seen that with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. We hear that many local authorities around the country have capacity, and I hope they will continue to support counties such as Kent. I hope they will take part in the national transfer scheme and help Kent, as well as Croydon and other London boroughs.

Let me turn to the clauses that were removed from the Bill today. In some parts of the country, as I have outlined, there is great demand for intervention and support for looked-after children and children in need. We have seen growing demand for intervention for young people, especially those with complex needs. The strain on local authorities in terms of providing high-quality support and placements is still there. There is great variation in the quality of service and practice throughout the country, as my hon. Friend outlined, and outcomes for our young people remain poor.

I welcome the fact that the Government have the desire to get behind innovation in the children's social care system and to drive and encourage the reviewing and sharing of best practice. I am sure this is not the end and that the Government will continue to look at ways in which they can improve things, because the Minister is extremely passionate about doing what he can for young people in our care. I would like to see vast improvement across the country in the delivery of children's social care. This should not be—I am glad it will not be—the preserve of local authorities that may have been judged to be good; it must happen in other parts of the country where innovation is much needed.

I look forward to the Minister making further proposals on meaningful reform, after consultation with frontline professionals and care deliverers. For example, I would like IROs—independent reviewing officers—to become truly independent of local authorities, enabling them to make decisions and face challenges on the outcomes for our looked-after children without the demands of budgetary pressures. We still need to tackle social workers' caseloads because there is such a vast difference in the number of cases that social workers will have in different local authority areas. Local authorities are struggling to keep up with demand, and when there is higher demand, caseloads are greater. We need to protect our workforce

and enable them to carry out their role knowing that they are safe when doing so, with the personal capacity to deliver good-quality services to the young people they are charged with looking after.

There is a high burn-out rate for professionals dealing with child protection cases, and many social workers are leaving frontline social work due to the stresses involved. Local authorities are relying heavily on agency workers, and this impacts on the continuity of some of the decision making that takes place subsequently. In turn, there is lots of churn in the system. I have seen examples where looked-after children may have 10 to 12 different social workers over a very short period, and that is just not right. We need to be bold. I hope that the Government come forward with further recommendations and further work in this area, and I am confident that that will happen.

My final point is about social worker regulation. Social workers, in my opinion, have never had the credit that they deserve. They are sometimes the forgotten public servants. They are vilified when something goes wrong, but we never hear about all the good work they are doing day in, day out in protecting families. Social Work England is a positive way forward. Social workers need a stand-alone body to make sure that they are held in the high regard that they deserve. I would like the Secretary of State and Ministers to work with the professional bodies to make sure that the qualifications and continual professional development is right and is acceptable for these workers. It is true that we see variations in the standard and quality of the delivery of social worker practice among individual social workers. I have had some first-hand experience of that.

Although there is some concern from the profession about these changes, I really do believe that they rightly put social workers in the position that they deserve. I hope that the Government will continue to work with them to make sure that they, as a profession, can continue to carry out their job knowing that the Government—this Conservative Government—are fully behind them and all that they are doing for young people in this country.

4.38 pm

Victoria Borwick (Kensington) (Con): I very much support the ambitions of this Bill. As we have all seen, there have been a number of changes during its passage. I want to be assured by the ministerial team that, notwithstanding those changes, we are monitoring the outcomes of safeguarding for those in residential care and those in boarding schools—not just those sent because of the care system but those who attend. Some of my constituents have raised concerns about that. I would very much welcome the Minister's comments.

Edward Timpson: I can offer my hon. Friend that reassurance. The care plan outcomes of every child who is in care have to be closely monitored to make sure that, whatever their setting, they are achieving what the plan sets out. Of course, I am happy to discuss that with her further and to provide her with more detail about how we can do that in the future and keep a close eye on the issues that she has rightly raised.

Victoria Borwick: I thank the Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, with amendments.

United Kingdom Statistics Authority

4.40 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Skidmore): I beg to move,

That this House endorses the nomination of Sir David Norgrove for appointment as Chair of the United Kingdom Statistics Authority.

May I first offer my thanks to Sir Andrew Dilnot, who has performed the role very commendably over the past five years? I truly believe that his initiative has driven all of us to think more critically about statistics and how we can make better use of them.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) for his help in the selection process. I am pleased that that process, which included a pre-appointment scrutiny session before the Select Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs, has identified in Sir David Norgrove an outstanding candidate and a worthy successor to Sir Andrew Dilnot.

I, like the Committee, am convinced that Sir David has both the professional and the personal qualities necessary to make an excellent chair of the UK Statistics Authority. I commend the motion to the House.

4.41 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Before I turn to the nomination of Sir David Norgrove as chair of the UK Statistics Authority, I should like to echo the Minister's tribute to the outgoing chair, Sir Andrew Dilnot. In so doing, I want to acknowledge two important contributions.

First, the outgoing chair, Sir Andrew Dilnot, has, as noted by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee in its report published in January, worked tirelessly over the past five years in maintaining both the independence and the overall excellence of the UK Statistics Authority. There is no better example of that approach to independence than when Sir Andrew took the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the current Health Secretary to task for presenting to the public misleading figures on supposed increases in NHS spending.

I note how, in the four years that have followed, the Government have been less than attentive to Sir Andrew's concerns, but it is important to recognise the impartiality that the role brings to challenging the spin and the misuse of data and statistics to which all politicians, if we are honest, succumb from time to time. If we look back over his term, we will see that Sir Andrew has performed his public duties robustly and with complete impartiality, and I am sure that the whole House is grateful to him for his public service.

Secondly, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) and the Select Committee on Public Accounts under her leadership for their engagement in the appointment process. In an age where terms such as "fake news" are bandied around regularly, it is more important than ever that we have an independent, rigorous and reliable official statistics body.

It is also important in the current climate that the public have faith in such an institution. A 2014 report by the Committee on Standards in Public Life found that only 30% of the general public had confidence in

Parliament as a public institution, which amplifies the new chair's task in maintaining the rigid independence demanded by his post. The public deserve accurate statistics, free from political interference, and Members on both sides of the House must do more to ensure that the public have total confidence on the issues that matter most.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I assure the shadow Minister and the Minister that the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee gave full consideration to ensuring that there is a worthy successor to the current chair of the UK Statistics Authority. As the shadow Minister says, it is vital that the public have faith in public statistics. Does he agree that a key job of the new chair may be to challenge statistics presented in UK referendums? We are aware that the country may face another referendum in Scotland. Some of the statistics used in the EU referendum could usefully have been challenged by the chair of the Statistics Authority.

Andrew Gwynne: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We are talking about the misuse of statistics and data not just within the parliamentary forum, but in elections. He mentioned the EU referendum, in which the origin and robustness of the statistic about health spending post Brexit, in particular, were quite questionable. I share his view on that.

In respect of Sir David's professional competence, I agree with the Committee's report that his extensive experience makes him highly suitable for the role of the chair of the UK Statistics Authority. As the Minister noted, Sir David Norgrove has had a distinguished career, most recently as the chair of the Low Pay Commission, where his leadership in support of campaigns for the national living wage and national minimum wage has been crucial. In addition to that experience, he has also chaired the Pensions Regulator, and that will stand him in good stead in driving forward the structural changes needed in the Statistics Authority, as laid out in the Bean review.

We are convinced that Sir David's skills and professional background as chair of two highly regarded and statistically driven public bodies will allow him effectively to oversee the twin tasks of statistical production and strictly regulating Government statistics and the veracity of Departments' claims. Throughout his career, Sir David has been unafraid to question authority when those with power threatened to abuse or distort the process. That was seen when he famously faced down Sir Philip Green after the retail entrepreneur tried to buy Marks & Spencer with a bid that jeopardised the solvency of the pension scheme. Sir David's record speaks for itself, and I am therefore satisfied—and rather hopeful about the fact—that he will bring the same toughness and fairness to challenging the Government's use of statistics.

The Opposition are less concerned about the suitability of Sir David for the role in question than they are about the lack of diversity in the wider appointment process, which gives the impression of a closed system. Of the 14 candidates who applied for the chairperson's position, only three were women and 11 were men. Added to that, all three previous authority chairs have been white, male and Oxbridge-educated. The Labour party recognises the quality that diversity can bring to both the selection

[Andrew Gwynne]

and appointment processes, and we urge the Government to take steps to ensure that future candidates are from as diverse a pool as possible to ensure that every part of Britain is represented and that each person has an equal opportunity to aspire to the highest posts in the land.

The post involves the significant responsibility of promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official figures that serve the public good. Sir David has already made it clear how crucial it is to have consistency in how the Government produce their figures. The appointment of a new chair of the board of the UK Statistics Authority is extremely important. We need a candidate who can maintain the code of practice for official statistics and ensure that Government figures are produced and presented to the highest standards of independence and integrity. We share the view of the Government and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee that in Sir David Norgrove we have a candidate who can rise to that challenge.

4.49 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): SNP Members welcome the appointment of Sir David, and we certainly wish him well in his future role as chair of the UK Statistics Authority. However, we have some concerns about the UK Statistics Authority's rather narrow approach to the way in which it reviews and undertakes a critique of the statistics used by the Government and others.

Tomorrow, we will be faced with the Budget. I predict that it will have forecasts from the Treasury and the Office for Budget Responsibility, and may possibly even throw in the odd forecast from the Bank of England. One thing that will be true of every forecast produced by all those bodies is that not a single confidence interval will be mentioned. We know that their forecasts are consistent—consistently wrong and always need revision, partly because the models used are inappropriate.

I notice in the description of the UK Statistics Authority that part of its task is to make sure statistics are available to aid Government decision making, which is a very worthy purpose. I have struggled to find any expertise in, for example, Bayesian statistics that could be used as decision aids. That is possibly because the Government do not use any statistical decision aids in their decision making. I think there is a long way to go in developing the authority to provide the kind of critique that will realistically help the Government both now and in the future. For that future, however, we wish Sir David well.

4.50 pm

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I rise as a member of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which scrutinised the appointment, to give a warm welcome to Sir David's appointment. I pay tribute to his predecessor, Sir Andrew Dilnot, for his work, which did well in holding the Government to account and ensuring that statistics were used reasonably when debating the NHS.

It is a difficult time for politics for us all. We have come through a referendum campaign, during which various statements and assertions were made on both

sides of the debate. At the forefront of the minds of members of the Committee when scrutinising the appointment was the need to ensure that we had a new chair who would scrutinise the use of statistics in future referendum campaigns. It does credit to nobody in the House to see statistics potentially misused in referendum debates that captivated the mind and votes of the overwhelming majority of the public. The shadow Minister quite rightly outlined some of the concerns about NHS spending that were raised by those on one side of the referendum debate, while other perhaps somewhat exaggerated claims were made by those on the other side of the debate. No matter which side of the debate we have sympathy with, we can recognise that the referendum campaign did no credit to the use of statistics. It is important to have an independent chair—I am sure Sir David will fulfil that role—and I hope that that will restore some public faith in the independent challenge offered to the misuse of statistics in the future.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I, too, congratulate Sir David. However, I want to pick up the point that the hon. Gentleman has quite rightly made about the importance of looking closely at statistics during elections and referendums. May I add to that list by encouraging the authority, under its new chair, to look at the statistics that may well be claimed by Sinn Féin for a border poll in Northern Ireland? This is not just about referendums and elections, but about such a border poll. It is very important indeed that propaganda perpetuated by Sinn Féin and the popularity of Sinn Féin do not lead—unexpectedly, and without any good reason—to a border poll in Northern Ireland. The authority should look at that.

Dr Poulter: The hon. Lady is absolutely right in her comment. She may be reassured by the fact that, when scrutinising the appointment, members of the Committee asked Sir David directly about his approach to the issues involved in his scrutiny of another possible referendum in Scotland and of debates in all devolved parts of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland and Wales. He assured our Committee that he will be keeping a keen eye on these issues. We are very aware of the recent concerns that may have manifested themselves as a result of the election results at the weekend. I am sure that Sir David will be mindful of that as he comes into post. When we have what are sometimes emotive debates, it is vital that the public can have faith that there is an independent authority that will hold politicians to account. It is important that that happens in Northern Ireland and, indeed, elsewhere.

I am sure that another pressing issue on Sir David's mind will be ensuring that claims that may be made in a future Scottish referendum are properly scrutinised. I remember that there were a lot of discussions about North sea oil and its potential revenues during the last referendum debate. I am sure that he will be mindful of that when taking up his position. When there is a referendum, or an important debate of that nature, the public must have faith that politicians are in no way willingly misleading the public, although they may exaggerate statistics. We would not wish to do that in this House, and we should not do it in debates outside this place.

The Committee was satisfied that in Sir David we have a new chair who meets those criteria, will be a robust defender of the correct use of statistics and will

hold Executives—and, indeed, political parties—in all parts of the United Kingdom to account when they make claims in referendum campaigns.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab) *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I will call the hon. Gentleman even though he was not here at the beginning of the debate. We are not short on time and he has promised that he will be brief.

4.56 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I am most grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I apologise for being late; the earlier business finished much sooner than I expected so I was caught short, so to speak.

As I chaired the confirmation hearing for Sir David at the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, I thought it would be appropriate to say a few words. We thought he was the right person for the job and strongly approve of him. He has some great predecessors. Sir Michael Scholar, the first chair, challenged the Government over misuse of statistics, and we want the chair to take a strong line with the Government or any other official body that makes light of official statistics. Sir Andrew Dilnot, who is coming to the end of his term, is a great friend and another great communicator with broadcasting and so on in statistical matters. He is an excellent chair. Sir David has two great predecessors to follow. I am sure that he will measure up and do a good job, but I hope that the UK Statistics Authority continues to hold the Government to account if they misbehave.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders (Public Business)

4.58 pm

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

That:

(1) In Standing Order No. 83S(3)(c), after the paragraph (4A) treated as inserted in

Standing Order No. 83J, insert-

“(4B) In addition, a clause or schedule-

(a) relates exclusively to England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and

(b) is within devolved legislative competence,

if it does nothing other than set one or more of the main rates of income tax for a

tax year.”;

(2) In Standing Order No. 83S(3)(d), at the end insert “and”;

(3) In Standing Order No. 83S(3), omit sub-paragraph (f), and the “and” preceding it;

(4) In Standing Order No. 83T(2)(c), for “, (7) and (12)” substitute “and (7)”; and

(5) In Standing Order No. 83U(8), for “(4A), (7) and (12)” substitute “(4B) and (7)”.

As hon. Members will be aware, the Scotland Act 2016 received Royal Assent last year. The Act provides the Scottish Parliament with the power to set its own rates and thresholds of income tax. For that reason, the Government announced in the 2016 Budget changes to the structure of income tax intended to ensure that from the Finance Bill 2017 onwards, a clause setting the main rates of income tax would be certified under the English votes procedures. In other words, the consent of hon. Members from constituencies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland would be required for any income tax matters that affected their constituents and that did not affect Scottish taxpayers. The necessary legislative changes to achieve this were made in the Finance Act 2016, and mean that from April this year, these UK main rates will no longer affect Scottish taxpayers.

The technical amendments to Standing Orders before us will ensure that provisions setting the main rates of income tax will be subject to a certification decision by the Speaker now that the Scottish rates of income tax are set by the Scottish Parliament. It will mean that the Standing Orders on which Parliament has already voted will work as originally intended, but now taking account of the new element of the Scotland Act 2016.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am grateful to the ever-generous Leader of the House. If the Chancellor were to come to the Dispatch Box and deliver a Finance Bill in which he said that the rates of income tax in England and Wales would alter and that, on that basis a different set of taxes, which were still reserved, would be altered—national insurance, for example—would this English votes for English laws clause be appropriate?

Mr Lidington: It would be a matter for certification by the Speaker. As in all other such matters as provided for already under our Standing Orders, the Speaker’s test has to be whether the content of the clause or amendment under discussion is devolved to Scotland—or, for that matter, to another part of the United Kingdom—and then, in addition, whether the subject-matter before the House at that time is the sole province of English, Welsh or Northern Irish Members.

Ian Murray *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I shall not give way again; I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have a chance to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is important that this small technical change is made in time for this year's Budget and Finance Bill. As hon. Members know, the Budget statement is due tomorrow, so that is why we are bringing this change to the Standing Orders before the House now.

5.1 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House and I appreciate that he has said that there has to be an amendment to Standing Order 83S. Doubts have been raised as to whether under the current provisions of Standing Orders, the main rate of income tax under the Finance Bill will definitely be certified as English only, particularly when this comes with partially devolving income tax to the Scottish Parliament this year.

However, this is a point of principle and Her Majesty's Opposition oppose EVEL, which in our view is poorly conceived, a knee-jerk reaction and a constitutional disaster. It risks dividing the UK, rather than allowing devolved Governments to work together for the benefit of the whole UK. The Labour leader in Scotland, Kezia Dugdale, has more recently called for a "constitutional convention", which is the position we support. If the Government had listened to these suggestions, the House would not be in the position of having to amend Standing Orders—both now and possibly in the future. For these reasons, Her Majesty's Opposition oppose the motion.

5.2 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): This is the second time this afternoon that I have debated English votes for English laws on the Floor of the House, and I have to say that I did not expect to be speaking conclusively on EVEL on either of these occasions. It is always a pleasure to address some of the issues surrounding English votes for English laws.

SNP Members see this very much as a technical change to the Standing Orders, and we are quite surprised that we are getting into a general debate about the whole insidious package of English votes for English laws. I totally understand Labour's concerns, and there are good reasons to be concerned, but it seems a curious environment in which to be having some of these debates about EVEL just now.

Ian Murray: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is the very distinguished Chair of the Scottish Affairs Committee on which I serve. For clarity, will he re-emphasise that he and his party previously supported English votes for English laws?

Pete Wishart: I am happy to confirm that we believe conclusively that English Members should of course be responsible for all their own measures, and we agree that it is up to English Members to determine their own legislation and their own policy. We have a very elegant solution for that, and I think the hon. Gentleman knows exactly what territory we are getting into with that. English votes for English laws is simply the wrong

way to do that. As a package, it has been utterly divisive in this House and has been supported by absolutely no one other than the Government themselves, so I think it should be reviewed. I shall come on to that later, and I will allow him to come into the debate again if he thinks it necessary.

Let me address what is before us now. When it comes to these changes to the Standing Orders, we need to recognise the fact that the Scotland Act 2016 devolved to the Scottish Parliament the right to set the main rates of income tax—and thank goodness for that. This was agreed between the party of the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) and my party in the Smith Commission, and we are grateful to know that the rates of income tax are now a responsibility for the Scottish Parliament. That is a good and positive thing, which we very much welcome.

We see the motion as a recognition of our legislative authority on rates of income tax and as a tidying up exercise. If anything—I am loth to concede this to the Leader of the House—it is helpful in clarifying the new arrangements on Standing Orders relating to English votes for English laws. That is why I am surprised that Labour has decided to have a real debate and conversation tonight about EVEL. I am always happy to debate EVEL. I am just surprised that Labour has chosen this evening to conduct such a debate.

The changes take account of the fact that there might, in future, be resolutions or pieces of legislation relating to main income tax rates that are specific to England, or to England, Wales and Northern Ireland but not Scotland, because those matters have been properly devolved. It also makes changes to ensure certainty on who are and who are not Scottish taxpayers. The hon. Member for Edinburgh South will remember the tortuous conversations we had on trying to identify who are and who are not Scottish taxpayers. The changes will clarify that a touch and are therefore reasonably helpful in that regard.

There is much about English votes for English laws that SNP Members do not like. You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that our issues with EVEL are many and manifest. No one understands what on earth is going on. We just had a Legislative Grand Committee. The bell went off, the Mace went down and the Mace went back up again, and not one Member from England had got to his or her feet to contribute. I have the House of Commons record for contributions in Legislative Grand Committees. In fact, I have spoken twice as much in LGCs as all the English Members put together, yet we were told that EVEL was an absolute necessity, a burning issue that concerned and consumed the shires of Englandshire as they were revolting about me and my hon. Friends coming down and voting on all their precious legislation. And what do we get when they actually have the opportunity to discuss this? Absolute and utter silence! That is why we say again that English votes for English laws are unnecessary. They are burdensome to this House and cumbersome to the way we do business. More than anything else, they divide this House on the basis of nationality and geography. It is on that basis that we profoundly disagree with the whole idea of English votes for English laws.

Now that is all well and good—I am looking at you, Madam Deputy Speaker, getting edgy and tetchy about where I am going with this—but in our view this is not

the place to have this debate. I am surprised at Labour's lack of understanding about what is being pitched by the Government. As the Leader of the House says, this is a technical change to Standing Orders. I understand that the Labour party will press the motion to a Division. I will support Labour on that as I will oppose English votes for English laws at any opportunity, but I know that the Leader of the House finds it very curious that Labour has decided that this will be a matter of principle on which to vote this evening.

English votes for English laws is an absolute disaster. This is nothing to do with the Leader of the House, bless him; this is all about his predecessor's charge to bring this forward to the House without any due regard to its impact on our business. It is wrong. It does not work. The House does not require it and it does not satisfy anybody. It does not satisfy us in Scotland. It certainly does not satisfy English Members, who have not contributed one peep to English Legislative Grand Committees. This is an opportunity for the Leader of the House. Yes, go ahead with the technical changes. There is no real issue from us on them, but he will not get the support of the House on EVEL. He has seen all the reviews and reports and it manifestly does not work. It sits awkwardly with the idea of a unitary UK Parliament, where every single Member should be equal. This may be the wrong place to have that fight, but on EVEL we are in the trenches and will support Labour this evening.

5.8 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I agree with most of what the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) says about how EVEL was brought to this House. It is an unnecessary change to Standing Orders, because the Conservatives and the Government have a majority in both England and Wales, and across the UK. They do not have to use this process to get legislation through. All it has done, as the Conservatives have done consistently over the past few years, is create more division, which the SNP—if SNP Members do not mind me saying—thrives on in this House.

That brings me to the motion and the Standing Order. We have now added to English votes for English laws the issue of income tax. I am delighted that income tax has been devolved to the Scottish Parliament. It is a shame that members of the Scottish National party, who have spent their entire lives fighting for more powers to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, failed to use that in their most recent Budget, because they did not want a differential between Scottish and English rates. That is the irony of the position.

Adding the income tax issue to the EVEL provisions, Madam Deputy Speaker, not only undermines the principle of the House, but puts pressure on you, and on Mr Speaker's office, to determine, when dealing with a Finance Bill, whether a provision should indeed be invoked under the EVEL regulations. That means—this is why I intervened on the Leader of the House earlier—that an individual clause in the Finance Bill could rightly say, “We will set the following rates of income tax as part of the Finance Bill for England and Wales,” but the Chancellor could come to the Dispatch Box tomorrow and, hypothetically, say, “We will reduce income tax by x pence in the pound, and we will pay for it with an increase in national insurance.” The income tax rates in the Finance

Bill will be in a separate clause, and that will then have to be determined by Mr Speaker and his office, but the national insurance increases will be in another part of the Bill that will not be subject to EVEL.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I am loth to bring this up, but I am holding a copy of the Standing Orders of February 2016, which specifically mention the Scottish rate of income tax. That was already in the EVEL Standing Orders presented by the Leader of the House previously. This is just a technical change in the language. Has the hon. Gentleman read the Standing Order?

Ian Murray: It seems to me that SNP Members agree with English votes for English laws and do not want to defend the principle that we are against them, or they want to vote with the Government this evening, or they want to abstain. I am not quite sure what they are doing. However, if I heard the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire correctly, he is going to vote with the Labour party against the motion. I am not sure where the hon. Lady stands on that argument, but the point I am trying to make is simply about division and unnecessary complication in the House. The Government's majority will see any Finance Bill that they wish to present before the next general election—whenever that may be—through the House, because that is the way in which Governments and majorities work. If the Government have a problem with their own Back Benchers when they are trying to change income tax rates, that is entirely fine.

The hon. Lady was right to raise the point that she has just made, but let me gently say to her that we wanted to debate this matter today because it is the first opportunity that we have had to return to the EVEL regulations. It does not make sense for it to be possible to invoke this procedure in the context of income tax.

That brings us to the great repeal Bill and what will come back from the European Union. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire has raised that issue on a number of occasions. What will happen then? Will more technical changes be made by means of statutory instruments and Standing Orders to determine whether provisions are subject to English votes for English laws? We do not even know where some of the powers will lie when they are repatriated. It is important to note that none of these issues were examined in depth at the time of the McKay commission's proposals. There was no consideration of the impact and the knock-on effect of the provisions on the way in which the House operates.

On four separate occasions, under the premiership of Gordon Brown, the Scottish National party asked for English votes for English laws. In fact, they used the term “EVEL”. Then, after 2015—I do not know what happened in 2015; they must have won more seats—SNP Members became opposed to English votes for English laws. Now they are reluctantly voting against this measure. I think the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire just said that he profoundly disagreed with it as a matter of principle, but was not sure whether he would vote against it. He seemed to be saying that these were merely technical changes.

On top of all that, the greatest anomaly in all the regulations, including the one that is before us now, is that even when the hon. Gentleman has sprung up in that strange Committee where the Mace goes down,

[*Ian Murray*]

Madam Deputy Speaker moves to the Chair to take the proceedings and no one speaks, and when he has—invariably, and quite rightly—railed against English votes for English laws, SNP Members do not vote when they are allowed to do so, on Third Reading. They are, in practice, demonstrating English votes for English laws in any event.

I remember the circumstances surrounding the housing Bill where the EVEL provisions were put in place for the first time in this House. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire rightly railed against EVEL, and we supported him on that, but then the SNP Members did not vote on the Third Reading of the Bill in any case, when they were entitled to, so I am not quite sure where the principles of that lie, or whether or not the hon. Gentleman should have been voting on the housing Bill.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Of course we support the principle of English votes for English laws and its ultimate logical conclusion of independence, but does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that there is a difference between supporting that concept in principle and this dog's breakfast of Standing Orders that were brought forward in such a rush after 2015? It is these procedures that we have an issue with, not the principle of English votes for English laws.

Ian Murray: And that is quite right: it is a dog's breakfast, which is why I am so surprised that the hon. Gentleman's spokesperson on the Front Bench, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, did not rail against this particular dog's breakfast, but instead welcomed this technical change and is not quite sure whether he will vote for it or against it or abstain on it this evening. If it is a dog's breakfast and a matter of principle, let us try to fight these changes at every possible turn, of which this is a great and ideal opportunity in this House this evening.

I will conclude by saying what the alternative is for the Government. Let us take away all these changes to Standing Orders—the mess that the Leader of the House is making of the constitution—and get to a point whereby we have a set of constitutional arrangements in this House that work for the UK. We have called for a constitutional convention that would look at all these issues—the House of Lords and everything we do in terms of the constitution—and do it through a sensible and pragmatic approach, where we can look at everything in the round and come out with something the public want. It is time we started bringing the country together: no more division, no more separating different classes of MPs, no more bringing Standing Orders to this House that merely set one MP off against another. Let us work together to try and find a set of circumstances that work for the entirety of this House. It seems to me that when this Conservative Government talk about taking back control, they are not talking about taking back control to the people of this country; they are talking about taking back control for themselves, and that is the principle behind all these English votes for English laws.

This is a dog's breakfast and it does not work, as has been highlighted time and again in this House. It is a waste of this House's time to have to go through the

process of a Committee to address whether or not we have English votes for English laws. It is inelegant and we will be voting against this this evening, to send a strong message that we as Members of Parliament are all one in this House, and the Government must go back and think again about what they are doing to the procedures in this famous House of Commons.

5.17 pm

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I am delighted to have this opportunity to raise my voice in opposition once again to the procedure known as English votes for English laws. The acronym EVEL seems very appropriate from my point of view, if I may say so. It is deeply divisive, demeaning and humiliating for MPs from Welsh, Northern Irish and Scottish constituencies to be told repeatedly that this is the United Kingdom, given that although when the Prime Minister took over the reins of power from David Cameron on 13 July last year she spoke about wanting to bind together the parts of the United Kingdom, the continued use of EVEL certainly does not do that.

I have a very high regard for the Leader of the House. In a previous role he was a spokesperson for Northern Ireland—a spokesman, rather; I will allow him to be a spokesman—and he will therefore be very sensitive indeed to how divisive English votes for English laws and its continuation in this House is, particularly after Brexit. None of us in this House should be under any illusions as to how the circumstances in Northern Ireland have changed. That is evidenced by the Northern Ireland Assembly election on Thursday. A reduced number of MLAs was returned—90—and the Democratic Unionist party, which dominated for so long, now has a majority of just one over Sinn Féin, the republican party. Sinn Féin's vote went up dramatically. I am not speaking for Sinn Féin—I am speaking as a Unionist—but I am reflecting to the House the seriousness of the situation. With the greatest respect to the Prime Minister, for whom I have great respect, her first call of duty yesterday morning should have been to Northern Ireland, as part of the United Kingdom, to reassure the people there that it was firmly within the United Kingdom. That opportunity has now passed.

It behoves this Government to look at ways and means of binding together a very disunited United Kingdom post-Brexit. With the greatest respect to the Leader of the House and to the Government, the continuation of the procedure known as English votes for English laws is counterproductive. It unnecessarily drives a wedge between MPs in this House. The Conservative Government have a majority. Indeed, they increased it in a recent by-election, and their new Member was greeted with great applause last Wednesday. I congratulate the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on her election.

I urge the Leader of the House and his Government to take a long, hard look at the consequences of perpetuating the procedure of English votes for English laws, not just through the issue before the House tonight but when the great repeal Bill comes before the House. He will know that I asked him, in a written question, whether Standing Orders—including the EVEL procedure—would be applied to the great repeal Bill, and I had a perfect parliamentary reply. It told me virtually nothing, except that the great repeal Bill would be the subject of Standing Orders.

The Government can no longer turn their eyes away from what is happening in Northern Ireland. They must take seriously the consequences of last week's Northern Ireland Assembly election. One way of doing that successfully would be to bring back equality and respect in this House for all Members who stood at the general election on the same day. I stood in the general election in Northern Ireland. I did not explain to my electorate who returned me—because I did not know that I would have to—that my vote would be disregarded when the Government decided to apply English votes for English laws. This is wrong. Let us please wake up to the consequences of Brexit and to the consequences of perpetuating the divisions within our country by using EVEL when it is wholly unnecessary to do so.

The only kind words that I can add are to commend those who provided the explanatory memorandum to the motion on the Order Paper. The motion is so threadbare that it is impossible to understand what aspect of Standing Orders we were to debate, so I commend the officials who drafted the explanatory memorandum. I would have liked the Leader of the House to take the opportunity to do so as well. Perhaps he will do so in his closing remarks. Without that explanatory memorandum, no one—but no one—would have been able to understand what we were voting for without a crystal ball. That is inappropriate. We need to understand what we are going to vote on. My message is loud and clear to the Leader of the House, whom I respect, and I expect him to come back at some stage, having considered—with his boss, the Prime Minister—how we in this Parliament are going to bind up the wounds that undoubtedly exist throughout this country.

5.23 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I first saw these proposed changes to Standing Orders on the Order Paper last Tuesday and, as any competent, capable parliamentarian would do, I decided to find out what they meant. I spoke to the Clerks and to the more senior members in my group. I also went to the Leader of the House's office and asked his officials to produce an explanatory memorandum, so that we could understand the changes that were being made and the reasons behind them. Having spoken to the Clerks, I realised that these were in fact fairly innocuous changes that were intended to tighten up the language.

I am against English votes for English laws. I do not like the way the arrangements have been implemented through Standing Orders. I do not think that that was the right way to bring forward such a significant constitutional change in this House. It has shown up at least one technical problem with the drafting. That is a concern, and it would not have arisen had we had proper scrutiny and primary legislation to make the change. I am against EVEL because of how it has been implemented. I am against the fact that significant decisions can be taken on things that have a major impact on Scotland's public finances and on Barnett consequential without Scottish Members being able to take a full part in the debate and have a full say in the votes. That is not right, and the change was not an appropriate way to implement EVEL.

We were reassured by the former Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), that Scottish Members would be able

to have a full say in the financial processes and the departmental budgets in the estimates process, but the estimates process is utterly rubbish. It does not allow MPs in this House, whether Back-Bench Conservatives or anybody in the Opposition, to scrutinise departmental budgets. The only people who have a say over departmental budgets are those in the Treasury. The Treasury puts them forward in the form of estimates, which we are not allowed to debate. We were promised that we would still have our say under EVEL on all the financial implications through the estimates process. If the Government are to change EVEL, instead of the change they are making today they should make meaningful changes to allow Scottish MPs to have a say on things that have a financial impact on Scotland's public finances.

My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) said that income tax has been "properly devolved", which is an interesting phrase, particularly in this context. The Standing Order allows for decisions around the main rates of income tax, which are wholly devolved, to be classed under EVEL. I do not like EVEL at all and I do not think that we should have EVEL, but if we are going to have it, it is probably sensible to have it on something that does not have direct impact on Scotland's public finances.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) mentioned the great repeal Bill, which is important in this context. The great repeal Bill cannot be subject to EVEL, and the Leader of the House should bring a further amendment to the Standing Orders or commit to suspend the Standing Order when we discuss the great repeal Bill, because it is not appropriate for Standing Orders relating to EVEL to apply during the great repeal Bill. Scottish Members should absolutely have a say at all its stages. We are being dragged out of the European Union against our will, and we should have a say in the great repeal Bill.

Patrick Grady: My hon. Friend is making an important point. We have always been worried about the EVEL Standing Orders placing the Chair in an invidious position. Will that not increase if the Scotland Office, and the Government as a whole, cannot be clear about what powers will be devolved to Scotland in the event of Brexit? The Scotland Act sets out that if something is not reserved, it is devolved, but if the UK Government start to legislate, how on earth will the Chair know whether something should be subject to the EVEL process?

Kirsty Blackman: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly clever point. The waters are muddy, because the Secretary of State for Scotland has not been clear about what will actually be devolved. He keeps saying that more things will be devolved, but he has been utterly unclear about whether agriculture and fishing will be devolved. The Chair will be in an even worse position when making decisions about the great repeal Bill due to the mud in the water.

My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire and the shadow Leader of the House said that this is a matter of principle. I get that. I am against EVEL and do not think it should have been implemented in this way. We should not have a constitutional convention; we should have independence. If the Labour party is so

[Kirsty Blackman]

concerned about voting against the Government on matters of principle, I suggest that the one to have started with would have been the article 50 Brexit vote.

5.29 pm

Mr Lidington: With the leave of the House, the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) enjoys huge respect on both sides of the House for the way in which she has championed peace and political reconciliation in Northern Ireland. We all take seriously her concerns about the current fragile political situation there. Both the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland are working as hard as they can to bring about reconciliation, and they will want to listen to her views and the views of other Northern Ireland colleagues in the days and weeks ahead.

The hon. Members for North Down and for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) both asked about the application of the Standing Order No. 83 tests to the repeal Bill. One reason for my reluctance to go into great detail is simply that the repeal Bill has not yet been published. I can give a measure of reassurance that the repeal Bill will seek to repeal the European Communities Act 1972 and convert European law into UK law, which is not a matter that could relate only to England or only to England and Wales. It therefore strikes me as very unlikely that EVEL would apply to the Bill, and even more so when one considers the tests that Mr Speaker is required under the Standing Orders to apply to Bills, or to clauses of Bills, when considering the application of Standing Order No. 83.

To be treated under the EVEL procedures, a Bill or a clause has to deal with a devolved matter—in most cases, the procedures apply to matters devolved to Scotland. The repeal Bill will address the cessation of the application to the UK of an international treaty, and international treaties, as the whole House knows, are expressly reserved to the United Kingdom Government and Parliament in all three devolution settlements.

It is difficult to see how the EVEL procedures could apply to matters under the repeal Bill, but I will be cautious about that until the day when the repeal Bill is published and everybody can inspect it.

Kirsty Blackman: I appreciate that the Leader of the House is giving us more clarity on the issue than we have previously received, but I still ask him seriously to consider suspending the Standing Order when the great repeal Bill comes to the House, to ensure that it cannot possibly be subject to the EVEL procedures.

Mr Lidington: I take note of the hon. Lady's representation.

It is always good to hear familiar riffs. Like putting Eric Clapton on the turntable and hearing the golden oldies from one's younger days, the speech of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) is familiar to me. He puts his finger on the truth that I am not sure the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) or the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), really grasped. This is a narrow, technical change.

On the question before the House, it is true that all UK MPs will still be able to continue voting on Budgets and on all aspects of income tax. But English, Welsh and Northern Irish MPs will have an opportunity expressly to approve matters that primarily affect their constituencies, such as the main rates of income tax. That simply reflects the fact that it is Members of the Scottish Parliament who vote on devolved matters, including the main rates of income tax, in so far as they affect Scottish taxpayers.

Why are we making this change? We are making the change because of a degree of uncertainty in the current Standing Orders when we have to take into account the implications of the Scotland Act 2016. As the hon. Member for Aberdeen North pointed out, our Standing Orders already provide for certification in relation to Finance Bills, so we are not debating some new extension of the EVEL procedures. The 2016 Act presents us with a particular problem. The main rates of income tax are paid by residents of the United Kingdom who are not subject to the Scottish main rate of income tax. That means that in future no Scottish taxpayer will be affected by the UK main rate, but there is a theoretical possibility that the main rate of income tax could affect an individual who is not a Scottish taxpayer but has some connections to Scotland—perhaps they have a second home there. Because of that possibility, it was unclear whether, subsequent to the 2016 Act, a clause that set the main rates of income tax would relate exclusively to England, Wales and Northern Ireland and therefore trigger a vote under the English laws procedures according to the existing Standing Orders.

The narrow amendment we are considering will remove the element of doubt and ensure what was always intended when the House approved the Standing Orders, the 2016 Act and the measures in last year's Finance Act—namely, that a vote on the main rates of income tax will attract an EVEL vote. This will ensure that English, Welsh and Northern Irish MPs have the final say on setting income tax rates when no Scottish taxpayer will be affected. That seems to be a perfectly fair way to proceed, so I invite the House to support the amendment.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 239.

Division No. 175]

[5.36 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Blackman, Bob
Aldous, Peter	Blackwood, Nicola
Allan, Lucy	Blunt, Crispin
Allen, Heidi	Bone, Mr Peter
Amess, Sir David	Borwick, Victoria
Andrew, Stuart	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Ansell, Caroline	Bradley, rh Karen
Argar, Edward	Brady, Mr Graham
Atkins, Victoria	Brazier, Sir Julian
Bacon, Mr Richard	Bridgen, Andrew
Baker, Mr Steve	Buckland, Robert
Baldwin, Harriett	Burns, Conor
Barclay, Stephen	Burrowes, Mr David
Barwell, Gavin	Burt, rh Alistair
Bebb, Guto	Cairns, rh Alun
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Carmichael, Neil
Benyon, rh Richard	Cartlidge, James
Beresford, Sir Paul	Cash, Sir William
Berry, James	Caulfield, Maria
Bingham, Andrew	Chalk, Alex

Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinéage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evennett, rh David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, 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
 Hancock, rh Matt

Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 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
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kinahan, Danny
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel

Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 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
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 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
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Graham Stuart and
Steve Brine

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Anderson, Mr David
 Arkless, Richard
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Black, Mhairi

Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard

Burnham, rh Andy
 Butler, Dawn
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Johnson, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewis, Clive
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess

Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel
Tellers for the Noes:
Thangam Debonnaire and
Jeff Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

PETITION

Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts

5.49 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is particularly appropriate that, on the eve of International Women's Day, I present this petition from the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign in Newcastle upon Tyne Central, and many men, calling for fair transitional arrangements for 1950s-born women affected by changes to the state pension age.

In my recent Westminster Hall debate, I highlighted how these changes disproportionately affect working-class women of that generation, who are more likely to have started work at 15, more likely to be in manual trades, which take a greater toll on the body as it ages, more likely to die younger and less likely to have private pensions. There are many such women in Newcastle and across the country who wish to highlight the hardship, stress and worry they face as a consequence.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Newcastle Upon Tyne Central,

Declares that as a result of the way in which the 1995 Pension Act and the 2011 Pension Act were implemented, women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age; further that hundreds of thousands of women have had significant changes imposed on them with little or no personal notice; further that implementation took place faster than promised; further that this gave no time to make alternative pension plans; and further that retirement plans have been shattered with devastating consequences.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002024]

Rural Policing and Hare Coursing

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

5.52 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to Mr Speaker for granting this Adjournment debate on rural policing and hare coursing. It is particularly important that we discuss this issue now, as we must reflect on, and learn lessons from, the most recent hare coursing season, which is coming to a close.

Hare coursing, poaching and the surrounding issues of antisocial behaviour should be matters of great concern for this House, both as individual crimes and examples of the challenges associated with policing rural communities. I have been struck by the number of hon. Members who have approached me following notification of the debate this evening. In particular, I would like to draw the House's attention to my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who will be unable to contribute, but I understand she has a strong interest in some of the issues I am about to raise.

We must carefully consider two key issues. First, we need to recognise the damage sustained by farmers to their properties and their wellbeing, as many are made to feel intimidated by those carrying out these heinous acts. Secondly, we need carefully to consider the police's approach to this problem and what tools are necessary to ensure that the law is effectively enforced.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My hon. Friend is absolutely right on both points. On the first point, farmers can, of course, dig ditches and barricade their fences, but many in my constituency are afraid to undertake that work in case there is retaliation against their equipment as a result.

John Glen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As somebody who used to live in his constituency, I empathise strongly with the concerns he raises. I will set out similar examples of my constituents who have shared the same experience.

My first and principal concern is the threat that hare coursing poses to farming communities. Hare coursers are not simply a few individuals quietly chasing hares on unused land: they are, most often, large groups who show serious contempt for the law. This results in a number of significant problems for my constituents. Farms are vandalised; people are intimidated; and often farmers are isolated and unable to count on the law for timely protection.

The National Farmers Union has found that hare coursing is now the most common crime experienced by farmers in Wiltshire. That has a number of troubling implications for rural communities.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that hare coursers marauding across farmers' land in their vehicles not merely cause an unsightly mess but vandalise livelihoods, and should be dealt with accordingly?

John Glen: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention: I absolutely agree. Again, I will come on

[John Glen]

to set out more examples and give the Minister some suggestions on what could be done to deal with the problem.

I want to outline some of the implications of hare coursing. First, when entering these private lands, hare coursers and poachers regularly cause criminal damage to gates, hedgerows, fences and growing crops. This creates financial costs arising from repairs to the damage and the need to increase security infrastructure, probably involving CCTV cameras. It also wastes a huge number of man hours as farmers are forced to look for damage and repair it. This is extremely time consuming, frustrating and upsetting for many farmers, whose land is the single most important asset of their business and their livelihood.

My constituent Chris Swanton, whose family have farmed on his farm for several generations, has regularly experienced at first-hand on his farm in South Wiltshire the problems I have described. He wrote to me saying:

“I get upset because I am very passionate about my farm and I have a certain amount of pride in the appearance of my fields and crops. I find it gutting and very depressing to drive around my farm after hare coursers have been all across my fields.”

It is totally unacceptable for farmers like Chris who have worked 80 hours a week preparing seed beds and planting crops to find them ruined by mindless vandals. His experiences are by no means unique, as this happens right across my constituency, and, from what colleagues have been telling me in the past few days, over large tracts of rural England.

The impact for victims is not merely economic. Many face unjustifiable intimidation and antisocial behaviour on their doorsteps. Hare coursers will often threaten and behave violently towards landowners who attempt to challenge them or collect evidence to report to the police.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

John Glen: I would be delighted to give way to my hon. Friend and neighbour.

Dr Murrison: It is a great pleasure to contribute briefly to this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend and neighbour on bringing this matter to the House's attention. Does he agree that these are not good people and that these groups probably contain within them individuals who are intent also on acquisitive crime? Not only are they violent people, but they are probably also eyeing up the property of our rural constituents, which, as he will know, is very much under threat at the moment from bespoke criminality focused on thieving to order. The suspicion is that this population and the hare coursing population are very often one and the same thing.

John Glen: Those are characteristically wise words from my hon. Friend and neighbour, and I absolutely agree. This speaks to some of the suggestions that I am going to make about the nature of resourcing of rural policing. I am delighted that the Minister is here to hear those words and, I hope, respond positively.

Lincolnshire police found that the majority of people involved in hare coursing in their county already had the criminal histories that my hon. Friend refers to and

often travelled for hundreds of miles to participate. This is particularly distressing for farming communities, who are genuinely vulnerable. The average age of farmers is now 59, and they often work alone, so there are few or no witnesses to the crimes that are perpetrated on their land. Farmers know too well the repercussions of trying to deter coursers from their own land—from targeted break-ins and theft on their farms, to extremes such as arson and direct physical attacks.

Another of my constituents, who understandably did not want to be named, lives on a farm with their teenage daughter. While on their own land, the constituent was confronted by three men with dogs who threatened that they would “do over” their car and carve up their crops. My constituent's daughter now worries for her parent's safety and is concerned that the coursers know where they live and what their car looks like.

It is completely unacceptable that constituents do not feel safe on their own land, and these are not isolated cases. In January, the BBC reported that violence and intimidation have escalated in the recent hare coursing season. One farmer, who also wished not to be named, fearing for his own safety, stated, “They would kill us if they could.”

I emphasise to the Minister that, for rural communities and farmers in particular, hare coursing is not simply a nuisance; it is a serious blight on livelihoods and wellbeing.

I want to turn to how we can ensure that there is an effective and coherent response by the police and the magistracy. In preparing for this debate, I was struck by the exasperation of constituents who tell me that they regularly reach out to the police but feel as if nothing is being done and that they are fighting hare coursers on their own. One constituent remarked that his tactic of digging ditches around the farm to stop the coursers' vehicles felt almost medieval—building a moat to prevent the enemy from entering.

I pay tribute to Wiltshire police force. Its officers do very difficult work in challenging circumstances, and they should be commended for the innovative steps that they are taking to improve their response to rural crime. The general quality of their work was acknowledged by last week's report from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, ranking them good across the board. Wiltshire police have put in place a number of initiatives, including funding six dedicated wildlife crime officers, and I welcome the news that further funding has been secured to train another five.

I recognise the apparent logic of weighting police funding by population size and demography, but cases such as hare coursing demonstrate that rural areas require specialist resources to ensure that isolated and sparser populated communities do not feel abandoned by law enforcement.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this Adjournment debate. The rural part of my constituency is served by Humberside police, which is a predominantly urban force, and the farming and rural community feels somewhat neglected. Does he agree that it is equally important that the rural community, wherever it is situated, is suitably prioritised by the police?

John Glen: I absolutely recognise the situation described by my hon. Friend. It is particularly true of hybrid

constabularies that have to serve significant urban populations, but the rural element needs to be properly recognised.

May I urge the Minister to take those factors into consideration in his deliberations on the new police funding formula? Although Wiltshire is the 15th largest county geographically, it receives the fourth lowest budget from Government. The resources needed to tackle rural crime must be reflected in allocations within the overall funding envelope. That will require him to challenge his officials on the different spreadsheets that they put in front of him and make sure that the pockets of rural need are properly reflected in the review's outcome.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Is not the real challenge faced by rural police forces the fact that they have to deal not only with issues such as hare coursing, which is a form of organised crime, but with those challenges that are also faced by urban policing, including changing tactics for cybercrime and domestic violence? That is a perfect storm and it requires special attention.

John Glen: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, who once again comes up with a sensible analysis and a sense of how we need better to join up the different attempts to tackle this very difficult problem.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Is not one of the issues the lack of neighbourhood policing in some rural areas? In the northern part of my constituency, in Bassetlaw, we have a long-standing police officer, Bill Bailey. He knows the lanes; he knows many of the criminals; and he knows how to respond to and sort out such crimes. He is also fluent in the law in this area. All too often, when officers such as Bill retire, as he will do in October, they are replaced by police officers drawn from a much wider area. His replacement is likely to be drawn from urban areas such as Worksop and Retford, where crimes are very different. Response times will diminish, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) has said, it is difficult for people to be certain that police officers who understand the rurality of the area will be able to get out and sort out the problems.

John Glen: My hon. Friend makes a reasonable point. Like many Conservative Members, I gained some familiarity with my hon. Friend's constituency in the weeks running up to his election. I would not want to comment on the specific example that he gave, but it is absolutely key that we have the right resources in the right places.

I return to the specific issue of hare coursing. I believe that it is both a policing and a judicial issue, and I want to raise three policy concerns that I hope the Minister will reflect on to ensure that constituencies such as Salisbury and south Wiltshire can effectively deal with hare coursers and the many disruptions and problems that I have just described. First, I ask the Minister to consider creating a more widespread infrastructure for seizing and rehoming the dogs used in such criminal activities. Will he look—perhaps not personally—into how the police organise themselves in that regard? Hare coursing dogs are high-value assets worth tens of thousands of pounds. I think that the threat of dogs being taken or rehomed, and therefore losing their value, will deter hare coursers. To be able to seize dogs, the police must have the appropriate kennels

and facilities to look after them. In Wiltshire, despite a large number of hare coursing incidents, we do not have that vital infrastructure in place.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): I am listening with great interest to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Can he give us some idea of the extent of the hare coursing, badger baiting and illegal foxhunting that take place and the percentage of those incidents for which people have been prosecuted in the recent past?

John Glen: Actually, I can give the hon. Gentleman some of those statistics, if he will just wait a few minutes.

In terms of legislation, hare coursing offences sometimes fall under the Game Act 1831, which does not provide the powers of seizure and forfeiture of dogs and vehicles that the Hunting Act 2004 provides. Updating the 1831 Act could rectify that issue and allow more hunting dogs to be seized. In addition, if we gave police the ability to recover kennelling costs for seized dogs in a way similar to the process for seized vehicles, we could make that deterrent more financially viable.

Secondly, I hope the Minister will consider the penalties given to those guilty of poaching and hare coursing. Currently, the maximum possible penalty is unlimited. Despite that, the House of Commons Library reports that between 2010 and 2015, the average fine for offences under the Hunting Act was just £256.43. Wiltshire police told me that they had a recent case in which three males were sent to court for offences under the Night Poaching Act 1828. They had dogs, lamps and a gutting knife in their possession, and they had travelled some 100 miles from Wales to Wiltshire. The three men received a fine of just £50 each. The men were persistent offenders who were known to the police, and they were stopped again just three days after their appearance in court. Are we honestly surprised that when hare coursers have the opportunity to earn thousands of pounds betting on their illegal activities, such small fines do nothing to deter them? It is nothing short of outrageous that such individuals can simply give no comment at interview, go to court, plead guilty, accept a fine of £50 or £100 and return to the fields the very next day. Magistrates must be encouraged to use the full extent of the penalties available to them. As a former magistrate, I am very aware of the guidance that sometimes comes out, and I feel that it needs to be updated. Will the Minister commit to working with colleagues in the Ministry of Justice to examine such matters and ensure that sentencing guidance in this area is reviewed?

The third and final issue is conviction rates. On the figures I have, there were 2,169 reported incidents of hare coursing in Lincolnshire during the six months between September 2015 and March 2016. Some 176 men were charged or reported for summons, but only 25 were actually convicted, which is less than one in seven. Of the 176 individuals charged, 117 cases were discontinued, usually when witnesses declined to give statements for fear of reprisals. Even if CCTV cameras are used—presumably at the farmers' expense—farmers are obliged to declare that they have individually put in an evidence-capture system, therefore putting their name on the record and risking retaliation through some of the apps I have described. That situation is simply blocking access to justice. Until the Government send a clear

[John Glen]

message that farmers will be properly protected and perpetrators brought to justice, the unwillingness to provide evidence will only increase. Will the Minister work with local police forces and the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure that farmers are not deterred from coming forward because the evidence they are required to gather is too costly or cumbersome to obtain or puts them at risk?

In conclusion, hare coursing is a serious issue, and we must not underestimate the financial and emotional harm it inflicts on vulnerable rural communities, and on farmers in particular. Despite pockets of good practice, more must be done to stop the increasing prevalence across the country. I am concerned that the overall framework governing policing and sentencing does not currently act as a sufficient deterrent. May I urge the Minister to look carefully at the measures I have suggested? We must send a clear message to hare coursers that they will no longer be able to get off the hook with paltry sentences and very low conviction rates. What they are doing is wrong, and we must not allow it to continue in the way currently experienced.

6.12 pm

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): It is very handy to have the opportunity of an extended debate, which has shown that a number of colleagues are concerned about this issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) has done us a service by finding an opportunity to raise the matter.

I do not need to be reminded that I have been a Member of Parliament for a very rural constituency for a long time. I cannot recall circumstances that are now regularly being reported to me ever having been raised with me before. I am not naive enough to believe that hare coursing did not take place in former years, but it now seems to have achieved epidemic proportions in my area, with village after village now reporting incidents.

The police are stretched. Whatever the force available to the chief constable of Essex—indeed, this applies to any other constabulary—it is bound to be deployed in areas of higher crime than in areas of low crime. The district of Uttlesford and rural Chelmsford are areas of low crime, but that does not mean that there is no crime. This form of crime, which has now started to surge, if that is not too strong a word to describe what is happening, is particularly difficult for the police to cope with. There is obviously great mobility on the part of the offenders, and if we are to get a grip on this type of activity, there needs to be co-operation between police forces.

John Howell: In my constituency, the police have set up surveillance areas, but this has become a bit of a cat-and-mouse game, because they are spotted while setting up the surveillance areas and the hare coursers simply move to another field on another farm. Does my right hon. Friend recognise that as a problem?

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Absolutely; on the basis of reports I am getting from constituents, I am beginning to ask myself “where next?”

For historical reasons, Essex has always felt underfunded, and if any of my Essex colleagues were present for

tonight’s debate, they would heartily agree, because we are always pressing for more resources. This is now a new situation that has to be confronted.

Matt Warman: The chief constable of Essex was recently quoted on Radio Lincolnshire complaining that Lincolnshire’s success at dealing with hare coursing meant that Essex was being placed under even greater strain. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that underlines the fact that we have to work together to tackle this problem?

Sir Alan Haselhurst: I absolutely agree, and I hope that the Minister will be able to respond in the right terms to indicate that this has to be a co-ordinated approach.

Let me add one further point about the impact of this activity. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury spoke mainly about the farming community, which is absolutely right, but there have been some particularly odious practices performed in my constituency that affect not the farming community, but ordinary residents in villages. Mutilated corpses of hares are being laid on people’s cars or lawns, and parts of these dead bodies are being draped round the handles of doors. This is sickening, and small children will obviously be more vulnerable to the horror of seeing that kind of thing. We are getting well beyond the thought that this is some illegal sport that is far removed from everybody. Yes, this affects the farmers, as my hon. Friend clearly said—my farmers have spoken to me about it, too—but there is also this extra dimension, which makes the problem truly appalling and underlines the need for special attention to deal with it.

If this activity has not been as prevalent in former years and is now becoming a phenomenon to which we are all giving witness here today, perhaps we need to stamp down on it, to quell it once and for all. That requires special attention, special resources and special drive of policy.

6.17 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I echo the thanks and congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) on raising this important issue. Although some people might view the debate and the problem as merely an issue of animal welfare and wildlife crime, which of course it is, as others have suggested, it goes much wider than that. We are talking about vandalism of property; loss of income for farmer and landowner; theft, atrocity and intimidation of farmers, their families and in some instances gamekeepers and others employed on estates; and a lot of road traffic issues, including the driving of unlicensed and uninsured vehicles, driving while disqualified and so forth. This all adds up to the picture of criminality that my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) alluded to in his intervention.

My constituency is easily split between east and west. The western part of North Dorset is the Blackmore Vale, which has heavy clay, and nobody would try to course on that. The hares do not like it, and it is too heavy to make a form; sometimes even a 4x4 will get stuck in the clay of Blackmore Vale. Cranborne Chase on the eastern side of my constituency, however, is beautiful, undulating chalk downland, very similar to

the area at the border with Wiltshire. It is, of course, an ideal and fertile ground for illegal hare coursing, and it happens on all too regular a basis.

My hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) talked about the chief constable of Essex blaming the robustness of his colleague in Lincolnshire for transporting a problem across a county border. In Dorset, we have also seen an element of that, given the significant success that the chief constable and officers of Wiltshire have had in clamping down in that county. The problem has merely translocated over the border to us.

I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury said with regard to value of the sighthound used for this purpose. I was told by one of my local police officers that, having confiscated a telephone from a hare courser, he looked—I could not tell the House why—at the gentleman's photo album on his phone. He had 184 photographs: 20 of his family and 164 of his dog. That, I think, demonstrates the importance and value that these people place on their livestock. The problem is exactly as my hon. Friend suggested. Local authorities have pulled away from taking stray dogs off the street and have contracted it out, often on narrowly defined contracts. The police do not have kennels to house these dogs. I would prefer a far more robust approach, not just in the provision of kennels but in the removal and permanent confiscation of dogs and their rehousing.

Robert Jenrick: Last year in Scotland was, I think, the first time that a hare courser or a group of hare coursers were prosecuted successfully and imprisoned using DNA evidence taken from a confiscated dog. We have heard in the debate about the scale and importance of these crimes, so perhaps the police elsewhere in the country should look to take that forward.

Simon Hoare: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. The deployment of technologies that may have been advanced for other purposes can easily be used for exactly the sort of incident my hon. Friend suggests.

I want to draw the attention of the House, if I may, to the excellent work undertaken by the Dorset constabulary in this area under the leadership of Martyn Underhill, our police and crime commissioner, and the chief constable. After discussions with me as a Member of Parliament, we now have a dedicated rural team—and not in name only. The team has the right vehicles—4x4s and Polarises—telephones, equipment and so on. It is doing a fantastic job. It was my pleasure, if that is the word, to join them on a night operation ranging from 8 o'clock in the evening to two o'clock in the morning, where a collaboration of three police forces—officers from Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire—came together with local farmers and gamekeepers. I was obviously the “heavy” man brought in for intimidation. We drove around the countryside using intelligence and telephones to identify where people might be and disrupting activity as it was about to unfold: the interception and interruption of illegal activity taking place in our countryside.

A number of hon. Friends mentioned intimidation. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury provided statistics on the number of people brought to court and the rather lenient slap-on-the-wrist fines. If someone is prepared to wager £10,000 on one greyhound getting a

hare, a fine of £276 is but a drop in the ocean. I wonder, as I often do in these circumstances, whether our local magistrates feel intimidated, given the reputation of a lot of people involved in hare coursing knowing no bounds to the retribution they wish to see. I hope our magistrates are made of strong and robust stuff, but that might not necessarily always be the case.

I again congratulate Dorset constabulary on its work. I echo entirely the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury that the funding requirement is, as so often in our rural areas, very bespoke. If one talked to councillors in Manchester, Bristol or Birmingham about rural crime on farms as a result of hare coursing, they would probably scratch their heads and look very bemused, but it causes a great loss of income, great degradation of the countryside, a vast amount of cruelty and a huge amount of illegality. These niche issues that need to be policed with robustness, intelligence and co-ordination do need to find, in our rural policing and its funding formula, an identification of how best to marry funds with the very clear demands elucidated by my hon. Friend in what has been an excellent debate.

6.24 pm

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) for securing the debate, and I thank all Members for their contributions to it. The number of Members present, as well as the number who have spoken, illustrates the importance of this issue to rural communities throughout the country.

I shall not detain the House for long, because in principle I agree with what has been said, but I want to go into a little more detail about the position. It is clear from what Members have said this evening that the issue is of concern to rural communities, but I have also heard of their concern at first hand. I am very clear about the fact that people should not have to experience the crimes that have been described; nor should they ever feel threatened, victimised or harassed, whether they are witnesses or actual victims. Anything of that nature is wholly unacceptable, and I expect the police to act in such circumstances.

As has already been mentioned, the Hunting Act 2004 came into effect on 18 February 2005. Under that Act, an individual who is found guilty of illegal hunting or hare coursing can be liable for an unlimited fine. Let me, at this point, respond to the second request made by my hon. Friend. I noted his comments about the level of the fines that are issued by magistrates courts, and I can assure him that I will liaise with colleagues in the Ministry of Justice to establish what guidance is given to the courts and the Sentencing Council about the use of that power. The criminals—and they are abhorrent criminals—who behave in this way should be sent the message that such behaviour will not be tolerated.

Section 30 of the Game Act 1831 gives the police the power to seize and detain vehicles taking part in hare coursing until a court hearing takes place. The police also have powers to deal with other criminal offences. When I visited Lincolnshire recently at the invitation of my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), there was clear evidence of the ability to deal with all the crimes being committed. As we have heard this evening, hare coursing is an offence in itself, but other offences are potentially committed within it,

[Brandon Lewis]

such as aggravated trespass, abuse, intimidation, harassment and criminal damage. All those offences are prosecutable in their own right.

As one of my officials pointed out when we were in Lincolnshire, the police may not be able to catch someone in the act of hare coursing because of the speed that is involved. However, through CCTV and other means, they often discover number plates of vehicles that are not taxed or not MOT-ed. They can act on the basis of such an incident in itself, without necessarily catching someone in the act or putting farmers in a position where they have reason to be fearful. I emphasise that the police have a range of options enabling us to be smart about prosecution and cracking down on behaviour of this kind.

Decisions on the use of resources and on law enforcement in individual areas is of course a matter for chief constables. It is for them to determine their priorities and policies, along with their police and crime commissioners. I believe that the policing plan of the Wiltshire police and crime commissioner was published today. PCCs such as Lincolnshire's Marc Jones want to get a grip on such issues, and I commend them for appreciating that in representing their communities they are understanding what is important to those communities. That demonstrates why devolving powers to locally accountable, locally elected PCCs was such an important step.

Members have mentioned funding this evening. Let me remind them that we are firmly committed to reforming the current police funding arrangements, because they are out of date. We want a fairer system that is up to date and, importantly, is transparently able to reflect the way in which crime is being dealt with locally. We are at the moment taking forward a detailed engagement with the sector itself—police, chief constables, police and crime commissioners, and experts and academics in the field. I have met a range of PCCs and chief constables to discuss the issues they think should be covered. A number of them, including representatives whose Members have spoken this evening, have raised the issue of making sure that the costs and challenges that rural policing faces are reflected in the formula. No new formula will be implemented without public consultation; there will be a full process of that, but it will come at the end of this substantial piece of work that we are doing, to make sure that it is fully informed. I have met the PCC for Wiltshire, who has made this point about his own force very directly to me, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury.

I also appreciate that there are complaints both from communities and Members that the police are not always doing enough to deal with the criminals involved in this activity. As I have said, we need to be smart. We need to drive this through our PCCs and our local chief constables, to make sure that local police use all the tools at their disposal to deal with criminal behaviour, including any challenge about the speed with which people move. Those tools might include trespass and the way they deal with cars. As has been noted, there is a clear and powerful message in the seizure of vehicles, which is an expensive circumstance for people to have to deal with, and the seizure of the dogs themselves. I know from

talking to the police in Lincolnshire that they are looking to seize dogs; they have organised the kennels, and even have the kennels outside Lincolnshire to make things more difficult. That sends a powerful message, because the dogs are valuable to the people who own them—they are worth tens of thousands of pounds. That is a very clear message that we and the police can send.

I join my hon. Friend who secured the debate and my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) who has just spoken in congratulating both of their forces on the excellent work they are looking to do to deal with issues around rural crime, as well as the work that others, including Lincolnshire police, are looking to do to develop this and make sure they are representing the needs of their local communities. I want to make it clear that, as I said a few moments ago, the decisions on how people allocate their resources and what local police are focused on is a matter for them to determine with their PCCs, based on their local knowledge, and working with their chief constables. If the police and the chief constable or the PCC are not focused on such an issue, I encourage people to bring it to their attention and make this point. I will happily continue to work on that as well. As I recently did, I will again be meeting the National Police Chiefs Council lead on rural crime and these issues to reinforce the strength of feeling outlined so clearly and eloquently by colleagues this evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury outlined three particular requests. I have dealt with his second, but will now deal with his first and third points. On updating the legislation procedures around seizure, I will look at the powers the police have, although I think they have the powers they need and that the question is how they are being used and implemented. However, I undertake to do some further work, again working with the National Police Chiefs Council lead on this issue, and I will get back to my hon. Friend on that and involve him and any other colleagues interested in making sure they are up to speed with the work we are doing and what the opportunities are.

My hon. Friend's third point was about the number of people who are actually being charged with these offences and the issue of farmers potentially feeling intimidated if they come forward as witnesses. We discussed that recently when I was in Lincolnshire, and there is a real challenge there. I want people to feel that they can come forward and work with the police both formally and informally, and we will continue to work to develop that.

In closing, I would like to thank not only my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury for securing the debate but all the hon. Members who have taken the time to be here today to highlight the genuine importance of ensuring that we are able to police and protect our rural communities properly. I also want to take this opportunity to commend and congratulate the police, who work hard to deal with this issue, as well as to remind them that we expect them to use the full set of tools at their disposal. I will support them in doing that as we move forward.

Question put and agreed to.

6.34 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 7 March 2017

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

Beer Duty

9.30 am

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered beer duty.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to open this debate on a very important matter. First, I must acknowledge and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies), who secured this debate only to find that it clashed with other, unavoidable parliamentary business. He therefore asked if I would step in for him. His loss is my gain. I am sure he would want me to mention right at the very beginning Gower Brewery, which produces some excellent ales—I remember a very enjoyable evening with my hon. Friend, drinking Gower Gold. It is right to acknowledge that in his absence.

The debate is timely, taking place the day before the Budget. We hope once again for good news from the Chancellor and another cut in the much despised beer duty. There is no doubt that the brewing and pub industry has faced a great many challenges in recent years, which have brought a wind of change blowing through one of the oldest and best loved traditional businesses in the UK. Public houses—or, as we all more affectionately know them, pubs—and breweries have experienced enormous change and upheaval over the past 30 years or so. The vast and often overlooked brewing and hospitality industry is an icon of our nation, cited by tourists the world over as one of the reasons for visiting the UK. Almost 900,000 people work in pubs and the supply chain, from agriculture to brewing, logistics and the licensed trade.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing the debate. He rightly points to the vast number of jobs that the industry supports, many of which are in peripheral areas of the country such as our constituencies. Does he agree that action on beer duty, which is up to 10 times that of the duty paid in our neighbouring continental countries, is a vital step?

Steve Double: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Whereas many other industries are centralised in very specific areas or regions of our country, the pub industry is spread right across it and provides much needed jobs in many of the more rural areas. He is also right that we need to reduce the gap between the duty we pay in this country and the duty paid in many other countries, and I will come on to that later.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman rightly identifies the role of rural pubs, many of which serve those who come out to the countryside from our conurbations. What impact does he think the ill-thought-out

proposals from the Local Government Association to cut the number from 2 pints or 1.5 pints to 1 pint will have on those pubs?

Steve Double: I assume the right hon. Gentleman is talking about the guidelines for alcohol consumption. I suspect that is a subject for another day, but I understand his point.

Mr Spellar: No, I am not talking about the guidelines; I am talking about the drink-drive limit. Most of the offences are recorded at the much higher level of about 150 mg. A reduction in the limit could have a dramatic effect on many rural pubs, let alone rugby clubs, Royal British Legion clubs and so on.

Steve Double: I now understand the point the right hon. Gentleman is making. I would never drink and drive at all. That attitude has become much more the norm in today's society, where most people consider that drinking anything and driving should be avoided. I am not entirely sure that I agree with his point.

The brewing and pub industry not only employs 900,000 people but attracts many younger people to its workforce—in fact, 46% of those employed in the sector are under 25 years old. That level of employment among the young is a critical factor, especially in rural constituencies such as the one I represent in Cornwall. While many start out in basic roles, they go on to become professionals in the trade or elsewhere—for example, working as chefs, licensees or successful businesspeople in their own right, and employing others.

That said, the news has not always been good in recent times. Some 17,000 pubs have closed in the past three decades, and while the closure trend has slowed markedly of late, many communities will grieve the loss of their local, which all too often is the only pub in the area.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): Although it is not the only factor, does the hon. Gentleman agree that cuts in beer duty increase investment and employment opportunities, particularly for the young, while increases do the opposite?

Steve Double: I wholeheartedly agree. Lower taxes generally encourage investment and growth in a sector, and I will press for that as the debate goes on.

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my sense of pride that it was a Conservative Government who in 2012 finally put an end to the beer duty escalator—a measure that had led to duty going up 42% between 2008 and 2012? Following that, in 2014 beer sales increased and an estimated 21,000 jobs were created in the industry.

Steve Double: My hon. Friend may have been reading my notes, because that is a point I will come on to highlight.

There are many reasons why pubs have closed. Some of them were badly managed, and some lacked investment to keep the facilities up to date. Although I believe that the smoking ban was the right thing to do, and it is popular among many pub goers, we have to acknowledge that it stopped smokers visiting the pub quite so often.

[*Steve Double*]

There are also changing social habits, with more people drinking at home as a result of cheap alcohol available in supermarkets and other outlets.

Those factors have all contributed, but it is also undeniable that the dreadful and despised beer duty escalator introduced in 2008 had a devastating effect on the industry. Annual duty rises under the escalator led to beer duties rising to among some of the highest anywhere. Even now, following successive years of duty reduction by this Conservative Government, our pints remain heavily taxed at around 52p on a 5% alcohol by volume pint, compared with 4p in other key beer-brewing nations such as Germany and Spain—an enormous and disproportionate difference that needs to be addressed.

There is much more happening now, with a revolution in the old craft of brewing and selling beer to the UK's 32 million beer drinkers. Numerous microbreweries have opened up and craft beer and real ale are rising in popularity. I have the great privilege of having a great example of a local family-run brewery in my constituency. St Austell Brewery has been a roaring success in recent years, particularly since the launch of its excellent Tribute ale. It now makes many excellent beers, and I spent an enjoyable day during the recent recess assisting master brewer Roger Ryman in making a batch of Proper Job. I count the fact that I managed to make more than I drank that day as a notable success.

While it is right to recognise concerns about alcohol abuse, we must note that the majority of people enjoy healthy levels of drinking. Given the social benefits that come with a visit to the local pub, it makes no more sense to celebrate pub closures than it does to close roads because some motorists speed.

Mr Spellar: On the subject of craft breweries, will the hon. Gentleman, who rightly attacks the beer duty escalator, acknowledge the very considerable role played by the duty exemption for small breweries that are getting off the ground? That was a major factor in the explosion of the craft brewery business and was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) when he was at the Treasury.

Steve Double: I will happily agree. The support given to microbreweries to develop right across the country—they are now producing very high-quality, excellent craft beer—is a success that should be noted.

David Mackintosh (Northampton South) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that larger breweries, such as Carlsberg in my constituency, also play an important role in providing beer for people, but the beer duty also has an impact on them?

Steve Double: I wholeheartedly agree that the beer duty affects the whole industry. That is why I believe it needs to be addressed.

One interesting statistic I read was that communities that have a well loved pub are happier. Pubs have that very positive effect on local communities. I was dismayed when a local Liberal Democrat councillor in St Austell recently suggested tightening up the local licensing regulations and limiting the number of pubs to curb incidents of antisocial behaviour. That misses the point

entirely, because well run pubs promote responsible drinking, and in my experience they have a positive impact by reducing crime and antisocial behaviour, rather than being the cause of the problem.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned St Austell—I am very partial to a pint of Clouded Yellow myself. A family brewery, John Willie Lees, is a major employer in my constituency. I fully support the comments that the hon. Gentleman is making about social drinking. I am sure that he will agree that we should be promoting pubs, keeping them open and stopping people buying cheap alcohol and drinking alone at home.

Steve Double: I wholeheartedly agree. Not only are pubs great places for community cohesion, but they promote responsible drinking in a safe environment, which we should wholeheartedly support.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again; he is very generous. On responsible drinking, another change has been the move to lower alcohol beer. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that beer with an alcoholic strength of less than 3.5% is subject to 66% more duty than very high-strength cider at 7.5%? Does he agree that we could do more to incentivise the consumption of beers under 3.5%?

Steve Double: I agree. We do need to look in particular at the amount of duty on high-strength ciders, because it is disproportionately low and should be increased. The duty on lower strength beers should also be looked at, to encourage their consumption. The industry was challenged by the Government to reduce consumption of alcohol units by 1 billion by 2015. By reformulating and introducing lower alcohol drinks, the industry surpassed that target ahead of schedule, which we should acknowledge and welcome. There is also a fall and clear downward trend in problems relating to under-age drinking in pubs, as licensees—pub landlords—have become more responsible in their approach to that matter.

The problems associated with drinking have less and less to do with pubs and more and more to do with sales of cheap alcohol in supermarkets and other off-licence establishments. It is clear that pubs can and do have a very positive impact on their local communities. Pubs are experiencing a revolution. They have caught the spirit of the times and of this Government: there is a belief and a strategy about getting best value for money and a happier, better outcome for everyone by making best use of what we have and combining our efforts.

Let us take as an example the village of Nanpean in my constituency of St Austell and Newquay. Once a bustling, busy community, almost solely reliant on the booming china clay industry, it has declined in recent years. That and changing shopping habits over the years meant that the Co-op supermarket, four general stores, the butcher's, the bakery, the fish and chip shop and the post office all had to close. No shop remained—none was viable as a stand-alone unit; none could survive with separate overheads and wage bills. Thanks to innovation, though, the Grenville Arms pub in Nanpean now houses the post office and a shop, and the combination of the three has proved a great success. Each one helps the others to provide key services to the local community

of about 2,000 people. The shop sells essentials and locally produced food, and the return of the post office is a real asset to the whole community. The scheme has created new jobs and, with its fresh role at the centre of village life, the pub has become a community meeting point.

All that was achieved by converting a disused room. Of course, there was a cost. That was met by the licensee and an organisation that was originally the inspiration of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. Pub is The Hub is a voluntary, not-for-profit organisation helps pubs in rural communities to innovate and thrive. By working with all interested parties—breweries, licensees, councils and local communities—it has had success in bringing together talents and opportunities and meeting needs. It gives guidance to groups seeking to buy their local pub to save it from closure. Besides advice, it gives grants—modest sums of money that make a big difference. Pub is The Hub says that, on average, for every pound in grant provided, an additional £1.60 is forthcoming from other sources.

I am very grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), who is responsible for pubs. He continues to champion Pub is The Hub and has this year supported the organisation further with a £50,000 grant. Heineken matched the funding, giving Pub is The Hub further assistance to continue its excellent work across England and Wales and now, I believe, in Scotland.

A revolution is under way in the pub trade, and we need to do a lot more to support it. The simplest and best way to do that is by continuing the process of reversing the crazy, punitive, unfair and mean-spirited hikes in beer duty imposed by the previous Labour Government. The UK's excise duty rate for beer is much higher than that in most European countries. Despite the three duty cuts by the Conservative Government in recent years, the UK has the third highest duty rate in the European Union. Forty per cent. of all beer duty paid in the EU is paid by the UK, yet we drink only 12% of the beer.

Tax on beer has been a sorry story. From 2008 to 2012, there were steep and relentless tax increases, with a staggering 9.1% hike in March 2008 and an 8% increase in December of the same year. Then came the beer duty escalator, which increased beer duty by 2% above inflation every year. By 2012, beer duty had increased by 42% since 2008. Although other factors played their part, that was a disaster for the industry, with thousands of pubs closing and tens of thousands of job losses. Despite the hike in duty, revenues rose by just 12%. Punitive taxes do not work.

In 2013 the beer duty escalator was, mercifully, dropped. Then came further relief with three 2% cuts and a freeze in 2016. There is revived confidence in the sector. Beer sales have increased, which in turn has led to higher levels of investment in pubs and breweries. Tax cuts work. They boost trade at home and give this major exporting industry extra confidence in its future. In 2016 the value of UK beer exports was a healthy £584 million; it was up 17% on the previous year. So there we have it: a multimillion-pound industry that exports the world over, employs the young in record numbers, attracts visitors to our shores and yet has in

its sights ensuring that villagers still have a post office and the lonely have a place to go and be part of the local community.

I and many other hon. Members present want to thank the former Chancellor and the Government. Despite the enormous task of deficit reduction and the difficulties that lay ahead, they chose to reduce beer duty, seeing the beneficial effects that that would ultimately have. Confidence and investment are returning but now we need another hand up—we need a further reduction in beer duty. Seven out of 10 alcoholic drinks sold in pubs are beer, and 82% of those are brewed in the UK. The most effective way of keeping our community pubs open and trade buoyant is by continuing to support them and giving them the confidence they need. I am calling for a revival of the beer duty escalator, but escalators go in both directions. I want an escalator that goes the other way and reduces beer duty significantly.

9.50 am

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on his speech; he told us that he was a substitute, but that was certainly not the introductory speech of a substitute. May I also take this opportunity to welcome my next-door neighbour and good friend, the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), to his place? He is the chairman of the all-party parliamentary beer group. I was with him in the Terrace marquee the other night where, I must say, I enjoyed the award-winning beers from the Campaign for Real Ale, including Bingham's vanilla stout, which I enjoyed—but only in moderation, of course.

I have had the pleasure of going to two pub openings in my constituency in the past couple of weeks. I went to the Handbridge pub, which has been refurbished by Punch Taverns, and I was very pleased to go to the Bull and Stirrup in Chester, which is a historic pub, particularly for the labour movement, to open it with the actor Ricky Tomlinson. It has been the beneficiary of a £2 million refurbishment courtesy of Wetherspoon's. It employs 70-odd people—most of them very young—and is an excellent example of the fact that pubs and the industry provide employment, including at entry level, for people looking to make their way in their career.

I want to speak briefly about one of the big employers in my constituency, Admiral Taverns, which I am proud to represent. It employs 145 people in my constituency, has 850 pubs across the UK and is consistently winning awards. It was the leased and tenanted pub company of the year in 2013 and 2016, which makes it the current holder of that prestigious award, and I can tell Members this morning that it is again shortlisted for community pub operator of the year. The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay talked about the importance of community pubs. I worked with Admiral Taverns when it closed the Centurion pub in Vicars Cross in my constituency. I worked with community leaders Trevor Jones and Bob Hindhaugh, and we managed to persuade Admiral Taverns to reopen it with community leadership. That was a tough business, because the numbers had to add up, and part of the reason for the closure was the high beer taxation levels. I have worked with Admiral Taverns on a couple of projects since, and I am proud to do so. It is keen to see a continued light touch in the taxation of the pub sector.

[*Christian Matheson*]

In this short contribution I want to draw the Minister's attention to the conflict between beer duty and business rates. I am told that business rates for pubs are calculated on turnover, but that that turnover includes beer duty. As Admiral Taverns point out that is, therefore, a double whammy—I believe that is the phrase, Sir Roger. They are being taxed on taxation, because turnover includes beer duty. I ask the Minister whether levels of beer duty or the business rates calculations can be taken into account.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I want to reflect on that briefly, because my hon. Friend is making an exceptionally important point. Even before the re-evaluation of business rates, which will hit pubs particularly hard, pubs were paying 2.8% of the total business rates bill but only accounting for 0.5% of total business turnover. That is a crucial area that I hope the Minister will take into account and feed into the Budget negotiations for tomorrow.

Christian Matheson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. There does seem to be a discrepancy. I would not like to think that pubs, which play such an important part in communities, as we correctly learned from the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay, are seen as a soft touch and an easy hit.

I am keen to convey on behalf of my constituents, particularly Admiral Taverns, with which I have an excellent relationship, that there needs to continue to be a light touch to allow the sector to flourish. We heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr Spellar), who is no longer in his place, about the effect on microbreweries when there was a reduction in taxation—that sector of the business expanded. I believe that could also help in the pub sector and in community pubs, but there is a real problem in the conflict between business rates and beer duty, and I ask the Minister to look at it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. Graham Evans, Jim Shannon, Helen Whately and Claire Perry are all seeking to speak, and I intend to call the Front-Bench speakers at 10.30 am. I am not going to impose a limit, but do the maths.

9.55 am

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I pay tribute to the Backbench Business Committee and the Chairman of Ways and Means for enabling the debate and to my hon. Friends the Members for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and for Gower (Byron Davies) for their speeches. Indeed, I pay tribute to Gower Gold, which is an excellent beer, and to Tribute; I look forward to visiting St Austell brewery in my capacity as chairman of the all-party beer group. I pay tribute to my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), who did an excellent job in slaying the hated beer duty escalator.

I must confess that I have stopped many a barrel of beer going sour in my life. I met Mrs Evans in a pub when I was a wee slip of a lad in my 20s working behind

a bar. My mother was a barmaid and she worked in a pub; my brother and sister worked in a pub; my father spent most of his time in the pub. My auntie and uncle had a pub in Chester on Northgate Street—I am sure the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) knows it well—and it is an excellent coaching inn. I used to stay there for my school holidays. It was haunted—I believe it still is—and it used to scare the life out of me, but that does not stop me going in whenever I visit Chester.

The economic value of pubs and beer is important. The industry employs nearly 1 million people, many of them young, and contributes £23 billion to UK plc and £10 billion in tax to the Exchequer. I welcome the steps taken in the last Parliament on the dreaded beer duty escalator, with the three successive cuts in beer duty before the freeze in the 2016 Budget. Although it is easy to think that a penny or two off a pint does not make any difference, it does make a significant difference, as right hon. and hon. Members have said. The turnaround in confidence since 2013 has seen more than £1 billion invested by brewers and pub owners each year, with thousands of pubs across the country being able to keep their doors open.

Yet despite those positive steps, the UK still has the third highest duty rate in the EU. The amount paid per pint is almost three times the EU average. UK beer drinkers pay 52p of duty per pint, whereas those in other major brewing nations such as Belgium, Germany and the Czech Republic pay around 5p per pint. Having recently met the Minister, I know she will be aware of the cross-industry initiative to incentivise the production of low-alcohol beers benefiting from the duty reduction on products below 3.5%. Although the industry has taken some steps with low-alcohol beers, the lower the percentage, the less the flavour, so looking at a stronger strength up to 3.5% ABV gives brewers the opportunity to create tastier beers.

Jessica Morden: The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point on lower-strength beers. Does he agree that AB InBev in my constituency, which is developing more of those products, has a laudable aim in trying to have 20% of its products in the lower strength range by 2025? Does he agree that that is a positive development?

Graham Evans: That is a good and powerful point, and I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Lady. I grew up with a Manchester brewery called Boddingtons; we used to call it the “cream of Manchester”, but sadly it cannot be called that because it is brewed in Luton these days. AB InBev is producing it at 3.5%, which puts it in that low ABV category. I am keen to support the promotion of beers such as the ones made by the company in the hon. Lady's constituency. At 3.5% Boddingtons is still a tasty beer, although it is not quite how I remember it from the '70s and '80s.

Few can argue that 3.5% beers should have 66% more duty imposed on them than 7.5% high-strength cider, which is more associated with problem drinking than any other drink. Hon. Members may remember the question that the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon) asked at last week's Prime Minister's questions about her constituent who tragically died while drinking high-strength cider.

We are in a difficult economic position and alcohol excise duty makes an important contribution to reducing our inherited deficit, but beer duty clearly remains a concern to publicans, constituents and hon. Members. I therefore urge my hon. Friend the excellent Minister to carefully consider beer duty's impact on the profitability of pubs, responsible drinking and the future of our local communities. Some 90% of the beer we drink is brewed in the United Kingdom and supports UK jobs and industry. In a post-Brexit Britain, the Great British pint drunk in the Great British pub will be able to compete on a level playing field with our European and international competition. We are lucky that the Minister loves beer and pubs—she is a member of CAMRA—and I urge her to do whatever she can for the Great British brewing industry.

10.1 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, Sir Roger, and I congratulate the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on presenting his case well. He was certainly a super-sub, so well done to him.

I have been contacted about the beer duty on numerous occasions—a few times by constituents complaining about the rising price of their well-earned beer at the end of a day, but mostly by the hospitality sector and industry, groaning with the weight of trying to inspire growth while being restricted by a seemingly never-ending duty increase, which happens year on year without fail. I would like to give Northern Ireland's perspective and talk about how important the issue is for us and about the Minister's responsibility.

I was contacted before the debate by Hospitality Ulster, which is the professional body that represents the hospitality industry in Northern Ireland—its membership consists of pubs, bars, café-bars, restaurants, hotels and major visitor attractions. Tourism is important for us in Northern Ireland, and the hospitality sector's role is particularly important. Hospitality Ulster believes that it can transform the local economy and create additional wealth and job opportunities. The successful growth and expansion of the industry will have direct financial benefits, but only with the Government's help and support. That is why the chance to set out the issues in this debate is important and why I am presenting this case on the industry's behalf.

Figures indicate that there are 45,000 jobs in the hospitality sector in Northern Ireland. That may not seem a lot compared with similar job opportunities across the United Kingdom, but when we pare that down, it equates to one in 20 jobs being sourced in food and drink and the hospitality sector in Northern Ireland, so the importance of this debate is clear. The hospitality sector overall accounts for 60,000 jobs across Northern Ireland and generates some £88.4 million in tax. It contributes approximately £1.1 billion to the Northern Ireland economy and pays out £653 million in wages, keeping people in employment and creating opportunities. Its importance, therefore, cannot be underlined enough.

In my area of North Down and Ards and in my constituency of Strangford, the sector pays some £7 million in tax and provides just over 3,700 jobs. There is potential for so much more, but we need to put in place support

networks and help. That is partly about addressing the issue of taxation and duty, which is the key reason why we are here.

The tourism industry in Northern Ireland is competing in a cost-sensitive marketplace locally and globally. High taxation and the additional costs of unnecessary, disabling regulations and outdated legislation directly affect its ability to compete. In addition, the lack of access into and around Northern Ireland limits not only the number of people visiting the country but its residents' access to the evening economy. Tourism brochures and information indicate that Belfast is one of the best areas for nightlife in the United Kingdom, and there are tremendous opportunities to do much better on access to it.

Much of the responsibility for this issue lies with the Northern Ireland Assembly—these are devolved matters—and I hope that it will soon be up and running; we are in the middle of a process of talks at the moment. However, taxation and duty are major issues for this House to address. Duties on all alcohol products are forecast to raise some £11.2 billion in 2016-17. To split that up, the duties on beer and cider are expected to raise £3.6 billion, whereas the duties on wine and spirits are expected to raise £4.2 billion and £3.4 billion respectively. Receipts from beer and cider duties are expected to rise slightly to £3.8 billion in 2017-18. That is a massive amount of money, and we understand its importance to the Treasury in balancing the books. We also need sustainability for the industry, which is why we want this matter to be looked at.

We need to ensure that this is the last small rise in a series of rises that has seen the price of a pint rise to £3.46, which is 20 times the amount that it would have cost in the 1970s. The hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) referred to those free and easy days, and that is a fond memory of a time when I also had hair. Correct me if I am wrong, but wages have not increased at a similar rate, so people are missing out and publicans are seeing customers sitting at home with a tin of beer at half the price. We have to address that as well. I will come on to that point, because some of these issues could be dealt with in the Budget and, at the same time, the importance of the hospitality sector could be reinforced.

We want to encourage a society that enjoys a drink responsibly. That is what pubs do: people are refused drinks if they are too drunk and car keys are removed, and there are protective barriers when people leave the pub. Pubs and landlords are careful about what they do, and they are responsible. On the other hand, the alcopops sector can have special offers in supermarkets, allowing 20 shots of vodka from a one-litre bottle to be downed for a shockingly small price tag. That issue was highlighted at a reception in Westminster three weeks ago. I was not aware that a big, one-litre bottle—it looked like lemonade, by the way, but it clearly was not—was so cheap and was placed in supermarkets to make it more attractive for people to buy. We have to address these issues. We all have great respect for the Minister, as others have said; she has always done her best in the many portfolios she has held, and I know that she will do the same for us today.

Something is not quite right about how we are approaching this issue. I believe that the duty rises should be put on the alcopops sector, which is often a

[Jim Shannon]

favourite of under-age drinkers and is often where alcohol abuse takes place. The hospitality industry should be given a break, which may well keep businesses open and attractive to consumers who can put money in the local economy as opposed to the pockets of supermarket shareholders. I am not against supermarkets making money, but something is unfair when there is a clear imbalance.

I oppose any rise on beer duty, and I ask the Government and the Minister to fully consider the needs of this industry, which brings so much into the local economy and has the potential to do so much more if encouraged to do so.

10.8 am

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies) on securing the debate and my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on his impressive opening speech, particularly given that he was a substitute. He covered an enormous amount of ground and made important points.

This debate is an opportunity for colleagues to talk about their experiences with the world of pubs, but I cannot possibly compete with my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), who told us that his family have been in the pub trade. I have not been to a pub since Sunday. I can vouch for the health benefits of pubs in my constituency, because the best way to get my children to go on a long walk in the rain and hail is the promise of a pub at the end of it—however, I assure hon. Members that they have a packet of crisps while the rest of us may have some beer.

Beer, the pubs trade and brewing are important to my constituency and have enormous historical significance. Brewing in the area goes back to medieval times. I have been told that my constituency is the first place in England where hops were grown. At the time, they were a new-found and not entirely welcome import to the English brewing scene, but times have changed, and they are most certainly welcome nowadays.

As well as being part of our history, brewing and pubs are critical employers in my constituency. Shepherd Neame, our largest brewer and the oldest in England, employs about 700 people in the constituency. Its well-known brands include Spitfire, Whitstable Bay and Master Brew, with which I hope colleagues are familiar, along with many other own brands and beers brewed under licence for other breweries. Whitstable Brewery is also in my constituency, although Whitstable itself is not. We also have several craft breweries and microbreweries, such as Hopdaemon, the excellent Mad Cat Brewery, which I have visited, and many others. Brewing is important to my patch, providing at least 2,000 jobs including in pubs.

On top of that, there is the agricultural side of brewing. Kent was once renowned for its hops. Although we do not still grow hops on the same scale, the hop sector is still a significant part of the Kent economy, and British hops are experiencing a revival. Hop growing in the UK has increased by about 8% in the last couple of years, and at least half of that is in my constituency. We have renowned experts on hops, such as the farmer

Tony Redsell, who recently produced an excellent video about hop growing; I point viewers to it on my Twitter feed.

Pubs themselves are also important to my constituency. We have 84 pubs, and hopefully there will be another one soon: the Harrow pub in Ulcombe. It is currently closed, but the community are getting together to revive the pub. Pubs are so much more than just a place to go and have a drink; they can be the heart of a community. In a small village, there are often no other amenities or facilities, and the pub is the one place where people can meet up. It is important that we look after our pubs.

I am grateful that the Government have been doing so. I know that the industry in my constituency has welcomed the reductions and freezes in beer duty over recent years. I ask the Minister to consider continuing that approach to support the industry, bearing in mind that at the moment, pubs and the brewing industry as a whole face rising employment costs as well as the challenge of increasing business rates, as other hon. Members have mentioned. In that context, this is a particularly important moment to consider whether the industry can be helped through beer duty.

As other Members have mentioned, we are mindful of the difference in beer duty between the UK and some other brewing countries. Belgium and Germany have both been mentioned as countries with lower beer duty for their brewers. We know that we want to increase our exports, and that beer exports have been growing. There is a significant connection: a strong and vibrant brewing industry at home provides a good platform for brewers to export successfully. I feel strongly about supporting it through the tax system. On behalf of my constituency, I welcome the support that the Government have given to the brewing and pub industry, and I urge the Minister to continue that support.

10.14 am

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on securing this important debate. Colleagues have already referred to pubs in their constituencies; if I started doing that, I would have more than 100 to read out, and no one else would get an opportunity to speak. I will not play favourites towards any of them, but I will say that in Chesterfield, our night-time economy is incredibly important to us. I welcomed the liberalisation of licensing hours as a punter, although I must say that as the parent of a 19-year-old I am less enthusiastic than I used to be about our pubs being open until 6 o'clock in the morning.

None the less, pubs are an important part of our economy. When we reflect on their importance, as other Members have done, we must reflect on the contribution that they make to the economy and the community, and the contribution that they make as employers. They employ young people, and predominantly women, which is important to areas where the economy needs more help.

This debate is specifically about beer duty. Understandably, hon. Members have taken the opportunity to reflect on some of the other issues facing pubs, but beer duty is an important issue, and I am glad that the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay reflected on it. It sends a message from the Government about the

importance of pubs to our communities, our society in Britain and our sense of national being. Beer is one of those iconic products of which I think all of us in Britain feel proud.

It is also important to reflect on the fact that if the Chancellor announces something about beer duty today but simultaneously puts pubs through the mill on business rates, not many will raise a glass. Beer duty needs to be seen alongside the impact of VAT and the potentially serious impact of business rates. The previous Chancellor deservedly got credit for cutting beer duty, but we should also remember that he raised it through the beer duty escalator. He came to power in 2010, and it was 2013 before he got rid of it; he milked it as well as abolishing it. It is important to see his record in that broader context.

As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for pubs, I work closely with the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) and his all-party parliamentary group on beer. We all collectively recognise the importance of pubs in our communities and our economy. In the spirit of working together with that group, I join him in calling for the Minister and the Chancellor to recognise the value of pubs in the Budget, and to ensure when considering beer duty and business rates that publicans will raise a glass to the Chancellor on Wednesday.

10.17 am

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): I join others in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), and my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies), who cannot be here, on securing this important debate.

I have spoken several times in similar debates over the years. As I am sure Members know, I am the proud representative of Wadsworthshire. I have in my constituency Wadworth Brewery, which brews iconic beers such as 6X, Swordfish and Bishop's Tipple. It has 240 pubs in its chain and employs about 500 people. Nobody who visits Devizes can fail to be struck by the incredibly iconic brewery building, in which brewing has taken place since 1875, and Max and Monty, its two dray horses, who often cause traffic chaos when delivering to local pubs, although nobody minds, because they are a symbol of a wonderful local business. As well as Wadworth, I have Ramsbury Brewery, Shed Ales, World's End Ales, Three Castles Brewery, Stonebridge Ales and Eastbury Brewing Co. in my constituency, all of which report that things are definitely looking up.

Why did I come along today to support the call for a cut in beer duty? I must confess that I was a little sceptical about what the impact might be when the original tax cuts were announced, for many of the reasons that have been mentioned: we drink in a different way; we often prefer to drink at home; supermarkets have historically used alcohol as a loss leader to generate foot traffic; the smoking ban has hurt businesses; and the drink-driving laws, which I absolutely and heartily support, have changed people's way of being entertained. However, it is obvious that since we abandoned the beer duty escalator and cut beer duty in 2013—I am thinking of the billboard outside the Red Lion pub that day with a big sign saying, "Cheers, George!"; the former Chancellor should indeed be applauded for it—there has been a material impact on the industry.

I know that the Opposition Members present would not have voted for this, but in 2008 taxes on beer were hiked twice: by 9% in March and then by 8% in December. The escalator was then whacked on at inflation plus 2%, which led to a whopping 42% increase in overall duty between 2008 and 2012. As we have heard today, thousands of pubs exited the industry. It was a significant hit to an industry that we all know and love, and that had a major impact on employment in many of our constituencies.

Since then, with relatively modest measures—the abandonment of the escalator and a reduction in duty—we have seen some really rather extraordinary things. In 2014, beer sales increased for the first time in a decade. Oxford Economics has estimated that more than 20,000 more new jobs have been created in the sector than there would otherwise have been. That shows that very small changes in taxes can have a material impact. I submit that what the Exchequer is giving up in tax duty is being more than recouped from the increased income tax paid by the now thriving businesses and the employment contributions coming in.

On the subject of employment, let me mention a couple of very important things that are happening in my constituency. As a result of the change in the business climate, companies such as Wadworth are now substantially increasing their own investment programmes; indeed, investment in Wadworth's 240 pubs will increase by 30% this year. I am proud to have been associated with the reopening of some wonderful pubs that are now thriving, such as the Three Crowns in Devizes: morning, noon and night, groups of people are going in for coffee and sampling the wonderful beers and delicious food. That is happening not just in my constituency but right across the country. I was fascinated to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) that it is also having an impact on the supply chain—a piece of good news for hop production that I did not know about.

I support future investment and the increase in apprenticeships. Wadworth now has 62 apprentices—it has been investing hugely in my area—but it is facing pressures, including the apprenticeship levy and the increase in rates that we have discussed. It seems to me that to support the industry, stimulate demand and encourage companies to invest their own capital so that we can have a thriving beer, pub and hospitality industry, this relatively small adjustment in the Budget would be very welcome indeed.

10.22 am

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on introducing this debate and the hon. Member for Gower (Byron Davies) on securing it.

It is clear from hon. Members' contributions today that there is a large degree of agreement among us all. We have heard about the benefits of the local pub in our constituencies—I certainly support the pubs in mine as much as I possibly can. A strong case has been made this morning for minimum alcohol pricing, given the dangers from the very high levels of alcohol in alcopops and other such drinks.

I have recently noticed an increase in the number of craft beers being produced with 0% alcohol, including Tennent's Hee Haw and BrewDog's Nanny State—I

[Owen Thompson]

think the brewers were having a deliberate go at the establishment when they came up with that name. Many such beers are coming into the market, demonstrating that a 0% alternative that still retains flavour is possible.

It is clear that there are many points that we agree on, and the one thing that we can be absolutely certain of agreeing on is that beer is good. It is good for our economy, it is good for our communities and it is definitely best served while watching Scotland win the rugby. Like most worthwhile inventions, it has been suggested that it was invented in Scotland, in some form at least; evidence has been discovered of fermented beverages being brewed in Scotland, possibly as early as 400 BC. In my constituency, Midlothian, there was a brewery in Dalkeith that had been there since at least 1789. The last remaining brewery, McLennan and Urquhart, brewed what I am led to believe was a very fine selection of sweet ales, and the business thrived in Midlothian for the best part of a century. Unfortunately, it closed in the late 1950s and was demolished in the 1960s, and sadly brewing left Midlothian for quite some time.

That was a common picture in Scotland. The economic situation in the '60s and '70s made it impossible for breweries and pubs to survive, and closures were savage. The '60s may have been swinging, but there was not much for brewers to smile about. High unemployment, shipyard closures and the decline of traditional industries were common throughout Scotland, and for breweries the picture was just as bleak. In 1920, there were 62 breweries in Scotland; by 1960, there were just 26, and in 1970 only 11 remained. What we must learn from that period is that not nurturing the right business environment for breweries creates consequences that can be far-reaching across communities, have an impact on national, local and micro-economies and have knock-on effects on pubs and jobs.

We are now witnessing something of a beer revolution, as the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay put it. More consumers are searching for new flavours, or simply for good beer, and new breweries are starting up more and more frequently. I am pleased that new breweries are flourishing and growing in Midlothian. I positively encourage all hon. Members to visit my constituency, have a look around the breweries and taste their products. The first brewery to rekindle Midlothian's brewing history is Stewart Brewing in my home town of Loanhead. It was founded in 2004, led by a team of ambitious, passionate and hardworking beer enthusiasts, and its business has grown and expanded considerably—some may suggest that my own contribution and appreciation of its very tasty craft IPAs has contributed to that. I have also been fortunate to have the opportunity to visit the newly established Cross Borders brewery in Eskbank. It was clear from speaking to the team there that they have an absolute desire to expand, to contribute to the local and national economy and to be a key player in the beer market.

In fact, all over Scotland there is a rapidly growing industry, which we are embracing. The food and drink sector is vital to Scotland's economy, with one in five people in Scottish manufacturing working in it. The SNP Scottish Government have been working hard to support this key sector: since 2008, they have supported

173 food and drinks companies and organisations to achieve a 77% improvement in their access to local suppliers and a 62% increase in new market penetration. Scottish food and drinks exports are now worth some £4.8 billion every year. In February, the SNP Scottish Government announced business rates relief for the hospitality sector, which will save Scottish pubs around £6 million. The package also included a one-year cap on business rate increases in Scotland for the hospitality sector at 12.5%, which will benefit a further 8,000 businesses. Brigid Simmonds, chief executive of the Scottish Beer and Pub Association, said:

“The introduction of a business rates cap, set at 12.5 per cent, is welcome, and shows that the Scottish Government has listened to the concerns of Scottish pubs and other hospitality businesses.”

The association's analysis suggests that the cap will save Scottish pubs around £6 million, with pubs standing to benefit by an average of £4,700. Many microbreweries may also benefit from the small business bonus scheme, which will give up to 100% relief in many cases.

What can we do to help this very important industry, and what can we learn from Scotland's approach? I agree with many hon. Members that a cut in beer duty is essential, but I fear that that alone may not be enough. I would like the UK Government to go further. The evidence is compelling. Of course businesses should pay their share in tax, which should be fair, but in 2015 beer duty comprised 49% of a brewer's turnover, and the British Beer and Pub Association calculates that the beer and pub sector is one of the most highly taxed in the country. Brewers also face more tax: business rates, employment taxes and corporation tax are added on top. Once costs of production are taken into account, a brewer makes an average profit of just 2p or 3p a pint. For all brewers, but particularly the types of brewer in my constituency, this situation stifles the potential for growth and the ability to employ more staff.

The SNP supports a better, fairer, evidence-based way of taxing alcohol. We need to find the right balance. I very much hope that today's debate will provide the Chancellor with beer for thought for his Budget tomorrow.

10.29 am

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your stewardship, Sir Roger. I too congratulate the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on bringing this matter to our attention.

Tomorrow's Budget day is also International Women's Day, so I thought it would be apt to begin my remarks by quoting the great female poet of the 20th century, Sylvia Plath:

“The beer tastes good to my throat, cold and bitter”.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have Frank Zappa, who said:

“You can't be a real country unless you have a beer and an airline—it helps if you have some kind of football team, or nuclear weapons, but at the very least you need a beer.”

That probably sums matters up. They are just two of two of the vast number of people who, like us, have enjoyed what is widely believed to be the oldest and most consumed alcoholic beverage in the world.

According to estimates by the British Beer and Pub Association, around 30 million adults visit a pub at least once a month, and beer accounts for around two thirds of alcohol sold in pubs. In economic terms, the

pub sector contributes £23.1 billion to the British economy and £12.6 billion in tax to the Exchequer. It also supports nearly 900,000 jobs, 42% of which are for under-25s. Brewing alone employs over 100,000 people, as many Members have referred to today.

Of course, that picture has to be counterbalanced by the health impacts of alcohol, which have already been touched on by Members today. Public Health England estimates that alcohol harm costs about £21 billion a year generally and specifically costs the NHS £3.5 billion. Consequently, when we debate this issue, we really must consider it in that wider context.

Of course, many traditional drinking establishments are now under threat, not least because business rates revaluation is coming into effect, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) said. In fact, in my constituency we have had to say goodbye to several novel establishments, including the Talbot, the Elm House, the Wyndham Hotel, St George's Tavern and the Stand Park, some of which I have drunk in myself in the past. We tried to make the Priory a community pub but could not succeed, and the story is the same right across the country. None the less, we still have many great pubs and long may it remain so. In my constituency, in the Crosby area, there is a micro-pub called the Liverpool Pigeon. That has given a really good boost to the sector and to the confidence of the local community, so I say "Well done" to the Liverpool Pigeon.

Pubs are more than just small businesses. As many Members have said today, they are often community hubs. Increasingly, they offer other goods and services, such as food, hot drinks and meeting spaces, and even libraries and postal services in some places. In my constituency—and, I am sure, in many others across the country—we have church parish clubs, including St Benet's and St Elizabeth's and even one called the Holy Ghost, which play a similar role to community pubs. The Holy Ghost is not the top of the pile, except perhaps in theological terms. My constituency also has the Royal British Legion and the Royal Naval Association comrades clubs. All those establishments help to support our communities in a whole range of ways.

I think all hon. Members would acknowledge that pubs are an important community asset and that we must do all we can to help them to succeed, notwithstanding the health issues. We always need to have those issues in mind, but we should not let them overshadow all other considerations.

As hon. Members have said, it was announced in the 2016 Budget that the duty on beer, spirits and most ciders would be frozen for 2016-17; that freeze followed three consecutive years of duty cuts on a typical pint of beer. On the other hand, duties on all other alcoholic drinks, such as wine at or below 22% alcohol by volume and high-strength sparkling cider, rose in line with the retail price index. Will the Minister say what effect that has had on prices for customers and what mechanisms are in place to monitor the effectiveness of these measures?

Of course, the industry welcomed the duty freeze, and Oxford Economics has produced research supporting the argument for a beer duty cut, to protect jobs and investment during uncertain times as the UK leaves the European Union. Labour was not opposed to the freeze on beer duty. However, in distributional terms the freeze

favoured those who consume more of the relevant types of drinks. The equalities impact statement relating to last year's freeze noted that

"any changes to alcohol duties will have an equalities impact that reflects consumption trends across the adult population",

but it failed to outline what the specific equalities impact is with regard to gender. It would be helpful to get that assessment at some point. Data from the Office for National Statistics show that wine, the tax on which was not frozen, is the most popular type of drink among women, while the most popular types of drink among male drinkers of all ages are normal-strength beer, lager, cider and shandy. We must take that factor into account as well. Additionally, many trade bodies have questioned why wine has been singled out for a duty rise, and I invite the Minister to comment on that issue, either today or in the future.

Of course, it is only proper to point out the Government's continuing duty of health care, and I will re-emphasise that. It is absolutely crucial, but having said that, let us strike a balance. The Government acknowledged in their policy paper that the freeze last year was

"likely to lead to a minor increase in overall alcohol consumption".

Will the Minister provide information on whether such an increase did occur and, if so, what mechanisms are in place to monitor it?

As I have said before, Labour is committed to securing the long-term future of pubs and the wider hospitality sector. Action must be taken to give pubs a fair chance to be profitable and to make a go of things, as well as give some of the independent small businesses a chance to grow, which is absolutely crucial. My hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield raised the issue of business rate revaluation, which needs thorough examination. I point the Minister in the direction of Labour's five-point plan, which will be a good starting point for her. We are calling for an overhaul of business rates to support local high streets and small businesses, including pubs and clubs, and I hope she will take these ideas on board, because this debate is not all about beer duty. It is also about helping pubs in a range of other ways.

10.37 am

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jane Ellison): I thank colleagues from all parties in the House for what has been a typically vivid and enthusiastic debate. It has been wonderful to hear so many fantastic pubs and breweries—both large and small—getting a name-check today in the House, which they deserve. I will not repeat them all, because there were so many mentions of people's local star businesses, but I pay tribute to all of them. Debates such as this one are so valuable, because they allow Members to bring real colour to a debate about duty by demonstrating the impact that duty has had or could have on businesses in their own area.

I particularly thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) for opening this debate on behalf of our hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies). I know that my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay and others here are advocates for the important role that pubs can play; we have heard today about pubs' community role, as well as their wider economic role.

[Jane Ellison]

I congratulate both the all-party group on beer and the all-party group on save the pub for the work they do. Of course, the all-party group on beer is led by my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), who took us through his own extensive history of pubs. However, bearing in mind that he was born in 1963, I hope that his experience of Boddingtons in the 1970s came very much at the end of that decade and not at the beginning.

I noted that my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay said that it was important that this sector was not overlooked. I can reassure the pub and brewing industries that their interests are never overlooked in Parliament; they have fantastic advocates in Parliament, who are passionate and articulate champions, and they come from up and down the country and from all parties. As a result, industry concerns are regularly brought to the attention of Ministers. I myself have taken part in debates such as this one as a Back Bencher; I responded to similar debates as the Minister with responsibility for public health; and now I am responding to this debate today as the Minister with responsibility for tax.

I will try to respond to as many of the issues raised this morning as I can without repeating some of the points that others have made. As I am sure Members will realise, I cannot pre-empt anything that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will announce tomorrow. [Interruption.] I will resist all blandishments on that front.

Turning to beer duty rises, the Government of course recognise the importance of the UK pubs sector and its contribution to promoting responsible drinking. I mentioned my previous role as Public Health Minister. In that role I made the case for pubs as advocates of responsible drinking. That was not always the most straightforward thing to do, because there is always a balance in reconciling the undoubted problem our country has with alcohol in some regards against the fact that we love our pub and brewing industry. Actually, pubs are very much the answer in that regard. They bring together those two ambitions: they encourage people to drink responsibly while at the same time doing all the other good things they do, such as providing employment and contributing to community life.

As we have heard, the sector's footprint covers every constituency across the country. If I am allowed one namecheck, it is for the fantastic Sambrook's Brewery in my constituency. Along with other Members, I managed to get one of my local ales into the Strangers Bar. I know that many of us have taken that opportunity over recent years. We appreciate the contribution that all breweries—large and small—make to local economies and the wider beer market. The rise in the number of small breweries has increased diversity and choice in the beer market and promoted consumer interest in a much larger range of beers, which has benefited all brewers and the industry as a whole.

We have heard about the action taken on the beer duty escalator since 2013. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) deserves the praise he has been given for that. A pint of beer is 10p cheaper than it would have been had the beer duty escalator not been ended in 2013. That has disproportionately benefited

pubs, given that two thirds of the alcohol sold in pubs is beer. The British Beer and Pub Association—it stays closely in touch with Members and briefs them—feels that the action taken since 2013 has increased confidence. I heard that in person from the head of a well known brewery who came in as part of the delegation led by my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale last week. As my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry) said, when we talk to people involved in the industry, we can hear the impact that confidence has. Sometimes it is hard to put an exact figure on its impact on a particular part of our economy, but I have heard that from people.

The BBPA estimates that more than £1 billion is being invested by brewers and pub owners each year, and that impacts on employment decisions across the supply chain. I draw the House's attention to the ways in which the Government have supported the innovative domestic brewery industry other than by duty cuts and freezes. The shadow Minister noted them in his contribution, and they include supporting the employment of younger people through some of the changes made there, boosting research and development for small and medium-sized enterprises and reducing corporation tax on company profits from 28% in 2010 to 19% from April. In 2020, it is moving to 17%. Cutting the tax on profits encourages reinvestment and innovation.

Toby Perkins: Does the Minister recognise that there is a real debate about the value of a reduction in corporation tax on the profits that businesses make as compared with the fact that we have the largest corporate property tax in all of Europe? We are expecting businesses that often are not making a profit to see their business rates tax bill go up and up.

Jane Ellison: The hon. Gentleman brings me to the next section of my speech, which is about business rates. I am not surprised that colleagues across the House have raised that issue. We recognise that business rates can represent a high fixed cost for some businesses. I will not rehearse all the facts about the 2017 revaluation. I think we all acknowledge that there was a long gap between revaluations, but I emphasise that for those who face an increase in business rates as a result, there is a £3.6 billion transitional relief scheme. It will support them by capping and phasing in rises in bills. The Chancellor has already said that he is working with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to provide additional support for the hardest hit businesses.

As the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and others have said, pubs are valued for business rates around the idea of a fair maintainable turnover. An approved guide on the valuation of public houses for business rates has been agreed between the Valuation Office Agency and all five bodies representing pubs, including the British Beer and Pub Association and the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers. That formula has been agreed, and that is a welcome step that provides more certainty for pub operators over their business rates bill.

It is also worth noting that in the Budget 2016, the Government announced a £6.7 billion business rates reduction package to benefit all ratepayers. I draw the House's attention to the switch of the annual indexation of business rates from the retail prices index to the main

measure of inflation, the consumer prices index, from April 2020. That will represent a cut every year from 2020. In 2020-21, that benefit will be worth £370 million, and it will grow significantly thereafter.

I will turn to a number of the issues raised by Members. A number of people have made the case—I am familiar with it and recently had the chance to hear it in person from industry representatives—that duty cuts boost Exchequer revenues. It is fair to say that even if we allow for other additional tax revenues, the industry analysis we have seen shows that duty cuts still have a net cost to the Exchequer. For example, because the public finances assume an increase by RPI each year, the duty changes from Budget 2013 onwards are estimated to have reduced total alcohol duty receipts by £800 million for 2016-17. That implies that to make up for that, Government would have to raise taxes in other areas of the economy, cut spending elsewhere or increase the deficit. I put it on record that cuts and freezes have a real impact on how the public finances account for things.

A number of Members have raised the issue of lower duty rates on low-strength beer. I recognise some of the challenges around the point at which that line is drawn and around brewing to that level. High-strength beer is taxed more than the equivalent low-strength product, but the 2.8% threshold is set by European Union law and is being reviewed by the Commission at the moment. In the industry meeting, we explored the impact and discussed where the threshold should be.

Members have rightly discussed the challenge around the on-trade and the off-trade and discussed how pubs can encourage responsible drinking. Current rules do not permit the Government to apply a different tax treatment to the same product. We cannot tax alcohol sold in shops at a different rate to alcohol sold in pubs, but we recognise the role that pubs play in promoting responsible drinking. In 2014, we took action on very cheap alcohol by banning sales below duty plus VAT in England and Wales.

Liz McInnes: I appreciate the point that the Minister is making about different rates of tax, but is it not true that minimum pricing for alcohol would apply only to alcohol sold in supermarkets and retail outlets, and not to alcoholic drinks sold in pubs? Is that not correct?

Jane Ellison: I suspect that is a debate for another time. It is certainly a debate in which I took part in my previous role. If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I will stick to the topic of the debate, lest we get drawn into minimum unit pricing, as it is a complex issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) spoke about the long history of the brewing industry in her constituency. She is another strong advocate for the brewing industry, and she rightly mentioned beer exports, which were worth £531 million in 2015, up 10% on the previous year. I reassure her that no duty is payable on exported alcohol, so the link between duty cuts and exports is not a direct one, although I take her point about general confidence within the industry.

The issue of high-strength alcohol has been challenged. I think the House is unanimous in wanting to tackle excessive alcohol consumption and the related health

harms associated with the strongest products. The question is how we do that, but the point has been well made and the Government are of course reflecting on that.

I hope I have covered most of the points raised. I have not been able to respond to the whole thrust of the debate, although more will be said tomorrow in the Budget. The debate has been a valuable opportunity to discuss the issues, and it has been interesting to see so much common ground.

Jim Shannon: In my contribution I talked about alcopops—I know that might be a separate issue—and the advantage that high-street supermarkets have over the pubs. Do the Government intend to address that imbalance, the unfair advantage that high streets have over pubs, and the control of the alcohol that is sold?

Jane Ellison: Again, that is perhaps for a wider debate, but, as I recollect from my time as Public Health Minister, the industry was rightly praised for the extent to which it stepped up to address issues with certain products. A lot of alcopop products have been phased out by some producers who decided to change their portfolio. One or two speakers referred to the bigger chains and the fact that they have tried to shift their portfolios as they recognise the challenges that certain products pose, especially for younger drinkers. It is worth putting on the record a recognition of the industry's actions in that regard, although there is always the challenge to do more.

I hope that I have been able to reassure Members on some issues. In opening the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay said that the industry wanted to make sure it was not overlooked, and I can reassure him that it is not. Its voice is rightly heard loud and clear across the House and within Government. We have regular meetings and dealings with the industry and we listen very carefully to all the points made.

Peter Dowd: Will the Minister give way?

Jane Ellison: Very briefly.

Peter Dowd: I take the point that the Minister makes about the industry not being overlooked, but it is important to put this in context. For example, according to the industry, the business rates rise will put a 15% increase on pubs' costs and 23% on restaurants' costs. That is an additional £300 million to £500 million a year. The Minister should perhaps give more consideration to that.

Jane Ellison: If the shadow Minister thinks that the Government have not given consideration to business rates in recent weeks, he has not been looking at the newspapers. Of course it is an important issue and we have given consideration to it. Many establishments in different parts of the country will gain from the business rates revaluation. More businesses will see their rates cut or frozen than will see an increase. For those that see an increase, transitional relief is available, so it is important for people to look at that. No doubt people will look at the impact of that fiscally neutral revaluation in their own areas.

To return to my previous point, the industry's voice is rightly heard loud and clear in Government. It has powerful advocates in all parties in this House. The

[Jane Ellison]

debate has been constructive and has brought out important issues. I have heard all hon. Members' contributions today and will take them as representations ahead of tomorrow's Budget.

10.53 am

Steve Double: I thank all hon. Members for their contributions to this debate, which has been positive. There has been a great deal of unity among all parties on the importance of the sector to our economy, to jobs particularly for our young people, to our communities and to the Exchequer, and on the vital role that pubs play. I can reflect on the comment that the Minister made and recognise the reduction in beer duty and the drop in the amount of beer duty going to the Exchequer because of that. However, because the industry has grown and employed more people, I suspect that the overall tax take by the Exchequer has not dropped too much because extra income tax, national insurance and other taxes have been paid as a result of the growth. So there is a balancing act.

There has been a clear message from the debate today. Lowering beer duty has a positive effect on the industry. We have heard about an increase in confidence and about increasing investment to enable the industry to produce better beer and more beer more efficiently. That contributes to the overall growth of our economy and will become even more important once we have left the EU. We must ensure we have a very robust beer and pubs industry in this country that can play its part in making sure our economy is strong going forward.

I am grateful to the Minister, who has listened and taken on board the points made. I am grateful for her reassurance that the industry is in the minds of Government as they make decisions. I am sure we all look forward to—let us hope—good news tomorrow from the Chancellor.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered beer duty.

10.55 am

Sitting suspended.

Coast to Coast Walk

11 am

Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Coast to Coast Walk.

It is a pleasure to move this motion for debate today. In 1973 the legendary fell walker Alf Wainwright set out from St Bees in Cumbria on a walk he called the Coast to Coast. Stretching 190 miles from the North sea to the Irish sea, his route took him through no less than three national parks: Cumbria's Lake District, my constituency's Yorkshire Dales and the North York Moors. In the 40 years since, not a day has gone by when those footsteps have gone unfollowed.

In Yorkshire, we are perhaps not renowned for our generosity, but when it comes to our nation's most precious treasure of all, there is surely nowhere on Earth that is more giving. With polls regularly naming the Coast to Coast walk one of the world's greatest, I would venture to say that there is no better showcase of Britain's peerless natural beauty.

We all know that our new Prime Minister is a great walker and, in yet another sign of her excellent judgment, on her visit to Germany last year she chose to present Chancellor Merkel with a copy of Alf Wainwright's Coast to Coast book. I understand that Chancellor Merkel is herself a keen hiker, so although Tony Blair and President Bush may have preferred the golf cart in Camp David, surely it is only a matter of time before Chancellor Merkel and the Prime Minister negotiate while strolling together on the Coast to Coast. I would recommend that when they do, they take to heart Wainwright's very wise advice:

"There is no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing."

With all the fame and prestige, it might seem self-evident that the Coast to Coast walk would be one of Britain's 15 official national trails. However, it is with regret that I report that this remarkable route is yet to be officially recognised and has not taken its rightful place alongside what are, in many cases, far less celebrated walks. Despite its renown and the thousands who walk it every year, the Coast to Coast does not even appear on Ordnance Survey maps. That means that as popular as the walk is, attracting the visitors that it does, there is much less opportunity to promote it and attract even more visitors, which the rural economy needs. More concerning still, its lack of official status means that none of the official funding provided to national trails such as the Pennine Way and Offa's Dyke is available to the Coast to Coast. That is why in April last year I met members of the Wainwright Society at Surrender bridge in Swaledale, to launch the Coast to Coast "Make it National" campaign.

I am privileged to say that since that day, the campaign has garnered a coalition of formal support from no fewer than 53 local, district and county councils along the route, the national parks and, of course, members of the Wainwright Society, custodians of the legendary walker's legacy. The Minister will no doubt be excited to learn that the campaign has also attracted two celebrity backers, in the form of Julia Bradbury from "Countryfile" and Eric Robson, host of the BBC's "Gardeners' Question Time". I am also privileged and thrilled to have received the support of colleagues here in Westminster—indeed, from every Member of Parliament along the route, including the hon. Members for Workington (Sue Hayman)

and for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop), my hon. Friends the Members for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) and for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) and my hon. Friend the newly elected Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison). I am delighted that three of my colleagues are here today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border is a particularly keen user of the Coast to Coast, so I can only hope that his famous two-year trek across Afghanistan and Pakistan has provided him with the necessary skills to deal with the more cantankerous locals he might encounter. I understand that the Coast to Coast even has its friends in the Cabinet. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), makes regular use of his SAS training and walks the 190-mile path in just eight days.

Our campaign has three simple aims: first, to preserve one of our best-loved national treasures; secondly, to help more people discover this iconic walk; and lastly, to give a helping hand to the north's rural economy. I will speak first about preservation. As I mentioned, national trail status comes with a modest amount of public funding of about £100,000 a year. That may not be much in the budget of a country or even a county council, but for the Coast to Coast, that sum could make the difference between the slow erosion of rain, wind and bracken and an iconic walk that is preserved for the next generation.

The money could be used to signpost the route, keep bogs off the path and check the creeping advance of hawthorn, making the path easier for walkers to follow. To the credit of the local authorities, the route has been relatively well maintained and is mostly in great condition, but as the years go by, more and more issues arise that they do not have the resources to fix. The crossing point at the A19 dual carriageway at Ingleby Arncliffe is one example. At the end of a hard day's trek, carrying a heavy pack, walkers have to dodge traffic travelling up to 70 mph to get across. With national trail status, we could make a strong case for a footbridge to be built.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and on his tremendous campaign, which I and many colleagues are very happy to support. Does he agree that, as tourism is so critical in both our constituencies these days, and as the route passes over the North York Moors and through Rosedale, which is the most beautiful part of the North York Moors, it is critical to the public houses and restaurants in those areas that we get designation as a national trail?

Rishi Sunak: I thank my hon. Friend for his support. He is absolutely right: the rural economy is vital. As I will touch on later in my speech, it is worth billions and billions of pounds to constituencies such as his and mine. If we want to make sure that the countryside is not just a museum but a living, breathing place where people can live and have jobs, we need to ensure that businesses can thrive. National trail status would help with that.

At Nine Standards Rigg in Cumbria, the bog has become so bad that areas of the path have become virtually unwalkable. With national trail status, we can

ensure that the Coast to Coast is kept as safe as possible, giving people the confidence to undertake one of Britain's most magnificent journeys.

That leads me to the second objective of our campaign, which is to help more people discover the Coast to Coast. Funding would help keep the path accessible to everyone from fell walking fanatics to young families such as my own, but national trail status would also be an enormous asset in promoting the Coast to Coast in the UK and abroad. Indeed, for proof of the impact that official status and well organised promotion can have in rural areas, we need only look to our national parks. Since their creation in the 1950s, they have boomed. Receiving about 100 million visitors a year, national parks sustain 68,000 jobs while generating more than £10 billion for the economy.

That brings me to the final objective of our campaign, which my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton mentioned: supporting rural prosperity. In constituencies such as ours, the Coast to Coast is more than an institution that is close our hearts. It is one of the most vital arteries of our rural economy. Lining the path's 190 miles are not only spectacular views but hundreds of communities and businesses. Texas has oil, Australia has gold mines and north Yorkshire has its countryside.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this really good debate. Of course, north Yorkshire, the Esk valley and East Cleveland had ironstone and alum mines. Part of the Coast to Coast route includes historic sites such as Kildale and Rosedale. It also goes through my constituency from Guisborough all the way to Eston. Westminster also has a local link, because, of course, the ironstone in Big Ben more than likely came from those mines. In my constituency, we have the Cleveland Ironstone Mining Museum. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the Cleveland Way and the Coast to Coast walk received funds and recognition, that would boost tourism to that mining museum, which is a crucial link to our historical lineage as a North Yorkshire community?

Rishi Sunak: I thank the hon. Gentleman for informing us of that wonderful link between the ironstone mines in his constituency and Big Ben. I did not know about that museum, and I would be delighted to visit it with him. I agree wholeheartedly that promoting the walk would have many knock-on benefits and bring people to our areas to enjoy all the things that we know about and take for granted, and which we would like to open up to the rest of the country and the world. I hope that will be the case.

VisitEngland estimates that those who go on walking holidays spend about £2 billion annually. For businesses in our constituencies, that makes the iconic status of the Coast to Coast a vital source of custom. During the election campaign I called into one such business—a local pub like only Yorkshire makes—in the village of Danby Wiske near Northallerton. The landlord told me just how important the walk is to the prosperity of his business. The hundreds of walkers who stop by for a well earned pork pie and a cold pint of Yorkshire bitter in the summer months are the difference between a loss and a profit for his business. He is not alone. Coast to

[*Rishi Sunak*]

Coast Packhorse in Kirkby Stephen is a successful local start-up that transports walkers' luggage to their next stop. Businesses along the Coast to Coast, perhaps including the museum that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, tell the same story.

When we talk about infrastructure investment in this House, as the Government rightly do, we all have a similar image in our minds—gigantic bridges, high-speed railway and motorways—but for rural areas, infrastructure such as the Coast to Coast can be just as vital because it allows communities to capitalise effectively on their national assets. I know public money is tight, but national trail funding is an investment that would be repaid many times over, both in the long-term economic benefits it would generate and in the communities it would help to sustain—communities whose hands repair our dry stone walls, tend our forests and keep our fields green and lush. If they were to disappear because of a lack of jobs of investment, every one of us would be poorer.

Natural England is currently focused on its coastal path project, due to open in 2020—an ambitious national trail that showcases the best of our coastal areas. As that programme moves towards completion over the coming years, I urge Natural England to look closely at finally giving the Coast to Coast the recognition it deserves. For now, a feasibility study would reflect the widespread support that the campaign has received and support the message of so many businesses from St Bees to Robin Hood's Bay. Officially promoting and protecting the route would do so much for their prosperity.

The Coast to Coast route is part of the legacy of a unique man whose contribution to the natural world is unparalleled. Across mountains and fells, wandering through valleys and villages, it is an inspirational crossing of the north of England. In the words of Alf Wainwright himself:

“Surely there cannot be a finer itinerary for a long-distance walk!”

I hope the Minister will consider the case that the “Make it National” campaign has put forward and do all he can to encourage Natural England to launch a feasibility study as soon as possible. The Coast to Coast is already a national treasure. It is time to recognise it as a national trail.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, let me take the opportunity to welcome the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) to her first excursion into of the joys of Westminster Hall. Sadly, as she knows, she is bound by parliamentary convention and will not be able to intervene until she has made her maiden speech, but we look forward to her doing so in the near future. It is a pleasure to see her here.

11.14 am

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): May I also say that it is a pleasure to see my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) attending this debate, which is obviously of great importance to her constituency as the Coast to Coast walk starts there? I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) on securing this debate to highlight his long-running campaign for the well known Coast to

Coast path. As he explained, the path was set out by the pioneering fell walker and author Alfred Wainwright in 1973, and my hon. Friend made a very strong case for it to become a national trail.

All hon. Members agree on the importance of the existing family of national trails in England, which were designated as such under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. They are long-distance routes that are maintained to a higher standard than other public rights of way, and they cover more than 2,000 miles in England. All have rights for walkers, and some are also open to horse riders and cyclists. I know that people care a lot about our national trails, and I recognise the value and the range of benefits that they bring. There can be no doubt that they are an important means of connecting people with nature. They are popular: there are at least 70 million visits each year to places that a national trail passes through. Visitors include local people, day visitors and international visitors to England. People come to enjoy some of our finest landscape and scenery, to get fresh air and hopefully to enjoy our finest weather. National trails are important to walkers and users, as they provide health and exercise benefits. They are also major tourism assets and attract a variety of visitors, who spend money that makes a significant contribution to local economies and rural regeneration.

My hon. Friend spoke of his campaign for the designation of the Coast to Coast path as a national trail. The path goes from St Bees to Robin Hood's bay—a length of just over 190 miles. I am told it can be walked in about 11 to 15 days, although I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) might do it slightly faster, given his enthusiasm for walking. It takes walkers from the north-west coast, through the Lake District and parts of the Yorkshire dales, and then finally through the North York Moors before finishing on the east coast. About 70 miles of the total 190 miles is within the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks), which highlights its importance for him.

My hon. Friend said that local people have a long-standing interest in the designation of the path. I congratulate him on the local support he has obtained for his campaign and on the enthusiastic responses received from various local authorities whose areas the path crosses. He has also made it clear that every hon. Member representing a constituency along the route of the path supports his campaign.

As my hon. Friend is aware, the key responsibility for making any proposals to designate the Coast to Coast path as a national trail lies with Natural England, which is responsible for the provisions of the 1949 Act. Under section 51 of the Act, Natural England has a power to propose new national trails to the Secretary of State. To make such a designation, all the local authorities, including any national park authorities, within whose boundaries the route will pass have to be consulted. Natural England must then prepare a report setting out various matters such as the route, maintenance costs and likely capital outlay for creating a trail. The report is submitted to the Secretary of State, who may approve, modify or reject Natural England's proposals.

My hon. Friend has been in contact with officials at Natural England since late 2015 or early last year, and he has met Natural England's chairman, Andrew Sells,

to discuss the matter further. Natural England has provided my hon. Friend with information about its powers under the 1949 Act with respect to national trails and the process for designating a path. Natural England has said that any proposal for a path to be designated as a national trail would need to secure a considerable amount of local support from all of the access authorities through which the new national trail would pass, as well as from landowners and land users.

As is often the case, and as my hon. Friend mentioned, money is the issue with the designation of new national trails. Natural England has indicated to him that while it supports the idea of designating the Coast to Coast path as a national trail, it has no plans to designate any new national trails. At the moment the Government's priority is to develop coastal access proposals under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 for the England Coast path, which is to become a national trail as each stretch of the coastal walk is completed. Resources are now focused therefore on the delivery of the England Coast path, which we are committed to completing by 2020. To date, we have opened up public access along 338 miles of the English coast, along with additional spreading room for people to use for recreation and enjoyment. Once complete, the England Coast path will double the total length of national trails in England. Recently, I met local representatives of Natural England to discuss proposals to complete the coastal path around Cornwall.

My hon. Friend asked whether Natural England, working alongside the relevant authorities, would undertake a feasibility study to scope out the actual route of the Coast to Coast path and to see what is required for it to be designated as a national trail. As I have said, Natural England has no plans to designate any new national trails other than the England Coast path, and any such feasibility study might divert Natural England's existing resources away from its work on that path. Once a decision is taken to designate, there is under the process provided for by the 1949 Act something akin to a feasibility study, including, for example, exhaustive

consultation with local authorities and an assessment of the required maintenance costs. That is what I believe my hon. Friend is asking for, which would be the first stage of designation, rather than a separate feasibility study.

Once the England Coast path has been implemented in 2020, Natural England might be able to look at options for the Coast to Coast walk. I am sure that hon. Members with an interest in that will want to look at whether future party manifestos might include issues of this sort. In the meantime, I point out that other funds are available, such as those to promote tourism in rural communities. Perhaps alternative sources of funding can help to raise the profile of the Coast to Coast path in preparation for possible designation. It should also be remembered that nothing prevents local authorities along the path from increasing either their level of support for it or the amount they are willing to spend on its maintenance. There is no requirement to leave such activity to Natural England; in the interim, local authorities may invest in the path.

I recognise the value that users place on the experience of the Coast to Coast walk and the tourism value that it can bring to local communities. As I have pointed out, many other long-distance regional and trans-regional paths in England have the support of local communities and access authorities along their route in recognition of their value, although not all of them are national trails. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) for his lively campaign, however and for setting out so ably the case for the walk to become a national trail. I hope that he understands that limitations on our budget mean that we cannot consider that yet, but I encourage him and other colleagues to maintain pressure on local authorities and perhaps, in a few years' time, once we have completed the England Coast path, to revisit the issue with Ministers.

Question put and agreed to.

11.24 am

Sitting suspended.

O'Neill Review

[MR GARY STREETER *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Before I call Mr Hollinrake to move the motion, I shall let you know that eight colleagues are trying to catch my eye, in addition to the Front Benchers and the mover of the motion, so I will impose a voluntary time limit of four minutes on Back-Bench speeches. Please—I beg you—keep interventions to a minimum. We will see how it goes. I may have to impose a compulsory limit as we go along, but I hope not.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the O'Neill review into antibiotic resistance.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter. In advance of this debate, I penned an article for PoliticsHome titled, "Antibiotic resistance—the new Black Death?" As I was writing that headline, I could sense outraged people saying, "A typical politician grabbing a sensational headline to terrify the public once again," but it reflects the devastating conclusions of the review on antimicrobial resistance, which involved some of the world's leading scientists, academics and economists, including its chair, Lord O'Neill, the world-leading economist and former Treasury Minister.

The O'Neill review's report states that bacteria are gradually becoming more resistant to antibiotics, and its most grim prediction is that 10 million lives will be lost globally every year by 2050. That is more than are lost to cancer and similar to the number of deaths caused in the 14th century by the black death, which killed some 75 million people between 1346 and 1353.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My hon. Friend cites 10 million deaths, but the effect will not be the same everywhere. Was he as shocked as I was to discover that the figure for Africa is more than 4 million? Does he think that more research should be done to ensure that the right resources are in the right places?

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The key element of the fight against antimicrobial resistance is its global nature. We absolutely must not isolate ourselves from the rest of the world—we must collaborate—but we must take national action, too, and I will come on to that shortly.

That figure is of course a prediction—it could be lower, but it could also be higher. Predictions have been made about other contagions, such as Ebola, Zika, HIV and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, and our scientists, academics and clinicians thankfully have managed to mitigate the worst effects and worst predictions for those diseases. But there are three reasons for us to be more alarmed this time: first, antimicrobial resistance is already happening; secondly, the problem is spreading rapidly and by all available means; and thirdly, research is not being carried out on anything like the scale required.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): A quarter of all the deaths that are predicted to happen as a result of drug resistance will be caused by tuberculosis,

a disease that already kills 1.8 million people a year. Does my hon. Friend agree that research and development is essential if we are to develop a vaccine to prevent tuberculosis? No epidemic has ever been fully beaten without a vaccine.

Kevin Hollinrake: I absolutely agree. The difficulty is that due to the reward mechanisms in the system, such research and development is not happening. I will turn to that shortly.

This is not an apocalyptic prophecy. Antimicrobial resistance causes some 700,000 deaths globally and an estimated 12,000 deaths in the UK every year—similar to the number of people who lose their lives from breast cancer. Quite simply, if the bacteria that cause infections become resistant to antibiotics, people die. This issue is listed in the national risk register of civil emergencies, a five-year Government register, which states that an "increasingly serious issue is the development and spread of" antimicrobial resistance and points out that much of modern medicine will become unsafe. Minor surgery such as organ transplants, bowel surgery, cancer treatments and caesarean sections will become high risk—there will be more illness and more deaths.

Dame Sally Davies, our chief medical officer, pointed out that antibiotics have extended life by an average of 20 years—20 years of our lives may therefore be lost—and 40% of our population could die prematurely if this situation is not resolved. Operations would become unsafe due to the risk of infection during surgery or chemotherapy. Influenza pandemics would become much more serious. The national risk register states:

"The numbers of infections complicated by AMR are expected to increase markedly over the next 20 years. If a widespread outbreak were to occur, we could expect around 200,000 people to be affected by a bacterial blood infection that could not be treated effectively with existing drugs".

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that we heed the O'Neill review's recommendation that antimicrobial use in farming must reduce if we are to address the frightening consequences that he is outlining? In particular, we need to move away from intensive farming, which is reliant on the prophylactic use of antimicrobials.

Kevin Hollinrake: My right hon. Friend is right that bacteria can move from animals into humans, and the O'Neill review was clear that we need to take action in agriculture as well as our health services.

The national risk register states that we will be unable to treat some 200,000 people with existing drugs and "around 80,000 of these people might die." That is a Government report.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful argument. Is it not true that it takes about 15 years for a new antibiotic to get to the marketplace? Given the position that he has just laid out—deaths and resistance are happening already—that is quite frightening.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. We need to take action now because of the delays in producing new drugs.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. Is it not self-evident that the prevention of the occurrence

and spread of infection must be in the first line of the battle against this problem, and screening people on admission to hospital to determine who might be resistant and carrying infections would be very useful?

Kevin Hollinrake: The right hon. Gentleman is right. Some 50% of prescriptions are needless, and diagnostics would mean that a lot of drugs were no longer prescribed.

We talk glibly about tens of thousands of deaths—Stalin once said, “One death is a tragedy; a million is a statistic”—but the reality is that these are our partners, our brothers, our sisters and our children, so we must act.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point, but is not the key to find new antibiotics? Is he aware that several antibiotics originated from organisms in soil? That is how penicillin was found, and the first lead on a new antibiotic was recently found in soil. Does he agree that protecting our soil is key to our future? Given how much soil is being eroded and degraded, the Government should treat that as an important issue.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion of the natural environment, and she makes a very good point.

The World Health Organisation has stated that antimicrobial resistance is

“one of the greatest challenges for public health”

and that the problem is increasing and we are

“fast running out of...options.”

Antibiotic resistance is just one form of antimicrobial resistance—others concern viral and fungal infections—but my focus is antibiotics, which the public more readily understand and should have real concerns about. Bacteria undergo an eternal battle for survival, and natural resistance occurs as a result of bacteria fighting that battle, but when we use antibiotics—particularly when we overuse them—that natural resistance accelerates significantly and becomes super-charged, and we end up with many more antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing the debate. He is right to highlight the scale of the challenge not just here but globally: it is difficult for countries to bring forward large-scale programmes to deal with the problem of antimicrobial resistance. Does he agree that, apart from inappropriate prescribing, one of the key issues in this country is people not always completing courses of antibiotics, which increases the challenges and problems of bacteria developing resistance?

Kevin Hollinrake: I defer to my hon. Friend's in-depth knowledge in this area. I recognise my father's habits in taking antibiotics when he felt a bit unwell—he had a little cupboard in the corner of his lounge. That is a problem, and that is why we need to improve the education on treatment of illnesses for which people are prescribed antibiotics.

The point about antibiotic resistance spreading is that it can be spread in so many ways: on aeroplanes; in our water; from contact with unwashed hands of people who carry bacteria resistance; coughing and sneezing; and from animals to humans. Some Members may have

come across the excellent BBC Radio 4 drama “Resistance”—the first episode was aired on Friday and the second episode is this Friday—which talks about the transference from animals to humans. That means we must tackle this problem both in agriculture and in our health services.

Bacteria do not recognise national borders, so, as many hon. Members have already pointed out, this is a global problem. We would think that with those apocalyptic visions of the future we would be spending an awful lot of money on tackling this issue, but that is not the case. About \$100 billion is spent every year on cancer research, but only about \$5 billion is spent every year on tackling antimicrobial resistance. The reason for that is the commercial return that large pharmaceutical companies will get from bringing forward a new antibiotic to tackle this issue. Almost by definition, any new drug is held as a last line of defence, so there is not a significant commercial return for the pharmaceutical companies who we rely on for such new drugs. About \$50 billion a year is spent on antibiotics but only about \$5 billion a year is spent on patented antibiotics, which is equivalent to one cancer drug. It is a better commercial activity to be involved in cancer research and cancer drug development than in antimicrobial resistance. There has been a huge reduction in the number of pharmaceutical companies involved in research and development—in 1990 there were 18 and in 2010 there were only four—and no new classes of antibiotic drugs have been developed in the past 25 years.

Of course, the O'Neill review has studied that and come up with clear and compelling recommendations such as rapid diagnostic testing, which the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) referred to. Yesterday we had a Twitter debate, which was interesting, listening for an hour to people's experiences. Many clinicians got involved in that particular Twittersphere, and we trended nationally at one point, which was certainly a new experience for me. One thing that came across was the pressure that clinicians were under to prescribe antibiotics to people who felt ill. Obviously, if we had diagnostics that could show people that they did not carry something that could be treated by an antibiotic, they would be much less likely to put that pressure on doctors.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a good point about educating patients so that they appreciate that they do not have to come out of the GP surgery with a prescription in their hand if a diagnostic test can be carried out to prove that antibiotics will not work in their case.

Kevin Hollinrake: That is right. I had a test myself at a drop-in session in Portcullis House that showed me that I was not ill—I did not think I was ill, but they told me that I was not, which was reassuring. Again, we need to ensure that prescriptions are given when they will be effective. One other area that we do not seem to have control over at the moment is the online sale of antibiotics: whether through UK-based pharmacies or those based overseas, it is too easy to access drugs without a proper prescription.

The second key point that the O'Neill review highlights is the need for a global public awareness campaign so that people are aware of the issues. Again on Twitter yesterday, a student who had undertaken some analysis

[Kevin Hollinrake]

said that 80% of the people she had spoken to had no awareness of antibiotic resistance. We need a significant national and international effort to draw public attention to the problem. As people have already said, we need a reduction of usage in agriculture. That is clearly set out in the O'Neill review as one of the four main recommendations.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an important point about the dangers of antibiotic resistance. Does he agree that as well as not prescribing antibiotics for illnesses, it is important to recognise when there are alternatives that will reduce the use of antibiotics overall? For example, there is research being done at Newcastle University into using antiseptics for urinary diseases.

Kevin Hollinrake: Yes, what we need is a mixture of solutions. The UK by its own admission is mid-range across Europe in its use of antibiotics in agriculture. That is one thing, but we have been world leaders on this issue and for me mid-range is not where we need to be; we need to be at the forefront and world leaders in terms of best practice, whatever aspect of this issue we are dealing with.

There are four key recommendations in the O'Neill review's 10 main recommendations. The last one is on market entry rewards to solve the problem of pharmas not investing in research and development, as well as a possible levy on drug companies that do not invest in research.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The World Health Organisation has made it clear, chillingly, that resistance to last resort antibiotics is present globally, so we have to act. Does my hon. Friend agree that we will not create vital new drugs until we align better the public health needs with the commercial incentives, and that Governments need to correct what is the most dangerous market failure in history?

Kevin Hollinrake: That is correct, and the review sets that out clearly. At the moment, if there is not a commercial return, it is difficult for pharmaceutical companies to invest in this field, although some are. For example, AstraZeneca recently sold its late-stage small molecule antibiotic business to Pfizer and so stepped out of research and development, but others, such as MSD, are still investing. It cannot be right that some companies are willing to invest—perhaps for altruistic purposes—when others are not. The O'Neill review discusses whether there should be a reimbursement or an insurance model, so that pharmaceutical companies can be sure that they will get a certain amount every year for drugs if they do develop them. It cannot be right that some contribute and some do not, so a levy for those that do not seems sensible to me. I do not think it should be left simply to big pharma to solve the problem.

The O'Neill review talks about a global AMR innovation fund—GAMRIF—to make funding available for smaller third sector organisations. Having Antibiotic Research UK, the world's first charity in this field, in my constituency is how the issue was brought to my attention. It is doing fantastic research. From donations made by individuals, it has got hundreds of thousands of pounds that it is

investing in “resistance breakers”, which is blending drugs together to repurpose existing antibiotics. That again is one of the recommendations in the report. Yes, big pharma, but we have also got to make some funding available to the smaller organisations, too.

Mr George Osborne (Tatton) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kevin Hollinrake: I am happy to give way my right hon. Friend, who has been a leader on this issue globally.

Mr Osborne: I congratulate my hon. Friend on highlighting this issue, and the wide range of Members here shows the degree of support across the House. He is now on the nub of the problem: there will not be an international levy unless Britain leads the argument internationally; no other country will do it. David Cameron established the review and Jim O'Neill has provided the answers. The British Government now need to double up their efforts and make sure that this is one of the major things we campaign for at the UN, the G20 and the like. We have made a good start and we have an extremely capable Minister, but now we need to finish the job.

Kevin Hollinrake: I am grateful for that intervention and for my right hon. Friend's work on the issue in the past. He gives me an ideal opportunity to close my comments; I know you are keen to get other Members in to speak, Mr Streeter.

The UK is a world leader on this in both words and actions, but we need to do much more. The former Prime Minister—and the current Prime Minister, I am sure—and the former Chancellor of the Exchequer are leaders on this on the world stage and have drawn it to the world's attention, as has Lord O'Neill. It is hugely important that we maintain that leadership. I look forward to hearing the thoughts of colleagues and the clear plans of Ministers for how we will act now to meet today's challenge, because the fear is that tomorrow will be much worse than today.

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members of the voluntary four-minute time limit. There are about to be Divisions in the House.

2.51 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on securing the debate. For time reasons, I will focus only on the use of antibiotics in farming. We know that, just as there is a clear correlation between rising levels of human use of antibiotics and growing antibiotic resistance among humans, higher use in farm animals undermines antibiotics' effectiveness in human medicine.

Too many of the superbugs listed by the World Health Organisation as posing the greatest threat to human health are also found in retail meat and food animals. At the end of last year, yet more studies found antibiotic-resistant *E. coli* in British supermarket pig and chicken meat and MRSA in UK supermarket pork. It is encouraging that DEFRA has now—after being rather complacent about the routine use of antibiotics in farming, it has to be said—committed to a 20% reduction by 2018, in line with the O'Neill review's recommendations, but more action is needed.

The Government have said that the Veterinary Medicines Directorate is working closely with the sector to embed responsible use of antibiotics, but we know that is simply not happening. Routine mass medication of groups of animals, either on a purely preventive basis or when a few animals within the group are sick, is still far too frequent, particularly in the pig industry. Last March, the European Parliament voted through proposed new regulations that included a ban on preventive group treatments, but the dialogue between the Parliament, the Council and the European Commission has been delayed yet again until September. At the time of that vote, the then shadow Health Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander), and I, in my then capacity as shadow Environment Secretary, wrote to our counterparts to ask them to respond positively to the proposals, but we received a pretty opaque response. Will the Minister say whether the Government fully back the European Parliament's position? It may take several more years before an EU ban, so I urge the Government to take action now and follow the Netherlands and the five Nordic countries, which do not permit such treatments.

There have been welcome moves by the British Poultry Council, but the British pig industry has not moved as fast. Colistin, which is a last resort treatment for life-threatening infections in humans, is now one of few options doctors have left for treating carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae—CRE—which has been described as the nightmare bacteria. It is important to me because my niece and several of my constituents have cystic fibrosis, and colistin is used for treating lung infections arising from CF. The Cystic Fibrosis Trust described growing colistin resistance as a

“matter of life and death”

for such patients. Only last year, new products were licensed by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate in a move that Professor Timothy Walsh, one of the scientists who originally discovered colistin resistance, described as “sheer, utter madness”. He says that that last resort antibiotic will become useless as a drug within 10 years if its usage in veterinary medicine is not stopped.

The Government also urgently need to set specific targets for “critically important antibiotics” because of their importance to human health. The Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics has called for an 80% reduction in the use of CIAs in farming in five years, and a 95% reduction in 10 years—a call I endorsed this time last year—but sales fell by only 5% in 2015. We need far greater reductions. We also need more ambitious sector-specific targets. As I said, the poultry industry is doing more but antibiotic use is extremely high in the pig industry—more than five times higher per pig than in Denmark and the Netherlands, which are our competitors. As has already been said, intensive farming goes hand in hand with the overuse of antibiotics, which is something the Government need to encourage farmers to move away from.

2.55 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on securing this important debate. I will focus on Lord O'Neill's call for antibiotic prescriptions to be informed by a rapid diagnostic test “wherever one exists” by 2020. Such tests do exist and have for probably at least 25 years. I know that because I tried to launch

such a test previously. At that stage it was about better prescribing, but it is now more about tackling the huge problem of antimicrobial resistance, which Dame Sally Davies has said is as big a risk as terrorism and climate change.

Why are we still only talking about these point-of-care and diagnostic tests, which could make a huge difference? I think it is partly due to the way that in vitro diagnostic tests are block funded through centralised hospital labs. In Scandinavia, point-of-care tests are a lot more widespread, including for C-reactive protein—CRP—and funding is decentralised. There is not yet a mechanism for such tests to be funded in the UK. It is so important to look at how such tests will be funded, whether they are to be used in a GP surgery or local pharmacy. It has been calculated that £56 million could be saved in prescribing and dispensing costs alone if point-of-care tests were introduced, as they can be vital in deciding whether to prescribe antibiotics.

Let me explain. High levels of C-reactive protein are found in somebody with a bacterial infection. The level is normally only slightly raised when the patient has a viral and not a microbial infection. When my hon. Friend was tested, the results showed that he was either healthy or had a viral infection. Point-of-care CRP tests are available and can be carried out by GPs, practice nurses and community pharmacists, and they take just four minutes to determine whether a patient needs antibiotics or not. It sounds very simple, and it can be. As I said earlier, patients feel they have only had their money's worth from a GP appointment if they come out with a prescription, but studies have shown that giving them a point-of-care test can also leave them feeling satisfied and as though they have had their money's worth. In one study, 90% of respondents felt reassured by a point-of-care CRP test if they were not prescribed an antibiotic.

The tests are very simple. Patients have their finger or thumb stabbed and a small drop of blood is taken. It is then tested within four minutes, while the patient waits in the doctor's surgery. Lots of studies have shown a reduction in antibiotic prescribing, including by 30% in one and 23% in another project, which was cost-neutral; the cost of carrying out the tests versus prescribing is very effective. I am mystified as to why we have this problem yet are not tackling it with tests that are already on the market, which is in line with current National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines. I ask the Minister: why can we not change the funding streams for these tests to make sure that they are carried out exactly where they are needed?

2.59 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter. I was not expecting to be called so soon—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Despite your pleasure, Mr Grady, there is a Division in the House.

3 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

3.33 pm

On resuming—

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): We will recommence even though the Minister and the mover of the motion are not present. Sir Kevin Barron will speak now, and we will come back to Patrick Grady's speech later. The debate will end at 4.33 pm.

3.34 pm

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on securing this very important debate. We will all be aware that the World Health Organisation says that antibiotic resistance is one of the most significant threats to safety in Europe. Resistance is driven by overusing and inappropriately prescribing antibiotics, and it leads to higher medical costs, prolonged hospital stays and increased mortality. The aim of appropriate use is to ensure that patients receive the treatment that is most likely to treat their condition without increasing antimicrobial resistance. That includes ensuring that courses of antibiotics are completed and are not prescribed unnecessarily, and reducing the spread of infection through vaccines and other early interventions.

One area that is often overlooked is dentistry, which accounts for up to 10% of all antibiotics prescribed in the UK. It is essential that dentists play their part in reducing antibiotic prescribing, and I believe that they are willing to do that. The British Dental Association tells me that many patients are not aware that antibiotics cannot cure decay or dental abscesses and that surgical intervention and painkillers are more often the appropriate treatment for tooth-related pain. The briefing sheet that the BDA sent me gives this good example:

"Hundreds of thousands of patients show up at GP surgeries and A&E departments every year with dental pain, but these places are not equipped to help them, and they are sent home with antibiotics to tide them over until they can arrange to see a dentist."

There should be awareness of that throughout the medical profession.

I agree with Lord O'Neill's statement that diagnostic technology needs to be improved to ensure that antimicrobials are used appropriately. I am no expert in this area, but the chair of the review board called on the Governments of rich countries to ensure that, by 2020, all prescriptions for antibiotics will be on the basis of surveillance information and a rapid diagnostic test where one is available. The review recommended a diagnostic market stimulus to support the diagnostic technology market. The Minister is not in the Chamber at present, but I hope that the Government will look at diagnostics.

The Government must also look at the factors that have hampered investment in antibiotic development, particularly the low commercial returns on investment. With high costs and long lead times for developing new medicines, there is a need to create an attractive environment for companies to invest in antibiotic development, in order to increase research and development. The current system of antibiotic reimbursement does not provide companies with a fair return on investment. That is driving companies out of the anti-infection market.

Pharmaceutical companies and Government are developing a delinked domestic reimbursement model. That will remove the incentive for companies to promote antibiotic sales, which can accelerate the development of resistance. The proposed model will deliver a return

on investment for antibiotics that is delinked from the volume of sales. It will also encourage the appropriate use of new antibiotics by ensuring that they are prescribed based on clinical need and in line with stewardship goals.

I see the time, Mr Streeter, and I am about to conclude. A delinkage model is proposed in the O'Neill report, and we must put our minds to it, but it is very much for the future. What we have to examine now is how we manage patients' expectations on when antibiotics are and are not appropriate. We should be doing that daily in all parts of the health service.

3.37 pm

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): The O'Neill report focuses on many things, but I would like to focus on three key points. One is unnecessary prescribing. The second is the so-called disappeared antibiotics—those that should be available, but are not. The third is alternatives—something that Jim O'Neill talks about, but does not elaborate on.

Jim O'Neill says:

"Huge quantities of...antibiotics, are wasted globally on patients who do not need them".

That is a key challenge for us, but he also says that a study in 2012 of 38 high-income countries found that

"two thirds of the antibiotics surveyed were not available in more than half of the countries. The main reason for this is that drugs manufacturers and distributors discontinue the stock where it is not profitable enough to maintain it."

The point is that those antibiotics are available, but are not being used because of economic factors.

We looked at this issue in the Select Committee on Science and Technology, of which I was a member in the previous Parliament, and we found:

"Of the 18 to 20 pharmaceutical companies who were the main suppliers of new antibiotics 20 years ago, just a handful of companies persist in this field."

It is all down to money, and we will clearly have to address that with funding.

If we go through the back of the O'Neill report, we find that there are hardly any contributions from anyone who knows anything about anything other than mainstream medicine. Between one third and one half of the world's population live in China and India, where there is integrated healthcare using herbal medicine and mainstream medicine. There are 60,000 hospitals in China, and there will be a larger number of herbal clinics. In India, the Ministry of AYUSH regulates Ayurveda of different types, yoga and homeopathy, of which there are 200 colleges—we probably will not get on to that this afternoon.

In the previous Parliament, the then Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), asked a group led by the deputy chief medical officer, and me as his deputy, to look at regulation of herbal medicine. My hon. Friend the Minister has just published her response. I congratulate her on it and am very much in favour of the idea of getting better regulation through the Professional Standards Authority. However, I have to tell her that she has been badly advised in one respect. She says, on herbal pharmacies:

"Allowing people with no qualifications to put together medicines and carry this out on unregulated premises conflicts with everything else the MHRA does".—[*Official Report*, 28 February 2017; Vol. 622, c. 8WS.]

I have to tell her that that is not the case. Professor David Walker, who wrote to her predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), made this clear:

“The idea of herbal dispensaries was to allow the preparation of herbal remedies on behalf of individual practitioners, for individual patients, but at a distant location by a third party. This would be safer than unskilled practitioners making products in unsuitable environments.”

So that is completely the opposite. He said:

“We consulted the MHRA about the feasibility of this change in our deliberations and the advice that we received was that it was feasible but...would take considerable work”.

That is the problem—the MHRA do not want to do the work. He went on:

“We felt that this effort would be worthwhile and that dispensaries would improve access to herbal medicines, generate business and improve patient safety.”

If we marry that with the new regime that the Professional Standards Authority has put in place, and if we give the herbal pharmacists from China and India and the phytotherapists in this country oversight of regulation through the PSA, my hon. Friend the Minister will have a powerful tool. However, that will not be the case if she does not have another look at the herbal pharmacies proposal, which we worked on for nearly 18 months. The former Minister, who commissioned the report, is not in his place at the moment, but he would agree.

3.41 pm

Patrick Grady: It is still a pleasure to be serving under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter.

Antimicrobial resistance was described earlier by another Member as a market failure. I have also seen it described as a “tragedy of the commons”, which is a phrase that some of us might associate with the hassle we have to go through because of the antiquated voting systems in this House. It is actually an economic term describing where individual users acting independently according to their own self-interest behave contrary to the common good by depleting a resource that should be there to serve everyone. That is precisely what has happened through the misuse of antibiotic medicines over the years. It shows that the resistance we are discussing today is an avoidable and man-made problem, and it is therefore in our gift to overcome the challenge.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): One of my concerns is that we view this as though there should be a proper market functioning. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we do not actually want a functioning market, in that we want a new generation of drugs to become available and then, as far as possible, not to be used? We do not want the market to operate; we want the use of such drugs to be in reserve.

Patrick Grady: Absolutely. I wholeheartedly agree. That leads me nicely on to my first point about the particular challenge faced in developing countries.

All Governments in the world have an obligation under the sustainable development goals—it is in SDG 3—to ensure health and wellbeing for all, which includes access to safe, effective, quality and affordable medicines and vaccines. That is about access to medicines; it is not about the right to buy or sell them on the market, it is about treating them as a common good. That is precisely

what we want to do, otherwise there is a real risk of backsliding on progress that has been made in tackling neglected and tropical diseases. We heard earlier about TB being responsible for more than 5,000 deaths per day, and about malaria, which is often treated by very strong antibiotics and affects more than 200 million people worldwide a year. That is why there needs to be a broad, co-ordinated response. Drugs that treat TB are often used to treat other infections as well, so in boosting research into neglected diseases there is an opportunity to supercharge the pipeline of development and make more drugs available for treatment as we need them.

I am glad the Minister is back in the Chamber. It would be interesting to hear what further commitments the Government can make. We welcomed the commitment to the global fund, but how is the Department for Health working with the Department for International Development on these issues? In particular, how much of her Department's spending will be counted as official development assistance when it comes to tackling antimicrobial resistance? The Ross fund was set up by the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), who is no longer in his place, and I congratulate him on it. What progress is being made on that fund, and what support will there be for researchers on the ground in developing countries? I am not opposed to using the ODA budget to fund Departments other than DFID, but wherever possible it should be used to support research on the ground in developing countries.

I want to speak briefly about domestic responses. I recently met a constituent, Linda Brooks, who has become the chair of the Scottish steering committee for synthetic biology—an initiative supported by Scottish Enterprise. She is also a manager at the company Thermo Fisher, which supports research in the life sciences sector including pioneering work on antimicrobial resistance and, in particular, the technology of genome editing, which has huge potential. It would be interesting to hear whether the Government provide any support in those areas.

We all have responsibility for the effective use of antibiotics. During the hiatus in this debate I was able to sign up online to become an antibiotic guardian, which Public Health England supports with the encouragement of all the devolved Administrations. It includes a range of pledges to treat symptoms, to talk to pharmacists, to dispose of unused antibiotics carefully, to take the flu vaccine and to always complete the course—I hope everyone will sign up to that pledge.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Order. I am afraid we now have to go down to three minutes per speaker. I am sorry about there being no notice of that.

3.45 pm

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter. First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for bringing this crucial issue forward for discussion. Keeping it in the spotlight is vital, to ensure that there is sufficient political will to carry forth the recommendations in the O'Neill report on antimicrobial resistance.

[Dr Caroline Johnson]

Having worked in the NHS as a consultant paediatrician, and having treated many patients with antibiotics, I have seen at first hand the work the NHS is doing to ensure that they are prescribed responsibly. I have also used the CRP test, which my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) mentioned, many times. However, I would caution that the result of that test is only a small part of a much larger clinical picture, and we should be mindful that a normal result does not exclude serious infection.

Over the years of my clinical practice, many measures have come into force to ensure that the right antibiotic, appropriate for the infection and the patient, is used. One of those is limiting access to the newest antibiotics, and using them only in specific circumstances after discussions with the hospital's consultant microbiologist. The measures have resulted in a more responsible use of antibiotics within the health service. However, as the O'Neill review identified, such stringent measures do not exist within veterinary medicine, and the use of antibiotics in farming accounts for about 40% of the UK's consumption of antibiotics.

As a Member for a rural constituency and the wife of a farmer, I believe that minimising the growth of antimicrobial resistance through our agricultural practices is of great importance and must be tackled with the same vigour with which we have addressed the use of antibiotics in human medicine. The O'Neill review made a number of recommendations, including the responsible use of antibiotics in animals, restricting the use of antibiotics that are critical to human medicine, and disease prevention. An effective antibiotic monitoring system can have a huge impact on reducing the use of antibiotics, as shown by the implementation of such a system in the British meat poultry sector, which resulted in a 44% reduction from 2012 to 2015. Restricting the use in agriculture of antibiotics that are of the most critical importance to human medicine is vital to ensure their continued effectiveness. The Department of Health requires continued support to bolster the regulatory oversight of veterinary antibiotics, to ensure that they are used responsibly and to keep back the priority antibiotics.

Finally, we must support our farmers in methods to prevent disease by emphasising improvement in overall biosecurity and herd health, including through vaccination. It is important that we do our part to deal with antibiotic resistance, but we also need to recognise, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) said, that this issue can only really be solved with international co-operation and a push for awareness of the problem, not only at home but within the international community, to help develop the regulatory framework. Much talk is made of a cliff edge where drug-resistant bacteria will be able to defeat the entire arsenal of antibiotics, but we have already reached that cliff edge.

3.49 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Streeter, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on securing this important debate.

The O'Neill review is a fundamentally important look at the future of medical treatment not just in this country, but globally. TB is one of the most dangerous

diseases worldwide and the most lethal infectious disease in history. As has been mentioned, 5,000 people die from it every day around the world and, as the review indicates, more than 10 million people will die from it annually by 2050 if we are not careful and do not contribute to the development of future research and vaccinations.

I am proud of the work of the all-party group on global tuberculosis and that of my co-chair of the group, the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert)—I think he has left the Chamber. We have had fantastic support from the Global TB Caucus and RESULTS UK. Both groups worked tirelessly to ensure the proper replenishment of the global fund last year. Eighty per cent. of the funding for the global fight against TB comes from the fund and Britain is the second largest donor. Still, at current rates, eradication will only be possible by 2167, which is not good enough—the speed we are going means that it will take 150 years to eradicate the disease. We have committed to eradication by 2030 but we are not doing enough to achieve it. Hopefully, the O'Neill review will be enough to drive forward the agenda that we need.

We have to work towards not just treatment, but vaccination. The standard treatment currently takes six months and 4,000 pills; it is no wonder that fewer than half of those who start the treatment complete the course. The difficulty of treatment drives AMR and the widespread nature of the epidemic. Hopefully, Lord O'Neill's review will go some way towards raising awareness of how acute the issue of AMR is for some of the world's poorest, even in this country. This and previous Governments have led the world on action on resistance. Let them again take up the mantle and drive forward the fight against AMR and help to secure a real vaccination against TB.

3.52 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I am delighted to serve under your guidance, Mr Streeter, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on securing the debate. A disadvantage of being the only practising dentist in the House is having to remember that the Commission is watching, so I have to declare it, Mr Streeter.

As the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) will know, as a dentist I am instantly lobbied by the likes of the British Dental Association, and I will stick to that area. As he said, around 10% of the antibiotics that are dispensed are for dental pains and dental problems. Hundreds of thousands of people swarm into GP surgeries and A&Es and they are given pills like lollipops to take away, but the solution is only temporary and does not solve the problem. To ask the Minister one small thing, will she think about working on a system to increase the number of emergency dentists that are available, because dental action, not pills, is needed?

Dental action can take many forms. Part of stopping the broad provision of antibiotics is straight prevention. In the case of dentistry, that is relatively simple. The cause of the majority of dental pain requiring antibiotics is decay and that is totally preventable. I am delighted that Sara Hurley, the new chief dental officer, is really moving on that issue. She is making changes so that kids are taught, from the moment that their teeth arrive right the way through to their school years, about brushing

their teeth and using fluoride toothpaste to prevent decay. Many of the hundreds of thousands of patients who go into A&E are children suffering from swollen faces, pain, sleepless nights and so on. They are given antibiotics to tide them over until they have teeth taken out. In England, some 900 kids a week are given general anaesthetics to have their teeth out. That is appalling and preventable. I encourage the Minister to work with the chief dental officer, the health and wellbeing bodies and charities to prevent the need for any antibiotics—or at least, to reduce the antibiotics used—in dentistry by simply preventing dental decay.

3.54 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter, and I thank the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for setting the scene.

I could not help but be shocked by the figures in the information that hon. Members received from the Library. The briefing stated:

“If we are unable to slow the acceleration of AMR, future consequences will be worse still.”

It also stated that

“10 million people a year could be dying as a result of AMR by 2050”.

Professor Dame Sally Davies has said that we could well “return to a time where 40 per cent of the population die prematurely from infections we cannot treat.”

Those are the facts, so what do we do to solve the problem? I will try to hit on some solutions, and I look to the Minister for encouragement.

I want to highlight the work that has been done on the boundary of my constituency at the world-renowned Queen's University Belfast. Researchers there are leading a €50 million Europe-wide project to develop new drug treatment to improve the lives of patients with cystic fibrosis and bronchiectasis. The inhaled antibiotics in bronchiectasis and cystic fibrosis consortium—the iABC—which is made up of world-leading lung specialists from across Europe, will develop new inhaled antibiotics to manage chronic lung infection, which is the main cause of disease and death in patients with cystic fibrosis and bronchiectasis. If we look across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for solutions and how to address the problem, we can see that we are doing a grand job on moving forward on this issue. The new antibiotics, which are being trialled over a five-year period and are being developed in response to the urgent need for new forms of inhaled antibiotics, are expected to improve patients' quality of life by reducing lung infections and flare-ups, improving lung function and overcoming antibacterial resistance, which frequently occurs in patients with those conditions.

The consortium is also funded by the European Commission and involves some 20 organisations from eight countries across Europe. As Professor Stuart Elborn, dean of the school of dentistry, medicine and biomedical sciences at Queen's University, said:

“There are limited antibiotics available to treat lung infection in cystic fibrosis and bronchiectasis, and the bacteria causing them are becoming increasingly resistant to current antibiotics.”

The work being done by Queen's University has the potential to deliver inhaled antibiotics that will improve the quality of life and survival rates of cystic fibrosis

and bronchiectasis patients. It is the latest example of the commitment of the researchers and staff at Queen's University to advancing knowledge and changing lives by working with international experts.

We are looking at how we can best address these issues, so I ask the Minister to tell us what has been done on the partnerships that clearly operate between big business, universities and Government to ensure that the giant steps being taken by the likes of Queen's University in Belfast can be replicated across the whole United Kingdom. If that can be done, we can solve the problem.

3.57 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I declare an interest as a member of the board of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. Indeed, I talked to Dr Adam Roberts who is a senior lecturer in antimicrobial chemotherapy and resistance there; he gave me some pointers to the things that he believes are extremely important in this work. I will touch on four of them.

The first thing, as others have mentioned, is to revitalise drug discovery. We are not talking about one or two drugs but 10, 20 or 30 new drugs. That is the scale of what is needed, particularly in the area of anti-Gram-negatives, because there is the least resistance to those drugs at the moment.

The second point, which has been made, is that the pharmaceutical industry as a whole should be involved. My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) rightly said that many treatments, such as more intense chemotherapies, rely on the availability of good antibiotics so that patients do not suffer when their resistance levels are lower. Why should those companies not contribute to the development of antibiotics, if they are not doing so already? As we said, that is challenging commercially. Perhaps we could even look at a tax on those drugs to pay for antibiotics or some other way of raising revenue from those that do not participate.

Thirdly, a public education campaign, which has been mentioned, would help people recognise that antibiotics are not to be taken at every opportunity and that we should consider who is using them, particularly in meat production. I believe that one or two major companies in the United States have already started using meat reared without antibiotics, which I welcome. The fourth area, which has also been mentioned, is regulation of the sale of antibiotics online. It is a major loophole that must be closed, and the United Kingdom can play a role.

Finally, I draw a parallel with malaria, which the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) mentioned. As a result of the development of rapid diagnostic tests for malaria, the use of the very effective anti-malarials has declined, because people no longer see anti-malarials as the only treatment that can be provided when their child gets a fever. Consequently, although resistance exists, it has become less of a problem in some places. Also, initiatives such as the Medicines for Malaria Venture have created a much stronger pipeline of anti-malarial drugs through co-operation among the pharmaceutical industry, charities such as the Gates Foundation, the United Kingdom and other Governments and the Global Fund to fight malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Such co-operation is critical.

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): I remind colleagues that this debate must conclude at 4.33 pm. Our winding-up speeches will begin now, but I hope that we will be able to give two or three minutes at the conclusion of the debate for the mover of the motion to have a final say.

4.1 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter, and to take part in this important debate, which has been well informed and highly consensual. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for securing it. This issue is one of the greatest global health challenges facing our generation. I agree thoroughly that it is potentially devastating and that it is already happening.

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

Worldwide, antimicrobial resistance currently kills an estimated 700,000 people annually, and approximately 70% of known bacteria have developed resistance to one or more antimicrobials. The O'Neill review sends a clear and stark warning to us all that we must act for the sake of our economy and, more importantly, our health. Lord O'Neill estimates that by 2050, 10 million people globally could die each year because antibiotics are losing their power to tackle common infections, and that a quarter of those deaths will be caused by tuberculosis, whose attributes make TB bacteria more likely to develop resistance. It is worth noting that the O'Neill review final recommendations highlighted that

“tackling TB and drug-resistant TB must be at the heart of any global action against AMR.”

It is also projected that antimicrobial resistance could cut global GDP by 3.5% in the same time period, which amounts to \$100 trillion. I am not even sure how many zeroes that is, but it is a frightening sum. Action is needed at a local, national and global level to improve knowledge and understanding of antimicrobial resistance, to conserve and steward the effectiveness of existing treatments and to stimulate the development of new antibiotics, diagnostics and therapies.

To those ends, the Scottish National party-led Scottish Government are taking their role seriously. Last March, the Scottish Government announced a £4.2 million research grant to investigate the prevention and control of healthcare-associated infections, as well as to research new ways of using existing antibiotics more effectively and efficiently. Scottish Government funding was provided to a consortium of researchers led by the University of Glasgow, working with other Scottish universities, to establish a new Scottish Healthcare Associated Infection Prevention Institute.

Antibiotics are not only critical for treating bacterial infections, they are a cornerstone of routine healthcare, as they prevent infections following surgery and cancer chemotherapy. In Scotland, more than 80% of antibiotic use is within primary care. Overuse and inappropriate use of antibiotics can unnecessarily increase the development of AMR. As limited new antibiotics are under development, it is vital that health professionals and the public work together to optimise how antibiotics are used to preserve their effectiveness for future generations.

Some progress is being made. The latest Scottish figures for 2015 show a 2.4% fall in one year in the number of antibiotics prescribed in primary care, a

reduction of 84,490 items compared with 2014. As per the recommendations of the UK five-year antimicrobial resistance strategy, a Scottish “One Health” report will be published in 2017. The report will contain antimicrobial use and resistance data for humans, animals and the environment, in line with the aims of the global “One Health” approach, which spans people, animals, agriculture and the wider environment. There is little doubt that a present and serious challenge faces us; what is less clear is how best to tackle it.

It seems to me that we have two principal problems, both of which have been covered by hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. First, pharmaceutical companies do not have a financial incentive to develop new antibiotics. Even if a company invests in developing a new antibiotic, it needs to be held back until we are resistant to other antibiotics. However, while the antibiotic is being held back, the time on its patent is still ticking down, meaning that the company has less time to recoup the money that it has invested developing it. Therefore, the SNP would like the UK to accelerate its leading role in developing solutions to incentivise the development and management of new antibiotics, promote re-investment in antibiotics and appropriate use and reduce the risks for both payer and investor. I look forward to any comments that the Minister might have on that aspect.

Our second major problem is the use of antibiotics in livestock, which we then consume via the food chain. The evidence suggests that the amount of antimicrobials used in food production internationally is at least the same as in humans, and in some places is higher. For example, in the US, more than 70% of antibiotics that are medically important for humans are used in animals. This form of antimicrobial usage is likely to rise as a result of economic growth, increasing wealth and food consumption in the emerging world.

When properly used, antibiotics are essential for treating infections in animals, but excessive and inappropriate use of the drugs may be a problem. It is therefore important that we play our part in working towards the O'Neill recommendation of

“a global target to reduce antibiotic use in food production to an agreed level per kilogram of livestock and fish, along with restrictions on the use of antibiotics important for human health.”

The SNP encourages everyone to play their part in reducing the unnecessary use of antibiotics, raising awareness and pledging to be an antibiotic guardian. I have not yet followed the example of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) and registered, but now that I know it is easy to do, I will do it today.

In November 2015, Scotland's Health Secretary, Shona Robison, said that the rise of drug-resistant infections is an issue that must be tackled in Scotland and around the world. Marking European antibiotic awareness day, Robison also pledged to be an antibiotic guardian, in a scheme run by a joint UK initiative to encourage everyone to become an antibiotic guardian by making a personal pledge. As part of European antibiotic awareness day, the Scottish Antimicrobial Prescribing Group, alongside UK partners, launched a target of 100,000 people signing up to become antibiotic guardians, including one in 10 prescribers and one in 100 other healthcare professionals.

Inevitably, any solution will have to be multi-factorial and involve a large range of stakeholders including Governments, non-governmental organisations, industry, the pharma, food and agriculture sectors, academia,

research, health professionals and the public at large. If we become completely resistant to antibiotics, operations and procedures currently considered routine will become a lot more dangerous. The medical profession in Britain has become a lot better at not prescribing antibiotics unnecessarily. We must maintain that stance, develop it further and encourage others to follow.

My final plea to the Minister is not to allow UK contributions to international efforts to tackle AMR to become diminished. I seriously hope that the issue does not become a casualty of any post-Brexit isolationism.

4.7 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on bringing this important debate to the House. He gave an eloquent and knowledgeable speech clearly setting out the issue and the matters to be discussed following the O'Neill review. I thank him for that.

An estimated 50,000 deaths occur every year due to untreatable infections, rising to 700,000 globally. That is why it is only right that we do all we can to address antibiotic resistance. It is believed that the number of deaths will rise to 10 million a year by 2050 if no significant action is taken. As we have heard from a number of Members, deaths from drug-resistant infections could exceed deaths from cancer.

This is an incredibly timely debate. Only a couple of weeks ago, the World Health Organisation published a list of 12 bacteria for which new antibiotics are now needed. Some strains of bacteria have built-in abilities to find new ways to fight off treatments that can then be passed on to other bacteria via genetic material to make them drug-resistant too. I find it a bit scary to consider what we are up against. This is a battle that we have to win.

I also thank other hon. Members who have spoken in this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) gave a very knowledgeable speech about the use of antibiotics in farming; other hon. Members touched on the subject as well. I really think we need to get a firm grip on it internationally, with the UK leading the way. Ten other Members spoke in this very active debate: my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron), my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma), the hon. Members for Erewash (Maggie Throup), for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), and the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day), who speaks for the Scottish National party. Their speeches were all thoughtful and knowledgeable, albeit brief because of time constraints.

I will touch on two key points: raising public awareness, and supporting research and innovation to combat antibiotic resistance. It is generally accepted that antibiotic resistance is a natural process—bacteria naturally evolve to become resistant to certain drugs used to fight them off—but it has been exacerbated by humans. As Dr Hsu of the Singapore Infectious Diseases Initiative has said, the causes come down to

“a single axiom—abuse and overuse of antimicrobial drugs.”

Concerns have also been raised that the development of new antibiotic drugs has dried up, contributing to the situation. According to the World Health Organisation, we are left in a precarious position. The WHO's director general, Dr Margaret Chan, describes antimicrobial resistance as

“a crisis that must be managed with the utmost urgency.”

That urgency applies here in the UK, too. In 2014, the chief medical officer, Dame Sally Davies, said that

“we could be taken back to a 19th century environment where everyday infections kill us as a result of routine operations.”

We could be taken even further back: as the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton said, this could be the new black death. That is not as melodramatic a statement as people may first think. Antimicrobial resistance is a really serious problem that we need to address here and now, so that those predictions do not come true.

I do not always do this, as I am sure you have noticed, Mr Hollobone, but I must give credit to David Cameron's coalition Government, who were global leaders when they announced Lord O'Neill's review into antimicrobial resistance. The review's 10 recommendations show just how complex and multifaceted the issue is and how wide-scale the actions needed to address it are. The review's final report was published in May 2016 and the Government responded at the end of last year, so now is a good time to ask the Government for an update.

One of the review's key recommendations was to introduce a large-scale global awareness campaign to reduce the demand from patients to be prescribed antibiotics when they are diagnosed with an illness. I am a firm believer in public awareness campaigns relating to health issues, especially cancer. My hon. Friends and I fully support such a campaign for antimicrobial resistance and we want to see the Government working hard to achieve it. The review's recommendation was for an international awareness campaign, but what does the Minister plan to do here in the UK to complement that international work? That is a pertinent question because a 2015 Wellcome Trust study found that people in the UK did not fully understand antibiotic resistance and how it affects their health. They did not understand that antibiotic resistance is to do with the bacteria in people's bodies, rather than a lack of antibiotics or the cost of them; it is not just a case of doctors being awkward. I would therefore be grateful if the Minister told us what relatable public awareness campaigns she is planning to ensure that people understand more about the problem and about what they can do personally.

I have already mentioned the problems with combating antibiotic resistance caused by the drying up of innovative developments in drug technologies. The O'Neill review identifies that the low commercial return on research and development for antibiotics makes them less attractive to pharmaceutical companies and reduces the chance of new drugs being developed. To reverse that situation, it recommends considering market entry rewards to encourage companies to develop new or improved drugs, especially in areas of urgent need. I hope the Minister will explore that issue further in her reply.

Public and private funding is being made available to help to combat these issues. On 20 December, the Minister referred to

“international programmes to tackle AMR, including the Fleming fund and the Global AMR innovation fund, which represent

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

more than £300 million of investment over the next five years.”—
[*Official Report*, 20 December 2016; Vol. 618, c. 1294.]

There is also the incredible work of the Longitude Prize, which is in the middle of its competition to develop

“a cheap, accurate, rapid and easy-to-use point of care test kit for bacterial infections”

to help to address antibiotic resistance. That is important work and we support it.

In summary, we cannot afford to get antimicrobial resistance wrong. Millions of lives depend on our tackling it. It is not far away; it is happening right here, right now, and it affects us all, so it is important that we do all we can to address this growing problem, both in the UK and internationally.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): If the Minister will be kind enough to finish just after 4.30 pm, that will give Mr Hollinrake time to sum up the debate.

4.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Nicola Blackwood): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on securing this very well attended debate and on his ongoing commitment to highlighting this issue. I pay tribute to the all-party group on antibiotics, my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) and the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) for their leadership. I also commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), who is no longer in his place. He really set the issue squarely on the international agenda during his time as Chancellor.

As many hon. Members have described well today, antimicrobial resistance has the potential to lead to 10 million deaths by 2050—more than are caused by cancer—and a loss to global productivity of £100 trillion. As my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton said, the figures are on a scale that is hard to comprehend, but the good news is that the ramifications of AMR are now widely acknowledged, and we can be proud that the UK has played no small part in that. Our chief medical officer, Dame Sally Davies, has led a global campaign to get AMR and the lack of new drugs in the development pipeline high on the global political agenda.

We have used the UK's antimicrobial resistance strategy and our response to the O'Neill review, which we published last September, to drive change at home and abroad. This has led to the landmark UN declaration on AMR in September, which was adopted by 193 countries. The declaration recognises that AMR is an issue that relates not just to human health, but—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers) and the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) rightly said—to animal health, agriculture and the environment, with a significant social and economic impact. It puts AMR squarely not just on the global development agenda, but on the global security agenda.

As numerous hon. Members have mentioned, a key Government commitment in response to the review was to work with international partners to develop a global system that rewards companies for bringing new, successful products to market and makes them available to all who need them. There are a number of options for addressing the market failure, but the O'Neill review suggests using

a system of market entry rewards to incentivise companies to bring new products to market. A number of international organisations, including the Boston Consulting Group, commissioned by the German Government, have looked at the issue more recently and come to similar conclusions, which is helpful in building an international consensus.

The UK supports that approach, particularly options that involve private sector contributions, but although a global solution is needed, different countries have different perspectives. In some countries, lack of access to effective antimicrobials is as great a risk as resistant bugs. The WHO estimates that 30% of people in developing countries do not have access to essential medicines, rising to 50% in sub-Saharan Africa. The UK is working to reach an agreement at the G20 to acknowledge market failure. The G20 has commissioned the OECD to consider potential solutions, and it will consider a range of options. The UK will support alternative systems that can effectively tackle market failure in a cost-effective and sustainable manner that ensures a long-term, sustainable supply of new antibiotics but also provides access to all.

While Lord O'Neill made it clear that interventions to stimulate the antimicrobials market should be administered at global level, he was also clear that at national level we must have better purchasing arrangements that conserve antimicrobials and do not incentivise unnecessary use. That is why the Department of Health is working with industry, through a joint working group with the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, to consider reimbursement approaches that support these aims and how reimbursement models that de-link revenue from volume can be operationalised. It is essential that such a scheme is workable, so I will report back to Members when I am able to do so.

Colleagues are right that we will not make progress if we do not improve our stewardship and diagnostics, and cut avoidable infections and inappropriate prescribing. One of our ambitions in that regard is to halve the number of healthcare-associated Gram-negative blood stream infections by 2020. Delivery of that ambition is being led by NHS Improvement. Our initial focus is a 10% reduction in *E. coli* infections by 2017-2018, because there are established interventions to prevent such infections, and we are making some progress in this area.

A second ambition is to halve inappropriate prescribing by 2020. This work is now being led by the chief pharmaceutical officer at NHS England, with support from Public Health England, but the challenge is to identify the proportion of current prescribing that is inappropriate, so that we can safely reduce our use. Our experts are working to set a baseline, so that we can clarify our ask to prescribers. This will build on work that is already under way to reduce unnecessary prescribing.

I can report that there has been some progress in this area. In November 2016, data showed that total consumption of antibiotics by humans in England fell by 4.3% between 2014 and 2015, which is the greatest change that we have seen since the early 2000s. We are making progress, but our experts believe we can go further so we have put incentives in place through the NHS quality premium and commissioning for quality improvement schemes—which is quite a mouthful—to encourage further reduction, and we will maintain that system for a further two years, so that we can embed those changes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton also said that over-the-counter antimicrobials were a key area. It is illegal for websites based in the UK to sell antibiotics online without a prescription. Some websites offer online consultations with doctors, but they must abide by the General Medical Council guidance on remote prescribing, and it is extremely important that people exercise caution in how they use online care providers, especially when it comes to seeking medicines or treatments that may not be appropriate for them.

Regulatory agencies, such as the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency and the Care Quality Commission, are monitoring the safety and efficacy of prescription medicines and those selling them. Following an internal review of all 43 online services that are registered, the CQC has brought forward a programme of inspections, prioritising those services that it considers might pose a risk to patients. It will obviously report soon on that work.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet and the hon. Member for Bristol East were absolutely right that the Department of Health needs to work closely with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate to reduce the use of antimicrobials in livestock and in fish farmed for food. Between 2014 and 2015, we saw a drop of 10% in sales of antibiotic for food-producing animals, but we know that we need to go further. So we are now in the process of setting sector-specific targets, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet said, to ensure that we achieve our ambition of 50 milligrams per kilogram weight of animal by 2018.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) was also right to highlight the need for better diagnostics if we are to achieve our stewardship ambitions. O'Neill was clear that that was necessary for better clinical decision making in both animal and human health. There is great potential to make better use of the diagnostic tests that are already available in a range of settings, including for self-care and monitoring in pharmacies and other high-street services. So NHS England has a programme in place not only to improve the use of the diagnostic tests that we already have but to identify the priority needs for new tests, so that we can work with researchers and industry to support the development and uptake of those tests. NHS England is also working with NICE to identify how its programmes could support more rapid uptake of effective diagnostic tests. If my hon. Friend would like us to, we will write to her with the details of that work.

In the end, this challenge is a global one that requires global leadership, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton has said. The UN declaration was the start of a longer process to make sure that all countries develop and implement a national action plan, and it is essential that the follow-up process, which was agreed in the declaration, is put in place as soon as possible, to ensure that no time is lost in getting to where we want to be before we go back to the UN General Assembly in 2018. Within that timeframe, we will continue to support other countries to tackle antimicrobial resistance, including providing help to build capability and capacity to develop good surveillance systems in low and middle-income countries, through our £265 million Fleming fund and our £1 billion Ross fund, exactly as the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) has said.

Lord O'Neill also recommended the establishment of a global innovation fund of \$2 billion by 2020. The UK co-hosted a side event at the UN in September 2016 that brought together a package of pledges from Governments around the world to tackle AMR, totalling more than £675 million, which is a really considerable start in achieving that recommendation.

All of this work means that we now have unprecedented levels of global collaboration in research in the UK, co-ordinated by the AMR Funders Forum and supported by the Medical Research Council. We are now working hard to promote research and innovation in AMR globally, which includes making a further £50 million commitment towards setting up a global AMR innovation fund, to increase global investment in AMR and support the development of new drugs and diagnostics.

In closing, I thank all Members—

David Tredinnick: On that note, will the Minister give way?

Nicola Blackwood: I will close now but follow up later.

I thank all Members who have attended today. The high turnout and the quality of debate speaks to the fact that AMR is more than a domestic health challenge and more than a global development challenge. It is truly a global security challenge, of a scale that requires long-term political leadership to drive through the international change, the up-front investment to break the cycle of market failure in drugs development and the urgent action needed to improve diagnostics and cut inappropriate prescribing, and to ensure that patients complete their courses of medicines in an appropriate way.

We can be proud of the genuinely leading role that the UK has already taken, both domestically and on the international stage, but my commitment to all Members here today is that we shall not miss a step in driving forward on research and development, on stewardship and on international co-operation. As a science superpower with an integrated healthcare system, we are uniquely well placed to meet this challenge and we are determined to do so.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Before I ask Kevin Hollinrake to sum up, I detect that there may be some Members in the Chamber who are here for the debate on social care in Liverpool. We have a half-hour debate on student loans before we get to that debate; everything has been held up by the Divisions in the main Chamber. I am just trying to be helpful to Members who might here for another debate.

4.26 pm

Kevin Hollinrake: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I thank the many colleagues who have contributed this afternoon to a very constructive debate; there has been a lot of consensus in this Chamber about what needs to be done. I also thank the Minister for her clear and comprehensive response to the many points that have been made; for the commitment she expressed at the end of her response, which is very reassuring; and, of course, for her great knowledge of this area.

[Kevin Hollinrake]

It is quite clear from all the contributions that we have heard today that there is no one solution to this issue. There will have to be a holistic solution—a mix of solutions—across both the health and agriculture sectors; that point has been very clearly made this afternoon. That will also involve the different research laboratories that can contribute to this process. Obviously, the big pharmaceutical companies are a key element in making sure that we have the right remuneration mechanism for them and of course, our world-leading universities will also be involved, as well as other clinical institutions.

However, as I said earlier, the third sector is also important. Having the world's first and only charity that specialises in combating antibiotic resistance in my constituency, I obviously feel honour-bound to support its fantastic activities. It is a collection of some of the UK's top scientists. It has put an awful lot of work and money into this area, and its initial research has gone very well, using resistance breakers to repurpose antibiotics. Again, that is a key recommendation in the O'Neill review. As I say, the charity is making this progress and it is absolutely desperate to get the right kind of support. Any help we can give, in terms of pointing Antibiotic Research UK in the right direction to get the sources of funding it needs, would be useful. Its approach is innovative. It perhaps does not meet all the criteria that would normally be applied for this kind of research, but I absolutely believe that ANTRUK is certainly part of the short-term solution to this problem, if not the longer-term solution.

As others have already done, it is right that I thank Lord O'Neill for his tremendous work, as well as all the other people who contributed to his report. It is fair to say from what we have heard this afternoon that all the questions and answers are in the report; we just need to ensure that we execute well and follow through on the recommendations in the report.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) said, leadership is a key part of this issue. We were very lucky with the former Prime Minister and the former Chancellor, who put it front and centre. They took global action and showed global leadership on it, which is critical. With leadership, all things are possible; there is no question about that. It is incredibly important that we continue to show that leadership in Parliament and Westminster.

It was tremendous to have so many contributions to this debate, not only from the Minister and former Ministers, who have so much knowledge of this area, but from those who have shown leadership at the highest possible level. It is great to see the UK front and centre, speaking out on this important issue on the world stage.

I thank you again, Mr Hollobone, for your time. It has been a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship and to contribute to this very important debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the O'Neill review into antibiotic resistance.

Sale of Student Loans: Regulation

4.31 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Would those not staying for the half-hour debate on the regulation of the sale of student loans please be kind enough to leave quickly and quietly? This debate can last until 5.3 pm.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered regulation of the sale of student loans.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I think this is the first time I have been involved in a debate when you have been in the Chair. On your past record, I know that you will be fair and lenient.

I have two universities in my constituency, Coventry University and the University of Warwick. I have come across Members who have attended the University of Warwick, and some who have attended Coventry University. Many students at those universities have expressed concern to me regarding the sale of student loans. It is possible that to a certain extent, the Government are heaping more debt on students that they can ill afford, against a background of further education budgets receiving a 27% cut. The education allowance and the bursaries for midwifery have been abolished. Those things raise questions about the Government's real intentions regarding skills, whether in the national health service or manufacturing.

On 6 February, the Government announced plans to sell off student loans taken out between 2002 and 2006. Conservative Governments have previously tried to introduce that policy, but they have never been successful. Indeed, the former Business Secretary, Vince Cable, scrapped the move in 2014, saying that it would not help the aim of reducing Government debt. Why are the present Government continuing to pursue the policy? With the sale of Royal Mail, we have seen how difficult it can be to achieve value for taxpayers. It could be argued that the taxpayer lost out in past privatisations. It can be controversial if the price paid seems too low, with short-term profit put ahead of the public interest. If the student loans are expected to be profitable, why are the Government not keeping them and helping the taxpayer?

The market has little experience of buying such debt, and it will be priced conservatively. It is therefore questionable whether value for money can be achieved. It has been widely acknowledged that the Government will make a loss on the sale. The price the loans are sold for is expected to be lower than the face value. It has been described by the *Financial Times* economic correspondent, Martin Wolf, as "economic illiteracy". As I said, I have two universities in my constituency, so I am very concerned about the proposal, as are the students.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend knows that like him, I represent two universities. He is a powerful advocate for universities and students, and he will know that students are worried about the impact on their repayments. The Government have given assurances that the repayment terms will not be affected, but there is an enormous lack of trust given that they have already retrospectively changed those

terms. Does he agree that the best way for the Government to reassure students would be to use the opportunity of the Higher Education and Research Bill to give a cast-iron guarantee in law that no retrospective changes to terms of repayment will be made?

Mr Cunningham: I agree with my hon. Friend. Frankly, retrospective law is always bad law. The three previous sales were of mortgage-style student loans. There have been no sales of income-contingent loans. In 2013, the Government announced that the final sale of outstanding loans had been made to Erudio Student Loans for £160 million. There have been problems with those loans and a number of complaints about their handling. Can the Minister guarantee that the loans we are discussing will not be resold to overseas buyers? What mechanisms will be put in place to protect students?

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend knows of my interest in this issue. I have only one university in my constituency, the University of Huddersfield. My students, too, fear that the sale is an ideological fix. We heard this morning in Justice questions that the Government are selling off a young offenders prison—it is ideology that is behind this. Does he agree that we should have an independent commission to look at the issue? I have never seen a compelling economic case for the sale.

Mr Cunningham: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. It is about time we stopped social engineering with education. We are getting to a point where we want some sort of commission established. I hope the Minister will announce that when he responds to the debate.

Will the personal details of students be secure? How will repayment work for European Union students? How will Welsh students be affected? The National Union of Students has consistently expressed concerns that such a sale is not in the interests of students, graduates or taxpayers. What implications will the sale have for students?

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I have the University of West London in my constituency. I do not have as many universities as my hon. Friend, but has he received emails, as I have, from students who are concerned that the indecent haste to sell off the family silver will mean that students who thought they were taking out debt that could go back to the state to fund public services will now be lining the pockets of private companies? It makes no financial sense, as the *Financial Times* has pointed out.

Mr Cunningham: My hon. Friend has put her finger on it. The Government are clearly taking an ideological approach, rather than a logical approach.

Can the Minister tell us whether there will be protection from adverse terms and conditions? In the future, we may find ourselves in a situation where the terms and conditions of student loans are designed with future buyers in mind, rather than the interests of students. The sale will not protect post-2012 students from further retrospective changes to repayment terms. That is a source of anxiety for many students and may have an impact on people's decision to go to university. Students are questioning who is really benefiting from their education.

Selling student loans represents a dangerous precedent. It paves the way for future privatisation of the education sector—I hope my colleagues will note that. The NUS is strongly opposed to the idea that profit is made from student debt. Privatising public assets should not be done for short-term profit.

Finally, the Government never learn any lessons. The sale will do nothing to ease the burden of debt piled on students who have faced trebled tuition fees and the scrapping of maintenance grants and bursaries. The Government have already changed the terms of post-2012 loans. How will the sale instil any confidence that more changes will not be made that are detrimental to students?

4.39 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. Mr Bailey, are you wishing to speak? Do you have the permission of the Minister and the proposer of the motion to do so?

Mr Bailey: I do, Mr Hollobone. I apologise—I was under the impression that you knew.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): There has been some confusion. I am delighted that you are able to speak, Mr Bailey. We must allow the Minister at least 15 minutes to reply, so if you could, temper your remarks accordingly.

Mr Bailey: Thank you, Mr Hollobone. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) on securing the debate, and I thank him and the Minister for allowing me to make a short contribution.

I wanted to contribute because I was Chair of the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills in 2014 when it examined the Government's proposals on this issue, which were mooted by the then Business Secretary. The Committee's report posed a number of questions and made a number of assertions, which are as relevant now as then. Arising at least in part from the Select Committee's contribution to the debate, the sale was subsequently withdrawn as the then Minister said he did not consider it to be value for money. The basis on which he made that observation is probably as relevant to this sale as it was to that previous attempt.

I would like to pose a number of questions to the Minister about the sale. I understand that the structure of the sale will be different from the previous one—it is not a whole loan sale going to a single investor, but is to be packaged up in the form of bonds. That is what I read in the *Financial Times* of 7 February. It seems to me that that process will redistribute the risk involved in the sale from a particular company to the bondholders. In view of that, I wonder whether the discount that the Government will give will have to be even greater to attract would-be bondholders to buy.

The arguments about discounts and the potential revenue to the Government were highlighted by a number of academics, and Rothschild, prior to the previous sale. The basic problem is that the dividend stream—the revenue stream—is now determined as 0.25% plus 1%, and of

[Mr Bailey]

course the retail prices index is running at 3% and is projected to be between 3% and 3.2% in the next three years. It will be difficult to persuade any investors to invest when the return will be less than the rate of inflation.

Rothschild said that the Government would have to give some sort of “synthetic hedge” in order to attract purchasers of the debt. The crucial underlying paradox that comes with marketing the debt underlines the value for money principles that we should be looking for in such a sale. Rothschild estimated that it would realise only £2 billion of the £12 billion that the Government projected—ironically, I see that they are projecting £12 billion on this occasion. If the calculations were done, I suspect that that may well be scaled down to the sort of figure that Rothschild projected before.

Is the Minister prepared to guarantee that the current loan terms will not be changed as a result of the loans being privatised? What are the estimates of future income that the Government would have if this loan book were not sold? What sort of discount would be offered, and what would the total revenue be if they were sold under the processes that appear to be outlined at the moment? Finally, given that Government projections can be wrong—heaven forbid—what processes will be put in place to evaluate the Government’s approach and ensure that there is value for money for the taxpayer?

4.45 pm

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) on securing this debate. It provides a useful opportunity for me to set out the Government’s approach to the proposed sale of part of the student loan book. I would like to explain the rationale for the sale and make sure that some important points, particularly those relating to the protection of students and graduates and to our commitment to securing value for money for the taxpayer, are firmly on the record.

We are all aware that tomorrow the Chancellor of the Exchequer will make a statement to the House on the Budget. I have been re-reading the statement he made in November of last year. He set out then his commitment to fiscal responsibility, and as part of that, he was clear that public sector net debt must be falling by the end of this Parliament. It is vital that the public finances continue on the path to sustainability.

Selling assets can reduce fiscal pressures and allows the Government to invest in other policies with greater economic or social returns. The Government’s policy is to sell assets where there is no policy reason to own them and where it is value for money for the taxpayer to do so. There is clearly no policy purpose to continuing to hold the student loan book on the Government’s balance sheet.

When we provide student loans, our purpose is to ensure that people who want to pursue higher education and have the qualifications that come from it are able to do so, regardless of their personal financial situation and with no limit, now, on their numbers. As soon as a loan is issued to support a student as they study, its purpose has been met. As I will explain in more detail, the planned sale would have no impact on the position of students or graduates.

A comprehensive assessment indicates that we have a good prospect of achieving value for money. The sale process is designed to achieve the best possible price to benefit taxpayers. As additional reassurance, I must emphasise that we will only proceed with the sale if market conditions remain favourable and the final value-for-money assessment is positive.

I know there is interest in the reasons why a private investor might be interested in the student loan book. The student loan book generates a long-term, inflation-linked set of cash flows, through an efficient and established collection mechanism. Our engagement with the markets has shown that that is attractive to investors—crucially, at a price that represents value for money for the taxpayer.

Mr Sheerman: Could the Minister tell us who the Department has been consulting—which experts, City firms or organisations have been giving the advice that this is a viable enterprise?

Joseph Johnson: There has been a process of engagement with the market, which has been conducted on behalf of the Department by a number of financial advisers, including Barclays and Rothschild among others. Our engagement has shown us that this is attractive to investors at a price that represents value for money for the taxpayer.

The private sector is willing to take on the risk and uncertainty of future repayment cash flows because it values this long-dated asset, while Government are looking to transfer that risk and generate cash for reinvestment in policies with greater economic and social returns. I hope hon. Members will therefore agree that there is a strong rationale for selling part of the student loan book. It is good financial management by the Government; it can help support policies with greater economic and social returns; and can be achieved without affecting the position of students or graduates.

Hon. Members, including the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey), asked whether terms might be changed. I can tell them that investors have no rights whatever to change terms as a result of any sale process.

Paul Blomfield: The Minister will understand why students find his reassurances quite weak, given his track record. Would it not be easier simply to accept the amendment to the Higher Education and Research Bill, which would embed in law a requirement to make no retrospective changes to the terms of repayment?

Joseph Johnson: As I said, as a result of this privatisation process, investors will gain no right to change the terms and conditions of the student loans they hold, so students will not be impacted by the sale.

Steve Rotherham (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I am worried that the Minister seems reluctant to agree to the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), which would assure students that the terms will not be changed in the future.

Joseph Johnson: I have just given exactly those assurances. After the sale of this part of the student loan book, terms and conditions will not change as a result of any actions by the investors who go on to own them.

The sale process we have launched covers loans issued under the previous system, which operated before 2012. Specifically, the loans in scope are those issued by English local authorities only, and which entered repayment between 2002 and 2006. A loan enters repayment the April after the student leaves his or her course, so most of the loans in the scope of the sale were taken out between 1998 and 2002. Some loans taken out after that date might also be in scope if they entered repayment in 2006. Loans issued by the devolved Administrations are not in scope, and nor are loans to EU borrowers, who became eligible to apply for a student loan from an English local authority only in 2006.

Dr Huq: Has the Minister has seen the *Financial Times* article from 8 February, which says that the Government are in a unique position to be the lender because they are able to monitor graduates' earnings? How will private companies do that? The article's headline is, "Selling off student loans makes no sense". Does the Minister have any comments on that? That was not the *Socialist Worker*, but the *Financial Times*.

Joseph Johnson: I cannot be held accountable for the views of the *FT*. The Government have made it clear that we will proceed with a sale only if it represents value for money. There will be a rigorous assessment, and, as per the Sale of Student Loans Act 2008 passed by the last Labour Government, the Government will be obliged to produce a report to Parliament within three months of the sale explaining the whole process. Parliament will have an opportunity to assess that point in great detail.

The sale will comprise the future repayments on the outstanding balances on a selection of these loans, which have a total face value of about £4 billion. The retention value to the Government is lower and is calculated using the standard Treasury Green Book methodology that was developed for asset sales. It also accounts for Government subsidy of the student loan system. The loans that are being sold have already been in repayment for 10 years or more, and therefore much of their original value has already been paid back to the Government.

A securitisation structure will be used for the sale to enable the Government to maximise value for money for the taxpayer. Under that structure, the loans will be sold to a new independent English-domiciled company known as the issuer, whose sole purpose is to own the loans on behalf of investors. Investors will purchase notes issued by the issuer, and the issuer will make payments on the notes using the repayments made on

the underlying loans. The sale is a competitive process open to all eligible investors. Market testing reassures us that the different tranches of notes are expected to be attractive to a range of potential investors, thereby promoting an efficient market and optimal pricing.

I emphasise that the sale will not affect the position of graduates or students. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Student Loans Company will continue to service loans in the scope of the sale on the same basis as equivalent unsold loans. As I said earlier, investors have no right to change any of the current loan arrangements or directly to contact people with student loans, including those in the scope of a sale.

Paul Blomfield: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Joseph Johnson: I have dealt with that point.

The sale will categorically not result in private investors setting the terms or operating the collection of student loans. Furthermore, it will not alter the Government's policies towards student finance and higher education. Under the current system of student support, whose framework has been in place since 2012, we will continue to offer a comprehensive package of financial support to eligible students. That is part of ensuring our economy works for everyone. The current system is and will remain fair and sustainable. That is why the OECD praised our student loan system and said that we are one of few countries in the world to have figured out a sustainable approach to higher education finance.

I am happy to explain where we go from here. The sale process began on 6 February and will last for several months. The final timings and the number of loans in the scope of the sale remain subject to market conditions. As announced in last year's autumn statement, the sale is expected to be the first in a series of pre-2012 English student loan sales, targeting £12 billion of total proceeds by the end of financial year 2021. Each sale will be subject to an assessment of value for money.

I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Coventry South for giving me the opportunity to discuss the proposed sale of part of the student loan book. I am clear that it represents an opportunity for the Government to reduce fiscal pressures and invest in other policies with greater economic or social returns. I am unequivocal in my commitment that we will do it without the sale changing the position of students and graduates. I look forward to engaging with the hon. Gentleman and colleagues in this House in the coming months on this important process.

Question put and agreed to.

Social Care (Liverpool)

4.57 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Would those who are not staying for the next debate please be kind enough to leave quickly and quietly? I see we have some of Liverpool's finest in the Chamber.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered social care in Liverpool.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. This is the third occasion on which I have raised the issue of adult social care in Liverpool in this place over the past two months. That is because major cuts in Government funding combined with rising needs are creating a situation where too many people are left feeling vulnerable in their own homes. Scarce hospital beds are occupied by people who are clinically fit to be discharged but cannot leave the hospital because social care is not available. That is bad for those individuals and for the national health service.

I realise that this is a national issue, but the debate puts the focus on the specific challenges that Liverpool and the Liverpool city region face. Mayor Anderson and Liverpool City Council have done their very best to protect the people of Liverpool from the impact of unprecedented Government cuts, but adult social care has not escaped the consequences of the Government's actions over a long period.

Adult social care covers a wide range of services, including domiciliary support—helping to dress, feed and bathe people in their own homes and, where appropriate, ensure that the correct medication is taken. Depending on the individual situation, that could involve several visits a day to an individual's home. In other cases, it might require one visit a day, but whether it is one visit or several, it is absolutely essential to allow that individual to lead an independent life. The provision of adequate adult social care enables many people to remain safely and confidently in their own homes, rather than feeling vulnerable or having to move to more expensive and much less satisfactory residential care. Adequate adult social care can bring peace of mind and provide a lifeline.

Let us look at what has been happening to Liverpool City Council's funding. Liverpool has now lost 60% of revenue support from the Government since 2010, and by 2020 that figure will have risen to 68%. Furthermore, having looked at revenue support systems, the Government plan to eliminate revenue support entirely under a new funding settlement. That will have serious consequences for a city with a low tax base and with 80% of its population in council tax bands A and B.

Liverpool council is a very responsible authority and has already identified £90 million of additional cuts that it is required to make in the coming financial year. The council continues to do its best to protect services, but it has not been able to stop substantial cuts to its spending on adult social care, which has been reduced from £220 million in 2010 to £154 million in 2016. It is anticipated that that figure will be reduced to £130 million by 2020.

Yes, the Government have their better care fund and yes, the local authority has a limited ability to raise an extra precept. The better care programme is expected to

allocate £39 million to Liverpool when its funding is due to be reduced in such a significant way, but that will still leave a massive gap. Neither the Government's better care fund nor the council's ability to raise extra tax can fill the gap caused by the withdrawal of central Government funding. The scale of that withdrawal is unprecedented.

At the same time as the Government are reducing support, demographic pressures and costs are increasing. The Office for National Statistics estimates that the percentage of people in Liverpool aged 65 years or more will rise from 14.6% in 2015 to 16.1% in 2024. It is wholly unrealistic to expect people in the fourth most deprived local authority in the country to fill the gap. The sums simply do not add up. To illustrate the situation, a 1% increase in council tax in Liverpool will raise £1.4 million; a 1% cut in central Government funding means a loss of £3 million. That is a totally unacceptable situation and one that cannot continue without inflicting severe cuts on services that are very important to the people of Liverpool.

I said that Liverpool was the fourth most deprived local authority in the country, which is correct, and there is great poverty in the city, but Liverpool City Council, through its pioneering spirit, its enterprising approach and its ability and willingness to innovate and work with others has been able to move Liverpool from being the most deprived local authority in the country to that No. 4 position. It is bad to be the fourth most deprived authority, but it is a tribute to the city council and its partners that they have been able to make progress in Liverpool. Furthermore, that progress has been made without proper funding from Government—indeed, Government funding has reduced, and that is the critical feature.

Social care packages in Liverpool have already been cut from £14,000 to £9,000, which has affected many vulnerable people, and many more are anxious. Many people in great need are being reassessed to see whether the care they receive can be maintained, which often induces great anxiety and apprehension, even if ultimately their care remains similar to what it was. That, too, is an important factor that is not always considered.

On the day that I visited the Royal Liverpool university hospital, 135 patients who were clinically fit to be discharged remained in their beds because social care was not available for them at home. That was in spite of the efforts of hospital and local authority staff to find suitable care packages for them—the money was simply not there. That figure, the accurate one for the day I visited the hospital, reflects the general situation and shows one of the problems caused by the cuts to social care in Liverpool. Those cuts have arisen solely because of cuts in Government funding.

The situation affects many people, and it can only deteriorate unless action is taken. What should be done? Let us look at what is happening now. Mayor Joe Anderson, cabinet member Paul Brant and Liverpool City Council as a whole must be commended for their work to promote partnership with the NHS and innovation, which involves new work with the clinical commissioning group and GPs to integrate health and social care. "Step Up" centres for intermediate care are being pioneered and the council plans to promote innovative joint work with community health services. A joint working party is considering new ideas.

All those things are extremely important and demonstrate the city council's willingness to innovate and work with other partners. Such work should be supported better by central Government. Whatever innovation takes place in Liverpool and however much the council is willing to work with other people and for integration, Ministers cannot escape the fact that more funding is needed. The issue is long term, but the crisis is now and immediate action is required. It is a crisis that Liverpool City Council cannot resolve on its own, nor can the people of the city fill the financial gap unaided.

I call on the Government to recognise their responsibilities and to announce an immediate allocation of targeted funding for adult social care in Liverpool. I recognise that that must be part of a national approach, but funds must be targeted to meet the needs of local communities. That will enable vulnerable people to live independently and safely in their own homes, as well as enabling the NHS to deploy its resources efficiently. Liverpool City Council should be congratulated on the resilience, innovation and flexibility that it has displayed, but it cannot resolve the crisis alone. I call on the Minister to act as a matter of urgency.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I am required to call the Front Benchers at 5.40 pm and the debate may run until 6.03 pm. That gives us 32.5 minutes of Back-Bench time and three Members have given me their names, the first of whom—who wrote a very nice letter—is Maria Eagle.

5.7 pm

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) on obtaining this crucial and timely debate. She set out in full and with great clarity the situation facing Liverpool and other local authorities in the city region, as the council seeks to set a lawful budget while desperately trying to keep going the public services on which so many of our constituents depend. She set out in great detail and with pertinent facts and figures many of the things that I was going to say about Liverpool. I endorse her speech fully—it was excellent.

Liverpool has had £420 million cut from the city budget since the Lib Dem-Tory coalition imposed cuts in 2010. There has also been the never-ending slashing of public services provision by this Government and their predecessor, and another £90 million has to be found. To illustrate that, Liverpool raised £147 million in council tax in the last financial year, but it spent £151 million on adult social care. I will emphasise that: Liverpool is having to spend more on adult social care alone than it can raise in council tax.

My hon. Friend set out some of the other concerns and problems. The demand for social care assessments is rising. Despite the cuts she described to the money that can be spent on adult social care, the demand for help of those depleted services from our citizens and constituents has increased by 15%. The demand for social care assessments in Liverpool has gone up from 18,000 a year in 2020 to 21,000 a year now. As she set out, Liverpool supports 9,000 people annually to some degree with a care package at home. That is fewer than half of the people who have asked to be assessed, so it is clear that only those with the highest needs get help,

and they may well not get a level of support from which they benefit and which might keep them out of more acute services for longer with a better quality of life.

Liverpool City Council announced in its budget proposal that it intends to increase council tax. It will of course do so reluctantly, because many of our fellow citizens will find it difficult to afford an increase, but that course of action must be taken. I say in all sincerity to the Minister that it is not credible to claim that the shortfall that results from resources being cut by 70% can be made up by efficiency savings. I could not lose 70% of my resources and make up the difference in efficiency savings.

My constituency of Garston and Halewood also covers part of the Knowsley metropolitan borough, which is a smaller authority but, thanks to this Government and the Lib Dem-Tory coalition Government that preceded it, it faces financial challenges that are just as severe. Its revenue is currently £148 million. It has had to make cuts of £86 million since 2010 and will have to find a further £17 million over the next three years. That is a total loss for a small authority of more than £100 million. Both Liverpool and Knowsley are among the top five hardest hit local authorities. Knowsley's income will have gone down by 56% by the end of this process.

Knowsley raised £43.2 million in council tax in the last financial year, yet it spent £47.1 million on adult social care alone. Are we seeing a pattern here? Just like Liverpool, Knowsley had to spend more on adult social care alone than it was able to raise in council tax this year. The pressures on the social care budget are huge. Because the population is ageing and people are living for longer—something we should all celebrate—Knowsley expects to face additional pressures of £10 million in the next three years for adult social care alone.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the picture she paints is grim, particularly for Knowsley? Does she, like me, envisage a time in the not-too-distant future when Knowsley simply will not be able to meet its legal responsibilities unless additional funds are found to ensure that adult social care is available?

Maria Eagle: I well understand my right hon. Friend's concerns. Indeed, the fear is that it will simply be impossible. Knowsley has not had 56% of its statutory obligations removed—just 56% of the money with which it is supposed to meet them. Knowsley, too, is looking at a council tax increase of 4.99%, with 3% ring-fenced for adult social care. This will be the first time that it has increased council tax in five years, and it will do so reluctantly, but that will generate just £1.9 million a year—a total of £3.8 million over the three-year period. That will pay for only just over a third of the pressures that are expected in adult social care alone.

Some additional money will come through the improved better care fund, and there will be one-off allocations—albeit of less than £1 million—through the adult social care fund, but none of that will meet the pressures that are apparent now. I say again to the Minister in all sincerity that one-off payments cannot deal with permanent pressures that are increasing relentlessly day by day when budgets have been cut so drastically.

Unfortunately, Government actions elsewhere mean that those pressures could easily increase rather than decrease because of what is happening in the health service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool,

[*Maria Eagle*]

Riverside mentioned. Greater pressures on our NHS hospitals and acute services, which have financial problems, the Government's never-ending austerity mania and real-terms reductions in resources for the NHS over the next few years mean that our NHS services, too, are under enormous pressure. That is where the Merseyside and Cheshire sustainability and transformation plan comes in, but that aims to offset £908 million of financial pressures on the local NHS. It has changed from something that was welcome as a way of improving co-operation and transforming our services into something that is simply about saving money over the next few years. I am afraid that that will not make things easier.

There has been a lack of consultation between the STP leaders and the councils. Neither of the councils that I have mentioned feels like they have been consulted at all about the proposals that are supposed to be going ahead for the NHS, despite the fact that they will face pressure from hospitals that want to get people back into the community—but to what? There is ever-decreasing resource in the community to help look after them.

Tomorrow's Budget is a chance for the Chancellor to tackle some of those problems with vigour. We hope that he will, but if the Government's briefing in the newspapers is to be believed, it looks like he will not. It is reported that he will announce an emergency fund of £1.3 billion to tackle the social care crisis. That is only half of the £2.6 billion that the Local Government Association estimates the spending gap will reach by 2020, and it appears that the Chancellor will direct it at schemes that aim to tackle bed-blocking. Knowsley will not benefit from such money, because it has tackled that problem already. Indeed, the Minister always prays Knowsley in aid when he tries to say that bed-blocking is not a problem in some authorities. Knowsley has lost 56% of its resource, and it now looks like it will be punished for being efficient while less efficient local authorities get a slice of the money that the Chancellor will give out tomorrow.

Apparently, the Chancellor will also establish another long-term review of social care funding. Although that is welcome, because this needs to be tackled in the end as a proper long-term policy issue, it will not tackle the problems that Liverpool and Knowsley face now. I must also observe that both Governments the Minister has been a member of have done the same, and they simply ignored the proposals that ended up emerging. The shadow Cabinet of which he was a prominent member before 2010 sabotaged the attempts by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) to have cross-party talks about a solution seven years ago for a cheap election poster alleging that Labour was proposing a death tax. So we will see.

Meanwhile, the social care crisis in Liverpool and Knowsley worsens and the Government simply pass the buck, play politics and offer zero leadership—I am afraid we have come to expect that from them. Those who lose out are the elderly and the vulnerable, who rely most on the services that this Government's actions decimate the most.

5.17 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I apologise for being a moment late in

coming over from the Select Committee on Health. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) on securing this important and timely debate on behalf of all our constituents.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. If the hon. Lady would like to sit, she is most welcome to do so.

Luciana Berger: That is kind, but I am fine. Thank you so much.

This is a pertinent and serious issue that affects thousands of people across the area that my hon. Friends and I are privileged to represent. I also endorse the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle). I will seek not to reiterate but to add to the comments that have already been made. I will raise some of the additional pressures that Liverpool has faced in the nearly seven years since the cuts were first introduced in 2010 and add some personal reflections from constituents who are experiencing those cuts at first hand. We are ultimately here on behalf of our constituents, and we should share their experiences with the House so that we understand the tragic human element and implications of the cuts. I will also reflect on my own experience of being in an accident and emergency department in Liverpool on a Friday night just a couple of weeks ago and seeing the number of ambulances waiting there. At least 10 paramedics were waiting to book people in, many of whom were older people. We know from the figures that delayed discharge is a significant challenge, and I believe that issues in accident and emergency departments are compounded by cuts to social care.

As we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Riverside and for Garston and Halewood, 5,000 fewer people in Liverpool are receiving support via care packages than in 2010. I have connected with two constituents about that issue in the past week alone. One, a lady called Sobia, is paralysed. She used to receive overnight care, but despite her condition becoming worse and even though her children are now of an age when they are going to university and are not as available to care for her as they were previously, she has seen that care stopped because of the cuts to social care in Liverpool.

In the past few weeks I have intervened on behalf of one of my constituents called Veronica, who had additional support to help her with various things. She is still waiting for some of that care to be reinstated. I have every sympathy with Liverpool City Council for the difficult decisions it is having to make in the current circumstances; the council is under significant pressures, as we have heard. Those pressures do not look set to get any easier. In particular, in the Liverpool city area we have demographic pressures—as many places do across the country—with the growing, ageing population. We know that the 65-plus age group is set to grow by 50% in the next 20 years. That is a significant challenge for any area to contend with, particularly given the cuts that have been incurred so far.

Liverpool City Council faces financial pressures as a result of the introduction of the national living wage. It is to cost £13.9 million in 2017-18, rising to £24.7 million by 2019-20, which is not an insignificant sum for the council to contend with. The Law Commission is also reviewing a specific piece of legislation, and I hope that

changes will come forward soon to help Liverpool City Council cope with the 400% increase in deprivation of liberty safeguards applications, which cost £1 million a year. We know that that needs some attention, and I hope that changes to the legislation will have some impact, because that is £1 million of the significantly larger sum that the council has to contend with.

The demand pressures we see locally are also significant. We know that every week Liverpool City Council is arranging care packages for up to 100 people leaving hospital, which is a 51% increase compared with last year. There are also a lot more complex home care cases, which cost a significant sum and may require two carers calling four times a day. We know that adult social care assessment requests have risen by 15% since 2010, up from 18,000 a year to 21,000, and are expected to rise to nearly 23,000 by next year. There were also 5,715 requests for support from new clients, which was a 10% increase on the previous year.

We as constituency MPs, on behalf of our constituents, are contending with the challenges today. I have shared just a few of the additional challenges—financial pressures, demand pressures and demographic pressures—that mean that Liverpool City Council faces even more challenges as the years progress. It is on that basis that I endorse the comments made by my hon. Friends. We need the Government to give serious attention to this matter.

Social care cannot be dealt with separately from our wider health service. The two go hand in hand. It is no surprise that more people are turning up to our accident and emergency departments or our GP surgeries when 5,000 fewer people get care packages today than did in 2010, given that we know need has increased. The Chancellor will give the Budget tomorrow, and I look forward to hearing in the Minister's response what representations he and his Department have made to ensure that social care is given the attention and resource that it desperately needs and deserves on behalf of the thousands of constituents who do not receive care but deserve it and the thousands more elderly people who will need it in the future.

I have not reflected specifically on constituents who might need mental health support but are not getting what they need and deserve today and going into tomorrow. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. We see and experience in our surgeries and weekly visits constituents who have to contend with the daily realities of not getting the support they need and deserve. We anticipated something in the autumn statement but there was nothing. On behalf of all our constituents, I sincerely hope that the Minister will give us some glimmer of hope that tomorrow there will be something that positively impacts on all of our constituents' lives.

5.25 pm

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), my constituency neighbour, on securing this important debate and on her speech, during which she laid bare any claim by the Government that they have any intention other than passing the buck for the health and social care crisis.

The Minister will be aware that, in the past few weeks, one of the main local hospitals in Liverpool has reported that an almost unprecedented 20% of its capacity

has been taken up by people who do not need to be there. That, of course, has a knock-on effect and reverberates across the whole NHS system. The Government's myopic approach has led to cancelled elective surgery, delays in A&E and ambulances backing up at hospital entrances, resulting in an incredibly inefficient use of already overstretched NHS resources. More importantly, it is not in the best interests of patients and patient care.

Keeping people who do not need to be in hospital in expensive NHS beds, instead of making provision for their illnesses to be treated at home or through other resources, is a wasteful and nonsensical way to spend taxpayers' money. The Secretary of State has claimed that delayed discharge is not just about social care funding. Perhaps when the Minister responds, he would care to identify a single local authority that has had the same Government funding cuts inflicted on it as those in Liverpool and yet has managed to avoid a delayed discharge crisis. I await his response with anticipation.

A recent report by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Institute for Government identified that people were waiting longer for critical hospital services such as A&E and cancer treatments. It highlighted the fact that delays in transferring people from hospitals into social care have risen by 40% since 2014. The Government cannot wash their hands of the crisis that has been created in Downing Street. They cannot simply shift the blame for the shambles they have presided over for the past seven years on to the shoulders of councils such as those in our area.

I should declare an interest in what I will say next, as a candidate in the Liverpool city region metro Mayor contest. If I am elected in May, I offer to work with the Minister's departmental officials and the leaders of the six districts in the Liverpool city region to convene a health and social care summit, to examine the current situation and look at how we might work together across the piece at what could be done better. As my hon. Friend said, there are some innovative approaches and best practices in our area, and the Government might even learn something if they took part. Councils in our area have already shown the leadership on social care that the Government are singularly failing to, so that summit is a chance for the Government to answer their critics, see for themselves the pressures that local authorities are having to contend with on a daily basis and work to tackle the problem at source.

We have a duty of care to ensure that health and social care work is as seamless and joined up as possible within the current structures of responsibility and funding restrictions. However, the Government need to accept their duty in relation to health and social care. In our area, the so-called social care precept would not even go close to backfilling central Government cuts to date, as we have heard, and it is seen as a scam to shift the burden of funding on to the shoulders of local taxpayers. Liverpool has a predominance of terraced streets—what we used to call two-up, two-downs—so the imbalance of band A and B properties means that for every 1% increase in council tax in our area, we raise about £1.4 million to £1.5 million. However, with a similar 1% increase in some of the leafy suburbs down here, councils can raise more than £5 million. That situation perpetuates the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots, and we will see tomorrow whether the Chancellor recognises that the cuts being inflicted on councils such

[Steve Rotheram]

as Liverpool, Halton, Knowsley, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral have gone too far, and whether a fairer settlement is offered.

We are doing our bit in our city region. The Government now need to accept their responsibility to the elderly and their families and carers. They have often tried to use a sticking plaster to offer a solution, but they know that a sustainable solution must be found to this growing problem. I hope that all the relevant factors—including demographic, socioeconomic and health inequality data—are included in any formula that the Treasury uses to calculate additional funding need. Perhaps tomorrow's Budget will see yet another sticking plaster applied to the crisis in social care and in our hospitals, but mark my words: it will be no more than a temporary measure at best. At worst, it will be more smoke and mirrors that will fall apart just days afterwards upon further scrutiny. I cannot believe the Government will allow that to happen.

At Prime Minister's Question Time, the Leader of the Opposition mentioned that Liverpool's director of adult social care, Samih Kalakeche, had handed in his notice because he was tired of being held responsible for axing services for the elderly and vulnerable in our city. Mr Kalakeche told *The Observer*:

"Frankly I can't see social services surviving after two years. That's the absolute maximum. If we don't do something within the next six months, I believe social services will not exist by 2018-19. This isn't scaremongering, this isn't me asking you to feel sad for me—whoever is making decisions out there has looked at social care as the Cinderella of the service...People are struggling, people are suffering, and we're really only seeing the tip of the iceberg."

I think those comments are directed fairly and squarely at the Government's door.

However, it is not only Samih who claims that. Last month, the Conservative chair of the Local Government Association, Lord Porter, said that services supporting the most vulnerable people in our communities were at breaking point. He said that

"extra council tax income will not bring in anywhere near enough money to alleviate the growing pressure on social care both now and in the future. The social care precept raises different amounts of money in different parts of the country. Social care faces a funding gap of at least £2.6 billion by 2020. It cannot be left to council taxpayers alone to try to fix this crisis. Without genuinely new additional government funding for social care, vulnerable people face an ever uncertain future where they might no longer receive the dignified care and support they deserve. This is not only worse for our loved ones but will also heap further pressure and wasted expense on the NHS."

Opposition Members could not agree more.

I know that our area, like the other 150 councils in England, will not get a sweetheart deal from the Government—sorry, I of course mean a memorandum of understanding allowing for a pilot of business rate retention. In any case, such deals are yet another example of the Tory approach that "to those that hath shall be given". For example, Westminster City Council raises so much money in business rates that it could probably afford to actually pay its residents to live there instead of taxing them. However, there are certainly limits to what can be achieved in our area at a local or even sub-regional level with the current inadequate resourcing.

I slightly disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), who welcomed the Government's social care commission. I do not think we need another commission; I think we all know what is happening in our areas. The Government need to start listening to people—to patients, carers and families who have to go through terrible circumstances on a daily basis. It is time for action, not for commissions. Our elderly family members and our overstretched and all-too-often under-rewarded social care workers deserve nothing less. I hope the Minister will talk about action in his response.

5.34 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) on securing the debate and on the excellent way in which she opened it. We have heard about the real pressures on social care in Liverpool from my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) and my hon. Friends the Members for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram). We have heard about the 5,000 people who have lost care packages, about cancelled surgeries and about patients stuck in hospital.

To be clear, the funding crisis in social care is, in my view, one of the Government's own making. The Chancellor failed to recognise the crisis and provided no extra social care funding from central Government at the autumn statement. Indeed, Ministers continued what they had already started in shifting the burden on to councils and council tax payers through increases in the social care precept. I will say more about that, but we have heard very well in the debate how that is not a sustainable solution.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside said, Liverpool still has to make a further £19 million of cuts by 2020, taking the cuts to its Government funding to a staggering £420 million—the equivalent of a 68% reduction since 2010. The cuts to grants and the increased reliance on council tax have hit cities such as Liverpool very hard; we have heard about some of the impacts. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton said, a serious weakness of using council tax to fund social care is that both demand for social care and the relative value of the council tax base vary so much across the country.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady when she is in full flow, but there is a Division in the House. We will come back in 15 minutes and carry on where we left off.

5.36 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

5.52 pm

On resuming—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Welcome back. The revised finish time is now 6.18 pm.

Barbara Keeley: As I said, a weakness of using council tax to fund social care is that both the demand for social care and the relative value of the council tax base vary

across the country. Census data show that in Surrey 40% of over-65s have a long-term condition that limits their day-to-day activity, but in Liverpool that figure is much higher, at 62%, and there is a strong link between long-term conditions that limit day-to-day activity and care needs. A 1% increase in council tax would raise £6.2 million in Surrey, whereas an equivalent rise for the same size population in Liverpool would raise only about half that sum—£3.4 million. Therein lies the problem.

As we heard in the debate, this year the 2% social care precept raised £2.8 million in Liverpool. That is not enough to cover the £9 million that Liverpool reports is needed in the care sector just for increases in the national living wage. Liverpool's Mayor did some months ago suggest a 10% council tax increase to pay for social care, which would have needed a referendum. That proposal was similar to the one for a 15% increase from Surrey County Council. As we know, Surrey appears to have got a sweetheart deal from the Government when it suggested that increase in council tax, so I would like the Minister, when he responds, to tell us where Liverpool's deal is.

As we heard, last month Liverpool's director of adult social care resigned, stating that councils are in danger of failing to meet their statutory requirements. He said:

"People are struggling, people are suffering, and we're really only seeing the tip of the iceberg."

Only those with the highest needs are getting help. I worry that financial pressures in social care are now leading to failures and serious reductions in the quality of care that people receive. That was underlined by the Care Quality Commission bringing prosecutions against the owners of Mossley Manor, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside. The neglect and poor care of residents at that care home was shocking. The CQC said that there was

"a continued and serious risk"

to the lives, health and wellbeing of residents. It is welcome that the owners have been prosecuted by the CQC, but I am worried that failures such as that are now a symptom of a wider problem.

The number of care home providers forced to cease operations because of deregistration has increased from 34 two years ago to 54 this year. A recent BBC "File on 4" programme reported that 23,000 allegations of abuse had been made against care staff working in people's homes. In the programme, the new local government ombudsman, Michael King, said that there is a growing problem with standards of home care. The CQC says that more than one quarter of care homes require improvement or are inadequate, and that figure rises to 41% for nursing homes. The King's Fund has said that adult social care is rapidly becoming a "threadbare safety net" for the poorest and most needy older and disabled people.

Falls in the quality or availability of social care are clearly having a knock-on effect on the NHS. We heard, rightly, about examples of that from Liverpool. My hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood talked about sustainability and transformation plans and the need for STPs to make savings, which is the ridiculous position we seem to be in, but as the Health Foundation has said:

"The vision contained in many STPs...on preventing ill health and deterioration of illness, of care delivered closer to people's homes...will be impossible without a vibrant social care sector."

As we heard in the debate, it is impossible to have a vibrant social care sector with the funding issues in Liverpool. The Government have tried to shift the burden of funding social care on to councils. In the Budget tomorrow, I hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer takes responsibility and both makes available the £2 billion needed immediately and suggests a longer-term plan, which is needed to put social care on a more stable footing.

Those who lose out are the thousands of people who need social care in cities such as Liverpool, but are now living with unmet care needs. That also hits their families, particularly the unpaid family carers, and the thousands of people in the care workforce, who are now working under very poor terms and conditions. A very large proportion of them are on zero-hours contracts; often, they are not even paid the minimum wage, are not paid for their travel time and have very poor prospects or no pension.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton has offered to convene, if he is elected Mayor—I wish him all the best in the forthcoming election—a health and care summit to look at the issues and explore solutions. I hope that he is able to do that, but I know that my hon. Friends and I are not happy to accept a threadbare safety net. We want a decent and fair social care system, and we want it to be funded.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): If the Minister would be kind enough to conclude his remarks no later than 6.15 pm, that would allow Mrs Louise Ellman three minutes to sum up the debate.

5.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): I thank all those who have spoken in the debate. This is a serious subject, and we have had a number of serious contributions. I will answer some of the points that have been made, before talking more generally about the Government's approach to adult social care, both now and for the remainder of this Parliament.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) on bringing this debate to the Chamber, because this subject matters. If there is one thing on which we can all agree, on both sides of the political divide, it is that the whole care agenda is very important to very large numbers of people. The care industry employs more people than the NHS: it employs 1.5 million people. As the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) said, many of them are not well paid. I think she said that some of them do not get the minimum wage. If she has evidence of that, she needs to come forward with it and we need to prosecute, because that is illegal.

However, it is right to say that 1.5 million people work in social care—more than in the NHS—and that number will grow over the next decade or two decades. Depending on how he gets on in the forthcoming election, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) may find that his responsibility in that regard is increased greatly. As well as those 1.5 million people, to whom we should all be grateful—I do not think I could do that work very well—6 million people across our country give informal care. Of those, some 300,000 are aged under 18. It is estimated that one in 30 people in schools

[David Mowat]

are giving informal care to an adult or sibling. We should all reflect on that, because that number will also increase over the next decade or so.

A number of Members have made the point that the precept raises less in Liverpool than it does in Surrey. The hon. Gentleman said that many more houses are in council tax bands A or B, and the consequence is that the precept will raise less. That is self-evidently true, and the Government accept that. That is why the way in which the improved better care fund is and will be allocated to councils takes into account the moneys that are available from the precept, so that the total is in accordance with the relative needs formula.

There is one thing I want to get absolutely straight. I do not want to spend the next 18 minutes bandying numbers around, and I am happy to write to all the Members here about the numbers that I am about to give. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside correctly said that the Liverpool spend on social care was £154 million in 2015, and she said that it is budgeted to be £130 million by 2020. I think those were the numbers she used. The number that we have in cash terms—I will write to Members with this—is £194 million by 2020. That is a real-terms increase of 18% between now and 2020. I have spent quite a long time with officials today to make sure that those numbers are correct. The amount that Liverpool City Council will receive from the improved better care fund in 2019-20 is £26 million. That dwarfs the amount that the precept will raise.

Barbara Keeley: The Minister said that he does not want to keep on bandying figures about, but as we all know, the difficulty is that the funding that he and the Government keep talking about is back-loaded. The problem is happening now—5,000 people have lost their care packages now, and the problem has been happening since 2010. It is not helpful, in this totally stressed situation, to talk about money in 2019-20.

David Mowat: I was just making the point that the figure the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside used was £130 million and the figure I have is £194 million. I accept that that number is not for today, and I also accept, as I have said many times in the Chamber, that the social care system is under pressure throughout the country, and Liverpool is part of that.

Steve Rotheram: I am trying to be helpful to the Minister. I quoted a former director of adult social care in Liverpool, Samih Kalakeche, who said:

“If we don’t do something within the next six months, I believe social services will not exist”

by the time that the Minister believes we will get the additional funding.

David Mowat: Today is not Budget day. I accept that the systems are under pressure. The precept has raised something, and Liverpool’s budget for social care is increasing next year, but it is fair to ask whether it is increasing enough given the pressures we are under—that is a reasonable point. My point about the £194 million figure was in response what was said earlier. Although I and the Government accept that there are pressures, it is important that we share accurate numbers with each other.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside also made the good point that there is now an increasing tendency for care to be provided in people’s own homes. If we look at the care home market over the past decade, we see that roughly speaking there are the same number of beds today as there were 10 years ago, and that is clearly in the face of a considerable increase in demand. That is because far more people are now being looked after through domiciliary packages in their own home, and that is the market we need to get right and make effective.

The hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) raised the potential issue of councils being punished in the Budget for being efficient. I will be very disappointed if that is the case—it is not my understanding of what will happen—but it is a fair challenge, and we will have to see about that when the Budget comes out.

The hon. Lady raised a number of points about the STP. We all share the STP area, and there is work to do on it. I will make this point, however: she talked about cuts of £908 million, but those are cuts against an increase in demand—they call it the counterfactual—of 4% or 5% over the next period. The truth is that Cheshire and Merseyside will be getting real-terms increases in funding for every year up to 2020. Nevertheless, that does not mean that there are not challenges, for some of the reasons we have heard, such as demographics and all that goes with that.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) asked for a glimmer of light and hope; hopefully, between myself and the Chancellor tomorrow, we can achieve that. She also raised the cases of Sobia and Veronica and their care packages. It is difficult for me to respond to that, other than to say that the Care Act 2014 set out statutory requirements for what councils need to do. If those statutory requirements are not being met, and the way she described those cases implied that might be the case, that is clearly against the law and there is recourse either to the local authority itself or to the ombudsman. I would be happy to talk to her about that in more detail.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton made a number of points and started by talking about delayed transfers of care. He rightly said that I have talked on a number of occasions about variations between councils in delayed transfer of care performance. I will say that DTOC is not the only measure of the effectiveness of a social care system; it just happens to be one the easier ones that we can get a metric around. The fact is that if we look at the 10% worst and the 10% best councils in the country—Liverpool is round about the middle—the level of delayed transfers differs by a factor of around 20 or 30. I absolutely concede that social care systems work better with more money, but it is not just about money, because that is about different working practices and different people doing things in different ways. It is right that we have the debate about that, as well as about the need for more money.

The hon. Gentleman challenged me to name some councils that were much better than Liverpool in terms of delayed transfer of care, within a similar budget environment. I do not know what the budget environment is, but I have a list I can give him of councils that have fewer delayed transfers of care. As I said, Liverpool is not a particularly bad council, and I do not want to imply that it is, but Durham, Kirklees, Sunderland,

Barnsley, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and St Helens all have at least 10 times less delayed transfers of care than Liverpool. I was taken to task at a recent Conservative councillors meeting, in which people said that having a good social services department is not just about delayed transfer of care; it is to do with a whole lot of other things. I absolutely accept that, but in a sense the hon. Gentleman started it, so I wanted to give him those figures.

Steve Rotheram: Will the Minister therefore pay tribute to Liverpool for what it has done and its innovative approach? My question was about councils that have had similar cuts to Liverpool of around 60%. None of the councils that he mentioned has had the same degree of cuts as Liverpool City Council.

David Mowat: The hon. Gentleman mentioned some councils that were in the south and I picked some that were not, but fair enough—I accept his point. He mentioned that, depending on the result of his election, he would have a summit. I would be delighted to attend, if he were to invite me—although who knows where I will be by then.

Steve Rotheram: It's only in May!

David Mowat: Indeed. On Thursday, I am going to Liverpool to give a talk at a care conference. I would be very happy during that visit to come along and talk to the council about some of the issues raised here today. As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, I am sure that the Government can learn from Liverpool. Frankly, we can all learn from each other. When I went to Whiston hospital and saw discharges to St Helens and to Liverpool, I saw some wonderful things happening there. Anyway, the offer stands.

Maria Eagle: I am sure that all councils in Merseyside would be happy—I know that Knowsley would—to see the Minister on Thursday if he has a bit of spare time. Does he agree that it will be a bit of a blow if the Chancellor's reported actions tomorrow reward those with a poorer record with smaller cuts to their resources than Knowsley's? Knowsley has a good record on delayed discharges, but according to the formulation listed in some of today's newspapers, it will end up getting very little, if anything.

David Mowat: I thought that I had said that I agree with the hon. Lady that it would be wrong to punish those that are doing better. She mentioned that Knowsley is one of the stronger councils in that regard; St Helens is even stronger. It would be completely wrong if that were the basis of the allocation. Frankly, that is not my understanding.

I want to talk a little about what the Government plan to do on social care. Part of that involves recognising the pressures that exist. One thing that we get into quickly in social care discussions is a debate about adult social care and frail people—people on the borderline between being ill and being old. If they are ill, they are in hospital under the NHS, and if they are not, they are old, and care is either means-tested or provided by the council. That is a difficult area.

One third of the pressure on councils such as Liverpool arises not from older people but from people with severe learning difficulties, autism and disabilities more generally.

Over the past decade, thankfully, the health inequality from which that cohort suffers has decreased considerably, and the life expectancy of people in those categories has increased. The cost to local authorities is clearly severe. In addition, the Government are determined to press ahead with a programme called Transforming Care, which came out of the Winterbourne View case. Too many people with severe learning difficulties were in institutions and long-term hospitals, with all that goes with that. We are moving them into communities with the help of local authorities. There is a plan to move some 3,000 people out of institutions—places hopefully much better than Winterbourne View—and into care. All of that creates pressures of the sort that we have been hearing about in this debate, but that does not mean that it is not the right thing to do.

Luciana Berger: Does the Minister acknowledge that those 3,000-plus people should have been moved a lot sooner? According to various reviews, we should not be in the present situation, with too many people still in that type of accommodation who should not be there.

David Mowat: That is a fair challenge. We have a plan, and we are implementing it in that process. Winterbourne View was about seven years ago now. I have met a number of parents of the children affected and there has been a lot of pressure from them to go as far and as fast as we can. I make the point that every one of those facilities is a project of its own in terms of finding other accommodation and putting in place care—sometimes round-the-clock care. To answer the hon. Lady's question directly, I would like us to go faster, but I think that we are doing as well as could be expected given the starting point. However, it is a fair challenge.

Barbara Keeley: I do not know whether the Minister watched last week's Channel 4 "Dispatches", "Under Lock and Key", which showed some serious cases of young people who were not better off in their institution, a private hospital. It seemed very difficult to get them moved out into the community. I know that it was a different part of the country, but there were young people in that institution from across the country. It is great to have a plan, but we see programmes week in and week out showing failures, as I have highlighted.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): In responding to the intervention, the Minister needs to make his last point.

David Mowat: Mr Hollobone, are we finishing at 6.18?

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): You have until 6.15.

David Mowat: I beg your pardon. I will finish at 6.15.

I saw the programme, and it gave us great food for thought. It is a Government priority to get those people moved. We have done some 1,500, but yes, there are 3,000 left in places like the one in Northampton, and it is not good enough. It is a long process, and it is not something that any of us from either side of the House can do just by clicking our fingers.

I will now sit down. This has been a good debate. I will write to all Members here with the figures that I have given, because the figures are right. It is fair to have this discussion, but it must be had on the basis of

[David Mowat]

correct numbers. Even with those correct numbers, I accept that some of the pressures that we have heard about exist.

6.15 pm

Mrs Ellman: I am very pleased that so many of my hon. Friends who represent Liverpool are here today; in fact, we almost have a full house. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), although he is abroad with the International Development Committee, which he chairs, is here with us in spirit and in thought. It shows how important the issue is to Liverpool and to the city region. We may dispute specific figures, but there is undoubtedly a massive gap in the funding to meet the needs of people in our area, and the biggest reason for it is the massive and ongoing cuts in Government funding. Whatever individual figures we might dispute, those are the basic facts, and they are not in dispute.

I thank the Minister for much of what he said, for his recognition that there is a problem and for his willingness to meet representatives of Liverpool City Council when

he is in Liverpool on Thursday. I accept that invitation on their behalf; I am pretty sure that they will agree. It is a welcome move, but nothing can detract from the fact that we need significant additional funding to make services available to all the people who need them. The problems are in two areas. The issue relating to the NHS and discharges from hospital is very important, but it is not the only issue. Care packages that enable people to live independently in their own homes are essential, but in Liverpool the number of packages has already been drastically reduced from 14,000 to 9,000, and we do not know how much lower the figure will fall.

I was pleased to hear the Minister talk about light and hope—I thought that it was very encouraging—but the first test will be tomorrow in the Budget. I am sure that we will all scrutinise what is said carefully; let us hope that it brings light and hope to the people of Liverpool.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered social care in Liverpool.

6.17 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Tuesday 7 March 2017

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Energy Council: February 2017

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman): The Energy Council, chaired by the Maltese presidency, took place in Brussels on 27 February.

The Council began with a presentation by Vice-President Šefcovic on the Commission's second state of the energy union report, emphasising that 2017 should be the "year of implementation". He emphasised the importance of co-operation between Council, the Commission and the European Parliament, and the need to adopt the clean energy package swiftly. The Commission stated that the EU was largely on track to meet its 2020 energy and climate change targets, but that some member states were still reliant on third countries for their energy supply and there was a continuing need for diversification.

Commissioner Arias Cañete then gave a presentation on the clean energy package, comprising legislation covering energy efficiency, renewables, electricity market design and governance of the energy union. He saw this as a significant opportunity to prepare European energy markets for the future and highlighted the importance of consumer interests across the whole package.

Nearly all member states considered that the Commission's timetable of agreeing the proposals by the end of 2017 was too ambitious and that it needed to be more realistic.

On the energy efficiency proposals, a number of member states explicitly expressed support for the Commission's proposals for a 30% EU-level binding target. Others were more cautious, and were of the view

that the legislation should be in line with the October 2014 Council conclusions and by inference propose a 27% indicative target.

On the renewable energy proposals, a number of member states stressed the role that bio-energy can play and wanted the associated proposals for sustainability criteria to apply to bio-energy. Others stressed the need for the proposals to take account of national specificities and that member states should determine their own energy mix.

Member states were generally supportive of proposals to improve the design of electricity markets as a key step towards a successful energy transition and a fully functioning market. However, a number of member states did raise concerns over the Commission's proposals to phase out regulated tariffs, arguing that such tariffs should be allowed and that the package should not lead to liberalisation of price regulation, as this could result in higher prices for some consumers. Some member states also highlighted the Commission's proposals to introduce "regional operation centres" considering it unacceptable to give these bodies extensive decision-making powers. A few member states stressed the importance of interconnection if the internal energy market is to operate effectively.

On the governance proposals, member state views were mixed. Some stressed the need for flexibility, others the need for ex-ante rules to address the question of what would happen if the EU were not on track to meet its targets.

The Council then received an update from the presidency on progress on negotiations on the energy efficiency labelling regulation and the gas security of supply regulation, in which the Council is now in discussion with the European Parliament.

The Czech delegation invited member states to attend the 12th meeting of the European nuclear energy forum taking place in Prague.

Finally, the Commission presented the ocean energy forum road map highlighting the important role that ocean energy could play in meeting the EU's climate and energy objectives.

[HCWS521]

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 7 March 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
MINISTRY OF JUSTICE	653	MINISTRY OF JUSTICE—continued	
Concerted Indiscipline: Prison Response	668	Prison Estate: Isle of Wight	669
Court Proceedings: Media Reports	663	Prison Officers: Recruitment and Retention.....	663
Court System	665	Prison Safety and Security	668
Foreign National Offenders: Legal Aid	669	Prison Service Pay Award.....	666
Imprisonment for Public Protection: Sentences.....	666	Prison Work	667
Insurance Premiums.....	656	Reoffending Rates.....	653
Leaving the UK: Human Rights	670	Topical Questions	670
Legal Advice	661	Whiplash Claims.....	657
Mental Health Problems: Prisoners.....	660	Youth Justice System.....	655
Personal Independence Payments: Inverclyde	659		

WRITTEN STATEMENT

Tuesday 7 March 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL	
STRATEGY	25WS
Energy Council: February 2017.....	25WS

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Tuesday 14 March 2017**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 7 March 2017

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 653] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Justice

Housing Benefits (18 to 21-year-olds) [Col. 677]

Answer to urgent question—(Caroline Noakes)

Queen's Sapphire Jubilee [Col. 687]

*Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Andrew Rosindell)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time*

Children and Social Work Bill [Lords] [Col. 693]

*Programme motion (No. 2)—(Edward Timpson)—agreed to
As amended, considered; read the Third time and passed*

United Kingdom Statistics Authority [Col. 757]

Motion—(Chris Skidmore)—agreed to

Standing Orders (Public Business) [Col. 762]

Motion—(Mr Lidington)—on a Division, agreed to

Petition [Col. 776]

Rural Policing and Hare Coursing [Col. 778]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Beer Duty [Col. 217WH]

Coast to Coast Walk [Col. 240WH]

O'Neill Review [Col. 247WH]

Sale of Student Loans: Regulation [Col. 272WH]

Social Care (Liverpool) [Col. 279WH]

General Debates

Written Statement [Col. 25WS]

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