

**Thursday  
30 March 2017**

**Volume 624  
No. 135**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 30 March 2017**

---



# House of Commons

*Thursday 30 March 2017*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

### ELECTORAL COMMISSION

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported to the House, That the Address of 13th March, praying that Her Majesty will appoint Professor Elan Closs Stephens as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 13 March 2017 for the period ending on 12 March 2021, was presented to Her Majesty, who was graciously pleased to comply with the request.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### TRANSPORT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Leaving the EU: Cabotage

1. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the implications for cabotage of the UK leaving the EU. [909571]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** The Government are carefully considering the potential impacts on cabotage as part of our preparations for negotiating our departure from the EU. The Department for Transport is engaging with industry on the matter. It is too soon to say what arrangements will be in place, but we are very conscious of the interest of the transport industry in future arrangements.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** The open skies agreement has provided great opportunities for EU-registered airlines, including UK companies such as easyJet that fly largely unrestricted between and within member states, as well as from the EU to the US, but Brexit could change all that. Can the Secretary of State reassure industry and passengers that the UK will remain part of open skies arrangements?

**Chris Grayling:** As I said a moment ago, we will reach that agreement in due course. It is our intention across the sectors, whether haulage or aviation, to secure the best possible agreement for the future that will benefit those from elsewhere in the European Union who seek to do business in the UK and those from the UK who seek to do business elsewhere in the European Union.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): How important is it to make arrangements for the worst-case scenario, just to show how serious our negotiating intent is?

**Chris Grayling:** My right hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that the Government of course take steps to prepare for all eventualities, but we enter the negotiations with good faith and the intention to secure a deal, because we believe very strongly that that is in everybody's interests, both here in the United Kingdom and across the European Union.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the worst-case scenario is no arrangement at all, that airlines have to schedule 12 to 18 months in advance, and that he therefore has to resolve the issue within the next six months?

**Chris Grayling:** I never speculate on these things, but I have had detailed discussions with the aviation industry over the past few weeks. I am well aware of the challenges it faces with regard to its business models. Of course the Government listen very carefully to it about how best to approach that important sector in the context of the negotiations.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Like the aviation sector, the maritime industry relies heavily on the EU with regard to cabotage. The shipping sector warned that Brexit may well cost UK-flagged and owned shipping companies the right to trade in EU coastal waters, which would entail a heavy financial price. What assurances will the Secretary of State give today that he will maintain the same access, and what discussions has he had with the Scottish Government about the implications?

**Chris Grayling:** As I said a moment ago, the Government are focused on ensuring that we have the best possible arrangements across the transport sector. We have regular discussions with the Scottish Government on a wide variety of issues. What I will say—I think this is good news for all us—is that the UK flag is increasing in size again, which we all welcome.

**Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): The Prime Minister told the House yesterday that she will “deliver certainty” to UK businesses about their position post-Brexit, but without agreement on the principles behind cabotage, trucking companies are already warning that new customer checks will gridlock roads leading to the channel ports. UK-based airlines are already warning that they may need to relocate their bases across the channel if the UK falls out of the common aviation area. Just how and when are Ministers going to deliver the certainty that those companies need now, rather than a ministerial aspiration that everything is going to be all right on the night?

**Chris Grayling:** Of course, this is not simply about UK companies, because the vast majority of haulage-based cabotage that takes place in the United Kingdom is undertaken by international hauliers operating in the UK, so they themselves have a vested interest in ensuring that their politicians work with us to make sure that we have the best possible arrangements for the future. That is what we will do, and I am confident that other European Governments will want to do the same.

### Northern Powerhouse Rail

2. **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): What the timetable is for Transport for the North to submit its proposals for Northern Powerhouse Rail. [909572]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard)**: As I am sure the hon. Lady is aware, Northern Powerhouse Rail will provide faster and more frequent rail services across the region. We have committed £60 million to developing the scheme and we are working closely with Transport for the North on potential route options and their costs and benefits. That analysis is due to arrive with us by the end of 2017.

**Judith Cummins**: I am sure the Minister will be aware that Bradford has launched the “Next Stop Bradford” campaign to secure a High Speed 3 station in our city centre. Will the Minister join me in supporting a Northern Powerhouse Rail station in Bradford city centre and thereby support the huge £1.3 billion boost to the northern powerhouse economy that the new station promises?

**Paul Maynard**: I am indeed aware of Bradford’s campaign. The leader of the council has already written to me, and I was grateful for that communication. It is important to stress that Northern Powerhouse Rail is about linking not just the major cities in the north but some of the smaller towns and cities where connectivity can be significantly improved.

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): Is the Minister aware of the economic study on east-west trans-Pennine connectivity that was recently published on behalf of the Lancashire and Yorkshire local enterprise partnerships? The report finds that taking steps such as reopening the Skipton to Colne rail route would boost economic prosperity across the north, but that a failure to improve connectivity from east to west would

“critically restrict the growth potential of the Pennine Corridor economy—a key driver of the Northern Powerhouse”.

**Paul Maynard**: My hon. Friend is entirely correct to point to the importance of trans-Pennine links, be they road or rail. I am very familiar, as I am sure he is, with the Skipton to Colne campaign and the Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership. I wish it well, and I hope that it features strongly on all the local growth fund bids that come in to the Department.

**Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Transport for the North has great potential to transform the northern economies, but what powers will it actually have? When will it become a statutory body, and will it have the same powers as Transport for London?

**Paul Maynard**: We continue to consider carefully what powers we want to give to Transport for the North. I very much hope that it will be placed on a statutory basis in the future, and we will make an announcement in due course. There is an awful lot we can do together with Transport for the North even now, on matters such as smart ticketing and infrastructure improvements. Transport for the North is a great success already, whatever its basis.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): There can be no doubt that the Government and Transport for the North have a plethora of plans, strategies and proposals. They are all wonderful, but what mechanisms are in place to ensure that all these plans are turned into some real action?

**Paul Maynard**: My hon. Friend is right to identify the immense creativity that exists in the north of England in terms of recommending potential new pieces of infrastructure, but it is vital to remember that there is only a finite amount of money at any one time. That is why in the Department, in the devolved Administrations and in Transport for the North, we have very complicated and, I think, sensible ways to judge the impact of any infrastructure and calculate the benefit-cost ratio.

### Switch Island, Sefton

3. **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): If he will make an assessment of the adequacy of road safety at the Switch Island junction in Sefton; and if he will make a statement. [909573]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones)**: Highways England acknowledged concerns about the safety performance of the Switch Island junction following the opening of the new Broom’s Cross Road and has since implemented interim measures to improve safety. Highways England has also identified options for a further safety improvement scheme and is discussing them with the hon. Gentleman’s local council. Those options include changes to lane markings and traffic signs and the introduction of gantries to make the road layout clearer.

**Bill Esterson**: I had two letters from the Minister of State last week, one describing work on the M25 and the other about Switch Island, which he describes. We all know that the Government have a Surrey-first approach to spending money, but my constituents want to know about Switch Island. It has a very serious safety problem. There are accidents nearly every week, and there was one just two days ago. Will he change the priority of this scheme? I was told it would happen next year, but it needs to happen much sooner than that. Safety must come first.

**Andrew Jones**: I would have thought the hon. Gentleman would be delighted to hear about our range of plans right across the country. The funding for the Switch Island project has been identified, and the various options are being worked through. Highways England has to work out what is feasible, plan the design side of it and implement the plan. The implementation is planned for the early part of 2018, but of course the hon. Gentleman’s concerns about road safety are part of the consideration.

**Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker**: No, no. The junction would have to be the biggest in human history if it were to stretch from Sefton in the north-west of England to Stroud in Gloucestershire, and it does not. We will accommodate the hon. Gentleman at a later stage, but for now he can resume his seat. We are grateful to the fella.

### Rail Ticketing

4. **Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): What progress is being made to simplify the rail ticketing system. [909574]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard):** The Department continues to work with the industry to explore what further improvements can be made to simplify fares. The action plan we announced in December will drive improvement for passengers, including removing jargon, improving ticket vending machines and trialling approaches to simplifying the fares structure.

**Iain Stewart:** Many of my constituents travel frequently by train, but not every day and not always at peak hours, so the traditional season ticket is not appropriate for them. What new ticket products is the Minister encouraging train operating companies to introduce to meet and encourage such demand?

**Paul Maynard:** My hon. Friend is quite right to raise the issue of part-time season tickets. This is a matter of personal importance to me, and I encourage all train operating companies to consider whether the range of products they have on offer actually meets their customers' needs. With regard to his own route to Milton Keynes, I am sure he will be pleased to know that the next West Midlands franchise will require that a part-time flexible season ticket be offered by the winning bidder, and I look forward to seeing what those bids contain.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the Government also simplify the process of compensation for customers when a train is cancelled? The school run train in the Rhondda is often cancelled, as for that matter are First Great Western trains from London to Cardiff. There is no automatic compensation on either of those lines, which other providers give. Why can we not have automatic compensation when a train is cancelled?

**Paul Maynard:** There is a very lengthy answer, but I am sure you would not indulge me if I gave it, Mr Speaker. I say briefly to the hon. Gentleman that we need to ensure that whenever a passenger makes a claim for compensation, they can demonstrate they were on the train in question. Automatic compensation can be achieved if they have either a season ticket or an advance purchase ticket. I would also observe that compensation arrangements on the Wales and Borders franchise are a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): One aspect of the ticketing system is that a lot of the money paid in compensation by Network Rail to the rail companies does not reach the passengers, which is quite scandalous. What action is the Minister taking to ensure that that money in fact ends up in passengers' bank accounts?

**Paul Maynard:** We had a very fruitful discussion of schedule 8 payments in the Transport Committee last week, when I explained at some length why the two are not directly comparable. My hon. Friend will have heard what the chief executive of the Office of Rail and Road had to say about trying to make schedule 8 payments more transparent and more closely related to what the passengers themselves have experienced. I look forward to hearing the Select Committee's recommendations in due course.

### Night Flights: Regional Airports

5. **Michelle Thomson** (Edinburgh West) (Ind): What steps his Department is taking to (a) monitor and (b) regulate night flights at regional airports. [909575]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** The Government set noise night flight restrictions only at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. We believe that noise is usually best managed locally, so we do not monitor the number of night flights outside those three airports. At Scottish airports, the powers to set night flight restrictions and other noise controls are of course devolved, and therefore lie with Scottish Ministers.

**Michelle Thomson:** I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. I acknowledge that the night flight proposals extend only to the three London airports, but given the anticipated growth in night flights generally, does that not seem rather short-sighted? We want such growth in airports because of the gross value added that that brings, but we have to recognise the rights of constituents everywhere, including those in Scotland.

**Chris Grayling:** This is clearly a live issue for people living around airports. The airspace modernisation programme will provide additional tools to improve things. I assume the hon. Lady is not asking me to take back powers from the Scottish Government to regulate night flights at Scotland's airports; were she doing so, she would have to talk to her colleagues in Edinburgh.

**Phil Wilson** (Sedgefield) (Lab): What plans do the Government have for nationalising regional airports?

**Chris Grayling:** We have no plans to nationalise regional airports. In some cases, local authorities—or, indeed, local authorities in partnership with the private sector—control regional airports, and that is a matter for those local authorities and the current and past owners of those airports. We have no plans to nationalise airports.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is important to ensure that international flights to regional airports are facilitated, but does the Minister acknowledge that it is equally important not to cause unbearable disruption to neighbourhoods? Does he believe that such a balance is being achieved under the current monitoring process?

**Chris Grayling:** The big difference that will come from the airspace modernisation programme is that by moving from systems that are 50 years out of date to ones that use the most modern technology, it will be possible to manage approaches to and departure paths from airports much more exactly, to provide more variation for local communities and to deliver a much smarter way of managing our aviation as a whole. That is why we are consulting on what will be a big change for this country.

### Private Parking

6. **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on the adequacy of the Government's policy on private parking; and if he will make a statement. [909576]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** The Department for Communities and Local Government has responsibility for off-street parking. I have had discussions with the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), and we have further meetings planned. Officials from my Department also have regular contact with their DCLG and Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency counterparts to discuss issues relating to parking.

**Nick Smith:** Motorists must be able to challenge unfair parking fines. When my constituents were punished by Excel Parking's poor signage in Ebbw Vale town centre, many were forced to come to me to have any hope of a refund. Have the Government assessed how effective the appeals service POPLA—Parking on Private Land Appeals—has been in protecting motorists? Does the service live up to its name?

**Andrew Jones:** That is actually a DCLG matter. We are discussing the independent appeals process, and the DVLA's role in that in supplying driver information, but also up for consideration is the vigour with which the codes of practice of the two accredited trade associations are enforced. While we recognise that there are many good parking companies, there are some whose standards of customer service do not meet expectations. We had a very good debate on this in Westminster Hall last week, and I look forward to standing up for consumers to make sure they get a better deal.

**Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** The British Parking Association represents many of the operators of private car parks, and the Minister has just referred to its code of practice for the industry. What discussions has he had with the association about improving the performance of parking operators?

**Andrew Jones:** I have met the British Parking Association and will be having further meetings. This is all about making sure that its independent appeals process and codes of practice work on behalf of consumers. That is our objective and that is what we will be taking forward in discussions with the DCLG.

**Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab):** A constituent of mine, Lisa Smith, was given a ticket for parking on the line. Another constituent of mine, Catherine Cheeseman, saw a £60 fine very quickly escalate to a £180 fine, with threats of court action, and a disabled constituent of mine whose blue badge was out of date by a week was given a fine. When are the Government going to bring forward legislation to deal with rogue private parking companies and those who rip off British motorists?

**Andrew Jones:** That was a point the hon. Gentleman made in the debate we had last week. I cannot tell him when the DCLG will be responding to the consultation that it has been running, but I can tell him that my Department will be working with the DVLA and the DCLG to do all we can to ensure that the consumer gets a better deal by tackling some of the bigger rogue parking companies.

**Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP):** Last week in Westminster Hall the Minister told me that the provision of DVLA data to private car parking companies is not subsidised, yet a

House of Commons Library report and a 2015 report by the Select Committee on Transport stated that it charges £2.50 for each inquiry. It costs the DVLA £2.84 to process each request. The difference in the cost of the service last year was a shortfall of around £700,000. Will the Minister publish current figures on the cost of DVLA data to back up his claim, or is the taxpayer indeed funding the disgraceful practices of private companies such as Smart Parking in many constituencies, including my own?

**Andrew Jones:** The charge is £2.50 for the data. It is basically set on a cost-recovery basis. It is not possible to predict entirely accurately how many claims there will be during the financial year; some years there could be a small deficit, some years a small surplus. As I undertook to do in the debate last week, I will put all the data in a letter in the House of Commons Library.

**Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab):** We have heard about the Westminster Hall debate last week and we have heard complaints from Members across the country about the practices of cowboy parking operators. Extraordinarily, in that debate the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) revealed hitherto undiscovered socialist tendencies by demanding that the Government act and introduce regulation. These cowboy operators need DVLA data to fleece their victims. How many operators have been struck off for poor practice? After years of dithering on this, when are the Government going to step in to protect innocent motorists?

**Andrew Jones:** There were a few points there. I shall relay to my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) his socialist tendencies, which will be a surprise to him. The answer on suspensions is 18, and I cannot answer for the DCLG on when it will respond to the consultation.

### Rail Network: Investment

7. **Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** What assessment he has made of recent trends in the level of investment in maintenance across the rail network.

[909577]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard):** Network Rail is responsible for delivering a safe, reliable and efficient railway, and is regulated by the Office of Rail and Road. Over the longer term the company has reduced the cost of the railway significantly, and asset reliability has improved. The trend in spending on maintenance at present is broadly stable, but it is vital that the company continues to drive efficiency to ensure a good service to passengers while reducing the burden on passengers and taxpayers.

**Rachael Maskell:** I thank the Minister for his answer, but the overhead line equipment on the east coast main line route is in urgent need of renewal, having been installed in the 1970s and '80s. We already know that there is six-times higher spend in the south than in the north on rail and transport infrastructure, but we also seem to have an east-west divide in rail: the east coast route has received £3 billion less than that of the west. Will the Government bring forward their funding to upgrade the east coast main line infrastructure, since

the passenger performance measure is now at 25.1% because of overhead line failure? In layman's terms, my constituents' journeys are being delayed and seriously diverted.

**Paul Maynard:** I predicted that the hon. Lady would raise the issue of overhead line equipment. I have already met the route managing director Rob McIntosh to discuss that specific issue. He said to me that he is looking carefully at how to best improve reliability of the overhead lines, particularly during periods of high winds and heavy storms, which often cause a problem. They are looking at sites with significant gradient and reviewing vegetation management near overhead lines, track geometry and the reliability of system tension during periods of high winds.

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Despite all the investment in maintenance, passengers in south-east London who use Southeastern services desperately need investment in rolling stock to deal with the serious overcrowding on the line. Will the Minister tell the House whether he is looking favourably on the revised bid that Southeastern has put forward?

**Paul Maynard:** I am sure the hon. Gentleman has already noticed our consultation on the future of the Southeastern franchise, which was released last week and clearly puts capacity front and centre. He is right to point out that we received a proposal from Southeastern, as a result of a personal request from me to the parent company for it to come up with better ideas. We have had it for a week now, and are looking carefully to make sure that it at all makes sense and adds up. I hope that those carriages will be hitting the network as soon as possible.

19. [909593] **Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Part of the proposal for new rolling stock for Southeastern involved the transfer of class 377 trains from Govia Thameslink Railway. I have been informed that those trains will cease to be used by GTR from Monday, and will be standing empty at the Grosvenor sidings outside Victoria station. It will be adding insult to injury if my constituents sitting on a crowded train are passing empty carriages that ought to be helping them out. Will the Minister please fix this soon?

**Paul Maynard:** My hon. Friend is entirely right to point out that we expect both those train operating companies to work more closely together, because they have a similar parent company and the rolling stock that they need. I expect a solution to this problem. We have had a proposal, and I want to see it introduced as soon as possible.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): As we move towards the post-Brexit world, and as the Scottish Parliament is supposedly going to get new powers, will this Government do something that is already in their gift—devolve the power in Network Rail to Scotland, so that the Scottish Government can fully take control of investment and maintenance delivery and programming in Scotland?

**Paul Maynard:** I am always happy to answer this question each month in Transport questions. We looked at that issue carefully in the Smith commission; there was no consensus, and we are not taking the proposal forward.

## National Road Safety Targets

8. **Kate Hollern** (Blackburn) (Lab): If he will reintroduce national road safety targets. [909578]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** The Government are not setting national targets and are not considering reinstating them. We do not believe that targets will provide further persuasion on the importance of road safety; it is already at the heart of departmental thinking.

**Kate Hollern:** Is the Minister aware that between September 2015 and September 2016 there was a 2% increase in deaths on roads, and a 6% increase in casualties? The rate of casualties in my constituency of Blackburn is 49% higher than the national average and, shockingly, child casualties are 102% higher than the national average rate. Between 2010 and 2015, the number of dedicated road traffic police officers in England and Wales, outside the Met, has fallen by over a quarter from 5,338 to 3,901. Does the Minister see a direct link between reduced capacity to enforce road laws and the annual increases in road deaths and serious casualties?

**Andrew Jones:** I have obviously considered this matter. I look at road safety data on a quarterly basis and an annual basis. On enforcement, how the police use their resource is a matter for individual police authorities and police and crime commissioners, but as Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary has made clear, there is no simple link between officer numbers and crime levels. The key is the output achieved, rather than simply measuring how many. It is important to point out that in 2015 we had the second lowest road safety data for those killed or seriously injured in British road history. That is positive and we are working to make our roads even safer.

20. [909594] **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): Cyclists in Stroud—and for that matter in Sefton—are crying out for more road safety measures to ensure they can go around roundabouts and across junctions in safety. Will the Minister take that into account in national transport planning?

**Andrew Jones:** Most certainly. I am acutely aware of the impact of cycling infrastructure on road safety. It is clearly part of our consideration. We hoped to launch our cycling and walking investment strategy last week, but for very obvious reasons there was a change to the timetable of Government announcements.

**John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): Following on from that question, what plans does the Minister have to address the issue of cyclists ignoring not only traffic lights but pedestrian crossings? This has now become a major problem in central London.

**Andrew Jones:** That comes down to activity undertaken to enforce the rules and to educating cyclists about the importance of following road safety directions. I am aware of cyclists who go through red lights. It is unsafe. It is part of our THINK! education campaign to help cyclists to know what is good behaviour on our roads.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): Two people died in November on the A52 in Bramcote, a suburban part of my constituency. There was another accident just a few weeks ago. In both of those cases, and after many complaints from residents for many years, there is clearly a real problem with people racing at very high speeds. Would the Minister be so good as to meet my constituent Tony Smith, who organised a petition, presented in this place only last month, of 1,600 people calling on Highways England to introduce speed regulation measures? We would be very grateful for that meeting in order to advance the campaign.

**Andrew Jones:** I meet local road safety campaigners on a regular basis, in particular families who have lost loved ones in incidents on our roads. They are difficult meetings, but I would of course be very happy to meet my right hon. Friend and her constituent.

**Pat Glass** (North West Durham) (Lab): National road safety targets were introduced by the Thatcher Government in 1980 at a time when deaths and serious injuries on our roads were at horrendous levels. The numbers fell consistently until 2011, when the coalition Government abolished targets almost at the same time as they abolished the grant for speed cameras. Surprisingly, the numbers have started to increase. I accept that we are nowhere near the levels of 1980, but if it is your loved one or your child, that is matterless. The last time the Minister was asked about this he said that he was open to any useful ideas on how to turn the trend, so is it not time to accept that road safety targets decrease the numbers of deaths and injuries on our roads? They worked, and at the moment nothing the Government seem to be doing is reversing that trend.

**Andrew Jones:** I simply do not accept that policymaking is as simple as setting targets. If we look at all the action the Government are undertaking—the changes to the statutory option on drink driving, drug driving legislation, the THINK! campaign, the increase in penalties in relation to mobile phone use and so on—we see that our efforts to take road safety further are significant. If policymaking was as simple as setting targets, Gordon Brown would have left us a very well-run Government and nobody pretends he did that.

### Heathrow: Noise Monitoring

9. **Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of noise monitoring around Heathrow Airport. [909579]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** Noise is measured around Heathrow airport by a set of fixed and mobile monitors. To ensure effective monitoring, the Government have instructed the Civil Aviation Authority to validate the data from the monitors, and reports based on that information are published annually.

**Dr Mathias:** Planes are currently flying at too low an altitude, which is causing excessive noise pollution over homes and schools in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how the new noise commission will be able to prevent medically unsafe noise levels from aircraft flying over residential areas?

**Chris Grayling:** I am well aware of the concerns of my hon. Friend's constituents and others, particularly about aircraft such as the A380 as it comes in on the flightpath into Heathrow airport. Obviously we need to get this right, and I hope that the airspace modernisation programme will help in that regard. We are pressing ahead with the establishment of an independent commission on civil aviation noise, and consulting on the powers that it should have. My hon. Friend has had a number of sensible thoughts about how we might address the problem, and I should be happy to meet her to discuss it.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Thousands of my constituents will live under an extremely loud noise environment if and when runway 3 goes ahead, but they do not at present, and I welcome the formation of the new community campaign group Brentford and Hounslow Stop Heathrow Expansion. Will the Government insist that if runway 3 goes ahead, Heathrow must match Gatwick's offer to pay all council tax payers within the 57 dBA contour £1,000 per annum in compensation?

**Chris Grayling:** I do not think that it is a question of comparison between airports. What we have at Heathrow is a world-beating package of compensation for those affected, combined with a rapid change in aircraft technology which means that the new generation of aircraft coming on stream are much quieter than any we have seen before. Alongside that are our plans for the modernisation of airspace. We also need to ensure that the angles of approach to Heathrow are the best possible, in order to minimise the impact on local residents. I believe that, overall, we are taking the right approach to what I know is a difficult issue for the hon. Lady's constituents and others. We have tried to get the balance right.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the best ways of reducing congestion and noise pollution around Heathrow would be better use of regional airports, and does he agree that a reduction in air passenger duty for regional airports would be a good incentive?

**Chris Grayling:** I am a strong supporter of our regional airports. There are some great success stories, including what I suspect is my hon. Friend's pet regional local airport, Birmingham: it has been enormously successful in recent years. However, I fear that my hon. Friend will have to make representations about air passenger duty to the Chancellor during Treasury questions.

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): Can the Secretary of State explain why the consultation on the draft national policy statement promoted improved certainty of respite from aircraft noise from an expanded Heathrow, but failed to mention that that respite would be reduced from eight hours a day to just six, or even four?

**Chris Grayling:** We have tried to set out the impact of the change in broad terms. It is certainly the case that in comparison with Gatwick and its fully mixed-mode operation, Heathrow, across three runways, is able to offer respite in a way that was not assumed by the Airports Commission in its consideration of both proposals. The impact on neighbouring communities is one factor among many that the commission considered, as did the Government.



### Road Collision Investigation Unit

10. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a road collision investigation unit. [909580]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** No assessment has been made of the merits of establishing a road collision investigation unit, as there are well-established collision investigation units in the police service, and effective ways of reporting conclusions and outcomes. The Department does, however, directly fund a programme of detailed investigation under the road accident in-depth study, in conjunction with police forces, coroners and several hospitals.

**Mr Sheerman:** The Minister knows of the interest that I take in this matter, as chair of the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Transport Safety and the international council for road safety research. There is no doubt that we need an investigation unit to deal with sea, air and rail transport. All the transport safety interests across the board are in favour of the establishment of such a unit. We do not think that it would be costly, and it would be effective. Will the Minister think again?

**Andrew Jones:** I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's long-established campaigning interest in road safety, and I would just refer back to the earlier answer: we have well-established collision investigation units within the police service, so I see no point in duplication.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Collisions have a range of causes, but one of them is undoubtedly the poor condition of our local roads. The Minister will be aware of the ALARM—annual local authority road maintenance—survey published this week showing that one in six local roads will not be fit for purpose in five years' time, and that the number of potholes filled per authority fell by 19% last year. I anticipate that he will tell me how just much money is being poured into those potholes, but does he accept that short-term fixes are no substitute for proper resurfacing, which for most roads currently happens just once every 55 years?

**Andrew Jones:** The condition of the local roads is the responsibility of the local highways authorities, and we are very keen to support them in their work. I fully recognise that there is a backlog and have seen various projections of how much that might cost to fill, which is why we have allocated a record amount of money to support local highways authorities. The sum stands at over £6 billion during this Parliament, including £250 million specifically to help fix potholes.

### Congestion: Oxfordshire

11. **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce congestion in Oxfordshire. [909583]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** The Government have an ambitious strategy for tackling congestion right across the country. In Oxfordshire this includes investing £35 million for public transport improvements on the A40 and a

£9.5 million budget for Didcot station car park expansion, as well as investing some £19.4 million in the next financial year to reduce congestion at key locations across the county.

**Robert Courts:** Congestion on the A40 between Witney and Oxford causes daily misery for commuters and restricts the economic growth of this vital dynamic area. It is essential that a complete solution to this problem is found. The £35 million for the public transport solution is welcome, but what steps will the Government take to provide funding for a complete solution to the congestion on that busy road?

**Andrew Jones:** As ever, my hon. Friend speaks up vigorously on behalf of his constituency. We recognise the importance of that local road to the economic growth of the area, which is why we are supporting the A40 science transit scheme, with £35 million of local growth funding for enhancements to the A40 corridor. I encourage local partners to continue to work together to explore further options to address the issues along that stretch of road. I would of course be happy to discuss any of the options with my hon. Friend.

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

**Chris Evans** (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** I am afraid Newcastle and Islwyn are too far away. Those Members will have to try to come in on another question; the M40 is not that big.

### North Wales-England Transport Links

12. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve transport links between north Wales and England. [909584]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** The Government are investing in major signalling renewals on the north Wales line to improve reliability and, after years of waiting, in the Halton curve. This will improve rail connectivity between north Wales, west Cheshire and the Liverpool city region, including Liverpool John Lennon airport. Our recently announced national productivity investment fund will also support local authority investment on the A483 corridor between Chester and Wrexham.

**Mr Hanson:** I am grateful for that answer, and the Minister knows that I support all of those initiatives, but will he consider the letter sent to him by Conservative and Labour Members of Parliament on behalf of the Mersey Dee Alliance and Cheshire East council asking him to look at the developments of High Speed 2 and the hub at Crewe? Building on that progress will help connectivity on behalf of all of us in the region.

**Chris Grayling:** I know all about the letter, and indeed had a meeting to discuss the issue yesterday. I am seized of the necessity to make sure that north Wales does not miss out in the investment that we are putting into our rail network. We will bring forward our thoughts in due course, but I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that this is very much top of mind in the Department.

**Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Mid Wales has difficulty with transport links to both north and south Wales, and indeed to England—although I can assure everyone that it is worth the difficulty of the journey in getting to mid Wales. What more can my right hon. Friend do to ensure that road links to mid Wales are improved?

**Chris Grayling:** We will do our bit on the English side of the border—we are spending more money than ever on the road network in England—but I fear that it is to Cardiff that my hon. Friend will have to look for the improvements that will provide that final link into his constituency. His is, of course, a beautiful part of the country, and all of us would want to be able to visit it.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): The Secretary of State rightly mentioned the Halton curve, for which I have campaigned for many years. It opens up all sorts of possibilities, not least in respect of our connectivity with north Wales. Will he look at the importance of reopening Ditton station in Halton and, when the new city region mayor is elected, talk to them about how that can be brought about much more quickly?

**Chris Grayling:** I had a meeting yesterday with the man who I hope will be the next city region mayor, the Conservative candidate Tony Caldeira, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that he has ambitious plans to improve the transport infrastructure in and around the Merseyside region.

#### East Midlands Rail Franchise

13. **Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): What progress is being made on awarding the east midlands rail franchise. [909586]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard):** On 1 March this year, the Department announced the three companies that are shortlisted to bid for the next east midlands franchise. A public consultation will be held in due course, followed by the publication of the invitation to tender and the stakeholder briefing document.

**Edward Argar:** I welcome that answer. In the context of my hon. Friend's work on the franchise, can he reassure me and my constituents that when the new franchise is awarded we will see new, modern rolling stock capable of operating on diesel and electric lines on that route, as well as later services and Sunday services operating on the popular local Ivanhoe line?

**Paul Maynard:** My hon. Friend is quite right to campaign on behalf of the Ivanhoe line and of his constituents. I hope that all Members of Parliament across the east midlands will contribute to the consultation and make it clear what they want to see in the new franchise. We look forward to reading their responses to the consultation.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): May I press the Minister again on that point? When the franchise is let, the HSTs are going to be phased out, having reached the end of their very long lives, and will need to be replaced. Will they be replaced with hybrid trains that will not have to be changed again when the midland main line is eventually electrified?

**Paul Maynard:** The hon. Gentleman will have to forgive me for making a somewhat elliptical response. We are continuing to look at the options for rolling stock on that route, working closely with the current franchisee and other bidders for the franchise. We hope to make an announcement in due course.

#### Kettering Rail Service

14. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): If he will use the forthcoming franchise renewal process for the midland main line to reinstate the half-hourly service northward from Kettering. [909587]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard):** As my hon. Friend has just heard, the train timetable options for the new east midlands franchise are still under development. Once it is complete and we have reviewed the responses to the public consultation, we will have a much better idea of what we want the bidders to deliver against. This will clearly include significant improvements, where possible to services to and from Kettering.

**Mr Hollobone:** This relates to the junction between the suburban service out of St Pancras to Corby and the midland main line service from St Pancras to Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield. The connectivity from Kettering northward was halved by the last Labour Government to one train per hour. Will the Minister make it one of his top priorities to reinstate the half-hourly service northward?

**Paul Maynard:** My hon. Friend and I have already discussed at some length the opportunities to improve services from Kettering, and everyone in the House knows what a doughty campaigner he is for his constituency. I am sure that I will be reminded time and again of these issues. A sixth path is being created on the route, and I look forward to seeing how the consultation recommends that it be best deployed. I am sure that Kettering will feature heavily in those submissions.

#### Bus Passenger Satisfaction

15. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in bus passenger satisfaction. [909588]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** The independent transport user watchdog, Transport Focus, produces an annual bus passenger satisfaction survey, and the autumn 2016 report was published last week. Overall bus passenger survey results scored 87%, up from 86% in the previous year.

**Liz McInnes:** I thank the Minister for that answer, but the *Manchester Evening News* recently ran its own survey of Greater Manchester residents, and in response to being asked which part of the transport network people most wanted to see improved, more than one in five identified poor bus services. Their complaints covered a whole range of issues including pricing, difficulty in making long journeys, the lack of night buses and general unreliability. What reassurance can the Minister give to Greater Manchester bus users that their complaints are being heard?

**Andrew Jones:** I would draw their attention to the Government's commitment to financing the bus service operators grant during the course of this Parliament, and to the Bus Services Bill, which received its Third Reading on Monday.

### Ship-to-Ship Transfers

16. **Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with Ministers of the Scottish Government on the devolution of powers on ship-to-ship transfers. [909589]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard):** Neither I nor the Minister responsible for this issue, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), has had any contact with the Scottish Government so far about the devolution of ship-to-ship transfers. However, the Minister of State wrote to Scottish Ministers earlier this month, acknowledging that the permitting arrangements for granting oil transfer licences for ship-to-ship transfers needed improvement. Our intention is to review the process around the application and assessment of licences in consultation with the devolved Administrations later this year.

**Steven Paterson:** I thank the Minister for that positive response. SNP colleagues, the Scottish Government and local communities are unconvinced by the safety of ship-to-ship oil transfers, particularly in the Cromarty firth, which is a European special protection area for bottlenose dolphins. I am pleased that the Minister is prepared to take up the case with Scottish Ministers, and I wonder whether he would consider devolving powers, which I think is appropriate, so that such decisions could be taken in Scotland.

**Paul Maynard:** We will certainly be consulting, as I just said. I understand that the original application from the Cromarty Firth port authority was not suitable and that it is looking to make a further application. If one is submitted, there will be a full consultation exercise, and the Scottish Government will be formally consulted.

### Litter Removal: Highways England

17. **Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that Highways England fulfils its statutory duty to remove litter. [909590]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** Litter collection is an important part of Highways England's duties. The Department recently asked Highways England to identify the worst spots on the network, and they were targeted for cleaning in early March. Highways England is responsible for cleaning litter only on motorways and the strategic road network—about 2.5% of the total road network—but it removes 200,000 sacks of litter from the roadside every year.

**Helen Whately:** Over 2,000 people responded to my recent rural residents survey in Faversham and Mid Kent, and one of the most common concerns was litter, especially on the A2 and the M2. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to ensure that Highways England fulfils its statutory duty to keep Kent's roads clean?

**Andrew Jones:** This issue is raised constantly by Ministers with Highways England. It has a duty to adhere to the code of practice on litter and refuse, which is part of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and we monitor that very carefully. My hon. Friend may be interested to know that 200 bags of litter were collected in March at the Marling Cross lorry park on the A2.

### European Transport and Safety Organisations

18. **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union on the UK's membership of the (a) European Aviation Safety Agency, (b) Single European Sky air traffic movement research project and (c) European common aviation area. [909592]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** I meet my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of Exiting the European Union on a regular basis to discuss the UK's exit. Ministers and officials in both Departments are working closely together to analyse the impact on the aviation industry after we leave the EU. We are carefully considering the implications for the UK's future participation in the EASA, the Single European Sky initiative and the European common aviation area.

**Margaret Ferrier:** I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. The Prime Minister flippantly said that we will be leaving EU institutions, but not Europe, as if that was a good thing. EASA plays a crucial role in excluding from European airspace any aircraft or company that has poor safety records, safeguarding the security and wellbeing of people right across the continent. Now that the negotiations are under way, the Government have a duty to tell passengers in the aviation sector whether the UK will be a participant, or are they happy to compromise our economy and passenger wellbeing to achieve their Little Britain hard Brexit?

**Mr Speaker:** I must say to the hon. Lady, in the friendliest possible spirit, that there is no danger of her suffering ill health as a result of excessive hurry.

**Chris Grayling:** That may be, Mr Speaker, but the hon. Lady does speak an awful lot of nonsense. We are not pursuing a Little Britain strategy; we are looking to build our role in the world, and aviation will be an important part of that, which is why we are seeking to expand Heathrow airport—subject to the consultation happening at the moment. We will of course bring forward our proposals in due course to this House and to this country. Many of these international bodies go far beyond the European Union, and we will carry on playing a role in many international bodies that go far beyond the European Union.

**Mr Speaker:** I call David Lammy. He is not here.

### Topical Questions

T1. [909596] **Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):**

Last year I set out a bold vision for a railway that puts passengers at the heart of everything it does. We have already heard today about our plans to deliver more capacity for commuters on Southeastern trains. Longer trains on the Southeastern network are a priority for this Government and an absolute priority for the new franchise. On Monday, I announced news for commuters on the south-western routes, with the new franchise announcement. With the experience of MTR, which delivers 99.9% reliability on the Hong Kong metro, the new franchisee will oversee a £1.2 billion investment, delivering more trains, faster journeys and more space. That will bring about a transformation for those passengers, which we are also looking to do for passengers around Manchester, Liverpool and Cardiff in addition to those around London.

**Helen Whately:** The recently published “Kent Corridors to M25 Route Strategy” identifies Brenley Corner in my constituency as a congestion and accident hotspot. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that his Department is considering significant investment in that junction?

**Chris Grayling:** We are in the process of digesting the route strategies provided by Highways England. The strategies set a blueprint for the projects we will need to deliver in the future to ease those points of congestion. I cannot at this early stage give a Government commitment to individual projects, but we are looking carefully at that study and others. We are seized of the need to make sure that we address such problems.

**Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab):** Three years ago the Law Commission recommended wholesale reform of taxi and private hire services, but the Government have not responded. Uber proliferates, but it pays no VAT and the country loses a fortune in avoided corporation tax. The former London Mayor was sat on when he tried to bring Uber to heel, despite the denials of his Bullingdon club friends. A No. 10 adviser, lo and behold, now runs Uber. Is it not time that we saw some urgent action from the Secretary of State on the taxi and private hire industry and, while he is at it, on the way in which his party runs its chumocracy?

**Chris Grayling:** Given the current state of the Labour party, I am not sure I would go down that road if I were the hon. Gentleman. We are currently looking at what is the best approach to the future regulation and structure of our taxi and private hire services. I see it as a particular priority to ensure public safety. We and local authorities are doing that work, and we want to deliver the right framework for it. Our job is to ensure that we have the right choice for consumers and the right options in our marketplace, but we also want to protect those parts of our industry, such as London black cabs, that are a national institution and that none of us would wish to see disappear. This is about a measured approach. Of course, some of the most evocative issues lie in the hands of the London Mayor and not of this Government.

**Andy McDonald:** The Uber scandal is not the only issue of concern right at the heart of this Tory Government, given their perpetual revolving-door employment strategy. While we await a formal response on how a senior Department for Transport civil servant awarded a rail

franchise while part-owning the consultancy advising the successful bidder, yesterday it was announced that HS2 had dropped the £170 million engineering contract with CH2M. The chief executive officer of HS2, now a full-time appointment, came from CH2M and, more than that, HS2's former chief of staff worked on the engineering company's bid for the project. Now the director general of HS2 has resigned this very morning. I do not agree with the TaxPayers Alliance when it says that it does not pass “the smell test,” because in fact it stinks to high heaven. Will the Secretary of State order an immediate independent inquiry into these goings on? His silence on the issue speaks volumes.

**Chris Grayling:** Let us be clear about this. First, on the appointment to the chief executive role of HS2, I want the best person for that job, and we will always seek to recruit the best person for that job. I will also ensure that if there are any questions about the recruitment process, they are addressed and investigated carefully by the civil service to reassure me that we can make an appointment without any concern. That we did, and I have absolute confidence in both that recruitment process and in that new chief executive. Yesterday's announcement that CH2M HILL has decided to withdraw from the contract after an issue—not a massive one—emerged in the contracting process is the right one. I am grateful to the company for doing that, as it is the right thing to do. I want to make sure that Government contracting processes recruit the right expertise, corporate or individual, but are also robust in making sure that, if things are not done right, it is addressed. That is what has happened.

T3. [909598] **Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con):** Have the Government given any consideration to Sir John Armitt's proposal for a UK national investment bank, which would be handy, for example, in supporting projects such as the bridge from Sharpness to Lydney in my constituency?

**Chris Grayling:** I know about my hon. Friend's interest in that potential scheme. Sir John is an important adviser to the Government in a number of different roles, and I respect and value his expertise. There is a substantial amount of private finance out there looking for projects to develop, and we always welcome serious proposals to improve our infrastructure with the support of private finance.

T2. [909597] **Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab):** The Minister may have inadvertently missed part of the earlier question from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), so will he tell us when Transport for the North will be put on a statutory basis?

**Chris Grayling:** I have told the board of Transport for the North that I am happy that that should happen, and it will happen very shortly.

T4. [909599] **Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con):** With the tourism season fast approaching, does my right hon. Friend agree that electrification of the Great Western rail line is vital for bringing more tourists to Wales and to beautiful Brecon and Radnorshire in particular? Will he give us an update on the Government's progress in this area?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard):** My hon. Friend rightly identifies that we need to improve the service on the Great Western main line, particularly to Cardiff, Swansea and beyond. We are looking at all the options for how we can deliver passenger benefits. A re-franchising process will commence shortly and I look forward to hearing all the ideas that hon. Members on both sides of the House have.

T5. [909603] **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): The Davies commission was explicit that when the third runway for Heathrow is constructed the Lakeside Energy from Waste plant will need to be replaced, yet the Minister's national policy statement on Heathrow simply says that its impact on the waste stream will require assessment. As it will be difficult to find an appropriate place in that area to situate that important facility for getting rid of landfill, will he change the national policy statement to make sure that the commitment to replace that plant is maintained?

**Chris Grayling:** I am well aware of this issue, and of course this is a consultation on a draft national policy statement. The ultimate decisions about that plant will be a matter for both its owners and Heathrow airport, and both will have to be satisfied that they are putting appropriate arrangements in place in order for things to go ahead. I take the right hon. Lady's comments today as a representation to that consultation.

T6. [909604] **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): This Sunday is an historic day, as Ilkeston finally reconnects with the rest of the rail network after an interval of more than 50 years. This would not have been possible without a £6.6 million new stations fund grant provided by this Government. Does the Minister agree that it is money well spent? Will he encourage people to use the train to visit Ilkeston and bring a much needed boost to the local economy?

**Paul Maynard:** I can only vouch for the anticipation in the Maynard household about this coming Sunday, but I am also glad to hear that Ilkeston is looking forward to utilising its new train services. I am heartened by the number of Members on both sides of the House who have approached me regarding potential new stations on their local rail network. This is a very welcome change from the era when the network was contracting, with people now seeing rail stations as opportunities for growth, both economically and in terms of population. I really welcome that progress.

T7. [909605] **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I was pleased at the announcement in the autumn statement of the inclusion of the expressway to relieve congestion between the M60 and M62, but I understand that that is not being finalised until 2019. In the meantime, we need investment in this road urgently to facilitate major housing development at New Carrington in my constituency. The roads Minister, the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), kindly met me before the autumn statement and gave his support for this project. Would it be possible to arrange a further meeting to see what we can do to bring this project forward as soon as possible?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** As my right hon. Friend is not here, I am very happy to put dates in his diary for him, and I am sure that such a meeting will be achievable.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Minister of State may well be trapped in the congestion around Newark on the A1 on his way back home to Lincolnshire. As you will have seen, Mr Speaker, according to the Office for National Statistics my constituents are the happiest of any in the country, but they are kept awake at night by the spate of terrible accidents on the A1 between Grantham and Retford. In the Minister of State's absence, will the Secretary of State commission a full review of safety along the A1, particularly at Newark and through this dangerous stretch between Grantham and Retford?

**Mr Speaker:** I can tell the House that the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) wrote to me to explain that he would be absent today, and I detected in his letter a very considerable sense of regret that he would be outside this country rather than in this Chamber. Personally, I have found it difficult, but we have done our best to manage without him today, and we look forward to the right hon. Gentleman's return at a subsequent session.

**Andrew Jones:** My right hon. Friend is actually in China, rather than delayed around Newark. I am happy to look into the issues raised by my hon. Friend.

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Anyone who has ever driven between the great cities of Sheffield and Manchester will have undoubtedly been caught in congestion in the Longdendale area of my constituency. The first public inquiry into a solution took place in 1967, and in the seven years I have been the MP for the area I have raised the matter repeatedly, so I am pleased that the consultation on a bypass route is now open as part of the trans-Pennine upgrade programme. Will the Minister join my constituents in getting involved and getting the route sorted?

**Andrew Jones:** I have met the hon. Gentleman and been to see the particular problems in his area, and I agree that they are acute. I urge everybody to participate in the consultation. Let us try to get the problem finally solved.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): With billions of pounds of taxpayers' money at stake, after last night's announcement on HS2, confidence in the transparency and decision-making processes in HS2 Ltd and CH2M have been called seriously into question. First, will the Secretary of State tell us whether CH2M jumped, or was it pushed? For a company to give up a £170 million contract is enormous news. Secondly, will he give the House an undertaking that no further contracts will be issued to other bidders—such as Bechtel or Mace—further down the line before there has been a full inquiry into the decision-making processes in HS2 Ltd and CH2M?

**Chris Grayling:** I do not normally like to differ with my right hon. Friend, but I am very clear on this: CH2M has done the right thing in taking a step back,

having identified a problem that would have called into question whether it could and should operate the contract. It was not some massive misdemeanour, but an error in process that has caused CH2M to take a step back. It is now for the board of HS2 Ltd and its independent directors to make sure that they do the right thing in taking the contract forward. From the country's point of view, it is important that we get on with the job. We will have all the necessary governance in place as we go through the process of replacing CH2M, but we do need to get on with the job.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): My constituents have endured all the disruption and chaos while the Thameslink work is going on at London Bridge, and they did so in the expectation that they were going to get an improved service. They are now incandescent with rage, because the new franchise proposes cutting services to Charing Cross and Victoria and reducing off-peak services. This is unacceptable. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me to discuss the matter?

**Chris Grayling:** The whole point is that it is a consultation. We have not taken any decisions, and we do not even have an intent. It is about asking people, "There are ways of running this railway that could potentially make it more reliable. What do you think?" If the answer is, "We don't want you to do that," we will listen. My focus for the hon. Gentleman's local passengers and for those local railways is to deliver more capacity, the best possible reliability and, in particular, longer trains. All those things are firmly on our agenda.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): The CH2M issue is a bigger problem for my constituents. It is welcome that instead of the proposed viaducts in my area there is now going to be a tunnel, but other changes and mitigation are still required. My constituents want to know whether the CH2M issue delays any potential changes or decisions that will affect their lives.

**Andrew Jones:** No, it does not.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): On Saturday, I am going to speak at the Newcastle Cycling Campaign annual general meeting. What can I tell the people there about what the Government are doing to bring the benefits of cycling to everyone, when studies show that the average cyclist is male, white, middle class, under-40 and in Lycra?

**Andrew Jones:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right that cycling needs to broaden its range. Part of the plan we will announce shortly will be to help local authorities to set up their own local cycling and walking investment plans, which will include broadening the range of potential cyclists.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): Last Friday, the A34 between Stafford and Stoke was at gridlock for several hours because of the closure of the M6, disrupting not only my constituents' journeys but the entire north-south commerce. What plans do the Government have to ensure that, when HS2 comes through Staffordshire and cuts across all the main arterial routes, we do not have repeats of this kind of congestion?

**Andrew Jones:** The planning for the construction phase of HS2 is obviously a critical part of delivering this project. As a part of that, there is local engagement between HS2, Highways England and the local highways authorities. My hon. Friend is right to highlight the potential risk, but all the conversations and the collaborations are taking place to make sure that that does not happen.

**Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): Last November, the rail Minister sat in a meeting with 15 colleagues, including three Cabinet Ministers, and promised additional carriages for the Southeastern network. This cannot be kicked into the long grass or delayed until the new franchise. It needs to happen now. When, and how many?

**Paul Maynard:** This is not being delayed until the new franchise. It will happen very soon. As I explained in my answer to an earlier question, we have received a proposal for new carriages from Southeastern. We have only had it a week and we are looking at it now. We want things to happen as soon as possible.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): The long-promised extension of the Metropolitan line from Croxley Green is running into financial difficulties. What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the project, and what discussions have taken place with the Mayor of London and Transport for London?

**Chris Grayling:** The basis of this project was that Hertfordshire County Council and the Department for Transport provided money to TfL for the extension work. The agreement was that TfL would meet any costs above the agreed price, and would retain any funds below the agreed price. That agreement was reached a couple of years ago. Quite a chunk of money has already been spent, including on the acquisition of a train. It is for the Mayor to complete this project, and I have asked him for his plans to do so.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware that he cannot easily brush off what has happened with that fiasco at HS2 and the resignation? Will he take into account the fact that now is the time—very opportune—to get rid of that stupid idea of having two HS2 lines running through the county of Derbyshire? The one called the Newton spur will lose us 1,000 jobs in the area and knock down 32 houses. It is called the "dawdle through Derbyshire". Get rid of it.

**Andrew Jones:** I always enjoy the hon. Gentleman's questions, but this is not a dawdle through Derbyshire. What we are looking at here is a consultation on how we get the routes through South Yorkshire. It is fair to say that there is no consensus on this matter, and I have met him and colleagues from South Yorkshire. We will be responding to that consultation later this year. The point is how we maximise the opportunities for South Yorkshire and the east midlands from HS2. These opportunities will be significant. He should get behind the project and work with us to mitigate the impact, but recognise also the positive economic impact that HS2 will have on our country.

**Mr Speaker:** I am extremely grateful to the Minister, but we are running late. I want to hear two more questions.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): Well, the people of Broxtowe are looking forward to HS2 coming to Toton Sidings, where we will have the east midlands hub, which will bring considerable benefit. May I thank the Minister for his visit to Trowell, for his interest and for the conversations with the Secretary of State, because in Trowell there is opposition, not necessarily to the route—although there is some concern—but to a 60 foot viaduct that will deliver HS2? Will the Minister be so good as to confirm that he will do everything that he can to ensure that all options are considered to deliver HS2 through the east midlands and through the village of Trowell?

**Andrew Jones:** I much enjoyed my visit to Toton and Trowell to see the economic impact that HS2 will have there, to talk to businesses and to look at the implications for local communities. I will of course be very happy to

take every action we can to ensure that this works for everybody, including the mitigation that my right hon. Friend suggests. We want to minimise the impact and maximise the benefits from this exciting project.

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): Back in a 2015 debate, the Under-Secretary said that he recognised that the 40-year rolling stock was coming to the end of its life and that he was looking towards having a new fleet. This was in relation to our Tyne and Wear metro. As we are now two years on, can he say when he is going to invest in our metro?

**Paul Maynard:** We are in discussion with Nexus at the moment on how we go about this. I have met representatives from the company and we are hoping to make it happen very soon.

## Speaker's Statement

10.43 am

**Mr Speaker:** On 8 September 2016, I announced to the House the launch of a new initiative, the Speaker's Democracy Award. The intention of the award is to allow this House to recognise and celebrate individuals who have championed democracy, or brought about social change in an emerging democracy.

A number of excellent nominations were received from hon. and right hon. Members and, following a meeting of the judging committee, I am pleased to be able to tell the House that Marvi Memon MP is the winner in this, the inaugural year of the award.

Ms Memon is a Pakistani politician who is the current chairperson of the Government of Pakistan's Benazir Income Support Programme—the BISP—and an elected Member of the National Assembly of Pakistan. Ms Memon has fronted a substantial and impressive programme of empowerment through her BISP work by giving over 5.3 million of the poorest women a modest stipend for essentials such as food, clothing, healthcare and education. This has done a great deal in terms of combating poverty and child malnutrition in rural areas. Moreover, the programme also facilitates the participation of women in Pakistani electoral politics by encouraging them to obtain identity cards which allow them to vote.

I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in warmly congratulating Ms Memon. I am hoping to be able to welcome her to this House to collect the award at a future date.

I am grateful to the hon. Members for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh), and to the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), for agreeing to serve on the judging panel. I am similarly grateful to the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), who nominated Ms Memon, as well as to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who initially suggested to me the idea for this award.

## Business of the House

10.46 am

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington):** The business for the first week back after the Easter recess will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 APRIL—The House will not be sitting.

TUESDAY 18 APRIL—Second Reading of the Finance (No. 2) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 19 APRIL—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Technical and Further Education Bill, followed by motions relating to the Higher Education (Higher Amount) (England) Regulations 2016 and the Higher Education (Basic Amount) (England) Regulations 2016, followed by a motion on section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, followed by a motion relating to the Social Security (Personal Independence Payment) Regulations 2017.

THURSDAY 20 APRIL—Statement on the publication of the 12th report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee on lessons learned from the EU referendum, followed by a statement on the publication of the 12th report of the Justice Committee on prison reform, governor empowerment and prison performance, followed by a debate on a motion relating to state pensions payable to recipients outside of the UK, followed by a general debate on research and development on tackling infectious diseases. The subjects for those debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 21 APRIL—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 24 April will include:

MONDAY 24 APRIL—Consideration in Committee of the Finance (No. 2) Bill (day 1).

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 20 and 24 April will be as follows:

THURSDAY 20 APRIL—Debate on the third report of the Transport Committee, Volkswagen emissions scandal and vehicle type approval, followed by a debate on the European arrest warrant.

MONDAY 24 APRIL—Debate on an e-petition relating to GCSE English literature exams.

**Valerie Vaz:** May I add my congratulations to the inaugural winner of your prize, Mr Speaker, which is very welcome? We have given refuge to Malala Yousafzai, who has also made an amazing contribution. We support everything that women in Pakistan do to promote democracy.

May I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business? I am sure that he is also getting concerned that our Gracious Sovereign might not be aware of the date on which she is due to give her speech. Is he checking whether she is actually free on the various dates being suggested for the Queen's Speech? Obviously I want to ask about the date of Prorogation as well. If the Leader could indicate when in May we are likely to rise, that would be helpful.



Eight right hon and hon. Members shared a birthday on 26 March—it was a significant day—including the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) and the youngest Member, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black). We wish them a belated happy birthday. But PC Keith Palmer, who often stood around here and was a Charlton Athletic supporter, Aysha Frade, Kurt Cochran and Leslie Rhodes will not be able to celebrate their birthdays again. Mr Speaker, I thank your chaplain, Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin, and Canon Pat Browne, the Roman Catholic priest for the House of Commons, for the services they held in the chapel of St Mary Undercroft last Thursday. They have always supported us when we need them.

It is a convention that when a statutory instrument is prayed against, the Government provide time for a debate, so I want to raise the Opposition's concerns that no time was provided to debate the regulations relating to personal independence payments and to tuition fees. Will the Leader of the House confirm that in future the convention will be honoured so that the Opposition will not have to use Standing Order No. 24 to get an emergency debate? That is extremely important because there will be a plethora of statutory instruments as we leave the EU and we do not want to return to powers being exercised by an absolute monarch when Parliament is sovereign and a democratic institution.

Not all of last Wednesday's business was carried over, so will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on exiting the European Union and global trade? The House would like to know what the Department for International Trade has been doing during the past nine months. The Prime Minister said yesterday that everyone has been busy, but as yet the Secretary of State has not come to the House to tell us what global trade deals are in the offing.

Yesterday was a significant day in our island's story, and we in Her Majesty's Opposition want a strong and collaborative future relationship with the EU, the exact same benefits as we currently have as members of the single market and the customs union, and the fair management of migration in the interests of the economy and communities. We want to defend rights and protections, and prevent a race to the bottom. We want to protect national security and our capacity to tackle cross-border crime and terrorism, and to ensure that any negotiation delivers for all regions and nations of the UK. That is a position of certainty, not the fall-back position of "no deal...is better than a bad deal",

which should not enter the Government's vocabulary.

Is the Leader of the House aware that the CBI says that businesses would experience serious disruption if no new trading relationship is agreed and they are forced to trade with the EU under World Trade Organisation rules? No deal should not be an option. Manufacturers in the west midlands have asked, "Do I need to change my supply chain? Will I have to enforce

new rules?" Those are just two of their questions, so may we have a statement on how the Government will answer such questions from business?

Could we have a debate on the National Audit Office's report "Capability in the civil service", which was published on 24 March? It says that the Government face ever-increasing challenges in providing public services. Continuing budgetary restraints are putting pressure on Departments, which are making important reforms with fewer staff and smaller budgets. There is a skills gap that cannot be filled by the private sector. The report says that one in four senior posts are unfilled. What will the Government do to address that skills shortage as we leave the EU?

When will NHS staff receive a pay increase of more than 1%, given that half the Cabinet have said that £350 million a week is now available for the NHS? Will the Leader of the House also set out how the Prime Minister will report back to the UK on the negotiations? Our children and grandchildren, 75% of whom voted to remain, feel hurt and betrayed, because they know that the EU is about equality, peace, security, collaboration, quality of life, the air we breathe, tourism, consumer rights and human rights. We must not betray them.

And so to R and R—rock and roll, and the recent death of the creator of that genre, Chuck Berry. It is as though he wrote some of his songs just for the Government. We have "Maybellene, why can't you be true?" and "Reelin' and Rockin'"—the Government have made some U-turns on national insurance contributions, and there has been disquiet about school funding and special deals with Tory councils—and there is one for you, Mr Speaker: "Johnny B. Goode".

I want to thank all our civil servants for the work that they have done while we have been part of the EU. I thank all the ambassadors and Ministers for Europe, including the Leader of the House. As he was such an outstanding Minister for Europe, I hope that the goodwill will come back when we finish our negotiations.

I also want to say goodbye and thank you to David Beamish, the Clerk of the Parliaments, who, sadly, is retiring after 42 years. He is a great public servant who has done a fantastic job, and he worked closely with our own Clerk. I also thank Russell Tatam, an unsung back-room hero who has worked for both Labour and Conservative Opposition Whips. He has kept us all going. We wish him well in his new post at the Department of Health, and we hope that he can sort that out, too. Finally, may I once again thank everyone for everything that they have done in the last week, and wish everyone connected with the House a very happy and peaceful Easter?

**Mr Lidington:** First, I join the hon. Lady in expressing thanks to your chaplain, Mr Speaker, and to the Roman Catholic chaplain for the work that they have done in the past week, which I am sure they will continue to do. I also join her in paying tribute to David Beamish, who has served the House of Lords, and Parliament as a whole, with great distinction throughout his career. I would add to that the name of Glenn McKee, one of our own Clerks, who is retiring after more than 30 years of service to this House. We put on record our thanks and appreciation to him for that record of service.

[Mr Lidington]

The date of the Queen's Speech will be announced as soon as possible. As the hon. Lady knows, the exact date of Prorogation will depend, as it does every year and under every Government, on the progress of business.

I turn to some of the other issues that the hon. Lady raised. The Government have delivered on the convention, and slots have been provided for debates on the prayers against the statutory instruments concerning tuition fees and the personal independence payment. The Opposition will get their opportunity to debate those after the recess. The Government will act, as all Governments do, on the basis of what Parliament decides.

The hon. Lady made a broader point about secondary legislation in the context of forthcoming European legislation. I am sure that questions will be put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union later today, and there will be ample opportunity to debate the matter during proceedings on the repeal Bill in the next Session, but it is a fact that Ministers may exercise delegated legislative powers through secondary legislation only if those powers have been expressly conferred on them by an Act of Parliament. Authority for the use of delegated legislation will have to be approved, after a full parliamentary process in both Houses, before such legislation reaches the statute book.

The hon. Lady asked about international trade. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade has hardly been invisible. He is doing the job that the Prime Minister appointed him to do, which is to maximise the opportunities for jobs and investment in the United Kingdom by drumming up support for trade and investment all around the world. He has been in the Chamber regularly, in the slots allotted to the Department for International Trade, to answer questions from Members on both sides of the House. I would add that the hon. Lady's description of what she wanted out of the EU negotiations sounded very much like a paraphrase of the Prime Minister's letter to President Tusk yesterday, which I welcome. If there is an outbreak of common sense and the Opposition take a more consensual approach by supporting the Prime Minister as a response to her call for national unity at this time, I would very much welcome that.

I do not think that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister could possibly have been clearer—either in her letter, or during the nearly three hours that she spent making her statement and answering questions at the Dispatch Box yesterday—that her objective is a comprehensive deal with our friends and allies in the European Union that makes possible a deep and special partnership between ourselves and the 27 countries of the EU after we have left, because it will remain an essential national interest of the United Kingdom that there is stability and prosperity right across Europe. While we will implement the decision that the British people took in the referendum last year, it is right that we should strive for a new form of co-operative agreement with countries that will continue to be our friends, allies and partners on so many different areas of policy.

The hon. Lady asked about the national health service and the capacity of staff to deal with what will be demanding reforms—I think that the chief executive has said that—but I would point her to the track record of NHS managers and clinicians in delivering effective

reforms. One of the things I find so striking about the national health service is that there can be a severe disparity of performance between different trusts or hospitals in various parts of the country. One of the objectives that NHS England wants to secure is to make certain that best practice—the successes of the most innovative parts of the NHS—can be disseminated and put in place more widely.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): May we have a debate on protecting and valuing the Church of England estate? We learned this week that the Church of England's consistory court and the chancellor of the diocese of Peterborough have given the green light to ripping out the interior of the grade I listed, 13th-century St Botolph's church in Longthorpe, Peterborough. That will include replacing the altar with a self-standing altar and the pulpit with a modern lectern, and ripping out all the pews. Is it any wonder that the Church of England is losing the support of its parishioners when it so grievously fails to protect its own architectural heritage?

**Mr Lidington**: I clearly do not know any details of the parish church to which my hon. Friend refers. There is sometimes a difficult balance to be struck between what a congregation wants to meet the needs of worship and the historic fabric of a church. I would hope that such matters are always approached with proper sensitivity and high regard for our architectural and design heritage, and that the views of the local community, and particularly of the church congregation, are fully taken into account.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I join in the thanks and tributes to the chaplains of the House for their exemplary work last week. I congratulate Marvi Memon on winning your inaugural award, Mr Speaker—thank you for such a fantastic idea. I also thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for after the recess.

It has certainly been another one of those weeks, hasn't it? What an historic week. This is therefore not the time for meaningless or provocative soundbites, but later we will continue with this pace when we see the White Paper on this shabby repeal Bill, as this Parliament attempts to repatriate almost 20,000 pieces of European legislation in what will be the greatest transfer of powers from Brussels to this Government. For a Parliament that has so jealously guarded its sovereignty throughout the centuries, how cavalier the Government have been about leaving the European Union. Parliament will need to have a look at this. These powers are not so much Henry VIII; it is more like a bespoke new Tessa the first.

One thing that we need to hear from the Leader of the House is a commitment that the shabby repeal Bill will not be subject to the English votes for English laws procedure. I say to him: just do not seek a certification. It is far too complicated and cross-jurisdictional for that, so will he rule it out today? This morning, without any fanfare or flourish, we got the Leader of the House's review into the operation of EVEL. The dramatic conclusion he comes to is that it is working perfectly. In fact, it is an absolute and total embarrassment to this House. The bells go off, we suspend our business, we go into Committee, we come out of Committee, and not a word is said. It is not so much the court of Henry VIII; it is the court of Byzantium when we are dealing with issues such as this.

Lastly, we still have not had any sort of statement or response from the Government on the historic vote that was held in the Scottish Parliament on Tuesday. That seems to be consistent with the way this Government treat Scotland. We know that there is no such thing as a common UK approach to leaving the European Union, and this Government could not have gone further out their way to antagonise Scotland over their plans to leave the European Union. Today, when we look at the great repeal Bill and think of Henry VIII, on the Scottish National party Benches we will be thinking of Robert the Bruce.

**Mr Lidington:** For a moment at the start of that question I thought the hon. Gentleman was going to become part of the new consensus that the Prime Minister is seeking to build. I hold out some modicum of hope for him, but I have to confess, after the rest of the tirade, not all that much.

I seriously encourage the hon. Gentleman and members of his party to read the White Paper before they make a judgment on it. When they have seen it, they will see that the case for certain powers as regards delegated legislation is made in detail. The argument is set out very clearly, as is the Government's position that it will be necessary for the exercise of any such specific delegated legislative powers to be subject to conditions and restraints to ensure that they cannot be abused and are used only for the purpose for which they are created. I am sure that other Scottish National party Members will want to put questions to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union this afternoon, but the Government will be proposing a number of very important safeguards on the exercise of those powers.

On the hon. Gentleman's question about the application of the English votes procedures to the repeal Bill, I have to repeat what I have said to him in previous exchanges. As we both know, the English votes procedures can be exercised only in a case where an issue to be determined is both devolved to the Scottish Parliament and, in relation to legislation before this House, applies to England only or to England and Wales only. The chances of that happening in the repeal Bill are very slim indeed, given that it addresses the application of the European treaties to this country and, as international agreements, they are reserved matters under the terms of the Scotland Act 1998. I cannot at this stage rule out some hypothetical piece of future secondary legislation, but it is not right to exaggerate fears of something that is very unlikely to come about.

The hon. Gentleman then asked me about the First Minister's call for another referendum—[HON. MEMBERS: "The Scottish Parliament's."]—and the vote by the SNP and the Greens in the Scottish Parliament for a second referendum. The Prime Minister was very clear yesterday that we are embarking on a major change of policy in response to what the people of the United Kingdom as a whole have decided, and that now is not the time for a further referendum on a matter that all sides agreed would be settled in the 2014 referendum. I simply remind the hon. Gentleman of what the First Minister of Scotland said when launching her party's manifesto for the Scottish elections in April last year:

"Setting the date for a referendum before a majority of the Scottish people have been persuaded that independence—and therefore another referendum—is the best future for our country

is the wrong way round...If we don't succeed, we will have no right to propose another referendum."

I support what the First Minister of Scotland said on that occasion.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. On my reckoning, a further 44 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. As per usual I am keen to accommodate all would-be contributors, but I remind the House that there is a very important statement to follow that is likely to be well-subscribed, and thereafter two important debates under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee. There is, therefore, a premium on time and brevity.

**Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I have been contacted by a growing number of residents who are concerned about the influx of Travellers and the number of illegal encampments in my constituency. There have been major reports of intimidation and threatening behaviour. I am well aware that there are problems in other parts of the country, but it is disappointing that local authorities and the police lack either capacity or willingness to use their powers to deal with them. Some of the problems relate to antisocial behaviour and a disregard for the local community. Will the Government make time for a debate on the obligations of local authorities and police, and on how the current law can be strengthened for the good of our communities?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend may have an opportunity to press this issue with Ministers at Communities and Local Government questions on 24 April. My view is clear: the powers she describes exist for a reason and I would hope that both local authorities and police forces use them.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for advertising the forthcoming Backbench Business. I also thank him and his staff for arranging to move back by two hours the debates scheduled for Westminster Hall on 18 April and 2 May to allow Members travelling from their constituencies to get here in time for them. One additional piece of news is that we have determined that on Tuesday 25 April at 9.30 am there will be a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall on post office closures, and on Tuesday 2 May at 11.30 am there will be a debate on voter ID and electoral fraud, also in Westminster Hall.

I am going to get my begging bowl out, Mr Speaker, not on behalf of my constituents—I know Government Members always accuse Members from the north-east of England of having a begging bowl—but on behalf of Back-Bench Members. In the week after the recess, on 20 April, we will have our 27th allotted day—actually, our 27th and one quarter allotted day—of Backbench Business, which is all that is allowed in this parliamentary Session. With my begging bowl out on behalf of Back-Bench Members, I ask the Leader of the House to please send any spare time our way. We already have a waiting list of debates.

I would just like to make a point of clarification. On Tuesday, during the Backbench Business debate on Yemen, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), on a point of order, asked whether it would be possible to use up the full

[*Ian Mearns*]

allocation of time—up to 30 minutes before the House was due to rise. Madam Deputy Speaker responded by saying:

“The House decided on the timetable.”

That was true, but she then went on to say:

“The Backbench Business Committee gave 90 minutes for this debate, and I am powerless to change that.”—[*Official Report*, 28 March 2017; Vol. 624, c. 206-7.]

Mr Speaker, the Backbench Business Committee asked for a minimum of 90 minutes of protected time for the debate, but the Order Paper allowed a maximum of 90 minutes. The Backbench Business Committee determines the subject matter of debates. The allocation of time, and the way in which the Order Paper reflects that allocation, is not within its remit.

**Mr Lidington:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his words of thanks. I will always do my best to accommodate what he and his Committee want, but, as I am sure he will appreciate, spare hours in the parliamentary timetable are a rare commodity.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): In March 2014, the only son of Joanne and Robert Wark, my 19-year-old constituent Callum Wark, was killed by an HGV driver who was three times over the legal drink-drive limit. On 29 October 2014, I held an Adjournment debate in the Chamber in which I asked the then Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), to conduct a sentencing review so that those who caused death by drink-driving would face a manslaughter charge rather than the current charge, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years. Callum’s killer was sentenced to just seven years, and will serve only three and half before returning to his home country of Bulgaria, where he will be free to drive unrestricted once again. May we have a statement from a Justice Minister, updating the House on the progress of the review?

**Mr Lidington:** Let me first express my heartfelt sympathy to Callum’s family. Three years on, they will still be grieving and feeling acute and inconsolable loss.

The Ministry of Justice consultation to which my hon. Friend has referred ran until February this year, and received more than 9,000 responses. The Government are considering those responses, and Ministers will publish a written response in due course.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): May we have a debate in Government time on the conduct of Virgin Care in our national health service? It has emerged that Virgin Care is suing the NHS after a contract to provide children’s care in Surrey was given to a non-profit provider, and apparently it is seeking a massive payout from the taxpayer. Does the Leader of the House agree that that is appalling behaviour, and will he ask the Health Secretary to make a statement?

**Mr Lidington:** If a case is the subject of legal action, neither I nor any other Minister can comment on the specifics, but if the hon. Lady will give me the details of this case, I will ask the Secretary of State or one of his team to write to her.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): Yesterday, which was a busy day, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced a consultation on the future of Channel 4. Please may we have a debate on its future direction, and does the Leader of the House agree that given the success of the BBC’s relocation to Salford, Channel 4 should perhaps consider coming to Yorkshire?

**Mr Lidington:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is seeking the broadest possible range of views and evidence to inform the Government’s assessment of the location of Channel 4. I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to be a formidable and persuasive advocate for Yorkshire.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): When can we discuss early-day motion 1131?

[*That this House is appalled at the runaway multi-billion pound waste of nuclear costs for a power source that promised to deliver electricity that would be too cheap to meter; notes that Hinkley Point’s estimated cost of £6 billion in 2008 leapt to £24 billion and is now estimated to soar to £37 billion, while the cost of nuclear decommissioning, estimated at £55 billion in 2005, is now set at £117 billion and rising; and condemns this and previous Governments’ gullible infatuation with the myth of cheap nuclear power that has created a massive burden of debt for the nation that will impoverish public spending for decades.*]

When can we discuss the staggering cost of decommissioning nuclear sites—£117 billion—and the leap in the price of Hinkley Point from £6 billion to £37 billion? Why were successive Governments infatuated by the myth of a cheap source of nuclear power which promised to deliver electricity that was too cheap to meter, given that what has been delivered is a £170 billion bill for taxpayers that will impoverish Governments and restrict their spending for decades?

**Mr Lidington:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy responded to an urgent question about nuclear decommissioning on Monday, but I advise the hon. Gentleman to seek an opportunity to initiate one of the longer Westminster Hall debates.

The Government’s view is that nuclear energy should be part of a broad mix of energy sources to ensure that we have a secure energy supply and can rely increasingly on sources that do not add to the problem of climate change.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): May we have an urgent debate on Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, which is illegally proposing to close its accident and emergency ward in the autumn, thus endangering up to 40 children a week? Does the Leader of the House agree that such moves should be subject to consultation with the public, local authorities and local Members of Parliament? There has been no such consultation, yet the proposal is going ahead.

**Mr Lidington:** I am concerned to hear about that, and I will draw it to the attention of the Secretary of State for Health. A significant change in the configuration of NHS services in any area ought to be the subject of public consultation. There is, of course a power for the

relevant committee of the local authority to ask the Secretary of State to call in such decisions and review them. I encourage my hon. Friend to pursue the issue with Health Ministers, but, as I have said, I will draw his comments to the Secretary of State's attention.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate on the state of local roads? In Nottinghamshire, which includes my constituency of Gedling, there is a £319 million backlog in respect of Nottinghamshire County Council being able to deal with those roads. My constituents and the people of Nottinghamshire are fed up with driving along roads that are crumbling and full of potholes, and it is about time the Government sorted it out.

**Mr Lidington:** It was precisely to address infrastructure problems that the Chancellor of the Exchequer found £23 billion of additional spending in the autumn statement. As the Transport Secretary said during Question Time earlier today, the Government have allocated very significant sums of money to support local highways authorities to deal with potholes and other local road repairs. But the reality, which any responsible Government must accept, is that resources are finite and the country and the Government have to live within their means. We still have a significant deficit in our public finances, and the responsible approach is to live within our means.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Will the Leader of the House grant an urgent debate on conflicts of interest? During that debate we could probably look, for example, at the relationship between CH2M, a High Speed 2 contractor, and HS2, currently in the constituency of the Leader of the House, your constituency, Mr Speaker, and my constituency, because that relationship cannot be a good one as CH2M must be facing some financial difficulties having given up a £170 million contract. We could also consider whether HS2 can explain what it is going to do with Bechtel and Mace, the other bidders—whether the contract will be started from scratch, or we are going to have to take its word that there was no conflict of interest if one of them is appointed. We could also clarify the roles of individuals such as Chris Reynolds and the raft of CH2M secondees working in HS2, and also—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps we could also look at the role of the chairman of the National Infrastructure Commission. [*Interruption.*] The NIC has to provide impartial expert advice to the Government and operate independently—

**Mr Speaker:** We are immensely grateful—

**Mrs Gillan:** Yet the NIC chairman serves as a director—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. That is enough; I have been more than fair to the right hon. Lady. I know that she is seeking a debate, but a number of Members are already muttering that the debate has now happened. I am sure she will get the debate, but we do have to make progress; I hope she will forgive me.

**Mr Lidington:** I did catch some of the Transport Secretary's response to my right hon. Friend a little earlier today. There are strict rules around any kind of public sector procurement and we expect all proper procedures to be followed, including the rules to provide safeguards against conflicts of interest.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Having received a response from the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), regarding over 40 of my constituents who allege they have been mis-sold solar panels by a Government-approved green deal provider, I am not entirely confident that his Department appreciates the magnitude of the problem and just how many people across Britain are suffering financial hardship because of this botched Government energy efficiency scheme. May we please have a debate in Government time to discuss this urgent, important and potentially far-reaching issue?

**Mr Lidington:** I have not seen the letter from the Minister to which the Lady refers. If she feels there has been maladministration by a Government Department, there may be a case for reference to the parliamentary ombudsman to investigate that. That is one option she might want to explore.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Will the Leader of the House schedule his own statement on your excellent award, Mr Speaker? That would give him the opportunity to announce the critical role of the Department for International Development in the Benazir Bhutto scheme, and explain to the House that this scheme uses the latest biometric technology to deliver money electronically to the world's poorest women, thereby absolutely transforming their status by providing them with a bank account.

**Mr Lidington:** Without tempting your wrath by giving a statement, Mr Speaker, I am very happy to applaud the Speaker's Democracy Award, and the nomination that was successful today. I also pay tribute to the role of the Department for International Development in this. As my right hon. Friend rightly says, the use of digital technology can provide power, freedom and opportunity to women, in particular, in some developing countries who would otherwise have to live in fear and never have any control over their own lives.

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): The funding crisis in the NHS has reached new heights today, with reports of a hospital trust asking full-time nurses to register and set up as sole traders so that it can avoid paying employers' national insurance contributions. Will the Leader of the House ask the Health Secretary to investigate this matter urgently and assure us that this outrageous practice is unacceptable and has to stop?

**Mr Lidington:** Given this particular case, I think that the hon. Gentleman should write directly to Health Ministers. Alternatively, if he would like to come by my office with the details, I would be happy to forward his concerns to the Secretary of State.

**Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Domestic dog attacks on sheep, especially now, in the lambing season, are a real concern not only for the businesses of our farmers across the country but for dog owners, who are often unaware of the consequences of such attacks for them and their pets. May we have a debate on what more the Government could do to improve awareness of the actions that farmers and the authorities can take when dogs attack sheep, and on what more could be done to prevent such attacks in the first place?

**Mr Lidington:** The Government certainly understand the huge loss that farmers face as a result of dog attacks on livestock. It is the duty of all dog owners to ensure that their animals are kept under proper control when on farmland. Government officials recently met police forces and farming representatives to discuss the situation and, as a consequence, five police forces are now going to pilot the more systematic collection of incidents and good response practices.

**Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab):** May we have an urgent debate on the 6,000 constituents of Norwich South who have been sanctioned by the Department for Work and Pensions since 2010? In particular, I should like to raise the issue of one 45-year-old terminal cancer patient who failed his work capability assessment. He was stripped of his employment and support allowance, denied jobseeker's allowance and is now living off his dying father, in food poverty. May we have a debate on this as a matter of urgency?

**Mr Lidington:** The sanctions, in their current form, have been used ever since jobseeker's allowance started in 1996, so the sanctions regime existed throughout the 13 years of the Labour Government, and the vast majority of people comply. If there are particular cases where things have gone wrong or where bad judgments have been made by officials, I would encourage the hon. Gentleman to take them up directly with the Ministers concerned. However, a sanctions system is a logical element in an effective and fair system of benefits.

**Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con):** Residents and retailers in Barton-upon-Humber in my constituency are angry about the possible development of a new Lidl supermarket on the edge of the town. The Government's efforts to revitalise and support our high streets are often undermined by the decisions of local authority planning departments. May we have a debate on the impact on the high street of planning?

**Mr Lidington:** I should probably direct my hon. Friend towards Westminster Hall opportunities for such a constituency case. It is right that these decisions are taken at local level and that we do not try to second-guess every supermarket location from Whitehall, but I am sure that he will be a formidable advocate for his own communities in trying to ensure that the planners reach a decision that takes account of local opinion.

**Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab):** On "The Andrew Marr Show" last weekend, the Home Secretary said that

"we need to make sure that our intelligence services have the ability to get into situations like encrypted WhatsApp".

This was a clear departure from stated Government policy. Lord Howe said last October:

"The assertion that the Government are opposed to encryption or would legislate to undermine it is fanciful."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 October 2016; Vol. 774, c. 2404.]

May we have a debate in Government time on whether the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 is still relevant and whether it is still GCHQ's guidance to industry to encrypt communications? Will the Leader of the House also enlighten us as to what the "necessary hashtags" are?

**Mr Lidington:** The Government want people to be able to communicate with each other securely. There is a real threat to cyber-security, and cybercrime has a massive cost on society, so we support encryption. However, we need a balance to ensure that encryption does not provide a safe space for terrorists, paedophiles or organised criminals. Therefore, we want to require companies to have the ability to decrypt those messages when they have been served with a properly authorised warrant. The hon. Lady will know that end-to-end encryption is a particular issue, which is why the Home Secretary is meeting representatives from the digital industry and internet providers today to discuss the issues further.

**Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con):** My constituent, prison officer Nick Medlin, died in the early hours of Christmas morning after a vicious attack, and PC Keith Palmer lost his life while doing his job here in Parliament last week. The trial of the man charged with the manslaughter of Nick Medlin starts on 26 June. May we have a debate on introducing a specific offence to deal with those who attack the people who protect us?

**Mr Lidington:** While I express my utter condolences to the family of the prison officer who lost his life on the Isle of Wight, my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot comment on a matter that is to be the subject of a criminal trial. The courts already have powers to impose an additional sentence on grounds of aggravation if an attack has been upon a police officer.

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** I do not know why the Leader of the House is being so coy about the date of the Queen's Speech; it is on 17 May, and we all know that because it is on the Government's all-party Whip and has been for the past four weeks.

IPSA seems absolutely determined to publish information regarding MPs that will reveal their home addresses. That is entirely inappropriate, and I hope that the Government will stand ready to legislate if necessary.

**Mr Lidington:** Both the hon. Gentleman and I have raised this matter directly with IPSA and, earlier this week, IPSA gave some assurances that the matter was under active review. I would certainly hope that action is taken at the IPSA board to ensure that any material that might identify a Member and put them at risk of possible attack is not published in future.

**Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** May we have an urgent debate on NHS workforce planning? Among the reasons given to me by my local NHS trust for difficulties in filling key posts are the impact of IR35 and the sharp decline in applications from European Union citizens.

**Mr Lidington:** There will obviously be opportunities, although not in the next two weeks, to put questions to Health Ministers, but I hope that my hon. Friend will be reassured to know that we have record numbers of nurses and GPs in training. The Government have significantly expanded the training provision.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP):** May I take this opportunity to place on the record my congratulations to Marvi Memon on winning the inaugural Speaker's Democracy Award? That speaks

to the importance of highlighting women's contribution to politics, which should be the focus of people's attention, not what we wear or how we appear.

Has the Leader of the House ever had the opportunity to listen to a recording of a personal independence payment appeal? An increasing number of constituents who visit me are upset and distressed by the process. Given that the majority of claimants are successful on appeal, the system is clearly failing them. May we have an urgent debate on how the system is failing and on how we can turn it into one that treats people with the dignity and respect that they deserve?

**Mr Lidington:** I simply disagree with the hon. Lady that the PIP system is failing. In fact, more than a quarter of those who receive PIPs get the highest level of support, compared with just 15% of working-age claimants under disability living allowance. If we look at figures for people with mental health conditions, we see that significantly more people are getting help through PIPs than secured help at a high level under disability living allowance, so the record is that PIPs are providing greater help to those in the greatest need.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): May we have a debate, or at least will my right hon. Friend raise the matter urgently with the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, on the developing situation with Falkland Islands Holdings Ltd? The alternative investment market-listed company holds the majority of land, transport and retail on the Falkland Islands and is facing a hostile takeover by a politically motivated Argentine billionaire, a matter on which the Prime Minister or the Chancellor would have to step in under the takeover code to protect the interests of the Falkland Islands people.

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend raised that matter earlier in the week, and the question is the subject of a full review by the Falklands Islands Government. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is giving support to the Falkland Islands Administration in that task.

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): On Monday students from Grange Technology College in my constituency visited me here in Parliament. During their visit I was asked about the more than £900,000 due to be cut from the school's budget by 2019. Research suggests that that equates to £612 per pupil, or the salaries of 24 teachers. That is at a school working hard to come out of special measures. Is the Leader of the House willing to allocate time to debate the severe funding cuts faced by our schools?

**Mr Lidington:** The hon. Lady refers to the new funding formula, which is the subject of a consultation. The Secretary of State for Education will set out her proposals in due course. It is hard to defend the current system, under which comparable schools with comparable catchment areas but in different parts of the country can receive startlingly different sums of money per pupil simply because of their geography.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It has become alarmingly common for business questions to take more than an hour. I have to have regard to the next statement and to the two

debates, so I appeal for short questions and short answers in the faint hope that we might be able to move on to the next business shortly after midday.

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): May we have a debate on diversity in the arts? On Monday night I was pleased to attend the *Muslim News* awards for excellence 2017, where my constituent Shahida Ahmed from Nelson was awarded the Alhambra *Muslim News* award for excellence in the arts, presented by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

**Mr Lidington:** I congratulate my hon. Friend's constituent on that achievement, and I give him the news that Arts Council England is making a priority of diversity in the arts. That has included half a million pounds for organisations such as Eclipse Theatre, which is delivering a programme supporting ethnic minority artists in northern England.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Further to the earlier question from my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), the Automobile Association says that our roads now resemble "Swiss cheese." I understand that the number of potholes filled by councils in England fell by 19% last year, so when will the Government properly deal with that issue? May we have a debate, please?

**Mr Lidington:** The latest official assessment of road conditions in England, published in March 2017, shows that local classified roads are improving, with fewer local roads needing to be considered for maintenance. The Government have provided councils in England outside London with more than £6 billion up to 2020-21 to improve the condition of local roads, but resources are finite. Clearly priorities have to be set at local level, just as at national level.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): The much-loved Harrow arts centre is once again threatened with closure. The centre has adult education and cultural activities for the whole community. Cultura London has raised £3.1 million towards funding the centre, but Harrow Council is now thinking of closing it. May we have a debate in Government time on the future of community and cultural centres across the UK?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend may have an opportunity to raise this either in Westminster Hall or in Department for Communities and Local Government questions on 24 April, but I hope that when Harrow Council takes its decisions it will take account of the strong representations from him and his constituents.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): The Leader of the House is known as a great big planner, so how much time is he planning to have on these 19,000 statutory instruments, pieces of legislation and other instruments on the great repeal Bill and its attendant legislation in this place over the next two years, so that Parliament can fulfil its job of parliamentary scrutiny? How much time is he planning?

**Mr Lidington:** We will have to wait for the Bill to be published and the statutory instruments to be brought forward. Of course, a statutory instrument can be dealt with only by whatever procedure this House and the

[Mr Lidington]

other place have approved in the parent Act of Parliament, but I can say to the right hon. Gentleman and to the House that the 19,000 figure he has just given is very far-fetched. In my view, the number concerned is going to be nothing like that.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House for making a written statement today on the technical review of the English votes for English laws Standing Orders and responding in particular to the Procedure Committee report. Does he agree that the 12 pages may be summarised simply by saying that there will be no changes at the moment but the provisions will be kept under review?

**Mr Lidington:** That is a very fair summary.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Leader of the House make time available for a series of debates, which I think it would be appropriate for the Cabinet Office to respond to, so that it can update us on the progress on the £350 million a week for the NHS, the reduction in immigration and the cut in VAT on fuel? It would also be able to update us on the increased costs associated with setting up parallel organisations to the European Court of Justice, Euratom and REACH.

**Mr Lidington:** The Cabinet Office is very active in seeking to ensure that the pledges given in the manifesto on which this Government were elected are delivered, whether through legislation or through other means. The points to which the right hon. Gentleman referred have not been part of the Government's manifesto.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate to clarify the Prime Minister's negotiating stance with the EU? If we extrapolate her wish list from both her statement in the House yesterday and her letter to President Tusk, the only conclusion we could come to is either being a member of the European Union or a member of the single market.

**Mr Lidington:** What the Prime Minister said yesterday was absolutely consistent with what she said both in her Lancaster House speech and in the subsequent White Paper. We are at the start of a complex and challenging period of negotiation. As she said yesterday, there will need to be the political will and give and take on both sides, but we are looking forward to that task and we are entering into it in a constructive spirit.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Will the Leader of the House ensure that a statement is made explaining to young people why his Government believe it is more important to reduce inward migration than to protect the freedoms that I have enjoyed so that my children can enjoy them, too?

**Mr Lidington:** We want to implement the decision that the people of the United Kingdom took in the referendum on membership of the European Union. That will clearly involve a change from the existing arrangements on free movement, which are provided under European law. The exact nature of movement rights and opportunities are things that Home Office

Ministers, in particular, will be reflecting on, but they are also going to be part of a conversation between ourselves and other European Governments.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): Options are clearly narrowing in Northern Ireland, so what time is the Leader of the House setting aside to prepare to do business on the Floor of this House on Northern Ireland after 18 April?

**Mr Lidington:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is the Government's wish that devolved government in Northern Ireland can be resumed at the earliest possible opportunity; we have no wish to see a resumption of direct rule. Obviously, I have been talking to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regularly in recent weeks. As the hon. Gentleman would expect, the Government make plans for many different contingencies.

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Commercial burglaries and serious knife crime remain persistent problems in parts of Walworth, Bermondsey and Rotherhithe in my constituency. When will the Government provide time to debate the worrying findings of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary report, which show that police forces throughout the country do not have the resources to investigate all crimes and that the Met in London has 700 fewer detectives than needed?

**Mr Lidington:** I point the hon. Gentleman to the success of the police both in and outside London in reducing crime, despite their having to make some difficult choices about budgetary management. The police have done that by reorganising their operations and priorities to ensure that cutting crime successfully comes first, and by implementing and spreading best practice.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): The issue is barely mentioned in the Leader of the House's EVEL technical review, so will he finally admit that, contrary to what his predecessor told us, it is simply not possible for Scottish MPs to debate or vote on Barnett consequentials through the estimates process?

**Mr Lidington:** A Procedure Committee report on the estimates procedure is due later this year; I will want to consider that, and the Government will of course reply to it in detail in due course. The basic problem is that it is in the nature of devolution that a budgetary decision taken here that has Barnett consequentials for Scotland does not ring-fence that Scottish funding for the same subject on which it might be spent here. It is up to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament how that money is spent. There is not a direct read-across.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Every day, I hear another story of a person who has discovered that they have been duped into buying a leasehold property. Lenders are now refusing to grant mortgages on these homes, threatening the very integrity of the housing market. The Prime Minister said on 1 March that there was no reason for these properties to be sold on a leasehold basis. When will the Government find time to introduce legislation to put those words into action?



**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning is taking this matter very seriously. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's concern to his attention, but I assure him that my hon. Friend is on top of the issue.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Leader of the House will be aware that paragraph 25 of the European Parliament's draft motion on Brexit makes it clear that passporting for financial services will not be countenanced. Financial services are of key importance to Edinburgh and to many of my constituents who work in the sector. May we have a debate in Government time to hear how the UK Government intend to support our financial services organisations, which are facing serious disruptions?

**Mr Lidington:** I refer the hon. Lady to the Prime Minister's letter yesterday, which made explicit mention of our objective of securing trade access for our financial services and, of course, reciprocal rights for financial services firms based in other European Union countries. The hon. Lady tempts me to speculate about a forthcoming negotiation; as she knows, that is not something I am prepared to do.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Small businesses in my constituency gained little confidence from the Prime Minister's statement yesterday. We were promised debates in Government time on important issues affected by our leaving the EU, including workers' rights and environmental protections, and on the effect on small businesses, yet they have not happened. Will the Leader of the House publish a schedule of debates in Government time on these important issues?

**Mr Lidington:** I can promise the hon. Lady that there will be numerous opportunities, particularly in the forthcoming parliamentary Session, to debate every aspect of our departure from the European Union.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): If the cross-party talks in Northern Ireland are to inform the legislation that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland introduces in late April, will the Leader of the House assure us that business constraints in this House will not be used as an excuse for saying that that legislation and those talks should not address serious issues such as how the First and Deputy First Ministers are jointly elected and the petitions of concern?

**Mr Lidington:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his statement earlier this week that he might need to bring forward legislation, not least to address the possibility of there not being funding for essential public services in Northern Ireland. It would be wrong for me to speculate about the exact nature of legislation that might conceivably be brought forward. We still hope that that proves not to be necessary, and the Secretary of State continues to work tirelessly with the political parties to try to secure the restoration of devolved government.

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Fly-tipping is a blight on the lives of residents across my constituency, particularly those living in Plumstead. May we have a debate on what more the Government can do, particularly with regard to the powers available to local authorities, to tackle this problem?

**Mr Lidington:** There will be an opportunity to put questions to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on Thursday 20 April. There are quite significant powers available to local authorities. Local authorities sometimes also work with police forces, because organised crime is quite often involved in large-scale fly-tipping. I am sure that there is good practice that can be shared around the country, but I will flag up the hon. Gentleman's concern with the relevant Minister.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Two years ago, a 33-year-old constituent, Caroline, was given just two months to live because of an untreatable brain tumour. Her continuing quality of life is attributed by many of those treating her to a reluctant decision to take a daily dose of cannabis oil. May we have a debate in this Chamber about whether it really can be right for those such as Caroline to be criminalised, hindering her treatment and discouraging others from making the same decision?

**Mr Lidington:** I express sympathy and support to the hon. Gentleman's constituent and her family. It is possible for a medicine that has been developed on the basis of cannabinoids to be properly licensed and to go through the necessary safety procedures that we have for any medicine in the United Kingdom before it is made available through the national health service or generally. I would be very reluctant to dispense with a system that has been put in place to ensure patient safety. Prosecuting authorities have powers of discretion, and, given the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman has described, I very much hope that everybody will look at the case with nothing but compassion.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The Leader of the House will no doubt be aware of the case of Mustafa Bashir who was spared jail despite repeatedly beating his wife, forcing her to take tablets and to drink bleach, telling her to kill herself and hitting her over the head with a cricket bat, saying: "If I hit you with this bat with my full power then you would be dead."

I fully support the independence of the judiciary, but may we have a debate on sentencing guidelines for domestic violence perpetrators?

**Mr Lidington:** This Government have introduced legislation to strengthen the penalties for domestic violence. It is something in which the Prime Minister, both as Home Secretary and now, takes a very close interest and to which she gives a high priority. Sentencing guidelines, as the hon. Gentleman knows, are published by the independent Sentencing Council, and individual decisions are taken by judges. In England and Wales, a consultation has started today on a new sentencing guideline to apply to all cases of domestic abuse. I hope that the authorities in Scotland might consider following suit.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Following the Prime Minister's article 50 letter yesterday, senior figures in Brussels have complained that she has issued a blatant threat and is treating security as a bargaining chip. May we have a debate in Government time about the art of negotiation so that the Government might learn that bullying and threats are not an effective way to get a good deal from our allies?

**Mr Lidington:** I am really sorry that the hon. and learned Lady—particularly with her legal expertise—is giving credence to such nonsense. The facts are that our participation in European arrangements on the sharing of information between police forces and judicial systems rests on instruments based in the treaties and grounded in European law. Under article 50, on the day that we depart the EU, the treaties, and therefore all instruments flowing from the treaties, cease to apply to the United Kingdom. That is why we say that we are ambitious for an agreement—a new, deep and special partnership with our EU neighbours—that encompasses security co-operation as well as trade. I wish that she would support that.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Last week, RBS announced a plan to close its busy Newton Mearns branch. East Renfrewshire was already the area worst affected by bank closures before this news. May we have an urgent debate on RBS's surprising assertion that branches remain a core part of its offering to customers when that is patently not the case?

**Mr Lidington:** It is obviously a commercial decision for RBS but, as with any bank, I would hope that it would stick to the code to which all banks say they adhere, whereby it would continue to ensure that the last branch of a retail bank in any particular community is not closed, except in the most extreme circumstances.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): May we have a statement from the Leader of the House explaining why the Government think it is fair to take half the surpluses on a year-on-year basis from the mineworkers' pension fund?

**Mr Lidington:** I will ask the relevant Minister to write to the hon. Gentleman.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): May we have a debate in Government time and a statement on the abuse of job trials by unscrupulous employers? One instance was brought to my attention by a constituent who worked for a week without pay for Juice Garden, which has now been dropped by the Department for Work and Pensions which acknowledged the abuse of contract by that company. Does the Leader of the House share my concern that these companies are making use of free labour above and beyond what is reasonable for a job trial?

**Mr Lidington:** All workers should be treated properly and certainly in accordance with employment law. We expect responsible employers to treat people who are on a work trial or work experience with decency.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): There is much concern about the delays for licence renewal and applications among the sporting and shooting organisations, and individual firearm certificate holders. One way of addressing that issue would be the extension of a firearm certificate to a 10 or 20-year period, thereby reducing administrative resources and costs. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement from the relevant Minister on how to deliver a 10 or 20-year firearm certificate?

**Mr Lidington:** I will ask the Minister to write to the hon. Gentleman, but I am sure he understands that a balance has to be struck between the problem he described and the need to ensure that we know where potentially lethal weapons are and that they are in the right hands.

## Legislating for UK Withdrawal from the EU

11.57 am

**The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about today's publication of a White Paper on the great repeal Bill.

Yesterday, we took the historic step of notifying the European Council of the Government's decision to invoke article 50; the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union. That notification marks the beginning of our two-year negotiation period with the EU, and it reflects the result of last year's instruction from the people of the United Kingdom. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, it is our fierce determination to get the right deal for every single person. Now is the time to come together to ensure that the UK as a whole is prepared for the challenges and opportunities presented by our exit from the EU.

We have been clear that we want a smooth and orderly exit, and the great repeal Bill is integral to that approach. It will provide clarity and certainty for businesses, workers and consumers across the United Kingdom on the day we leave the EU. It will mean that as we exit the EU and seek a new, deep and special partnership with the European Union, we will be doing so from a position where we have the same standards and rules. But it will also ensure that we deliver on our promise to end the supremacy of European Union law in the UK as we exit. Our laws will then be made in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, and interpreted by judges not in Luxembourg, but across the United Kingdom. Some have been concerned that Parliament will not play enough of a role in shaping the future of the country once we have left the European Union. Today's White Paper shows just how wrong that is. This publication makes it clear that there will be a series of Bills to debate and vote on, both before and after we leave, as well as many statutory instruments to consider.

Let me turn to the content of the White Paper. The paper we have published today sets out the three principal elements of the great repeal Bill. First, we will repeal the European Communities Act 1972 and return power to the United Kingdom. Secondly, the Bill will convert EU law into United Kingdom law, allowing businesses to continue operating knowing that the rules have not changed overnight, and providing fairness to individuals, whose rights and obligations will not be subject to sudden change. Thirdly, the Bill will create the necessary powers to correct the laws that do not operate appropriately once we have left the EU, so that our legal system continues to function correctly outside the European Union. I will address each of these elements in turn before coming to the important issue of the interaction of the Bill with the devolution settlements.

Let me begin with the European Communities Act 1972. Repealing the ECA on the day we leave the EU enables the return to this Parliament of the sovereignty we ceded in 1972 and ends the supremacy of EU law in this country. It is entirely necessary in order to deliver on the result of the referendum. But repealing the ECA alone is not enough. A simple repeal of the ECA would leave holes in our statute book. The EU regulations that apply directly in the UK would no longer have any

effect, and many of the domestic regulations we have made to implement our EU obligations would fall away. Therefore, to provide the maximum possible legal certainty, the great repeal Bill will convert EU law into domestic law on the day we leave the European Union. This means, for example, that the workers' rights, environmental protection and consumer rights that are enjoyed under EU law in the UK will continue to be available in UK law after we have left the European Union. Once EU law has been converted into domestic law, Parliament will be able to pass legislation to amend, repeal or improve any piece of European Union law it chooses—as will the devolved legislatures, where they have power to do so.

However, further steps will be needed to provide a smooth and orderly exit. This is because a large number of laws—both existing domestic laws and those we convert into UK law—will not work properly if we leave the EU without taking further action. Some laws, for example, grant functions to an EU institution with which the UK will no longer have a relationship. To overcome this, the great repeal Bill will provide a power to correct the statute book, where necessary, to resolve the problems which will occur as a consequence of leaving the European Union. This will be done using secondary legislation, the flexibility of which will make sure we have put in place the necessary corrections before the day we leave the European Union. I can confirm that this power will be time-limited, and Parliament will need to be satisfied that the procedures in the Bill for making and approving the secondary legislation are appropriate.

Given the scale of the changes that will be necessary and the finite amount of time available to make them, there is a balance to be struck between the importance of scrutiny and correcting the statute book in time. As the Lords Constitution Committee recently put it:

“The challenge that Parliament will face is in balancing the need for speed, and thus for Governmental discretion, with the need for proper parliamentary control of the content of the UK's statute book.”

Parliament of course can, and does, regularly debate and vote on secondary legislation; we are not considering some form of governmental Executive orders, but using a legislative process of long standing. I hope that today's White Paper and this statement can be the start of a discussion between Parliament and Government about how best to achieve this balance. Similar corrections will be needed to the statute books of the three devolved Administrations, and so we propose that the Bill will also give Ministers in the devolved Administrations a power to amend devolved legislation to correct their law in line with the way that UK ministers will be able to correct UK law.

Let me turn to the European Court of Justice and its case law. I can confirm that the great repeal Bill will provide no future role for the European Court in the interpretation of our laws, and the Bill will not oblige our courts to consider cases decided by the European Court of Justice after we have left. However, for as long as EU-derived law remains on the UK statute book, it is essential that there is a common understanding of what that law means. The Government believe that this is best achieved by providing for continuity in how that law is interpreted before and after exit day. To maximise certainty, therefore, the Bill will provide that any question

[Mr David Davis]

as to the meaning of EU law that has been converted into UK law will be determined in the UK courts by reference to the European Court of Justice's case law as it exists on the day we leave the European Union. Any other starting point would be to change the law and create unnecessary uncertainty.

This approach maximises legal certainty at the point of departure, but our intention is not to fossilise the past decisions of the European Court of Justice. As such, we propose that the Bill will provide that European Court case law be given the same status in our courts as decisions of our own Supreme Court. The Supreme Court does not frequently depart from its own decisions, but it does so from time to time. We would expect the Supreme Court to take a similar, sparing approach to departing from European Court of Justice case law, but we believe it is right that it should have the power to do so. Of course Parliament will be free to change the law, and therefore overturn case law, where it decides it is right to do so.

Today's White Paper also sets out the great repeal Bill's approach to the charter of fundamental rights. Let me explain our approach. The charter of fundamental rights applies to member states only when they act within the scope of European Union law. That means that its relevance is removed by our withdrawal from the European Union. The Government have been clear that in leaving the EU, the UK's leading role in protecting and advancing human rights will not change. The fact that the charter will fall away will not mean that the protection of rights in the UK will suffer as a result. The charter of fundamental rights was not designed to create new rights, but rather to catalogue rights already recognised as general principles in EU law. That was recognised by the Labour Government who brought it in, with a protocol attached to it, in 2007. Where cases have been decided by reference to those rights, that case law will continue to be used to interpret the underlying rights that will be preserved.

I would now like to turn to devolution. The United Kingdom's domestic constitutional arrangements have evolved since the UK joined the European Economic Community in 1973. The current devolution settlements were agreed after the UK joined and reflect that context. In areas where the devolved Administrations and legislatures have competence, such as agriculture, the environment and some areas of transport, that competence is exercised within the constraints set by European Union law. The existence of common EU frameworks had the effect of providing a common UK framework in many areas, safeguarding the functioning of the UK internal market.

As powers return from the EU, we have an opportunity to determine the level best placed to take decisions on those issues, ensuring that power sits closer to the people of the United Kingdom than ever before. It is the expectation of the Government that the outcome of that process will be a significant increase in the decision-making power of each devolved Administration. However, we must also ensure that, as we leave the EU, no new barriers to living and doing business within our own Union are created. In some areas, that will require common UK frameworks. Decisions will be required about where a common framework is needed and, if it is, how it might be established. The devolved Administrations

also acknowledge the importance of common UK frameworks. We will work closely with the devolved Administrations to deliver an approach that works for the whole of the United Kingdom and reflects the needs and individual circumstances of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Let me conclude by stressing the importance of the great repeal Bill. It will help to ensure certainty and stability across the board. It is vital to ensuring a smooth and orderly exit; it will stand us in good stead for the negotiations over our future relationship with the EU; and it will deliver greater control over our laws to this Parliament and, wherever appropriate, the devolved Administrations. Those steps are crucial to implementing the result of the referendum in the national interest. I hope that all sides will recognise that and work with us to achieve those aims. I commend this statement to the House.

12.8 pm

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement and the White Paper.

Nobody underestimates the task of converting EU law into domestic law. The question is: how is it done and what is to be done? On the question of how, the White Paper gives sweeping powers to the Executive. They are sweeping because it proposes a power to use delegated legislation to "correct", and thus change, primary legislation and devolved legislation, and because of the sheer scale of the exercise.

In those circumstances, one might expect some pretty rigorous safeguards for the use of those sweeping powers, but there are none to be found in the White Paper. On the contrary, paragraph 3.20 states:

"Given the scale of the changes that will be necessary and the finite amount of time available to make them, there is a balance that will have to be struck between the importance of scrutiny and the speed of this process."

The White Paper goes on to say:

"The Government proposes using existing types of statutory instrument procedure."

There are no enhanced safeguards for that sweeping use of powers.

In those circumstances, we have to go back to first principles. There should be no change to rights and protections without primary legislation—that is a starting and basic principle—and the same goes for policy. I add this: when we see the Bill, it must give no power to change rights, obligations and protections by delegated legislation. Will the Secretary of State provide assurances on those basic principles and look again at safeguards for the proposed delegated legislation procedures?

Again, there have to be clear principles for converting EU law into domestic law. All rights and protections derived from EU law must be converted into domestic law, with no limitations, no qualifications and no sunset clauses. This morning we need an assurance from the Secretary of State that he will face down those on his own side who will not be able to resist the temptation to water down those rights and protections before they are even put into the Bill. I remind him that the International Development Secretary said during the referendum campaign that we should

"halve the burdens of the EU social and employment legislation".

The International Trade Secretary has said:

“we must begin by deregulating the labour market.”

We need an assurance that those temptations will be faced down before the Bill is put before the House.

I turn to the charter of fundamental rights which, it is proposed, will be left out altogether. The charter codifies in modern form all EU rights. It is not directly enforceable—it is a codification—but it is none the less influential, and it is wrong simply to leave it out. I note what is said at paragraph 1.12 of the White Paper, but I seek an assurance from the Secretary of State that all relevant rights—I accept that some are not relevant, such as the right to vote in the European Parliament—and all substantial rights in the charter will be converted into domestic law through the Bill.

Finally, on devolved bodies, Brexit should not be an excuse to hoard powers in Whitehall. There has to be a heavy presumption that devolved matters will remain devolved as powers and responsibilities transfer from the EU to the UK, so I ask the Secretary of State to give us an assurance about that.

**Mr Davis:** At the end of my statement, I said that I hoped the House would come together in making this task happen. I reiterate that point to the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), my opposite number. He says that no change should be made to rights through delegated legislation, but I would have thought that that almost goes without saying. [HON. MEMBERS: “Then say it!”] While I say that it almost goes without saying, I actually said that in my statement, if hon. Members read it.

Let me reiterate that the use of delegated legislation will be for technical changes—the sort of alteration whereby, for example, a reference to a regulatory body in the European Union clearly has to be replaced with a reference to a body in the UK. Frankly, I think that that is as plain as a pikestaff. The hon. and learned Gentleman changed his wording slightly by talking about “all relevant rights”, and he is quite right to do so, because things such as the right to stand as an MEP, the right to elect an MEP and, indeed, the right to make a direct application to the European Court will go automatically. He is a reasonable man, so I take it that he accepts that.

On charter rights, let me remind the hon. and learned Gentleman of what happened with the Lisbon treaty in 2007. The Labour Government of the day negotiated that treaty and a protocol to it, about which the Prime Minister of the day said:

“It is absolutely clear that we have an opt-out from both the charter and judicial and home affairs.”—[*Official Report*, 25 June 2007; Vol. 462, c. 37.]

Actually, Mr Tony Blair was wrong to say that; he had misunderstood the Labour Government’s own protocol, which guaranteed that no new rights arose as a result of the charter of fundamental rights. That was reiterated later by the then Government in court and by their then Europe Minister, who said:

“The Protocol confirms that since the Charter creates no rights, or circumstances in which those rights can be relied on before the courts, it does not change the status quo.”

The 2007 White Paper said the same thing, and only last year—I think in December—the Joint Committee on Human Rights reiterated that understanding.

We looked at that matter very carefully because, as the hon. and learned Gentleman might appreciate, it is an area that I take very seriously indeed. Aside from the undertakings that he has asked for, I make this offer to him: if, in the next two years, we find something that we have missed, we will put it right. On that basis, I do not think that we have an argument. I do not think that that will happen either, because a clause-by-clause search through the whole charter did not throw up any significant issues, other than things such as the MEP matter.

On the treatment of the devolved Administrations, the first thing to say is that no powers currently exercised by them will be taken away. We have said that time and again. We also expect that there will be a significant increase in the powers exercised by the devolved Administrations. However, I say this to the hon. and learned Gentleman: we have to maintain the United Kingdom internal market, too. That market is four times as important to Scottish businesses, for example, as the European market, and it is incredibly important to Northern Irish and Welsh businesses as well. The Administrations understand that. We will be holding discussions with them at length—we have already started those discussions—about how we execute this. I will be happy to talk to the hon. and learned Gentleman about the matter as well, if that would be useful to him. I reiterate that this is a difficult task, but it is by no means beyond the ability of the House to achieve this properly, respecting our democracy and delivering for the British people.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I gently remind hon. Members who arrived after the statement started that they certainly should not expect to be called. Although I am very keen to accommodate the extensive interest in this statement, there are two well-subscribed debates under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee to follow, to which I need to have regard, so we need short questions and short answers.

**Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con):** I commend my right hon. Friend for the clarity and thoughtful analysis that lie behind the White Paper. With the great repeal Bill, we will be returning sovereignty to this House so that decisions about our lawmaking are taken in this House by the representatives of the British people, in line with their wishes at general elections. That it is not—I advise the Opposition to bear this in mind—the situation at present. So often, as we find in the European Scrutiny Committee, such decisions are taken behind closed doors.

**Mr Davis:** I thank my hon. Friend for those comments and for his work in this area over the years. Some of the ideas in this policy area have come from his past writings, so he is right. I make the point that although people complain about secondary legislation, nearly 8,000 statutory instruments were used to implement European law under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, so that attack is a little hypocritical. I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and commend him for his work in the past.

**Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP):** Scottish National party Members think that the triggering of article 50 made yesterday a sad day for everybody in

[Stephen Gethins]

Europe, including everyone in these islands. The EU has for years brought us peace, stability, security and prosperity. We are turning the clock back 40 years, and I am glad that the Minister reminded his own Front Benchers that devolution exists now in a way that it did not 40 years ago.

It has been suggested that the Government are looking at using Henry VIII clauses to take this through—so much for parliamentary sovereignty. Scotland’s aspiration to have a voice also seems to have been given the Henry VIII treatment; a rough wooing is clearly taking place. Will the Secretary of State tell us when legislative consent motions will be required, where responsibility

“will flow from Brussels to Edinburgh, hardly touching the sides...on the way”,

and who he means by the “democratically-elected representatives” mentioned in paragraph 4.2 of the White Paper? It strikes me that the Government have pushed the big red button marked “Brexit” with their fingers crossed and very little idea of what comes next.

**Mr Davis:** The hon. Gentleman loves his Henry VIII clauses—he thinks the public at large will believe this is some Executive fiat dating from the middle ages—but we are of course talking about a procedure that has been used throughout the past century and over which this House has complete control. That is the first point.

The second point is that I have been in Joint Ministerial Committee meetings with the hon. Gentleman’s colleague from the Scottish Government and representatives of the other devolved Administrations during the past six months or more. I have raised these issues there, as well as bilaterally, and I have said that we will have serious discussions about them. My preference is for more devolution, rather than less—that is my simple viewpoint—but the restraint on that is when there is a direct effect on the interests of the whole United Kingdom. Those interests include: the United Kingdom market, because it would be very bad for Scottish farmers and producers if the United Kingdom market became separated from them; issues of national security, which we need to deal with; issues of international negotiation; and observing international obligations, such as under environmental law. There are therefore plenty of areas in which it is clear that we need a UK-wide framework. That is the sort of criterion we will apply, and we will discuss it with the devolved Administrations at every stage.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): This measure should be called the continuity Bill, and it should be very reassuring for all remain voters because it is the means by which we will keep the rights and laws from Europe that they most like. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that any MP who wants to keep EU employment rights, for example, must vote for the Bill?

**Mr Davis:** I must tell my right hon. Friend that I lay some claim to the ideas behind the Bill, but not to its name. He is right that it is, to a very large extent, a continuity Bill, and it is the way in which we will protect a whole series of rights, including employment rights and environmental rights. He is also quite right that those who want to preserve those rights should vote, without any thought, for this Bill.

**Mr Nick Clegg** (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): I commend the Secretary of State for ignoring some of the more over-excitably demands from parts of the Brexit press and some of his Back Benchers, and for confirming, as he has done today, that he will incorporate into British law some of the jewels in the crown of the EU—the habitats directive, the working time directive and the green renewable energy directive—that we can all agree on. He will know, however, that there will be a fork in the road: the Government will either have to keep those provisions in domestic legislation, in which case Conservative Members will reasonably say, “What on earth was the point of leaving the EU in the first place?”; or he will remove those provisions, in which case the EU will need exacting safeguards to ensure that we do not undercut EU standards.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that it is impossible to do what the Prime Minister said yesterday about participating fully in crime-fighting and anti-terrorism EU measures without access to the Schengen information system and other databases—I remember from my time in government that such databases are devastating crime-fighting tools—and without abiding by EU data protection directives overseen by the European Court of Justice?

**Mr Davis:** After a commendation like the one with which the right hon. Gentleman started, I think my career is over.

The right hon. Gentleman is half right and half wrong. What the Prime Minister was referring to yesterday was, of course, the importance of either maintaining something very similar to, or putting in place a replacement for, the justice and home affairs strand of the European treaties. He is right in one respect: if we are to exchange data with not just the EU but other countries, such as the United States, we will undoubtedly need data protection, such as data laws and privacy protection, that meets their standards. The Bill will ensure that we get to that point on the day we leave the European Union and can therefore continue to exchange data. There is no doubt that there will be continuing discussions thereafter about how we maintain all our standards at the same level. However, that will be with not just the European Union, but all our allies, whether America, Canada, the “Five Eyes”—everybody.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the directives to which the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) referred are already in British law? We are talking here about what the Foreign Affairs Committee counted as the 6,987 regulations that must be applied in British law through the Bill. Will we have an opportunity to examine a number of the directives—the insolvency II directive, for example, which imposes significantly more costs on the equity release industry in the United Kingdom than a British law would—within the time limits that he will ask the House to apply to this legislation?

**Mr Davis:** My hon. Friend’s general point about the directives is right, and his specific point is right, in the sense that the whole point of the process is to bring such matters back to the United Kingdom. We will not by any means change everything—indeed, we will not want to change everything; we might want, as our own national decision, to maintain some parallel standards—but those matters will be brought back to this House of Commons, and we will make the decision on what is best for this country.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Government's aim that EU law, with all its rights and protections, will remain in place is a pragmatic approach; we need to find a way of making that happen. However, the Secretary of State will be aware of concern that others might try to use the process to get rid of EU laws they have never liked, or use these powers to make changes beyond the minimum necessary. Will he therefore commit to consulting closely with the Exiting the European Union Committee on the scope of the Bill, and does he intend to publish a draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny?

**Mr Davis:** I happily undertake to consult the Select Committee on this very important issue. I have already told the right hon. Gentleman privately—I will now say it publicly—that we will not publish draft legislation. However, now that the White Paper has been published, we will undertake a great deal of consultation, including with his Select Committee.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): May I commend the Secretary of State for his statement and assure him that I always listen very carefully to what he says? I heard him explain on the radio this morning that what I thought was an absolute guarantee—that the deal would, in his words, deliver the “exact same benefits” on trade and customs—is now apparently an aim, but I am sure he will be true to that aim. This is really a great transfer Bill, so will the Secretary of State give an unequivocal undertaking that workers' rights, environmental protections and consumer protections will in no way be changed as a result of the Bill—or, indeed, of anything else?

**Mr Davis:** The Prime Minister has already given those undertakings.

**Mr Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): May I commend the Secretary of State for his statement and the White Paper. This is the right approach to providing certainty once we leave the EU. In relation to the devolved Administrations and the greater powers thereto, will he engage intensively with the devolved Administrations during the two-year period that now lies ahead about where powers should lie—whether in London, or Belfast, Cardiff or Edinburgh?

**Mr Davis:** The straight answer is yes. One of the reasons the White Paper has been published a little later than I would have preferred is of course that we do not have a Northern Ireland Executive at this stage. I waited for the three weeks in the hope that we would have one, but at this point we cannot wait any longer. We will continue to consult the devolved Administrations. In the run-up to the election in Northern Ireland, I invited the out-going Ministers to make sure we had such a mechanism. I will ensure that we have another mechanism for Northern Ireland. I am not yet quite sure what it will be—I would be happy to hear the right hon. Gentleman's ideas—but I am sure we will have another mechanism, whether or not through the Executive, so that we can also consult with Northern Ireland.

**Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend for making it clear that two years from today our sovereign Parliament will indeed have the power to amend, repeal or improve all this ghastly EU legislation?

**Mr Davis:** I will pass on my hon. Friend's assessment of the legislation, but I will reinforce the point I have already made, which is that at the end of the day the aim of this Bill is to bring decisions back to this House.

**Dame Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State says that he wants the maximum scrutiny of legislation over the next few years, but given the sheer volume of particularly delegated legislation that he has outlined, does he think it is really feasible to reduce the number of MPs by 50?

**Mr Davis:** That question is stratospherically above my pay grade, but let me pick up the underpinning point about the volume of legislation. We are bringing a large amount of the legislation straight into UK law without change. The reason for change and the use of statutory instruments is, as I said to the Labour spokesman earlier, that there will be technical amendments and issues that will come up. Separate to that there will be primary legislation—on immigration, customs and a variety of other areas. That is different, but the technical legislation will aim to make things practical, not to maintain great changes in policy, and this House should be well able to do that.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Leave campaigners will vote for the Bill as it is part of the process of withdrawal, but remain campaigners admire EU law and want its provisions to continue, so can the Secretary of State think of any good reason why the great repeal Bill should not be passed unanimously?

**Mr Davis:** No.

**Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State needs to make it clear now that all those regulations and protocols relating to justice, home affairs, protection, security and terrorism will stay part of our laws with the co-operation requirements that we have upon us, because in their article 50 letter yesterday, shamefully, the Government suggested circumstances where we may consider withdrawing or weakening our co-operation. Does he not realise that that sort of squalid negotiation tactic will result in a less good deal rather than a better one?

**Mr Davis:** The hon. Gentleman should know better. The Leader of the House, who was previously a Europe Minister, was here and he made it clear, in terms, that the Prime Minister was talking about the fact that existing treaty arrangements, which will end when we leave the European Union, will fall by the wayside, so we will have to find an alternative—not our internal legal rights and privileges, but the treaty arrangements. That is the important thing.

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I very much welcome the pragmatic approach that the Secretary of State has adopted in this document, and particularly his emphasis on legal certainty and continuity, which we all know is vital for continued business confidence and is something the Select Committee on Justice report emphasised. Does he agree that it will be important to maintain the mechanism for ensuring continuing regulatory equivalents, not only in data protection but in important areas such as the financial and other service sectors? How might that be taken forward?

**Mr Davis:** I am going to seek your protection, Mr Speaker. That is two people who have finished my career today—I am being called “pragmatic” as well. The simple truth is that when we come to do the trade and other deals, there will be relationships between us, as there are with other countries, to ensure that we maintain common standards—the point the ex-leader of the Liberal party, the ex-Deputy Prime Minister, made about data protection and so on. There will be things that we will negotiate, but my hon. Friend would be surprised if I talked those negotiations out in this place at this time.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): I do worry, because the Secretary of State says in his White Paper:

“Existing parliamentary procedures allow for Parliament to scrutinise as many or as few statutory instruments as it sees fit.”

That is simply untrue. In 2014-15, nine negative statutory instruments were prayed against by the Leader of the Opposition; only one was allowed a debate, and that was not on the Floor of the House, so it could not be on a fatal motion. In 2015-16, 19 were prayed against by the Opposition and only five were allowed debates, again only in Committee. Not a single one was allowed a vote in the House. This is not bringing back control to this House, and we will be worried unless the Government change the process.

**Mr Davis:** We of course start by obeying the conventions that apply to the House, and I am afraid that we do have an SI procedure, which is both affirmative and negative, which has effects and influence. If the hon. Gentleman wants to come and talk to us about how he thinks we can improve that, I will be happy to see him.

**Chris Bryant:** At half-past 2?

**Mr Davis:** I am happy to see him, but not at half-past 2.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): That UK judges will be less creative is an open question. The notion of incorporating EU regulation, and indeed case law, gives me the collywobblers, but I assure my right hon. Friend of my support in the Division Lobby because he has bigger fish to fry.

**Mr Davis:** As the White Paper says, we made a very explicit decision that we would aim to make this a Supreme Court-level precedent—to reduce the number of courts that can deal with this to just the Supreme Court itself. The Supreme Court is fairly careful about changing its own precedent; indeed, it does so relatively rarely. We expect that to continue to be the case, but anything it does this House can change.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Plaid Cymru is demanding a continuity Bill in the National Assembly for Wales to enshrine appropriate European law in Welsh law. Will the Secretary of State confirm today that Westminster will not block or undermine our Parliament’s full right to legislate for Wales? My message to the British Government today from the people of Wales is this: hands off our Parliament.

**Mr Davis:** I reiterate: no powers that are currently exercised by the devolved Administrations will be taken from them.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the key point about the great repeal Bill is that the legal precedence of laws imposed on this country by the EU will end?

**Mr Davis:** Well, the legal precedence will not necessarily end, but the laws will be susceptible to our change. We will be able to change them both in our courts and in our Parliament.

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): With reference to the criminal justice measures of which we are already a part and the Prime Minister’s article 50 letter yesterday, will the Secretary of State set out for the House how the safety and protection of the public would be enhanced by us reducing our co-operation on crime and terrorism?

**Mr Davis:** As the Prime Minister made plain yesterday, she wants to see a comprehensive agreement. People have interpreted that as comprehensive trade agreement, but it does not just mean that; it means a comprehensive agreement across all the issues where we have a relationship with the European Union.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): Many users of e-cigarettes voted leave in the referendum in the mistaken belief that doing so would prevent the EU tobacco products directive from being applied here. Taking that regulation as an example, what opportunity will this House have to change provisions of EU law that do not operate appropriately?

**Mr Davis:** That is the point of bringing them back to the House for it to be able to deal with them. It will be right across the board. We are talking about 40 years of law, and it will take time to correct those that we do not agree with—of course, much of it we do agree with. That will take time, but the House will have its opportunity.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Paragraph 4.4 of the White Paper speaks of working closely with devolved Administrations for

“an approach that works for the whole and each part of the UK.”

I cannot help but feel that it is déjà vu all over again; so far, this Government have done nothing to demonstrate their intention to work with the devolved Administrations. If the Government continue their unsustainable approach of ignoring the will of the Scottish Parliament in relation to Brexit, and indeed on any other issue, why should the devolved Administrations trust the UK Government on anything?

**Mr Davis:** Sometimes the Scottish National party seems to have one element in its ideology and one element only, and it is entitled “grievance”, and the maximisation of grievances. In the past six months, I have attended six meetings with the representatives of devolved Administrations. In a number of the policy areas that we have discussed and that made it into the previous White Paper—employment rights, environmental rights and a whole series of other areas like those—and on the agreement that we need to maintain the maximum possible access to trade for all parts of the kingdom, we have been in the same place. We have, of course, not been in the same place on every single element of policy.



We said at the beginning that the DAs would not be given a veto, but would be very heavily consulted and involved in discussions, and that is precisely what we have done. The fact that the Scottish National party wants to claim that it is not happy about that is a matter for it, not for me or the facts.

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): Those who wish to remain in the EU bang on about EU rules and regulations. Surely the whole point of leaving the EU is that we in this place can live under our own rules and regulations, which are suitable for us and not necessarily for 28 countries, as things currently stand.

**Mr Davis:** My hon. Friend is exactly right.

**Owen Smith** (Pontypridd) (Lab): Notwithstanding the inevitable protest from the Secretary of State that he is always appearing before this House, the hallmark of his Government so far on this issue has been to avoid scrutiny and evade accountability. We now learn today that the great repeal Bill is actually going to be 1,000 statutory instruments, many of them not scrutinised properly in this place. How on earth can that be commensurate with taking back control and increasing the sovereignty of this Parliament?

**Mr Davis:** The hon. Gentleman continues with his habit of reading half of what we say and ignoring the other half when it suits him. One of the things I have said from the beginning of this process is that we will bring into British law all European law, including case law, except where there are significant—*[Interruption.]* This is what the Bill will do. It will of course require statutory instruments to modify technical aspects—*[Interruption.]* Well, up to 1,000, but we are talking about 40 years of law. I would be very interested to hear what he proposes we do about a law that refers to a European regulatory authority. Would he leave it that way, or maybe have a major debate on the matter? That does not strike me as very sensible. Material policy changes will be carried through in primary legislation and there will be a number of such Bills in the coming Parliament.

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State for his approach to this complex matter, but any discussion of English devolution is absent from the White Paper. To what extent does he envisage an opening up of opportunities for further legal powers to be devolved to the English regions and how might that work?

**Mr Davis:** It is not in the White Paper, but my hon. Friend will know that the Chancellor announced further devolution of powers to London, for example. I have been talking to a great extent with the Mayor of London about issues for London on this matter. It is not in the White Paper, but part of the Government's overall strategy is to bring government as close as possible to the people.

**Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): Despite Government protestations to the contrary, leaving the EU does not automatically and necessarily mean leaving the single market. Equally, leaving the treaty of the European Union does not automatically and necessarily

mean leaving the European Economic Area agreement. Will the right hon. Gentleman's so-called repeal Bill repeal the European Economic Area Act 1993 and will every Member of this House get a specific vote on that specific issue?

**Mr Davis:** Rarely have I heard a question based on so many false premises. The truth is that leaving the European Union does involve leaving the single market, because the single market requires the four freedoms. Whatever one thinks about the vote last year, it was clearly not a vote in favour of allowing the control of migration, the control of laws and the operation of the European Court of Justice to stay in Europe.

**Craig Williams** (Cardiff North) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for his mature and considered approach to the devolved nations. May I press him on the principle that if, when powers come back from the EU, they do not affect the UK internal market, which is so important to my constituency and our Welsh nation, they will they be given to the devolved nations as soon as possible?

**Mr Davis:** As I said, I am not going to demur from the principles I already outlined. My hon. Friend is right. The UK single market is several times bigger for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland than the EU single market. The only difference in the case of Northern Ireland is that there is £1 billion a week of trade between it and Ireland. We will see a significant increase in the amount of powers given to the devolved institutions, but we will have to protect matters such as the single market in the UK, security, environmental agreements and so on.

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): The Government have already signalled their intention to withdraw from the common fisheries policy. However, paragraphs 4.2 and 4.4 of the White Paper seem to suggest not just that EU powers on fisheries will revert to the UK Government rather than the devolved institutions, but that the Government

"intends to replicate the current frameworks provided by EU rules through UK legislation."

Are the Government seriously suggesting that we will have business as usual for the fishing industry under a CFP framework after Brexit? If not, will the right hon. Gentleman enlighten us on the Government's plans?

**Mr Davis:** Some of what the hon. Lady calls business as usual will be temporary and some of it will be permanent. That will depend entirely on the criteria I laid out earlier.

**Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to ending the role of the European Court of Justice in our domestic courts. Does he agree that this is the only option if we are to truly restore control over our laws to the British people, and reverse an ever-intrusive influence by the ECJ on social and economic policy areas and its operation as a federal court—things that were never envisaged at its conception in 1957?

**Mr Davis:** My hon. Friend is right and that is exactly why the Prime Minister made that a very important central piece of our policy.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Yesterday, the Prime Minister did not mention the customs union in her statement and nor is it referred to in her letter to President Tusk. Paragraph 1.22 says that

“we will introduce a customs bill to establish a framework to implement a UK customs regime.”

Will the Secretary of State confirm that he intends to take us out of the customs union?

**Mr Davis:** Unusually for the hon. Gentleman, as an ex-Select Committee Chairman, he missed the fact that the Prime Minister made direct reference to the White Paper, which covers exactly that point.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): I know we can rely on my right hon. Friend to be an extremely robust negotiator, but just for the sake of absolute clarity on the role of the European Court of Justice, can he confirm that it will have absolutely no authority in the UK and that he will not in any circumstances water down that commitment during the negotiations?

**Mr Davis:** I was just going to say yes, but I will make very plain what we are saying: the European Court of Justice will have no reach into the UK. It is of course the case that when one sells a product in another country, one meets the rules of that country. If one does that in the United States, one meets the rules that reach up to the Supreme Court. The same will happen in Europe, but the ECJ will not reach here.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Yesterday, Mr Speaker, you invited me to behave as if I was in a court of law. May I extend your entirely appropriate invitation to the Secretary of State and suggest that he pretends he is in a court of law and answers the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins)? Will the Bill require legislative consent motions, yes or no?

**Mr Davis:** I apologise. I forgot about the point the hon. Gentleman made when I was responding to his other points. At this stage we do not know, because we do not know the final format of the Bill. That is the simple truth.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): I welcome the Bill and the certainty it provides for business as we undergo this process. Will the Secretary of State confirm that certainty for business will be at the forefront and a priority for him throughout?

**Mr Davis:** Yes, and that is fundamental to the whole strategy behind the Bill.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The public are extremely worried about these Henry VIII clauses. In chapter 3 of the Secretary of State's White Paper, he says that one area where he wants to use secondary legislation is on the change from EU institutions. There are 40 of these EU institutions, ranging over areas from medicines to aviation safety. If we lose, he will have a choice. He can either set up a new one, or abandon the regulation altogether. Does he really think it is appropriate to do that through statutory instruments?

**Mr Davis:** The 40 are not in the UK; they are across the Union. It may be appropriate and it may not. It depends. [*Interruption.*] If the hon. Lady stops heckling I will answer. If, for example, it is a question of adding to another regulatory body already in existence, a statutory instrument might well be appropriate. In other cases where a regulatory body is created, it might be appropriate to have rather heavier level of parliamentary debate and insight.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Procedure Committee is conducting an inquiry into how we get the great repeal Bill into law. Unfortunately, my right hon. Friend has not been able to appear before the Committee. May I urge him to agree a date when we can help to facilitate the great repeal Bill process?

**Mr Davis:** I am happy to say that, yes, I will be doing so. That was the intention in any event. I cannot remember the reason for deferral last time, but it will happen.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): In the statement, the Secretary of State said that the Bill will convert EU law into UK law wherever practical and appropriate, allowing businesses to continue operating knowing the rules have not changed. However, companies such as Nissan and Hitachi in the north-east need to continue to expand if there is to be future prosperity in the region. What will he do to ensure that opportunities to grow exist and that workers' rights are protected, too?

**Mr Davis:** The hon. Lady will have noted that Nissan made an investment decision quite recently that was favourable to the north-east. The issue is a little wider than the White Paper. We said—indeed, the Prime Minister said in the article 50 letter yesterday—that it was important to establish transitional arrangements, or an “implementation phase”, and this relates exactly to that: the need to give a degree of certainty.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I am lucky to have part of the Peak District national park in my constituency. With that in mind, does the Secretary of State agree that the Bill is an important vehicle for helping to ensure the maintenance of environmental protections and the opportunity to enhance them, and that anyone who supports those aims should welcome it?

**Mr Davis:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. The Bill will ensure that those protections are maintained, and the only way that would not be the case is if the House made an explicit decision to change the position.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): References to disabled people or disability have been scant, if at all apparent, in all the Government's White Papers. Have the UK Government given any consideration at all to the impact on disabled people, who are among the most vulnerable, and will the Secretary of State confirm that there will be no erosion of their rights in the future?

**Mr Davis:** As a result of this, that will certainly not happen. I can only talk about the White Paper, but throughout the process we have tried to maintain in British law rights that arise out of European law, and that is what we will do.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I have known the Secretary of State for a long time, and he will expect a rough, tough road ahead, because people like me fight for the retention of every right that our citizens of Europe have in this country. Is he aware that if he panders too much to the secret—or not so secret—agenda of the barmy army Eurosceptics who are prominent behind him, he will not receive the level of co-operation that he would otherwise receive when he talks about pragmatism?

**Mr Davis:** The hon. Gentleman has indeed known me for a long time. On another occasion, I will tell Members how he got me into deep trouble in the House.

If the hon. Gentleman listened to my statement, he ought to realise that this is, to a large extent, about preserving rights that people have become used to, and expect to continue to have. I do not know who he was referring to with his rather strange allusions to armies of one sort of another, but he can be sure that the first thing that will cross my mind when I am dealing with this is my conscience.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State intend the great repeal Bill to devolve some matters that are currently reserved and reserve some matters that are currently devolved, or will he be presenting a new Scotland Bill, and if so, when?

**Mr Davis:** I have made two points about that, which I will reiterate to the hon. Lady. First, no decisions that are currently exercised by devolved Administrations will be taken away from them. Secondly, there will be an increase in the number of powers exercised by those Administrations.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Government seem to overlook the fact that we cannot simply incorporate in UK law matters that are based on a reciprocal arrangement with our European partners. How long does the Secretary of State think it will take, for example, to renegotiate all the trading arrangements that we have with them?

**Mr Davis:** The White Paper does not relate to that, but the hon. Lady is right in saying that we have to negotiate reciprocal arrangements, and that is what we will do. That is why we have proposed a comprehensive negotiation and a comprehensive free trade arrangement. We believe that that is eminently achievable, because we already have common standards, which the Bill will maintain, and there are already outstanding levels of trade between us—£290 billion of trade from the European Union to us, which its members will want to preserve every bit as much as we do.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): As we say in Glasgow, “Where’s your parliamentary sovereignty now?” This great power grab is taking power from Brussels bureaucrats and handing it to Whitehall mandarins. Given that statutory instruments are not currently subject to legislative consent from the devolved Assemblies, can the Secretary of State assure us that no statutory instruments will be used to legislate on devolved matters?

**Mr Davis:** That returns us to the issue raised by the spokesman for the hon. Gentleman’s party, the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins). We shall

be talking to the devolved Administrations about the extent to which this will have an impact, and ensuring that there are increases—not decreases—in the powers available to them.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Secretary of State consistently ignores my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander), who made a perfectly legitimate point about the European Economic Area Act 1993 and article 127 of the European Economic Area agreement, which states that the UK Government must give 12 months’ notice to remove itself from the EEA. How will that be dealt with in the great repeal Bill—or has the Secretary of State simply forgotten about it?

**Mr Davis:** No, but it is not a matter for the great repeal Bill.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): The great “download and save until delete” Bill will actually lead to a carnival of reaction, when, alongside the so-called bonfire of red tape, we will see Ministers competing in a demolition derby to reduce various rights and environmental protections. It is also a charter for dilution before devolution. Does the Secretary of State recognise that for some of us to trust Tory Ministers with the “holding and moulding” powers that he wants to give them would be like asking Attila the Hun to mind our horse?

**Mr Davis:** I did not know that the hon. Gentleman had a horse, but let me say this to him: his entire approach—his entire assessment—is just plain wrong.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Paragraph 3.20 of the White Paper refers to the need to trade off scrutiny for speed, whereas paragraph 3.13 states that the Government do not want to their ability to adapt EU law to be unduly constrained. Are the Executive creating a democratic deficit by using secondary legislation? How can they justify that?

**Mr Davis:** We are not going to create a democratic deficit. This is a White Paper, and that is what we are here to discuss, with Parliament.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): I understand from what the Secretary of State has just said that the European economic area will not feature in the Bill. Can he confirm that there will be a separate vote in Parliament on the EEA?

**Mr Davis:** It will depend on what the policy decision is, but I think that it is quite likely to come to Parliament.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): How can trade and security co-operation be maximised if UK courts are interpreting parallel legal provisions in a completely different way from the European Court of Justice? Surely UK courts will have to continue to consider ECJ case law as it develops after Brexit, and not just as it exists at the point of Brexit, as the Secretary of State sought to suggest in his statement.

**Mr Davis:** No, not at all. The whole point of this is to bring those laws back within the control of Parliament and our own courts, and our courts will continue to

[Mr David Davis]

interpret them as they see fit. They may continue to obey precedent, or they may decide to change it. That will be a matter for them, and, ditto, it will be a matter for the House of Commons to decide whether it wants to change such matters as well. Let me add, as an aside, that the Supreme Court often looks at what is done by other courts around the world—not just the European Court of Justice but, for instance, the American courts—in order to make its decisions.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): There was no mention of Gibraltar in the Prime Minister's letter yesterday, and I am pleased to see that it does at least get a mention in today's publication. Given that the overwhelming majority of Gibraltarians voted to remain in the EU, can the Secretary of State explain how the Bill will give certainty to businesses in Gibraltar?

**Mr Davis:** As the hon. Lady will have seen, there is an entire section on overseas territories and the like. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has been engaging in continuous discussion with Gibraltar about these matters, and we will seek to defend its interests as best we can.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State be clearer, please? How many EU laws will become UK laws? I think he has denied that it could be up to 1,000, so what is his best estimate?

**Mr Davis:** Well, all the EU laws will become UK laws as a result of the Bill. There will be subsequent changes—presumably through primary legislation—in, for example, immigration law.

**Nick Smith:** Combien?

**Mr Davis:** The hon. Gentleman shouts out, in French, "How many?" I am not going to try and give him a sort of "never mind the quality, feel the width" answer. The simple truth is that all EU law will move into UK law.

## Backbench Business

### Animal Welfare

[Relevant document: *Fourth Special Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, "Animal Welfare in England: domestic pets: Government response to the Committee's Third Report, HC 1003.*]

12.59 pm

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House notes that current penalties for animal welfare offences in England are among the lowest in Europe; believes that while the Government's plans for a new licensing regime for dogs in England is welcome the Government should consider a ban on the third party sale of dogs; and calls on the Government to increase the maximum penalty for animal welfare offences to five years, as recommended in the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's Third Report, *Animal welfare in England: domestic pets*, HC 117.

It is a great pleasure to introduce the debate. The report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, published in November last year, was the result of a long inquiry into aspects of animal welfare involving domestic pets such as dogs and cats, as well as horses. We took evidence from animal welfare charities, local government, the National Police Chiefs Council, industry representatives, veterinarians, academics and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, to name but a few. We visited Battersea Dogs & Cats Home to learn about its work and also visited a commercial breeder and an animal rescue centre in Wales.

The Committee was unanimous on animal cruelty sentences: the current penalties for animal welfare offences in England are far too low. The maximum sentence for animal cruelty is six months in prison and an unlimited fine.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Will my hon. Friend take some evidence from me on that?

**Neil Parish:** I certainly will.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** I agree with my hon. Friend on that and on his excellent motion, but part of the problem is persuading courts even to impose those minimum sentences that are far too low.

**Neil Parish:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention, and he is absolutely right. I just feel that if we have a stronger sentence and there is more flexibility in the courts, the magistrate will be able to impose that sentence for the very worst of cases. My right hon. Friend is right, but sometimes the current sentence of six months is just not long enough.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He mentioned the Committee being unanimous. Will he also acknowledge that many constituents across the UK have emailed their MPs and asked them to come here today because they agree with the Committee?

**Neil Parish:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point: I believe that there is huge public support for stronger sentencing, and I hope that the Government are listening. Given the number of people in our prisons, I accept that we do not want huge sentences for every crime, but those who beat dogs, cats and other animals to death and plead guilty get an automatic 30% reduction in their sentence; they get four months. I do not believe any of us think that that is long enough.

**Craig Williams** (Cardiff North) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend on securing this debate, and I wholeheartedly support him, while of course declaring my interest of having a dog as part of my family. Our sanctions against people who commit these horrendous crimes compare poorly globally; will he comment on that?

**Neil Parish:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. Our sentences are lower than those in Scotland and Northern Ireland, too, so there is far stiffer sentencing even in our own countries of the United Kingdom. We should also consider the message that it sends if the sentence for beating to death a sentient being that relies entirely on human care is less than that for, perhaps, stealing a computer; it really is not on. I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister is listening carefully; I know he is very keen on animal welfare. It is probably not always his remit to increase sentencing, but we must get this message out, loud and clear.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): To reinforce the hon. Gentleman's point, 1.2 million people have contacted the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals about animal cruelty. Importantly, the legislation is extremely weak and I support him in what he is trying to achieve.

**Neil Parish:** I thank the hon. Gentleman and agree entirely. Many aspects of animal cruelty are reported, but others are not. Having stronger sentencing would be a deterrent; we want to prevent the cruelty from happening in the first place. Having a sentence of at least five years would send the right message. Then it would be up to the courts to decide what sentence they dish out in the end.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Does he agree that it is much more important to prevent cruelty in the first place, and therefore changing the legislation on air guns is vital? Cats and dogs are often the targets for people using those weapons. Legislation has been changed by the devolved Administrations for their countries, and it is about time that it was changed in England, too.

**Neil Parish:** The hon. Lady raises a good point. The use of air guns against cats and dogs can have terrible consequences. Lead pellets often cause a lot of injury and subsequent pain.

To make a broader point, we need to do much more in schools and the education system to make sure people know how to look after an animal. Most people do know how to look after animals. Unfortunately, animal cruelty is going on in some families, and perhaps the children do not know of anything else but what is happening at home. We must try to tackle that.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): I declare my interest as someone who not only cares about the welfare of animals, but has prosecuted cases in the courts under animal cruelty legislation. Does my hon. Friend agree that the matter goes a little further than simply sentencing, however? A number of Members have referred to deterrents. Although the offences of those who have been convicted are recorded on the police national computer, that is not very accessible, and a national register, which is easier to consult, would go quite some way towards ensuring that people who have mistreated animals on one occasion and been convicted cannot then do so again.

**Neil Parish:** My hon. Friend makes a good point: a national register would be good. I would like to see this go further, too. In the United States, a lot of work is done on linking animal cruelty to human cruelty within the home, and I think the two need to be linked much more. It often does not take long to go from treating an animal cruelly—especially beating an animal to death—to starting to beat people up; we have to wake up to that.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I applaud my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He touches on a pertinent point: there are stark statistics proving that people who abuse animals often go on to abuse humans—and indeed it can happen at the same time, of course. A register would therefore be very beneficial in helping tackle what is a much bigger social problem.

**Neil Parish:** I thank my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for that intervention; she is an excellent Select Committee member. She makes the point about getting that link; when finding cruelty to animals we should make much more of a link to investigating what is happening in the home, to see whether there is much more going on than just the cruelty to the animal. We must open our eyes to what is happening. Most people look after animals very well, but of course those who do not can be incredibly cruel, and we need to tackle that.

I was surprised and disappointed that the Government rejected the recommendation for a higher maximum sentence of five years, and I again ask the Minister to go back to the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice to see whether we can get it increased, because six months is too low.

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has also had a conversation with the Government Whips, because on 24 February we considered the Second Reading of my Animal Cruelty (Sentencing) Bill, which would have increased the sentencing period to five years, but unfortunately it was objected to by the Government Whips. I hope he is putting pressure on them as well.

**Neil Parish:** I certainly talk to Whips, but whether they listen is another matter, of course—although I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) listens to every word I say. The hon. Lady makes a serious point, however; it is not good to talk out such Bills, as there is a legitimate reason for increasing the sentence. If we took a straw poll of all MPs, irrespective of their party, I am sure the vast majority would agree that the sentencing is too low at present; we have to find a method of increasing that. I accept that the Government wanted to come back with some other

[Neil Parish]

ideas, and I would be very happy to listen to them, but the sentencing period must be much more than the current six months.

**Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does he agree that we also need to make sure that children understand in school about the impacts of and problems with treating animals badly?

**Neil Parish:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. It is absolutely right to consider what our schools can do to teach young people not to treat animals cruelly.

I have been told that I have only 15 minutes and that I ought to get on with my speech, so I shall try to make a little progress. DEFRA has said that average sentences for animal cruelty are relatively stable, but I fear that that is a cop-out. Judges should have the flexibility to give higher sentences for the worst examples of animal cruelty, both as a well-deserved punishment and as a deterrent to other potential animal abusers.

Anyone who can seriously injure a sentient being such as a dog or a cat can do the same to a human. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting a link between the abuse of animals and violence against people. In the USA, the FBI has begun tracking incidents of animal abuse as part of its national incident-based reporting system, which collects data on crime. As part of our report on animal welfare, the EFRA Committee has recommended that a new abuse register should be established for those convicted of animal abuse offences, that those convicted of cruelty should never be allowed to keep animals again, and that the police should have access to those files in light of the link between animal and human abuse.

In addition to discussing sentencing for cruelty, the Committee went on to consider third-party sales of puppies. I believe that a ban on third-party sales will improve the condition of dogs sold in the UK. Unscrupulous dealers currently go to some lengths to pose as responsible breeders in order to sell animals to unsuspecting buyers. Buyers must see the puppy with its mother. Many dealers set up a false home, as a reassurance to potential buyers, which is then vacated so that they cannot be traced. The sad reality is that anyone who is selling a puppy indirectly, through a licensed pet shop, has no regard for the welfare of their puppies. A responsible breeder would never sell through a pet shop licence holder, because it has a negative impact on the welfare of puppies.

By allowing third-party sales, the Government are contradicting their own advice. They advise buyers to ensure that they see the puppy with its mother, yet buying from a third-party seller does not allow this. By banning third-party sales, the public would have to buy directly from breeders. This would allow buyers to assess the premises for themselves, which would drive up animal welfare standards. The Committee visited a puppy farm in Wales, and the conditions there were not good, to say the least. If buyers had to go there to get their puppies, I feel sure that something would be done about that. Also, the people producing those puppies were getting about £200 each for them, whereas the dealers in Birmingham were selling them for £700 to

£800, and sometimes as much as £1,000. There is a real problem there, and I am extremely disappointed that the Government have rejected our recommendation for a ban on third-party sales. Since the EFRA Committee published its report, many more animal organisations have come out in favour of a ban on such sales. Pup Aid has always been a vocal supporter of a ban, and the RSPCA has recently changed its mind on the issue.

In February, the Government announced tougher new breeding licensing rules. These include making it completely illegal to sell puppies younger than eight weeks old, and requiring anyone breeding and selling three or more litters of puppies a year to apply for a formal licence. That is a good start, but it does not go far enough. In addition to increasing maximum sentences and banning third-party sales, the Government should consider a reduction in the threshold for licensing a breeder from three litters a year to two litters a year, and the introduction of a new national inspectorate to assist local authorities and give the new regulations a powerful enforcer. It is too easy for unscrupulous dealers to fall outside the regulatory regime. As I have stated, a new abuse register should also be established for those convicted of animal abuse offences. I also believe that the Government should look not only at dog breeders but at cat breeders, who are not currently licensed at all. Britain is a nation of animal lovers, and our pets deserve nothing less than the very highest animal welfare standards. I look forward to hearing the strong representations of my colleagues throughout the debate, especially those who have intervened on me.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I should like to inform Members that if they speak for no more than eight minutes, everyone will get in. That would allow everyone to speak for eight minutes in the next debate as well. So if we could all stick to an informal limit of eight minutes, that would be fantastic.

1.14 pm

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate and I hope to be able to abide by your eight-minute rule, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), who chairs our Select Committee with distinction. Obviously his time spent in the European Parliament was not a wasted apprenticeship; he demonstrates his skills every time we meet.

The motion raises three issues: penalties for animal welfare offences; a ban on third-party sales; and the Committee's report on the underlying question of prosecutions. I wish to register my appreciation for the briefings I have received in preparation for the debate from Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, the RSPCA, Cats Protection, the Dogs Trust, Blue Cross, the Kennel Club and, of course, the House of Commons Library.

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the better licensing of breeders would promote a more responsible buying culture and help to prevent the cruel practice of puppy farming?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** My hon. Friend's good point reinforces the contribution from the Chair of the Select Committee. I shall say more about licensing in a moment, but it is certainly a key element of the Committee's report to which we hope the Government will respond positively.

I am always heartened that constituents contact me about a whole range of animal welfare issues because that shows that, while they articulate many concerns, animal welfare matters to them a great deal. Hon. and right hon. Members will receive emails and the occasional letter about the same animal-related issues as I do, including bees, badgers, domestic pets, circus animals, wild animals and dog fighting. It is good to see how much people care, but it is obviously disappointing, and indeed distressing, that these activities and abuses continue.

Along with others, I have backed the campaign instigated by Battersea Dogs & Cats Home that calls for tougher punishments for people who abuse and neglect animals. I was pleased to attend the launch of the campaign here in Westminster, and along with others I pledged my support for increasing sentences for animal abusers. It is unacceptable that people can abuse and neglect animals yet get away with such a small penalty. Battersea's research shows that England and Wales has the lowest sentences for cruelty across 100 countries and states worldwide. Six months in prison is neither a punishment nor a deterrent when it comes to some of the most serious offences.

Further background information for the debate comes from the EFRA Committee's third report of this Session. Animal welfare is mentioned in the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton—I nearly called him my hon. Friend, but we do this so often that it is almost passé. The report makes a number of recommendations, including on a timetable for the 10-yearly review of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. I am sure that the Minister will respond to that point in due course. It also recommends a ban on third-party puppy sales and that local government should be responsible for enforcing the 2006 Act.

The report goes on to discuss the role of the RSPCA, which has historically undertaken the overwhelming majority of animal welfare investigations and prosecutions. The Select Committee recommended:

"the RSPCA should continue its important work investigating animal welfare cases...It should, however, withdraw from acting as a prosecutor of first resort where there are statutory bodies with a duty to carry out this role."

A number of us said at the time that it was not for the Select Committee to require the RSPCA to withdraw in that way, because it will always have the right to raise private prosecutions in the courts, in the same way as any other citizen does. The real question was about the word "duty" in relation to other bodies, and the report considered which statutory bodies should be responsible in such circumstances.

The vast majority of our Committee's work is done by consensus, as is the case for most Select Committees. This was one of the few issues that split the Committee. I voted against the majority view, not as a matter of principle but on the practicalities. In my view, and with no disrespect to those who voted for this recommendation, the expectation that the Crown Prosecution Service or local authorities will step in as prosecutors is pure fantasy. However, after rethinking the matter and considering what happens in Scotland—the hon. Member

for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan), who represents the Scottish National party on the Committee, made a number of important points in this regard—I have been persuaded of one thing. If society is serious about animal welfare, it should accept its responsibilities. It is unfair that the RSPCA has to do society's work, and it is carrying out that duty because the CPS and local authorities are not. We should send a message that society should prosecute through the CPS and the police—we should not have to rely on the RSPCA—but that is not going to happen any time soon. Regardless of what the Committee says, the RSPCA will have to continue its work, because that is the only option—no one else is going to do it.

**Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con) *rose*—

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I am happy to give way to my other hon. Friend from the Select Committee.

**Chris Davies:** I thank my hon. Friend from across the divide for giving way. When the Committee took evidence, we found out that the system works particularly well in Scotland. It is not often that I praise how the Scottish National party runs Scottish affairs, but that system works well. Why cannot we do things as well on this side of the border?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** With my classic cockney accent, I hope that I will be forgiven if I do not join the hon. Gentleman in praising the Scottish National party. I think the policy predates the SNP taking over the Scottish Government, but it has continued since. Indeed, the Procurator Fiscal Service carries out that policy, and the CPS should do so here, but my point is that the CPS is not doing it, is not going to do it, and does not have the resources to do it. If it were not for the RSPCA, the work would not get done, so I support its ability to continue. Until such time as the Government give the CPS and local authorities the wherewithal to do the job, it will not get done unless the RSPCA does it.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing the debate. I want to give a bad example from my constituency, which has quite a few animal welfare issues. In this instance, a young fox had a habit of going to a large supermarket every night to hunt for food. A gang of boys got hold of the fox by the tail and hurled it round and round, smashing its head against a wall several times, and then stamped on its head. The punishment for that—well, it was hardly a punishment at all. It is absolutely necessary to increase the penalties for people who inflict that kind of cruelty on animals.

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** My right hon. Friend makes the point emphatically that the penalty does not fit the crime. As the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton mentioned, such penalties need urgent review.

I apologise that I will go over my eight minutes, Madam Deputy Speaker, but hopefully by only one and a half minutes. Given that the RSPCA cruelty helpline receives 1 million calls, 15% of which are investigated, there is too much work to expect the prosecutorial authorities to accept responsibility.

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

The issue of third-party sales split not only the Committee, but the animal welfare organisations. Dogs Trust and Blue Cross were against a ban, preferring a stronger enforced licensing regime, but the Kennel Club supported it. There is no disagreement about the objective, only about the tools that should be used to better protect animals and purchasers. I look forward to hearing the views of the Minister and the shadow Minister about that difference of opinion on the proposed ban, and about how the Government expect to make progress on dealing with concerns about this important issue.

The Minister knows that he is held in high regard by members of the EFRA Committee and by animal welfare organisations. Even though animal welfare is not his primary responsibility, he answers to the Commons on that topic. There is no disagreement about wanting better animal welfare; the key challenge is how to deliver it. I am confident that the Minister and his colleagues, encouraged by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) on the Opposition Front Bench, will continue to be as effective as possible in this matter. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to say my few words.

1.23 pm

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What a relief it is that we are discussing something other than our leaving the European Union. I am absolutely sick to death of hearing about it—and we have another two years to go.

The standard by which I judge civilisation is how we treat animals and animal welfare more generally. I have been involved in animal welfare matters ever since I entered the House, so I have heard many of the arguments before. Indeed, when David Mellor was a Member of this place, I recall serving on the Standing Committee that considered a Bill to amend the Protection of Animals Act 1911.

Looking back at the different things that we have done—I managed to get two pieces of legislation on to the statute book—by and large this country has a good record on animal welfare. However, the incident that the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) shared with the House was absolutely awful—no words can describe how horrible it was. I think we are going to have a debate in which we all agree; I doubt whether anyone will stand up and say, “Let’s be cruel to animals.”

I gently say to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), who opened the debate, that I have seen many reports produced by this place—some gather dust; some are acted on; and some are completely ignored. Parliaments change and new Members enter, so it can be as if we are raising these issues for the first time, but one or two things have changed. My hon. Friend is entirely right that we need tougher sentences, but can our prisons take the people? Do we need, as my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) mentioned earlier, more publicity when people are sentenced? I absolutely agree that we need tougher sentences.

There is politics in everything, and there is certainly politics in the animal world. I have received all sorts of emails asking me to mention an organisation or to praise this person or that person, and I am not sure that

we are all singing the same song, so I am going to praise just two ladies. The first is Lorraine Platt, who runs an animal welfare organisation that I support and has done a fantastic job as far as I am concerned. The second is the Countess of Stockton, who is a trustee of the RSPCA. I will leave it to other Members to decide which organisation they want to praise.

The main thing that has changed is online sales, which are a new challenge and a big issue. As we have heard, it is wrong for someone to buy a puppy without seeing where it comes from and how it is being looked after. Anne Widdecombe bought a black labrador for my youngest child, and I am delighted to say that it had been owned by the grandson of Rab Butler, so it certainly had a good pedigree and gave us 14 years of joy. It is important that people know where a puppy comes from. As we all know, while small things will look cute and cuddly, there is an awful lot of responsibility in looking after a pet when they grow up.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): According to my information, about one third of people do not see the mother when picking up a puppy.

**Sir David Amess:** My hon. Friend is right. The situation is lamentable, but I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton that I am unsure how we put that right. We just have to keep on and on with the same message.

As part of Project Capone, Hindsight has been monitoring the sales of animals on sites such as Gumtree. Its findings demonstrate the clear need for legislation to address the problem. Despite the figures I am about to quote, I stress that Gumtree should be lauded for doing more than any other site to monitor online sales and comply with Pet Advertising Advisory Group minimum standards. Gumtree UK adverts were monitored over a 12-month period ending in February this year, and 400,000 adverts related to the sale of animals were tracked, 58% of which related to dogs. Estimates suggest that as many as 88% of puppies born in Great Britain are bred by unlicensed breeders, which is totally unacceptable. The EFRA report, which I have of course read, states at paragraph 95 that Gumtree listings for pets for sale has decreased from 50,000 to 15,000, which should be welcomed.

I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that—my goodness—I have seen all sorts of people as Ministers. Some do the job brilliantly, but with some we need a little bit of convincing about their dedication to animal welfare. I am convinced that this particular Minister is absolutely genuine on this issue and that he will react positively to the report.

We need websites to commit to following at least the minimum PAAG standards, and it is important that all adverts display the age of the animal advertised. Although the vast majority of the public state that they would not buy a puppy from a commercially driven breeder, my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) is absolutely right about the small number who see a puppy with its mother.

I welcome DEFRA’s announcement that it will be a legal requirement for sellers to display their licence number on all adverts, but there are also problems with ensuring that licences are properly granted and that local authorities have adequate resources to assess applicants



for a licence. Local authorities are currently in charge of licensing, but it is extremely difficult for them to tackle illegal trading on such a scale because they lack the resources to monitor the enormous volume of online sales. Indeed, local authorities are unable to monitor the trade offline, or to provide qualified individuals to assess welfare needs.

Along with a stricter licensing regime, we need professionals who are able adequately to determine whether a licence should be granted. Unfortunately, local authority officials who inspect places where animals are sold are not necessarily trained specifically in detecting animal welfare issues. Another important point is that individuals who buy such animals are not aware that the seller should be licensed.

The message from this House should be that transparency and public education are incredibly important. Sometime in July we are holding a responsible pet ownership competition on the green at the other end of the building, and I hope that all hon. Members who are interested will join us in celebrating responsible pet ownership.

Income from online sales is rarely declared, so I remind the Minister that a lot of money is being lost in income tax, which should be of significant concern to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Apparently the single most expensive dog advertised—just last month by a London-based seller—was a French bulldog for £30,000, which is big money.

Research from Blue Cross shows that even when inspections are carried out, the quality of investigations varies massively from local authority to local authority. Standardised inspection criteria should help to ensure that basic animal welfare is met across the country.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton and his hard-working Committee on producing the report. I hope that it will not gather dust, but that it will be acted on.

1.32 pm

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) and all the EFRA Committee on securing this debate and on their excellent report. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to speak about increasing sentences for animal cruelty because, as I have already mentioned, my private Member's Bill specifically addressed that issue. I was disappointed not to have a debate on Second Reading on 24 February and that the Conservative Whips objected to the Bill in the dying seconds. I will now make the speech that I would have made on Second Reading.

We in this place owe a change in the law to those that cannot speak, that cannot defend themselves and that suffer abuse, violence and cruelty by the hands that are meant to feed them, care for them, protect them and love them. I introduced my Bill on behalf of Baby the bulldog and Scamp the dog.

Baby the bulldog was held aloft by Andrew Frankish at the top of a flight of wooden stairs before he repeatedly threw her down them as he laughed. Baby's neck was stamped on. She was thrown to the floor with force, over and over. Her small chest was jumped on with the full body weight of one of the Frankish brothers. The younger man said, "See if we can make it scream any

more. We should throw it down the stairs by its ears," before he picked her up against the wall, head-butted her twice and then threw her down the stairs again.

Baby was tortured and beaten by those who were supposed to care for her. The whole horrible ordeal seemed to be for the brothers' entertainment—for fun—as they filmed themselves laughing on a mobile phone. Baby should not have had to suffer such horrific abuse, but she did and was put down shortly afterwards.

When the evidence was found, by chance, two years later on a mobile phone card dropped on a supermarket floor, we might have expected Baby finally to have justice. Thanks to the hard work of the police, the RSPCA and all those who gave evidence, the brothers were convicted of causing unnecessary suffering to her under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, but she was let down once again by the law. The two brothers received a suspended sentence, six months' tagged curfew and £300 in costs. No one can feel that the justice system did its job that day.

On researching how the two brothers could have received such an impossibly lenient sentence for a vicious and premeditated assault, I was astonished to find that the maximum sentence for any form of animal abuse is just six months' custody. Incredibly, the maximum sentence has not changed since the Protection of Animals Act 1911, which was essentially introduced to make it an offence to overload or override animals pulling loads on the street or in pits. The law is lagging a century behind.

Under the last Labour Government, the issue was meant to be addressed by the 2006 Act, which made provision to increase sentencing to imprisonment of up to 51 weeks but, incredibly, the provision was never enacted, so people can inflict any degree of cruelty on animals and still receive a maximum of only six months' imprisonment. The public rightly find that hard to understand or accept as appropriate.

After the incident of the Frankish brothers came to my attention, I decided to try to amend the law to ensure that sentences fit the crime in such cases and was pleased to present my Animal Cruelty (Sentencing) Bill. But during the progress of that Bill, there was another horrific incident in my constituency that has made the case for a change in the law even more pressing. A small dog named Scamp was found buried alive in woods near Redcar on 19 October, with a nail hammered into its head.

On 22 February, 59-year-old Michael Heathcock and 60-year-old Richard Finch, both from Redcar, pleaded guilty to offences under the 2006 Act, but they were sentenced to just four months. They will probably serve just eight weeks in prison, which is not enough time for reflection, punishment or rehabilitation.

The people of my constituency have been horrified by those cases, and it is important that I pay tribute to their response. After hearing of the Frankish brothers incident and that of Scamp, they held vigils for the animals, with hundreds of people coming to lay flowers and light candles. They sent their message loudly and defiantly. There are also plans to build a dog park to the animals' memory.

The perpetrators do not represent our community. People in Redcar are decent and kind. I know many passionate animal lovers, and I meet wonderful dog owners as I walk my dog on the beach or in the Eston hills. But my

[Anna Turley]

constituents are angry. They feel that the criminal justice system is letting them down, which is why I am speaking here today.

On researching my Bill, I was shocked by the number of horrific cases I came across. I read of a dismembered cat left on a war memorial, of 20 ducks strangled with cable around their necks, of boiling liquid poured on a puppy and of a mutilated Shetland pony. Surrey police recently instituted Operation Takahe to try to find the person believed to be behind the theft and mutilation of more than 200 cats. The list of horrific attacks goes on and on.

The RSPCA receives and investigates thousands of complaints about cruelty to animals each year. It received 143,000 complaints in 2015, and 1,781 people were successfully prosecuted, yet only one in 10 convictions presently results in a prison sentence. We do not treat such crimes with the weight they warrant. I urge those who think that the crime of abusing defenceless animals is worth less serious attention than the abuse of people to look at the evidence, predominantly from the United States, as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton mentioned earlier. The evidence reveals a startling propensity for offenders charged with crimes against animals to commit other violent offences against human victims. It finds that pet abuse is concurrent in 88% of families under supervision for the physical abuse of their children.

In the UK, a new academic study—the first of its kind in Europe—by researchers at Teesside University has also identified a link between animal abuse and domestic violence. The study of young people in eastern Europe found that violence breeds violence. Adolescent males who have experienced domestic violence either show displaced aggression against animals or progress to committing violence against family members. Because abusers target the powerless and lack the ability to feel empathy with their victims, crimes against animals, spouses, children and the elderly often go hand in hand. Children who abuse animals may be repeating a lesson learned at home. Like their parents, they are reacting to anger or frustration with violence. Their violence is directed at the only individual more vulnerable than they are: an animal.

The findings point towards a worrying cycle of abuse in society if violence is not addressed or properly challenged, and increased sentencing is just one tool we need to break that cycle.

We would be forgiven for thinking that, as a nation of animal lovers, we should expect to be leading the way on these issues, but I am afraid to say that we are in fact lagging behind many other countries. The Northern Ireland Assembly recently increased the maximum penalty from two years to five years, and it should also be noted that Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK where more serious animal welfare offences can be tried in a Crown court. The Scottish Government recently committed to reviewing penalties under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. If we look around the world, we see that the maximum penalty for animal cruelty in Australia is five years, and in Germany it is three years. A maximum of six months here in England and Wales, decided by a magistrates court rather than a Crown court, seems derisory.

Such woefully inadequate sentences must be addressed if the punishments are to fit the cruelty inflicted on animals. My Bill sought to increase the custodial sentence for animal cruelty from six months to five years, and if we are to continue declaring ourselves a nation of animal lovers, it is about time we showed it by sending out the message that we take animal cruelty seriously.

I wish to thank the RSPCA, Dogs Trust, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home and the League Against Cruel Sports for their support for Bill. I also wish to thank my community in Redcar and Teesside, who have shown their compassion and their love for animals in the way they have responded to these terrible acts and in their support for my efforts to change the law. I also pay tribute to the EFRA Committee for its work on this and on today's debate.

Finally, I want to say a word about Baby the bulldog and the dog named Scamp, because it is in their name that I seek to change the law. We will probably never know the full cruelty and torture these silent and defenceless animals endured. We can only begin to imagine the pain they experienced and the fear they felt. We cannot undo the suffering done to them, but we can show one another that this kind of cruelty has no place in our communities and that such depraved behaviour will face the punishment that it deserves. I welcome today's debate and urge the Government to put right the injustice by changing the law on animal cruelty sentencing.

1.40 pm

**Mrs Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I wish to thank the Backbench Business Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) and the EFRA Committee for putting animal welfare on the agenda in Parliament today. I have found it distressing to listen to the brutal examples of animal cruelty we have heard about, particularly those detailed in the speech by the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley). I emphasise that animal welfare and action to prevent animal cruelty is a very high priority for many of my constituents, who contact me regularly about this. I warmly and strongly support the campaign for stiffer maximum sentences for those who abuse animals, act with unnecessary cruelty or otherwise fail to comply with our animal welfare rules in this country.

In the few minutes I hope to detain the House, I wish to focus on the welfare of farm animals, because I feel strongly that all of us who take animal welfare matters seriously should focus on the billions of animals used in agriculture across the world. If we want to ensure that, as a civilised society, we maintain high standards of animal welfare, it is vital that we extend this to farm animals. I thank Peter Stevenson of Compassion in World Farming for providing me with some help in preparing for this debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) said that he was sick of talking about Brexit, but Brexit does have relevance today, because about 80% of our animal welfare rules are currently part of EU law. Leaving the EU will give us back control over many policy decisions on animal welfare and farming. As I said when I had the opportunity to raise this matter during Prime Minister's questions, we should use Brexit to reaffirm our support for the highest standards of animal welfare. We should also use it as an opportunity to see how we can strengthen protection for animals.

Food and farming is one of the most important parts of our economy, supporting many thousands of jobs. I welcome the fact that last October the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said that high standards of animal welfare should be one of the unique selling points of UK-produced food in the post-Brexit era. If that is to be a reality in post-Brexit farming, we need to ensure that animal welfare is at the heart of our new system of farm payment support. It is crucial that we maintain that financial support for agriculture if we are to ensure that food produced in accordance with high welfare standards is not priced out of the market by cheaper, less compassionate, alternatives. In future trade talks, we should be prepared to ask those countries that wish to sell into our market to commit to acceptable standards of animal welfare, as was emphasised in the Conservative manifesto. It is my understanding that World Trade Organisation case law does allow us to do that, so long as we apply the same rules across different countries.

The compassionate treatment of animals should be at the heart of the UK's post-Brexit brand for food and farming. We should recognise the efforts made by UK farmers already, as the majority take animal welfare very seriously. Our new system of farm support should reward farmers who adopt higher welfare standards, for example, through compliance with recognised schemes such as those run by RSPCA Assured or the Pasture-Fed Livestock Association. We need to provide incentives to move away from industrial livestock production towards free-range systems.

In particular, we should aim for an end to the zero grazing of dairy cows. Industrial systems that keep cattle indoors all year round are not capable of delivering high animal welfare standards, no matter how well-managed. I welcome the acknowledgement the Minister gave in responding to my Westminster Hall debate on this issue, when he said that

“any farmer who has turned cattle out to grass in April and watched their reaction knows that cattle prefer grazing, all other things being equal.”—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 95WH.]

As part of our efforts to end the practice of zero grazing, I hope that the Government will consider measures to enable consumers to make informed choices on the milk they buy. At present, most milk, other than organic milk, is pooled together, making it impossible to distinguish intensively produced from pasture-based milk. We need to consider separation, to enable farmers using good practices and pasture-based grazing to advertise this fact to consumers in the way free-range egg producers have for many years.

**Rebecca Pow:** Recently, I raised with the Minister the idea of having a “Buy British Food” button when people buy food on the internet, and I hope to talk to him shortly. How about having some sort of guidance or button about standards and animal care, too?

**Mrs Villiers:** Both are good ideas, and I hope the Minister will respond to them when he sums up.

A further very important reason why we should discourage intensive farming methods is antimicrobial resistance, a matter the Select Committee has examined carefully. Industrial-style farming can lead to the overuse of antibiotics to fend off diseases and infection caused

by keeping animals in unnatural and crowded conditions that compromise their health and their immune responses. Antimicrobials are often given to whole herds or flocks of intensively farmed animals via feed and water. Unless we draw a halt to the trend that antibiotics are gradually becoming less and less able to protect us, we could face the risk of a return to the situation of previous centuries where such matters as childbirth, non-serious injuries and routine operations frequently gave rise to a risk of death. This is a very serious risk faced by our society, and many will no doubt have listened to the harrowing Radio 4 drama, “Resistance”, which was based on one of the worst-case scenarios feared by scientists. So it is necessary to find ways to reduce overall antibiotic use in farming, and our goal should be higher-welfare farming where animals are kept healthy through good husbandry practices rather than routine antibiotic use.

As we scrutinise the great repeal Bill and associated legislation, we will need to ensure that the enforcement powers currently vested in EU bodies are transferred to domestic alternatives. Here I wish to echo a point made by a number of hon. Members: enforcement is crucial. There is no point in having rules on our statute book that are not properly enforced. This has been a long-standing concern in relation to EU rules; I recall working with my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton when we were both in the European Parliament to try to improve enforcement. This debate is a good opportunity to emphasise that the proper enforcement of rules on animal welfare and preventing animal cruelty is vital for our constituents, who care so much about this matter. Analysis by the Food Standards Agency indicates that between July 2014 and June 2016 there were more than 4,000 serious breaches of animal welfare legislation relating to slaughter and transport to slaughter. We need to do better.

In conclusion, I urge the Minister to consider an end to the export of live animals for slaughter overseas. I believe that this trade would have been banned years ago if the decision had rested with Westminster rather than Brussels. The referendum vote means that very soon this House will have control over this decision once again, and I hope the Government will press ahead with a ban to end this cruel trade.

1.49 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for his extensive speech, as well as the Backbench Business Committee and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee for their work in bringing this debate to the House.

I feel extremely strongly about animal welfare—I have had rescue dogs in my family since childhood—and it has overwhelming support from the public throughout the UK, as well as from MPs; one has only to go to the Westminster dog of the year awards to see just how important animal welfare, particularly for puppies and dogs, is to MPs. I was pleased to come fourth last year with my dog, Rossi, who is a rescue dog. We hope to top that this year and move up the leadership board.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Come on Rossi!

**Dr Cameron:** Thank you.

[Dr Cameron]

I thank the organisations that got in touch with me regarding this debate, including the League Against Cruel Sports, the Kennel Club, the Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Marc the Vet, Pup Aid and Battersea Dogs & Cats Home. That is just a few of the organisations that work in this field. In my speech, I wish to touch briefly on several issues, including third-party puppy sales and animal cruelty sentencing.

For the public, the most visible way of selling dogs is when puppies are sold in pet shops, which is a real issue. The sale of dogs in pet shops gives the impression that they are commodities and does not afford them their status as man's best friend. It does not send the clear message to the public that we should send, which is that a dog is for life. Pet-shop puppies are often removed from their mothers too early: they are separated after just a few weeks, despite the regulations. Many may have been reared in puppy farms, which notable reports have exposed as having unacceptable animal welfare conditions. Puppy farms do not foster good care, socialisation or attachment with mothers, and those issues contribute to poor temperament in dogs and an increased likelihood of illness and disease. That is not good for puppies, and it is certainly not good for the public.

The high street is not the place to buy a puppy. The sale of puppies on the high street fosters puppy farming and puppy trafficking. It also leads to impulse purchases by people whose household may not be best suited to the dog, nor the dog best suited to the household. That is a poor start for all involved. Polling indicates that 90% of the public do not wish to buy a puppy that has been reared on a puppy farm, but people often do so unknowingly when they buy on the high street or from third-party breeders.

Numerous recent reports on puppy farming indicate an overwhelming lack of care and concern for basic animal welfare. Mothers are used excessively as breeding machines for profit and then discarded, or even killed, when they are no longer of any use. They are kept for their whole lives in cramped, unhygienic and often horrendous conditions. That simply is not acceptable to the UK public.

A puppy's journey should be tracked from birth, through a system of registration and microchipping. Disreputable breeders ignore the guidelines, but often go unpunished, which only reinforces their behaviour. Guidelines indicate that dogs should breed no more than six times in their lifetime, and the Kennel Club's recommendation is no more than four times. The Kennel Club reports that one in five pups bought in a pet shop needs veterinary care or dies before they are five months old. That is simply not acceptable for the welfare of the puppies involved or the right of the public to buy puppies who have been looked after properly and appropriately.

Will the Minister consider the need for a public awareness campaign, co-ordinated with the devolved Governments throughout the United Kingdom? Such a campaign could outline how to recognise best practice in dog breeding and provide the public with guidelines on how and where to buy puppies reputable. We are looking for Government leadership on this issue. As other Members have said, currently a third of people do not see the mother when they buy a puppy.

We must tackle the sale and trafficking of illegally imported puppies. Key agencies will require regular shared intelligence from across the EU and beyond, along with a published strategy that is monitored, enforced and reviewed. Visual checks should be routine for dogs entering the UK. Such checks are necessary on grounds not only of welfare but of public health. What procedures will be put in place for collaboration after Brexit? How will we make sure that systems are strengthened to ensure animal welfare?

We have heard some disturbing accounts of animal cruelty and the far too lenient sentences imposed. Such sentences are not a deterrent because the industry is lucrative, which is why people engage in it. Those involved have no regard for animal welfare. Research indicates, and I know from my work in psychology, that there is a link between cruelty to animals, and psychopathy and cruelty to humans, including children. That must be taken seriously, not only with regard to animal welfare standards, but because of the impact on other victims of cruelty. The individuals involved practise cruelty to animals and then transfer it to humans. The Government must act and sentences must be increased, because they are currently not a deterrent. It is a lucrative industry and fines are simply not enough. Small fines are not much punishment for people who are making large sums of money.

The Government must act on third-party sales to improve animal welfare for puppies, and they must act on sentencing and ensure that there are deterrents for those involved in animal cruelty. I have had numerous emails and letters from constituents who feel we just are not doing enough and that the problem has to be tackled, so I urge the Minister to look into it. I also urge him to consider awareness campaigns. It is extremely important that the public make good, informed decisions when they buy puppies, so that they can enjoy the puppy and the puppy can enjoy a good life.

1.56 pm

**Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I, too, thank the various members of the public and numerous organisations that provided evidence to the Select Committee with such conviction and passion. Animal welfare is an emotive issue, but Committee members were extremely grateful for the help we got in reaching our conclusions.

I shall touch briefly on three areas of interest. First, our inquiry revealed that this was about a lot more than just puppy farming. On canine welfare, we learned a lot about the dangers of a wider form of neglect when, in some cases, people are simply unable to look after animals to the standard we expect. To be blunt about it, there is cruelty by kindness. We learned an important lesson about how education is almost as vital as prosecution.

We were also concerned about issues such as breeding disorders, and how it seems to be acceptable, in certain areas of canine ownership, almost to deliberately breed abnormalities into canines. That is an act of considerable cruelty that does not seem to be taken care of by the law. The responsibility must lie with breed societies and show organisers. If nothing else, I hope this debate sends them a small warning that, as society moves on, we will probably close in on the deliberate breeding of dogs to have bizarre physical deficiencies purely for reasons of fashion.

Our conclusion was that we should be more proactive and less reactive on some of the issues. In other words, prosecution is not always the answer and, increasingly, education probably is. If we get that right, the pressure on the puppy-farming network to deliver will be reduced.

Secondly, on puppy farms and the related market, opinions were probably as divided as any and emotions ran as high as any. With a lot of welfare legislation, I am suspicious that a total ban—a populist and eye-catching expression that we occasionally use in Parliament—is not always the answer to a welfare problem. Nevertheless, I confess to changing my mind on this issue as a result of the visits we made, the vets we spoke to, the expertise to which we were exposed, and the visits to pet shops and other establishments. All that led us to the conclusion that however hard people tried, the basic minimum standards that we all expect could never really be met.

The Committee was also not persuaded by the claim that public demand must be met, and that the only way of meeting it is through this mass production route. We were convinced by the fact that ethical, effective and commercial alternatives do exist. Indeed, in my own part of west Wales, there is an ethical puppy farm, which has large numbers of breeding bitches and which sells large numbers of puppies to the public, but it does so in a way that enables the buyer to meet the mother and the father, have a cup of coffee and do all the those things that we would like to encourage, and yet it is perfectly capable of running a commercially successful enterprise in the process.

The Committee also learned that demand is not a dirty word. As colleagues know, I am interested in working dogs, and gun dogs in particular. I want to bring on a new gun dog as we speak, but I expect to have to pay money for it and to travel to find exactly the animal that I am looking for, and that is absolutely how it should be. I should not be able to buy one by going online, popping down to the pet shop, or going to some dealer whom I have never met before. I need to research the purchase and understand everything that there is about veterinary records, breeding and the like in order to do so. I do not see why that practice should be restricted only to working dogs. If we get that bit right, there are only moral, welfare, and economic and commercial upsides.

My third point relates to prosecutions, which was raised by the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick). Despite what the press may have said, prosecutions featured fairly low in the Committee's conclusions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there has been a little bit of misrepresentation in the media. The Committee never did, nor could it, recommend that the RSPCA be stripped of its prosecuting powers, because it does not have any such powers over and above those that we all have as private citizens in the UK—not in Scotland—which is the right to take out a private prosecution. The conclusion that we reached was based on the very compelling evidence that was offered by the SSPCA. It was just a more nuanced approach that avoids the accusations of a conflict of interest. We were also not persuaded by the argument that, in the absence of the RSPCA, no one would do this work. I have with me a schedule of animal welfare prosecutions, more than half of which have been carried out by local authorities and the police.

**Oliver Colvile:** Does my hon. Friend also recognise that it is very important that there is as much publicity as possible about how people misuse animals? It might be helpful if “The Archers”, of which I am a very strong advocate, were to run a storyline about animals that are being badly treated and badly harmed.

**Simon Hart:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I need to listen to “The Archers” a bit more often. From what I gather, the programme is covering quite a lot of contemporary issues at the moment, but he makes a good point.

In conclusion, let me bring to the attention of the House the letter written by the Attorney General's Office in the name of the Solicitor General to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier) who raised the question about whether the Crown Prosecution Service ever refuses to proceed with prosecutions on the basis of resource. The answer stated:

“Resources are never the only bar to prosecution because as you know, the Code of Crown Prosecutors sets out the two stages of the Full Code Test”.

In answer to the question, “Does the Crown Prosecution Service ever refuse to proceed on the basis of a lack of expert knowledge in the subject area in question?” the Solicitor General said:

“No, but a distinction should be drawn between expert knowledge provided by expert witnesses and specialist legal knowledge.”

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I made reference to the wording of a recommendation, which I have reflected on significantly. It says that the RSPCA “should, however, withdraw from acting”.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, and I agree that the CPS should be acting, but does he really think that the CPS will do it if the RSPCA takes a step back?

**Simon Hart:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The Wooler report, which has been much talked about and which has helped us to reach our conclusions, raises exactly the point that he makes. There is a transitional period, but it is fair to say that concerns have been expressed—not by people such as me who might be accused of having a partisan view, but by more arm's-length organisations—about potential conflicts of interest between organisations such as investigators, prosecutors, campaigners and fundraisers. The Royal Commission inquiry in 1983 recommended that the CPS was created so that the police would not be accused of that kind of conflict. My view was that if it was good enough for the police to have an arm's-length prosecuting process, it is probably good enough for the country's second biggest prosecutor to be subject to the same criteria.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I see you hastening me to a conclusion. Thank you.

2.4 pm

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I begin by expressing my thanks to the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for initiating this debate? I was keen to speak because, probably like everyone else in this Chamber, I believe that the welfare of animals is extremely important. Certainly, my constituents in North Ayrshire and Arran have been writing to me in large numbers asking me to voice their support for stronger sentences for animal cruelty. This debate has a particular focus on puppy farming and that is something of deep

[Patricia Gibson]

concern to all of us. Although puppy farming has been banned since the 1970s, there are still those who overproduce puppies. We must all be vigilant and consider the ethical sourcing of pets.

We really should pay attention to banning the third-party sale of dogs right across the UK. Dogs should be available only from licensed, regulated breeders or approved rehoming organisations, and that should apply right across the UK. Anyone breeding two litters or more a year should be licensed as a breeder, and that is two litters fewer than under Scots law at the moment.

Animal welfare is, of course, devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but I have called for sentences to be stronger both inside this place and outside it. Wilful cruelty to animals is simply unacceptable in a civilised society. Indeed, the Scottish Government will continue to legislate to improve animal welfare. A consultation on offences and penalties under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 will be held before too much longer. Despite the fact that there are different laws in England, Scotland and Wales, there are areas on which there is a huge amount of common ground.

The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is unique among animal welfare charities in the UK, because it is a reporting agency to the Crown Office, which means that its investigators are authorised to enforce the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. Last year, the SSPCA helpline received 241,403 calls and its inspectors and animal rescue officers attended a record 80,944 incidents.

The Scottish Government do not publish the number of people convicted of animal cruelty, but a Freedom of Information request from February 2016 shows that in 2013-14, 284 charges were brought by the Procurator Fiscal, and that in 2014-15 the figure was 184.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Like her, I, too, have an extremely large mailbag, with letters from constituents who are very concerned about this issue. We have heard an awful lot today about puppy farming, but not much about organised dog fighting. Does she share my concern that there are organised dog-fighting gangs in operation throughout the United Kingdom and does she agree that penalties and sanctions against these people should be much stronger and much harsher than they currently are?

**Patricia Gibson:** Absolutely. In fact, we had a debate in Westminster Hall on that very issue. Like general animal welfare issues, it is a subject on which all people in all parties can unite. This is a despicable act, an horrific example of cruelty, that is conducted purely for the purposes of making money.

We all know that the popularity of programmes such as "Animal SOS", "The Dog Rescuers", "Pet Rescue" and "Animal 999" has raised public awareness of the animal cruelty and neglect taking place in our communities, but we must continue to be mindful of the crime of animal cruelty. It is a serious crime in our own neighbourhoods. Governments must lead by example, and I am proud that the Scottish Government have confirmed a host of new measures to improve and protect animal welfare. I am talking about tough new regulations on the use of

electronic training collars; the prohibition of electric pulse, sonic and spray collars unless used under the guidance of a vet or another trained professional; a ban on wild animals in travelling circuses; and tough action on dog fighting and on irresponsible dog ownership.

When we see neglect, we must continue to ensure that the laws protect animals from such treatment, and that these laws are always fit for purpose. Sadly, there are too many cases, as reported by the SSPCA, of people who simply do not know how to look after an animal properly. It seems that quite a significant number of well-intentioned people welcome pets into their homes, but are simply unequal to the task of giving them the care that they need. That tells us that a job of public education and information needs to be undertaken so that potential pet owners are well acquainted with the full responsibility that having a pet places on their shoulders.

Where we find wilful cruelty—unfortunately, we find it too often—we must take it extremely seriously. As we have heard today, there is a connection between the wilful mistreatment of animals, and violence and mistreatment of fellow citizens. That, as well as protecting animals, should give us pause for thought. I am ashamed to say that the SSPCA has reported cases of "unimaginable cruelty", and I honestly do not believe that a life ban on owning a pet is sufficient censure for such behaviour towards a helpless animal. There is plenty of evidence that such cruelty is a precursor to, and has a clear link with, violence against other people.

Fines or community service orders do not offer much of a punishment or deterrence against such behaviour. Cases such as deliberately starving an animal to death, knowingly locking an animal in the boot of a car in soaring temperatures in the full knowledge and understanding that it will not survive such treatment, and other horrible examples that we have heard today must surely be eligible for a custodial sentence. However, we must all be vigilant when it comes to preventing cruelty to animals. We are the eyes and ears of the agencies who seek to prevent cruelty to animals and challenge it where it takes place. We all have a responsibility to report cruelty or neglect wherever we find it. The courts across the United Kingdom must send out a clear signal that wilful cruelty to animals will not be tolerated and will be taken extremely seriously.

Before I end, there is something that is of concern to us all: the need to be mindful of animal welfare standards in farming post-Brexit. Brexit poses a challenge to animal welfare because EU law is at the heart of animal welfare legislation, which protects animal health, consumers and, of course, the environment. The EU sets down minimum standards. National Governments may adopt more stringent rules, but the UK Government have been resistant to gold-plating EU regulations in the past over fears that this would weaken UK competitiveness. As well as answering all the points that have been raised, I would like the Minister to reassure the House that there will be no diminution in our animal welfare standards as we seek to work towards unilateral treaties outside Europe.

2.13 pm

**Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): May I join my fellow colleagues on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and other hon. Members

here in thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for bringing this debate forward? It is always a pleasure to serve under his chairmanship on the Select Committee.

I will try to touch on a few points that have not been made in the Committee's excellent report, but I must start by joining everybody else in talking about third-party sales and puppy breeding. I will be truthful: I went into the start of the Select Committee inquiry thinking that it was a bad idea to ban third-party sales. However, my opinion changed after looking at, listening to and reading the evidence, and seeing things with my own eyes while visiting a puppy farm in west Wales. There must have been 60 to 80 dogs when we looked around that puppy farm. They were all in tiny enclosures with 3 feet high walls, so they could not see out or see their neighbours. They could not be dogs. It was quite distressing because, although I could not look back and say that they were skinny, maltreated or in danger of needing relief and veterinary care, they just could not be dogs. Having had dogs all my life, I found that very disturbing and that visit made me change my mind.

Something that has sadly not been touched on today is the fact that there are many responsible dog breeders. We went to look for a dog only last year. I wanted a labrador and my wife wanted a whippet and, as is typical in our family—I have a wife and two young daughters—we ended up with a whippet, and a female whippet at that. We went to look at the bitch and the puppy down in the Vale of Glamorgan, where we had the choice of the litter. My children had to be there with us, and it was clear to me that we were being interviewed and interrogated by the dog breeder. If she had not thought us suitable, we would not have been going back a month or so later to pick up our puppy. That is what we should be aiming for. So far, we have all said what is wrong. We have all said that the law is wrong, but what we need is education and like-minded people to do the job of breeding dogs.

Something else that was clear when the Committee took evidence—I was quite surprised about this—was that even with the puppy farming here that we do not like, the country does not breed enough puppies to sustain demand. Hence, we have to bring in dogs from Ireland or mainland Europe. The situation really needs to be tackled. We need to look at how we can supply the demand in this country without these unfortunate practices. It is clear that many puppies coming here from abroad, wherever that may be, sadly leave their mother and do not even live to get to mainland Britain. That is a tragedy.

**Dr Cameron:** The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that part of the issue with demand is about changing public attitudes? Cats and dogs homes are full of puppies that have been discarded. They might not be pedigrees, but they make extremely good pets and should be offered the opportunity of a good home.

**Chris Davies:** I could not agree more. Because of that, I was surprised that organisations such as the RSPCA, the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals and Battersea Dogs & Cats Home were not keen on banning third-party sales. I am glad that they have now changed their minds. People now have a great choice in going to catteries and dog kennels to get an animal.

The British Veterinary Association has not been mentioned today, but it has come out with an excellent paper and it gave excellent information to the inquiry. It is a highly respected organisation, which says that "irresponsible dog breeding and the practice of puppy farming must be tackled as quickly as possible."

All of us, including the Minister, agree with this excellent organisation. We must listen to such organisations, which have so much to offer and carry out a lot of the work on our behalf.

The BVA also came out with an interesting point about having a framework of animal welfare because we do not seem to have one. We have heard the "B" word all week with Brexit, but the "D" word is devolution. More and more powers are going to various parts of the country, but these various forms of devolution—Parliaments and organisations—are coming up with their own laws, making life difficult for veterinary surgeons, RSPCA officers and so on. For example, electrical pulse collars are now banned in Wales, but they can be used in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. There are parts of my constituency with fields and commons where those collars would be illegal on one side and not on the other. Dog licences are required in Northern Ireland, but nowhere else on mainland Britain. There is separate legislation on control of horses in England and Wales, but none in Northern Ireland and Scotland. It really is getting terribly complicated for anybody who wants to comply with and enforce the law, so we need to think about a framework at some point.

I have owned horses all my life. Clearly, as the evidence shows and as we all agree, equine identification and traceability must be made simpler. There are over 60 passport-issuing organisations out there; the report recommends one single organisation. The national equine database closed in 2012, making this impossible to enforce. I ask the Minister where we are with this, because equines are vitally important, whether for leisure, work, or purely pleasure. They are great animals to have—I strongly recommend them—and we should certainly have the right system in place for them.

In closing, I am afraid that I must touch on the RSPCA. The report contains a very worthwhile set of points that should be looked at very seriously. Fund-raising, campaigning, investigation and prosecution do not fit together. As I said earlier, our friends from Scotland lead by example. The Attorney General has clearly said that there is capacity within his Department for us to look at this, and I strongly urge all Ministers that we should do so.

2.20 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on setting the scene so well and his hard work as Chair of the EFRA Committee. We all deeply appreciate not only his efforts, but the knowledge of the subject matter that he regularly brings to this Chamber whenever we debate farming issues. We all look forward to his contributions, whether on milking or, as in this case, on dogs and animal welfare.

I have received a substantial number of emails about puppy farms, and it is incumbent on me to put forward a plea on behalf of many of my constituents. We are often referred to as a nation of animal lovers. I believe that we are, by and large, but when we see examples of

[Jim Shannon]

animal cruelty by individuals, whatever the reasons for that might be, we realise that there are some nasty and evil people out there.

I should declare an interest. My wife is an active volunteer with Assisi, which is an animal charity that looks after cats and dogs. When I married her, I realised that I was marrying all the cats as well, so I became a cat lover, which I never was before.

The recently published plans to improve the licensing of animal breeding establishments are most welcome, but it is disheartening that it appears that, despite the calls from the EFRA Committee and numerous leading charities, a ban on third-party puppy sales is not being implemented. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to our concerns—he knows that I hold him in high esteem, as we all do in this Chamber. It is clear that while licensing and microchipping are necessary and good, that in itself will not address the problem of the puppy trade. In the words of my constituents, "it will not stop the cruel puppy trade."

There is something despicable and wrong about a puppy farmer continually and regularly breeding from a dog for the purpose of selling their pups, to the detriment of the dog's health.

I have had dogs about me for all my life, whether Pomeranians, when I was very young, or Jack Russells in later years. They say, "You don't own a Jack Russell terrier, the Jack Russell owns you." I am not sure how true that it is, but I know that the ones I had owned me. The hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) referred to working dogs, of which I have a number—springer spaniels and cocker spaniels. Whenever we sold dogs when the mother had pups, we always made sure that the person who got that dog was suitable—the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) referred to that. It was nothing to do with money; it was do with finding good homes. We wanted a good home for the dog, and we want legislation to ensure that that happens.

As other Members have said, it is thought that if the middlemen are eliminated, the dog-loving public will instead need to source their puppies from legitimate breeders or rescue centres, which will lead to a massive improvement in welfare standards for dogs. However, I must lay down a marker to the Minister in relation to labradors and alsatians—dogs that are prone to dysplasia. We need to do something about the fact that dogs and pups are often sold without the veterinary approval to say that they are free from potential physical disablement. I join with others who have called on the Government to put in place a ban on the sale of puppies without their mothers being present.

I again refer the Minister to legislation from the Northern Ireland Assembly. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire talked about the differences across all the regions of the United Kingdom. I think that we in Northern Ireland, if I may say so—we have to blow our own trumpet sometimes—have particularly good legislation. What discussions has the Minister had with representatives in Northern Ireland?

Animal cruelty sentences here are designed in such a way that if the defendant pleads guilty, their sentence is reduced, meaning that no matter how despicable the act of cruelty was, the sentence will be four months. That

situation needs to change drastically. After having had a similar sentencing scheme in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Assembly took steps to alter it, voting to change the law as part of the new justice Act. The amendment means that the maximum sentence handed down in the Crown court for animal cruelty crimes increases from two years to five years. That is justice that fits the crime, and that is how the legislation should be across the whole United Kingdom.

There have been some instances of dog fighting in my constituency. Nothing grieves me as much as to say that, because it a despicable act. We have a very active police force in Northern Ireland, with a specific wildlife officer set with the task of dealing with this. I happen to know the police officer responsible, because I have known her father for a long time. The police in Northern Ireland have been very active in trying to catch these people. Someone found guilty of causing unnecessary suffering to animals, or causing and attending an animal fight, will face up to 12 months' imprisonment instead of six months, and the maximum fine for a conviction will rise from £5,000 to £20,000. That is the sort of legislative change and action that we need.

New powers are to be handed to Northern Ireland's Director of Public Prosecutions to enable the appeal of animal cruelty sentences on the grounds of undue leniency. In the past, I have referred cases to the DPP for review, after which a stronger sentence has been handed down, as it should have been. That has happened not though my actions alone but those of many others. That, at the very least, must be replicated on the UK mainland. I sincerely urge the Minister to make contact with the Northern Ireland Assembly so that he can learn from the legislation and strategy that we have in place now. What discussions has he had with the Republic of Ireland, where the same legislation is not necessarily in place? What are we doing about the movement of puppies and puppy farms across the border and directly to the mainland?

The current system on the mainland does not even come close to ensuring that people understand the abhorrence of animal cruelty. A tough sentence must be available for offenders who persist in showing horrific cruelty to animals. I call on Minister—I know that he will respond positively—to take the time to ensure that steps are taken urgently to deal with the current failures on sentencing and puppy farming.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I call the patron saint of hedgehogs.

2.28 pm

**Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I very much commend my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) not only for securing the debate, but for chairing the EFRA Committee, and producing this report about animal welfare and how we should take better care of animals. I congratulate the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) on telling in no uncertain terms her heart-wrenching stories about how some people end up abusing animals. I come back to the point that I made in an intervention: it is important that we better educate children so that they understand the value and importance of looking after animals.



I will not pretend for one moment that I have ever lived in a family with lots of dogs and cats, and things like that—[*Interruption.*] I can tell the stories about hedgehogs in a moment. However, the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers) made about animals on farms is incredibly important.

It is important that we consider how to safeguard the animals of people with dementia. I am doing a lot of work with Professor Ian Sherriff of Plymouth University, who runs a dementia taskforce in the Yealm valley in Devon. The work is difficult. It found some people looking after a couple with dementia, but their animals were not being fed properly and there were problems to do with the drinking of water. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton and the Minister might want to look at that—indeed, the EFRA Committee may wish to carry out an inquiry into this important issue.

I make no apologies for saying that the Government need to look at the whole issue of protected species and to be much more flexible. I have spent a lot of time in this place talking about our wonderful friends the hedgehogs, the number of which has declined by 30% over the past 10 to 15 years. I launched an online petition that ended up with 50,000 signatures, while another 12,000 people signed paper petitions. I will present those petitions with colleagues who participated alongside me, and we will try to make sure that the issue is addressed.

Flexibility is important, because there are some places where not only hedgehogs but seagulls—the other big issue that I have been taking up—are in decline. We need more flexibility. Hedgehogs are in decline partially because of the decking of properties and the taking away of the wildlife and grassland that they go into. Occasionally the problem arises because people put down poisonous slug pellets; the hedgehogs eat slugs that have been contaminated and then end up dying. The Government need to look at that. They also need to look closely at the traps that are being introduced against stoats and so on. I have written about that to DEFRA—not to my hon. Friend the Minister, but to his colleague—and would be helpful if we could have a proper debate about it.

Seagulls represent a big difficulty in constituencies such as mine. We need not to cull them, but to find a way to control them better. That might involve putting in dummy eggs or injecting the eggs, especially at this time of year.

We also need to ensure that we pay attention to our ecology by looking after bees. A number of people have been critical of my interest in this issue, but if there is a decline in this country's animal species, we will be ruining our ecology and what happens elsewhere. We need to take that very seriously. I receive more letters on issues to do with hedgehogs, seagulls and so on than on anything else in relation to my work in this place. The British public are very keen on the issue. They want us to protect animals in the same way as they quite rightly want social justice for people.

2.33 pm

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I, too, commend the Chairman of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, of which I am proud to be a member, for securing the debate. The report is another example

of the very good work that the Committee is doing. I am delighted to see you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, because I gather that you are something of a Dr Dolittle, with a number of pets under your wing.

We truly are a nation of dog lovers and animal lovers. I was brought up on a farm with dogs, and a dog was my best friend. As a moody teenager, I turned to the dog more than anyone else to pour my heart out to. I, too, take part in the wonderful Westminster dog of the year competition. I actually borrow a dog from the Dogs Trust, just to highlight all the good work it does in promoting dog ownership.

**Bob Stewart:** Isn't that cheating?

**Rebecca Pow:** It is not cheating; I try to do a useful education job. We have talked so much about education—[*Interruption.*] There is a lot of mithering going on behind me, but it is not cheating; it is all about education and getting the right messages to people about animal ownership.

I will touch on a couple of the report's themes, namely sentencing and licensing, which have been addressed by many other colleagues. Puppy farming is a massive business in the UK. It is worth an estimated £300 million, so it is not small. To put it simply, demand outstrips supply, as we have heard, which leaves space for unscrupulous breeders to come in and operate. The report aims to address that.

Members on both sides of the House agree that the UK has very high animal welfare standards. We pride ourselves on that, which is why it is strange and puzzling that our sentences for offenders are so low. The maximum sentence, as we have heard, is six months' imprisonment and an unlimited fine. To put that in context, Northern Ireland, Latvia and Montenegro have maximum prison sentences of five years, which makes me think that we need to look at the issue.

We have the lowest sentences for animal abuse crimes in the developed world. As has been said—I am sure that the Minister knows this, but I want to highlight it again—there is a very strong link between animal cruelty and domestic violence. One study found that in 88% of homes where child abuse had been discovered, there had also been incidents of animal abuse. Another study found that up to 83% of women who enter domestic violence shelters report that their abusers have also been abusing the family pet. That very worrying and strong link shows why we should take the issue so seriously.

People can get five years for fly-tipping—that is a serious offence, so we should not backtrack on such sentences—but if someone burns their pet or carries out gross abuse such as that described by Opposition Members, they might get only six months. That is absolutely unbelievable. Clearly we do not want to overload our prisons, but we need to have another look at the issue and not be coy about very serious cases.

An example that recently arose in my constituency involved not a dog or a cat, but a dairy farm. The dairy farmer is in the top group for animal welfare standards among dairy farmers, but unbeknown to him, a lad he had taken on as an apprentice—this was secretly filmed by Animal Equality—was going in and kicking the nursing cows in the face, kicking the calves, pressing them up against metal gates, and slamming the gates on

[Rebecca Pow]

them and abusing them verbally. It was absolutely horrific. The dairy farmer had no idea that that was happening until he was shown the video, which hon. Members can see online. The lad's sentence is being considered at the moment, but it will probably not fit the crime.

I will quickly touch on internet sales, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) spoke eloquently. Many illegal puppy sales take place on the internet, and I am pleased that the Government are looking at the matter. I welcome the fact that breeders now require a numbered licence to sell puppies online. Many people want the Government to introduce a centralised register, as has been touched on. My daughter is always sending me pictures of cutesy little puppies in handbags or in chocolate boxes that she has seen online. She says, "Mummy, why don't we get one of these?" but I know for a fact that lots of those puppies have been illegally bred and imported, and they have probably been subject to some of the horrible things that we heard about in detail from my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies).

**Oliver Colvile:** We will, I hope, have a nice long, hot summer. Does my hon. Friend agree that we will face the problem of people leaving their dogs in cars without taking steps to protect them, such as opening windows or leaving water in the car?

**Rebecca Pow:** My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. Many colleagues will often see dogs locked in homes for hours on end when we are out canvassing. Many of those dogs now suffer psychological problems, and I gather that vets are giving some of them Valium to calm them down. There are loads of welfare issues that we have to deal with.

The Committee's report called for the breeders of puppies to be required to apply for a formal licence if they breed three litters a year—that is definitely a step in the right direction. There are calls for the number to be reduced to two litters, to take account of any accidental litters, which often occur. And please do not forget cats—as a lover of Mr Tips and Raffa, my family's two cats at home, I know that we must not forget cats. I applaud our Committee's recommendation that the breeders of cats who have two litters or more a year should also be licensed and subject to the relevant welfare conditions.

Education has been mentioned, and I wonder whether there is any way we can give our local authorities—they are often the ones who have to police these things, and they are often under pressure—a bit more education in this area. I am not necessarily saying that we should throw money at them, but education and additional support might help councils to clamp down on offenders.

I am coming to the end of my speech, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I want to make a final point about our animal welfare standards in general as we exit the EU. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers) touched on this. If the UK is to set itself up as an animal welfare exemplar for domestic pets and livestock—I believe that the Minister has that very much in mind—it is crucial that our regulatory framework is fit for purpose, and that framework should cover the use of antibiotics, which has been referred to, as well as how animals are kept and managed. That is essential if

we are to build a British brand on this platform. We know what countries in the EU do, but we also need to know exactly what our global partners do, because we have to trade with them on equal welfare terms. I urge the Minister to consider that; it is something that the all-party group on animal welfare, which I chair, could have a look at.

I applaud the Select Committee report. There is still much to do on welfare, but we have taken many steps in the right direction and I know that the Minister is listening. The overall aim of all the work that is being done is to give our pets the happy, healthy and lovely life that they all deserve.

2.42 pm

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): I want to make a brief contribution to the debate on the need to increase courts' flexibility to sentence offenders for up to five years. As it stands, the maximum sentence is six months, and that has been the case since 1911. All Members have experienced considerable pressure from constituents about the issue. Constituents have contacted me to say that they simply cannot believe that the law has stayed in place for so long without being changed.

When we look at the cases that we deal with in our constituencies, as well as the cases reported in the newspapers, we can clearly see that courts need the flexibility to deal with those offenders much more severely than they can at present. Making this change would not compel the courts to sentence somebody for five years—it would not compel them to do anything—but, as the Minister knows, it would send a message to the courts that they have that power and they can use it if necessary.

I support the Committee's recommendation, and I add the voices of my constituents in Gedling, and of many others from across the country, to those who ask the Government to review the matter as quickly as possible and change the maximum sentence from six months to five years. I hope that the Minister will take that on board and make the change as soon as possible.

2.44 pm

**Dr Paul Monaghan** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): The inquiry we are debating was conducted by a Sub-Committee of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, and I was very pleased to participate as a member of it. We ordered our detailed report to be published on 2 November 2016, following scrutiny of 256 items of published evidence, seven evidence-gathering sessions and three site visits. I am very grateful to a number of organisations, including Pup Aid and the Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, for the briefings they have provided for today's debate.

I should say at the outset that the inquiry caused me, and I believe other members of the Committee, significant distress from listening to accounts of serious animal cruelty and, indeed, viewing at first hand animals in recovery shelters and those held in horrific conditions in puppy farms. The treatment and the plight of many of the animals we saw is simply unacceptable. As other hon. Members have done, I want to focus on two aspects of the inquiry: first, the recommendation that an immediate ban be placed on the third-party sale of dogs; and secondly, the recommendation that the maximum penalty for animal welfare offences in England be increased to five years in prison.

This inquiry learned that dogs are bred, sold and traded every single day. While the scale of the market for puppies in England is largely unknown, estimates suggest that somewhere between 700,000 and 1.9 million dogs are traded each year, with a street value of somewhere between £100 million and £300 million per annum. The public purchase puppies from a variety of sources, including unlicensed breeders and back-street traders, commercial licensed breeders and pet shops, illegal importers, Kennel Club registered breeders and excellent rescue organisations. Unlicensed breeders, commercial licensed breeders and illegal importers are the sources that caused us concern. We identified a significant variation in the quality of puppies, their viability and the welfare problems experienced by dogs from these sources.

The Breeding of Dogs Act 1973 and the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999 set out the licensing regime under which local authorities license dog breeding establishments in England. The legislation states that anyone carrying on the business of breeding and selling puppies must have a licence irrespective of the number of litters. However, owing to a lack of clarity, many local authorities in England have interpreted the legislation to mean that a licence is required only for those breeding five or more litters during a 12-month period. As a consequence, a large number of breeders are considered to fall outside the current licensing regime, which means there is no record of the dogs being born and no enforcement of welfare standards.

DEFRA's recent consultation on its review of animal licensing establishments noted that there was confusion about the threshold and about how it should be used in practice. DEFRA has proposed clarifying the threshold at which a breeding establishment requires to be licensed, suggesting that in the future the requirement for a licence would be applied to

“(a) anyone in the business of breeding and selling dogs; or  
(b) anyone producing three or more litters from their dogs in a 12-month period.”

Witnesses told us that they want a lower threshold. In fact, experts in animal welfare argued that anyone breeding two or more litters per year should be required to register as a breeder. The view is that while one litter might be unintended, anyone producing more than one litter a year is clearly running a business breeding dogs for sale, and I agree with that opinion. Witnesses also told us that those falling below this threshold should be registered with their local authority. For example, the National Companion Animal Focus Group told us that a registration scheme would

“ensure licensing authorities are aware of breeding dogs in their area, and can monitor when they fall into the definitions of commercial breeding”.

I also agree with that opinion. It is vital to bring transparency to ensuring that appropriate welfare standards are in place. For that reason, the Committee recommended that anyone breeding two litters or more per year should be licensed as a breeder, and that those falling below the threshold of a licensed breeder should be registered with their local authority.

Turning to commercial breeders, current requirements dictate that anyone who carries on a business of breeding dogs for sale must hold a licence from their local authority and meet certain conditions, such as providing suitable accommodation, food, water and bedding. Dog breeders are supposed to keep records to show compliance with

those requirements. Puppies bred at licensed commercial breeding establishments are required to be sold at those premises or at a licensed pet shop. This is where the problems arise. Undoubtedly there are very good commercial breeders, but in evidence we encountered far too many examples of those requirements being ignored, with puppies being bred in substandard conditions on an industrial scale. Some of those establishments house as many as 200 breeding bitches. The cruelty and lack of care and attention was self-evident. In evidence, the Minister acknowledged that enforcement of the licensing regime was a “mixed picture”, with local authorities placing different levels of emphasis on it. That is an understatement.

We call for improvements in two areas in particular: the current legislation and licensing conditions, and the enforcement of the licensing regime. The current enforcement of the licensing regime is simply unsatisfactory. While some local authorities have developed expertise in animal welfare, the overwhelming majority of English local authorities lack any suitably qualified inspectors. We believe that a national inspectorate, which local authorities could call upon, would enable expertise to develop, bring consistency to the licensing process and support local authorities in enforcing the licensing regime, undertaking inspections and dealing with complaints.

In respect of illegal importers, we found that puppies are being imported for commercial purposes under the non-commercial trade rules that were set up to allow the free movement of people's pets through the pet travel scheme. Witnesses told us that loopholes originating in the UK mean that the pet travel scheme is abused by unscrupulous dealers and traders. Puppies are being moved as pets and then traded commercially at the final destination. Between the introduction of PETS in 2011 and 2015, there was an 850% increase in the number of dogs entering the UK from Lithuania alone. From Hungary the increase was 761% and from Romania it was 2,055%. As hon. Members have noted, puppies imported in that way are routinely bred in horrific conditions, are taken from their mother when too young and endure long journeys of over 1,000 miles. The welfare of those animals is severely compromised and many do not survive the journey.

During our inquiry, witnesses identified three areas of concern: the age at which puppies were allowed into the UK; a lack of enforcement checks by Border Force; and poor intelligence sharing between UK enforcement agencies. When buying a puppy, members of the public want to buy a happy, healthy animal from a reputable source; however, disreputable dealers are selling animals for huge profits without regard for their health and wellbeing, and leaving families with congenitally unviable, sick animals.

Witnesses told us that the Pet Animals Act 1951 was “thoroughly outdated” and that there is lack of clarity about what is and is not licensable activity. They had differing opinions on how to deal with current problems around the sale of animals. Some called for increased regulation, while others called for a ban on third party sales. On that point the RSPCA bizarrely changed its position several times within the period of the inquiry. The charities Dogs Trust and Blue Cross lobbied Ministers directly in ways that appeared to promote their narrow business interests rather than animal welfare, and disappointingly have chosen not to answer my subsequent correspondence seeking clarity on their position.

[Dr Paul Monaghan]

On this issue there is no excuse or room for implausible arguments. The Committee's recommendation to ban third-party sales is essential if unlicensed breeding, commercial breeding and illegal importation are to be brought to an abrupt end. Removing the opportunity to sell abused animals would address the issue. The advice to the public is simple: never buy a puppy that is not with its mother. Those ignoring that advice are supporting horrific puppy farming and regimes of cruelty that are of epic proportions.

I am coming on to my conclusion, Mr Deputy Speaker. Turning to sentencing policy, the sub-committee found that England and Wales has the lowest maximum custodial sentences for animal cruelty in Europe. Scotland currently has a maximum sentence double that of England and Wales, and Northern Ireland is to be applauded for recently increasing its maximum limit to five years. Our witnesses expressed grave concern that sentencing powers under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 are too low, neither recognising the seriousness of the offence nor acting as a significant deterrent.

The Association of Lawyers for Animal Welfare noted that sentencing powers in England under the Animal Welfare Act are some of the weakest within the international community. The RSPCA noted increasing inconsistency in sentences available in differing animal legislation in England. For example, the Law Commission recently recommended the imprisonment for up to two years for cruelty to wildlife. Under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, a person can be sentenced to three years if their dog injures a guide dog, but for only six months if they beat their dog to death with a baseball bat in front of their children in their living room. If the same individual then dumped the corpse illegally, they could be sentenced to five years for fly tipping. If they stole the baseball bat, they could receive a sentence of seven years for shoplifting. This is ridiculous and unacceptable.

DEFRA responded to the inquiry report on 27 January 2017. The response began:

"We have the best animal welfare in the world and we are a nation of animal lovers."

I say to the Minister that in fact England has some of the poorest animal welfare in the world. I have seen it. If he really wants to show respect to animal lovers in England, of whom there are very many, he must implement the Select Committee's recommendations.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I ask those on the Front Bench to try to stick to nine minutes, otherwise Members in the second debate will not be able to speak.

2.56 pm

**Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab):** I thank the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for bringing this debate to the Chamber, and for his continued chairmanship of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. We have had excellent contributions from both sides of the House, including many from members of the Select Committee.

I would like to speak broadly in favour of the Committee's recommendations. It is an excellent and thorough report, and I recommend that everyone read it.

Having seen the RSPCA's response to the report, I concur with its assessment of the recommendations and urge the Government to pay heed to them.

It has been said that Britain has the best animal welfare in the world. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 was a landmark piece of legislation and we in the Labour party are very proud of it. Acting upon the report's recommendations would cement our position as world leader and ensure that our high standard of animal welfare is maintained. I would like to touch on two main points from the report, areas that have been admirably covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick).

First, I agree with the Committee and the RSPCA that the Government should ban the third-party sale of dogs. Dogs should be available only from licensed, regulated breeders or approved re-homing organisations. The Pet Animals Act 1951 requires third-party sellers of dogs to hold a pet shop licence. However, this licensing is not protecting the welfare of all dogs or the interests of consumers, so the current situation is no longer fit for purpose. Licensing must be considered appropriate for third-party sales only if it meets the welfare needs of puppies. It serves no purpose if it does not mitigate risks or prevent harm. The only solution to protect the welfare of puppies is to ban third-party sales entirely.

International studies have found that puppies obtained from pet shops are more likely to be aggressive towards people, fearful, prone to separation anxiety, and infected with parasites and pathogens to a significant level. Behavioural problems are the most common cause of euthanasia in dogs under two years old, with the most common cause of fear and aggression being a lack of socialisation during the critical period up to 16 weeks old. Responsible breeders, by definition, will not sell puppies through third parties.

The third-party licensed pet shop market depends on and sustains low welfare breeding. As long as there is a market for cheap, intensively bred puppies, welfare problems will persist because the incentives for non-compliance far exceed the potential penalties.

We heard about online sales from the hon. Members for Southend West (Sir David Amess) and for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow). Demand has also been mentioned, and we need to look at that as well. Availability may artificially inflate demand, so reducing the supply of cheap, poorly bred puppies from dealers will promote a more responsible buying culture. A ban is vital to protect the welfare of puppies, and to serve as an essential first step in the improvement of standards in high-risk breeding establishments.

When we bought our family dog, a lovely chocolate labrador called Max, we knew how to find him—we knew who to buy from: we knew where to find a responsible breeder—but not everyone knows how to do that. We need to protect consumers from irresponsible breeders, and help them to make responsible purchases. We must ensure that animal welfare comes before profit. The Government must place a statutory duty on local authorities to enforce the Animal Welfare Act so that it has proper teeth, and then give local authorities adequate resources with which to enforce the regulations made under the Act.

The Committee recommended an increase in the maximum penalty for animal welfare offences to five years. My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) has

done a huge amount of work on that with Battersea Dogs & Cats Home; I am grateful for her contribution today, and I am proud to support her campaign. Labour's Animal Welfare Act created and amended a number of offences—for instance, causing deliberate harm or any unnecessary suffering to an animal, and wilful neglect. Such offences carry a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment or an unlimited fine: the penalty was raised in 2015 from a maximum fine of £20,000. The Act also includes a provision to increase sentences to 51 weeks under the "custody plus" system, consisting of a combination of community service and imprisonment. Current sentencing guidance issued by the independent Sentencing Council states that the starting point for attempting to kill, torture or cause prolonged neglect to an animal and the permitting of fighting is an 18-week custodial sentence, with a range of between 12 and 26 weeks in custody.

Unfortunately, the Government have yet to make any significant changes to ensure that the punishment for animal cruelty reflects the gravity of the crime. They should consider increasing magistrates' sentencing powers, and providing for the most serious cases of abuse to be heard in the Crown court. Groups such as the League Against Cruel Sports, the RSPCA, and Battersea Dogs & Cats Home have expressed concern about the sentences for animal cruelty, which do not always appear to match the abuse suffered by the animals, especially in the case of extreme cruelty such as dog fighting. Sentences—which were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker)—must reflect the seriousness of such crimes.

The Labour manifesto of 2015 committed us to improving protection for cats and dogs. We support the call by the League Against Cruel Sports for the implementation of its dog fighting action plan, which would include the holding by statutory agencies of a national register of individuals banned from keeping dogs. The RSPCA has run campaigns calling on the Government to undertake a review of sentencing for animal cruelty under the Animal Welfare Act, and to amend it to allow tougher sentencing for offences such as animal fighting. Of the 752 people who were found guilty of causing, permitting or failing to prevent unnecessary suffering to animals in 2014, only 76 received a sentence involving immediate custody, and only about half that number received custodial sentences of more than three months.

Finally, I have a couple of Brexit-related questions for the Minister. First, will he commit himself to maintaining all existing animal welfare legislation post-Brexit? Secondly—this was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers)—does he agree that any trade deals struck post-Brexit must respect the high animal welfare standards of the UK, and must not undermine the ability of British farmers to compete at home?

I look forward to the Minister's response, and hope that he will take on board the many excellent recommendations in the Committee's report.

3.4 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this debate on a matter that

affects so many of us, and thank him for his Select Committee reports into animal welfare in England that we are debating today.

Last month my Department published proposals to overhaul the laws on a number of animal-related licensing schemes, such as the regulations on pet vending, animal boarding, riding schools and dog breeding. The main aim of our proposed changes is to improve animal welfare and to make the licensing schemes easier to enforce.

I want to begin by talking about the issue of dog breeding, which a number of Members have raised. As my hon. Friend will recall from the time when I was on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I have long argued that we should reduce the threshold before which people have to be licensed by the local authority to breed dogs. I have argued that for some six months, and it is a pleasure to remain in a position in DEFRA for long enough to actually see through something I have argued for for so long. Included, therefore, in our proposals is that anyone breeding and selling more than two litters in a 12-month period will need to be licensed by their local authority. This will have the effect of increasing substantially the number of dog breeders needing to be licensed by about 5,000 per year.

We have also, crucially, proposed that statutory conditions will be applied to all licensed establishments. In relation to dog breeding, that will mean that basic standards taken from the model licence conditions and guidance for dog breeding establishments 2014, published by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, will be applied directly to all licensed breeders.

We had in our consultation initially proposed that there could be an exemption from requiring a licence for breeders who signed up to United Kingdom Accreditation Service-accredited schemes. The Committee and others expressed concerns about going that far, so we listened and have modified that proposal to enable local authorities to recognise risk and to recognise people who sign up to accreditation schemes without removing entirely the need for a licence.

On the question of a ban on selling dogs by third parties, which a number of hon. Members have raised, I understand the desire to try and help potential buyers realise that puppies should be seen with their mothers before they are purchased. Indeed, DEFRA makes such a recommendation. However, I think the specific proposal for an outright ban on all third-party sales is more problematic.

First, we have to consider who would enforce it and how they would do so. Local authorities have to balance their local priorities, and trying to establish whether a particular online advertiser of puppies is located in their area would require the commitment of considerable resources. As I have said, we have already increased the burden on local authorities by taking the number of people required to be licensed from 600 to some 5,000. The demand for dogs is also such that in our view there is a significant risk that an outright ban on third-party sales would simply drive the market underground.

We have therefore decided to address the problem in a different way, through a tougher approach to licensing provisions and to enforcement of the provisions in the Pet Animals Act 1951. First, we are placing beyond any doubt that online commercial sellers need to have a licence. It is not a pet shop licence; it is now a licence for

[George Eustice]

animal sellers, and we will make that absolutely clear in revisions to the licensing conditions. Secondly, as with dog breeders, we propose that statutory conditions should be applied to all licensed pet sellers, whether online or a shop. These will again be based on the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health model conditions for pet vending licensing of 2013. Thirdly, we have also made it clear that, as a condition of having such a licence, if breeders advertise online they will in future need to state their licence number. That will be particularly important in helping with enforcement. I believe that these steps to strengthen the licensing regime currently set out under the 1951 Act go a long way towards addressing the concerns raised.

A number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), raised the issue of puppies being brought through ports. I know there are concerns about the import of puppies for sale, and this is an area where we take action. It is a condition of approval that the transport company checks 100% of all those pets declared to them for compliance with the current EU pet travel scheme. Stringent penalties are in place for those who breach the law by smuggling pet animals or using false documentation.

The Animal and Plant Health Agency has been conducting random audit checks on pet animals arriving in Great Britain. Since December 2015, the agency has been working with Kent County Council, Dover police and the Dogs Trust to identify underage dogs, and in that time, 489 puppies have been seized and placed in quarantine kennels. The majority of them were judged to be younger than the age given on their passports. We have taken action, through our chief veterinary officer, to escalate our concerns to the authorities in the relevant countries from which the dogs came. We take this issue very seriously.

I shall turn now to the crucial part of the debate: the issue of maximum penalties for animal welfare offences. The hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) gave the House some touching examples of cases that she had seen in her constituency. I know that she and my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) have both recently introduced private Members' Bills to address this question, and the hon. Lady expressed her frustration at the Whips having objected to her Bill. I can tell her that she joins a large and illustrious club of hon. Members who have faced such a fate—myself included, some years ago—so she should not take it personally.

This is fundamentally a matter for the Ministry of Justice, but my Department obviously works closely with the Ministry. At present, the maximum penalty for such offences is six months' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. The unlimited fine was raised from £20,000 only in 2015. In addition, offenders can be disqualified not only from owning an animal but from having influence over the way in which an animal is kept, for as long as the court sees fit. This is an important point because it covers not only owning an animal but issues such as arranging transport.

My noble Friend Lord Gardiner is in regular contact with the Ministry of Justice to discuss the question of maximum sentences. Current sentencing practice for such offences does not suggest that the courts are

finding their sentencing powers inadequate. That is to say that changing the maximum sentence would not make a difference if the courts consider a lower sentence appropriate. However, the Sentencing Council has recently reviewed the magistrates court sentencing guidelines, including those relating to animal cruelty. The revised guidance, which is published on the Sentencing Council's website and which will be effective from May, will allow magistrates more flexibility when imposing penalties towards the upper end of the scale. In addition, I will ensure that hon. Members' representations for a change in the legislation to allow for higher maximum penalties are relayed to colleagues in Government.

I want to turn now to some of the other points that have been raised in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton raised the question of an animal abuse register. I know that the police are considering how they can improve access to the register that they already have. The police national computer provides a searchable single source of locally held police operational information, and there is existing functionality for a police officer to apply a person marker, which can also deal with this issue. My hon. Friend also raised the question of enforcement. We are in discussions with the National Companion Animal Focus Group to try to develop standards of competency and to raise all local authorities to the level of the best.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) raised the issue of the Pet Advertising Advisory Group. I would like to pay tribute to the six website groups—Gumtree, Pets4Homes, ePupz, Preloved, Viva Street and the Hut Group—that have signed up to this. In many cases, those organisations automatically email guidance on keeping pets to people who make a particular search. Organisations including Gumtree immediately take down adverts posted by people who are making repeat sales and high volume sales. It is through working with such organisations that I believe we can make good progress.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers) and the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) raised the issue of farm animal welfare, which I know we have covered before. As I have explained, we have a manifesto commitment to reflect farm animal welfare in our future farm policy. My hon. Friends the Members for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) and for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colville) talked about education. We are, through our consultation, planning to introduce a requirement for pet sellers to give guidance to people on certain pets, particularly exotic pets. Guidance relating to pet animals also exists in the current school curriculum.

3.14 pm

**Neil Parish:** In chairing the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I am fortunate to have great members who are supportive and good at attending, and five of them really contributed to today's debate. I thank everybody on both sides of the House for their contributions. We have been a united force in wanting stiffer sentencing, and many have called for a ban on third-party puppy sales. We also want to ensure that we stop the importation of puppies through our ports, so that illegal puppies are not brought into this country. I thank the Minister for his support, but I want more from the Government on stronger sentencing. We want

action. I also thank the shadow Minister for her support. We have had a really good debate, and I thank all Members for supporting the report. We need action now. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 is 10 years old and needs a lot of tightening up. We are a nation that loves animals, but unfortunately there are people out there who do not, and they must be dealt with strongly. All Members across the House have made that point clear this afternoon.

Finally, I thank the Kennel Club, the BVA, the all-party parliamentary group for animal welfare, the RSPCA, the SSPCA, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, Dogs Trust and the staff of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for helping to put the report together and for giving evidence. Following our report, I look forward to the Government taking even greater action than they already have.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes that current penalties for animal welfare offences in England are among the lowest in Europe; believes that while the Government's plans for a new licensing regime for dogs in England is welcome the Government should consider a ban on the third party sale of dogs; and calls on the Government to increase the maximum penalty for animal welfare offences to five years, as recommended in the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's Third Report, Animal welfare in England: domestic pets, HC 117.

## Easter Adjournment

3.16 pm

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment.

I speak today as the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, and on that note, I thank my esteemed colleague the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who so eloquently filled this spot on my behalf on a couple of occasions.

We have heard time and time again that we must spend within our means and that cutting public expenditure is necessary to bring down the deficit. I am not just the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee; I am also the Member of Parliament for Gateshead, and I am afraid to say that Gateshead has not been doing well out of the Government's programme of public expenditure cuts. We are told that slashing public services and increasing the complexity of our social security system are necessary to pave the way for countrywide prosperity in years to come, but I want to offer some home truths and facts and figures from my constituency.

My local authority, Gateshead, will have a £92 million funding gap by 2021. Real and damaging further cuts will have to be made, and I have no doubt that my already suffering constituents will face more misery. Our unemployment rate is twice that of the national average, the average weekly pay for a constituent is £20 less than the regional average in the north-east and £70 less than the UK average, and 26.8% of our children are living in poverty. That is just the tip of the iceberg in Gateshead. Significant numbers of my constituents are underemployed in part-time work, on zero-hours contracts, or juggling multiple part-time jobs to make ends meet. Many families in my constituency live in poverty, but many are living just above the bread line and also struggling. They are not "just about managing"; many of my constituents are really struggling. I appreciate that I have so far painted a bleak picture of my constituency, but it would be greatly remiss of me not to do so, because I am constantly aware from my casework workload that that is a fact of life for so many people.

There are, of course, some wonderful organisations and people, and a wide array of different cultures, in Gateshead. Just last week, on our annual single day of unbroken sunshine, I had the pleasure of walking from the heart of Gateshead—I live in the neighbourhood of Bensham—down towards the Gateshead quays. I walked through the Sage Gateshead music centre and on to the quayside by the Baltic centre for contemporary art. I could have been forgiven for thinking that I was in a tourist trap in any number of destinations across the world.

Gateshead is a great place to live and work. For those with a well-paid job, the quality of life can be very good. We are close to the countryside and to the coast, and we have the nightlife in the Newcastle-Gateshead conurbation. It could be argued that, for those in work, we probably have some of the best quality of life anywhere in the country.

Gateshead remains a hive of multiculturalism, too. Only three weeks ago the orthodox Haredi Jewish community where I live celebrated Purim, which is an event in itself. The youngsters from the community

[*Ian Mearns*]

really go to town, as it were, and are encouraged to do so. It is a fantastic event, and I live in the heart of that community. Purim is an event enjoyed not only by those who participate but by those in the community who appreciate the benefits of that diversity.

Earlier this month, along with students from the National Citizen Service, I pressed the button to tilt the Gateshead millennium bridge to celebrate the fantastic opportunities that the NCS offers to young people in Gateshead and across the north-east.

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Is that the bridge that goes from Gateshead to Newcastle? It is the Gateshead millennium bridge, is that right?

**Ian Mearns:** It is indeed, and I will come on to that in a moment.

The NCS in my constituency is already oversubscribed for the summer placements on this year's programme, and the young people who have been involved are a credit to my constituency.

The Gateshead millennium bridge is a magnificent feat of engineering, and it truly is an iconic landmark. On the Newcastle side of the bridge is a glass structure upon which the words "Gateshead millennium bridge" are emblazoned. On the Newcastle side of the river is a little piece of Gateshead in a foreign land that will be for ever Gateshead. A bridge that has, by its very nature, managed to secure a foothold for Gateshead on the Newcastle side of the river is an impressive achievement. Some Members will appreciate the importance of that to those of us from the Gateshead side.

I also continue to chair the governing body of one of my local primary schools, Kelvin Grove. The school, in the heart of Bensham, Gateshead, was rated good by Ofsted only a couple of months ago. Gateshead has an array of cultures within its population, and a significant proportion of students have English as a second language. At the last count, a total of 27 different languages were spoken by pupils at that school, and I am sure Members will agree that, although the mix of languages poses difficulties and complexities for the learning environment, there is no doubt that such diversity also has a significant positive effect on the education of all our young people in that neighbourhood. It is a great place to live in many respects.

There are further funding cuts to education, persistent problems in the NHS across the country, which we heard about over the winter, and the localisation of business rates. That localisation will have a negative impact on regions such as the north-east of England, where the 12 local authorities will lose some £300 million whereas Westminster, if we believe the figures published last year, will on its own gain more than £400 million, so we can see how it will have a different impact in different parts of the country. With all that happening, my constituents have little hope of benefiting from some of the measures of prosperity that we are told other parts of the country are currently enjoying or will enjoy. The Prime Minister pledges to have a country that "works for everyone" but, sadly, our definition of "everyone" varies somewhat, because the impacts of what is going on are very different in different places.

I have highlighted and will continue to highlight some of these injustices in this House and to anyone else who can understand what I am saying, but now I wish to take the opportunity to highlight some of the great things happening in Gateshead, despite some elements of Government policy that are having a detrimental impact on us. With colleagues from the Select Committee on Education, I had the pleasure of visiting Gateshead College in my constituency a couple of weeks ago. Despite significant cuts to funding for further education, Judith Doyle, the principal, and her team have ensured that Gateshead College remains one of the best further education colleges in the country, and only last year it was rated as "outstanding" by Ofsted. It is imperative in communities like Gateshead that we have institutions that have the ability to train our future workforce, in an environment that gives our young people the best opportunity to succeed going forward into their working life. Gateshead College, with its rich and diverse offer, is a fine example of this, and I am proud to have it in my constituency and to represent it.

Turning back to local government for a moment, significant cuts to the revenue support grant have forced local authorities to come up with ever more creative ways to plug the holes in their budgets and help grow the local economy. I was delighted to see the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman)—visit Gateshead earlier this month to open the new £18 million Gateshead district energy centre, which uses cutting-edge technology to recycle heat from the energy generation cycle, using it to heat homes and businesses and water throughout the centre of Gateshead. It is hoped that the scheme will provide local homes and businesses with affordable energy, as well as making Gateshead an attractive place for new businesses to invest, taking advantage of the lower energy costs. I hope that all hon. Members will join me in congratulating Gateshead Council on taking the bold step to self-fund the entire project, for the benefit of local residents, businesses and employers.

In Gateshead, my constituents are very fortunate, as we have a fantastic hospital trust, operating out of the Queen Elizabeth hospital, which provides excellent service and care for all of its patients. I wish to place on record my thanks to not only the staff at the Queen Elizabeth hospital, but all staff in the NHS across Gateshead and the north-east for their unreserved commitment and dedication to ensuring that every person of every background is afforded the care that they very much deserve. Colleagues will be aware that I, too, have had to use the services of the NHS in my constituency, and on a personal note I would like to place on the record my thanks to my GP, Dr Ruth Bonnington, and my physiotherapist, Shane Ryan, for greatly accelerating my recovery from the slipped disc I suffered some weeks ago. Without their care and attention, I would not be here to make this contribution today.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to the outstanding work that the voluntary sector does on a daily basis to help my constituents who often have nowhere else to turn. Whether it be in dealing with benefit sanctions, homelessness or illness, organisations such as the Gateshead citizens advice bureau, Barnardo's, the Trussell Trust, the Gateshead food bank, and many more organisations and individuals across Gateshead, put their lives on hold to ensure that



those most vulnerable in our communities receive the help and support they most desperately need. They are the real unsung heroes in our communities, and I would like to thank them for everything they do.

The north-east has a proud track record of donating to charity, despite the relatively low incomes people live on there. Our record on donating to things such as red nose day or Children in Need shows that we often exceed the national body's expectations. Despite low incomes and indeed poverty, we have very successful food bank collections. The points are often overflowing with food, which has often been donated by families who are struggling themselves. Sadly, despite the generosity of my constituents and others across the north-east, organisations providing often vital support to those most in need continue to find themselves short of resources. So as much as my constituents already give, I ask them from the Floor of the House of Commons to carry on and give more—it is needed.

As I open the debate, I look forward to the speeches of hon. Members from both sides of the House. Before I finish, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I wish you, the staff of the House and all hon. Members a very happy Easter?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Thank you. As in the previous debate, if Members stay within an eight-minute limit, everyone will be able to get in and there will be plenty of time for wind-ups. That is not an imposed limit, just guidance for Members.

3.29 pm

**Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow my friend the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), who is your successor as Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, Madam Deputy Speaker. I look forward to passing through his constituency, over the Gateshead Millennium bridge, on my way to see Newcastle when they return to the premier league next season, as no doubt they will. A little while ago, I got myself into trouble by being pleased that I would not have to make that journey again.

**Ian Mearns:** Please do not jinx them, for goodness' sake!

**Bob Blackman:** Even Newcastle would find it difficult not to get promoted after the season they have enjoyed so far.

In two years' time, when we have the pre-recess Easter Adjournment debate, we will be celebrating Britain's freedom from the yoke of the European Union; much of this speech will be about unfinished business as the House rises for the Easter recess.

I am delighted that my Homelessness Reduction Bill had its Third Reading in the other place last Thursday and now awaits Royal Assent from Her Majesty the Queen. I place on record my thanks and appreciation to Lord Best, who ensured the Bill's smooth passage through the other place. We can look forward to it becoming law in the not-too-distant future. The Department for Communities and Local Government is doing all the necessary work to prepare local authorities for their duties under the new Act. I trust that it will advantage homeless people throughout the country forevermore.

I also place on record my thanks and appreciation to Glenn McKee, who was the Clerk of the Public Bill Office and before that the Clerk of the Communities and Local Government Committee, and who is retiring after, I believe, 34 years' service. He gave brilliant help and assistance to ensure that we did everything necessary to get that private Member's Bill through.

On unfinished business, we had a wonderful debate last week on Equitable Life. I have the privilege of co-chairing the all-party group on justice for Equitable Life policy holders, which now has more than 230 MPs as members. I shall not go over that debate, but let me be clear that we will not cease until such time as every individual who suffered as a result of that scam is properly compensated. The Government have a debt of honour, and it sends the wrong sort of signal to young people in this country when, at a time when we are asking them to save for their old age, the Government will not properly compensate the people who suffered, even though it is proven beyond doubt that the regulator, Equitable Life and the Treasury knew about the scam but did nothing about it. We need to right that wrong.

I am also chairman of the all-party group on smoking and health. Smoking is the single biggest cause of cancer, heart and respiratory disease in this country, with 78,000 people alone dying unnecessarily each year. I am concerned that we still do not have the tobacco control strategy that the Government announced. The previous one ran out in December 2015. There has been an extended period of consultation on why a new strategy needs to be put in place, so I trust that the Government will publish the long-awaited strategy shortly after Easter, so that we can get in place the measures we need to take to combat this terrible affliction and addiction.

**Ian Mearns:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the tobacco control strategy. He mentioned football earlier: I used to say that the 90,000 people who died each year was around the capacity of Wembley; now, we are talking about the capacity of Old Trafford, but it is still very serious. The tobacco control strategy really is long overdue.

**Bob Blackman:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He is absolutely right.

I welcome the fact that the Government introduced a minimum excise duty in the Budget, and it will add, on average, some 35p to a packet of cigarettes. The money should go to the national health service to ensure that treatment is provided. We have introduced standardised packaging and a whole series of other measures to encourage people not to smoke, but that has meant that a number of local authorities are either phasing out, or removing completely, their smoking cessation services. The job is not yet done. In my own local borough of Harrow, the stop smoking services are being removed. Closing those services is a false economy when they have helped 1,751 people to give up smoking in the past two years alone. Such a move will return to haunt us unless we invest properly.

This week, the Government published the long-awaited consultation document on the use of the term "caste" and on caste discrimination, which was introduced in the Equality Act 2010. The term was added in the other place via an amendment to the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013. There was no proper oversight or

[*Bob Blackman*]

proper debate on the repercussions of introducing such a term into the British legal framework, and indeed it was not properly debated in this Chamber either. A considerable amount of hurt has been suffered by the Hindu community in particular. I encourage the whole Hindu community across the UK to participate in the consultation, so that we can get this unnecessary, divisive and ill-thought out legislation off the statute book once and for all.

I have also raised in the House this week Pakistan's decision to annex Gilgit-Baltistan, which had been illegally occupied by Pakistan in the first place. The annexation has caused widespread concern across the community and across the whole of Jammu and Kashmir. The reality is that we in Britain have a strategic role in helping to bring this divisive issue to an end, and we should use our good offices to prevent Pakistan increasing the impact on this area, especially as it had no right to occupy the area in the first place. The United Nations has registered that in a series of resolutions, yet Pakistan chooses to ignore them. We should ensure that we put that right.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): I support everything that the hon. Gentleman says in respect of both the caste legislation and Pakistan, but may I bring him a little closer to home? He is a great campaigner for his local constituents. I am a frequent user of Stanmore station. Whenever he has spoken in such debates, he has mentioned the new lifts to be installed at the station. Has he brought any good news to this debate about those lifts?

**Bob Blackman**: I would dearly love to give the right hon. Gentleman good news about Stanmore station, especially as he uses it regularly. The sad fact is that a planning application was made by a private developer for a site alongside Stanmore station. The developer offered £1 million towards providing a lift. Harrow Council's planning committee, in its infinite wisdom, decided to turn it down. It did not want the £1 million, so the developer, not unreasonably, took it away as part of their offer, but they still got their planning application for the flats alongside the station, which has received lots of objections from residents.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I realise that I am transgressing your informal time limit, but, having given way a couple of times, I will conclude on three quick issues that are of particular concern to local residents.

First, Harrow Council introduced the unwanted garden tax at the highest level in London—the highest garden tax in the country for garden waste collection—and has now increased it even further in this year's budget. It is rightly objected to by residents all over the Borough of Harrow. Secondly, I am delighted that progress is happening, albeit slow, on the redevelopment of the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital, which I have been campaigning on for an extended period.

The final issues are of education and the police service in Harrow. I have registered with the Secretary of State my concern that the proposed new fairer funding formula will discriminate against schools in Harrow, as 17 schools in my constituency will actually lose money, not just in real terms. That is completely unacceptable. Equally, the concern about police funding is that the new proposals for amalgamating boroughs will mean

that Harrow, which is the safest borough in London, will lose police and therefore be at greater risk of crime. That is also completely unacceptable, and I trust that we will put it right.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish you, the staff and everyone else involved in running the House a very happy and peaceful Easter. I look forward to coming back after the recess suitably refreshed. I apologise in advance that I am unlikely to be here for the wind-ups and the reply from the Deputy Leader of the House; I have to use the national health service for a long-awaited medical appointment that has to take precedence in these circumstances.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel)**: May I remind hon. Members that the eight-minute limit does include interventions? If everybody takes this much time, I am afraid that the last Member who wants to speak will not get to do so.

3.41 pm

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate and pleased to follow the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). I am grateful to him and the mover of the motion, the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, for the work that they do in facilitating colleagues to raise important matters in the Chamber and in Westminster Hall. They do a very difficult job. Having been to the Committee only this week to bid for time, I know that its members have pressures to balance. I am sure that they will make the right decision, but I am happy to wait to hear their conclusions in due course.

The title of the debate on the Order Paper is "Matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment". Such debates are an opportunity for colleagues to present their shopping lists to the Government and the House, and I hope to be brief in presenting mine. I shall begin with a few thanks. As co-chair of the all-party group on maritime and ports, may I express my appreciation to the Minister of State, Department for Transport, the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), and congratulate him on commissioning Lord Mountevans to chair the maritime growth study? The growth strategy produced by the study led to Maritime UK, which is chaired by David Dingle and is trying to showcase British shipping and ports. That positive initiative is very important post-Brexit, and I wish it well.

I also wish the right hon. Gentleman well in his negotiations with the Treasury for an extra £15 million for support for maritime training—SMarT—for ratings and officer cadets on board merchant navy vessels. The SMarT money was introduced by the Labour Government in their 1997-to-2001 term. It produced 50% of funding for maritime training, but that is now down to a third. The right hon. Gentleman is arguing strongly with the Treasury, and I wish him success. The amount is only £15 million, which would double the £15 million that is already in the kitty, so he is not asking for a great deal. He is also working strongly on the contribution of shipping to air quality, and we are grateful for his efforts on that.

During my Adjournment debate last Friday on cochlear implants, I did not get the opportunity to thank the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), who explained that it was for not the Department of Health but the

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to decide who gets cochlear implants. Some 600,000 people out there could benefit from them. The Minister's comments were positive and supportive, and I was grateful for the way in which he gave the Government's response to the debate. NICE will come forward with the conclusions to its review this summer, so I hope that it will have listened to what he and I said.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has produced a White Paper on housing, and the Minister for Housing and Planning is in charge of taking it forward. The Governments of 1986, 1993 and 2002 all tried to reform leasehold provisions, but were unsuccessful, and now this Government are trying again. The hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) and I co-chair the all-party group on leasehold reform, and I hope that the Government will be able to bring forward proposals on that in due course. The Housing Minister might also want to examine the role and accountability of housing associations, which is probably worth doing, given how important they now are within the housing market. They do great work, but when they do get things wrong, it is hard to rectify those problems.

I want to express gratitude to International Development Ministers for facilitating meetings between their officials and the international aid charity Fire Aid, which I chair. It is a small non-governmental organisation that is, on behalf of UK plc, delivering the millennium sustainable development goals put forward by the United Nations and the World Health Organisation. It works to reduce the one and a quarter million people dying on the world's roads every year and the 20 million who are seriously injured. DFID deals in billions of pounds. We are a small NGO, and £20,000 or £50,000 is life or death to us, but this does not feature on DFID's radar. DFID Ministers are reviewing the role of small NGOs in delivering international objectives, and we would be very grateful if they were to proceed on that more positively.

I want to issue an apology to the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman). During proceedings on the statement on personal independence payments made by the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions in late February, I asked about reports of the hon. Gentleman's comments about PIP and those suffering from mental health conditions. The Secretary of State advised me that his hon. Friend had issued an apology for his reported remarks and hoped that the House would accept that. Obviously I completely accept the assurance of the Secretary of State and the apology issued on the hon. Gentleman's website, which I have since had a chance to visit. Having raised the matter as a complaint, it is only right for me to put on record my acceptance of his position.

There is still a case for the fire service to have a statutory duty to deal with flooding. I see the chair of the all-party group on fire safety rescue, the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), in the Chamber. The Government's position has been that the fire brigade will turn up to floods like it turns up to fires, special services and road traffic crashes. Those are all now statutory duties, but it took decades for them to arrive. I think that a statutory duty on flooding will arrive, but the quicker it does, the better. I welcome the joint working between the fire service and the national health

service on social care issues in Greater Manchester, and with the ambulance service in London. I recognise that in many counties the fire service is now answering more medical calls than fire calls. This is clearly moving the fire service into more combined working. The Government are disinclined to create a fire and emergency medical rescue service, as we see in most other countries. However, it seems to be happening none the less, even though the Government are not putting it forward.

The final political matter I want to raise is the lack of prosecutions following the court case on electoral fraud and other offences in Tower Hamlets. Despite the judgments and penalties handed down by the electoral court, and despite the allegations of fraud, corruption, mortgage fraud, wrongful disposal of buildings, abuse of grants and so on, there have been no prosecutions—all has gone unpunished. I hope that the review by the Mayor of London and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary might mean that something will be satisfactorily concluded for the residents of Tower Hamlets.

Naturally, last week's events are still very fresh, as is the grieving of the families and friends of those who were killed and seriously injured, who are very much in our thoughts. The lockdown was a stressful experience for many of us here in the Chamber and the Lobbies, notwithstanding the safety we were in. I want to place on record my thanks to the Deputy Speaker, the Doorkeepers, the police and security officers, and other staff for looking after us. I hope that we all have a safe and peaceful Easter, and that those who are still in emotional and physical pain secure some relief.

3.49 pm

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Before the House adjourns for the Easter recess, I wish to raise a number of points. I shall end with a tribute to two Officers of the House who are retiring today.

We are leaving the European Union. My goodness, it has taken nine months actually to start the process, but now that we have done so, local fishermen Daryl Godbold and Paul Gilson have drawn to my attention the fact that marine conservation zones prohibit fishing in 20% of UK waters, but allow dredging for sand and gravel. That is weakening the British fishing industry, as Thames estuary fish stock levels are at a bare minimum due to dredging. Crabbing is popular in our area and apparently there is a shortage of local crabs. I hope that we will get on with addressing that issue quickly.

Last week there was a Westminster Hall debate about Iran. It is absolutely disgraceful that its regime funds Hamas and Hezbollah.

If the national schools funding formula goes ahead unchanged, every single school in Southend will be worse off and I will have to vote against the proposition.

Southend hospital has a successful regime. There is new management in place and I wish it well. It is very important that local residents realise that the A&E at Southend will not be closing. As the new chief executive officer, Clare Panniker, has said:

"We are not discussing any plans to move Southend A&E to Basildon. Our current thinking is that there should be 24/7 A&E services at all three hospital sites in mid and south Essex for the majority of people who go to A&E."

I shall hold a health summit in April to take that matter further.

[*Sir David Amess*]

I hope that the House realises that Southend is the alternative city of culture. It was such a joy to welcome the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) to talk about the wonderful books that he has written. Tonight, after I have left here, I will go to the Southend's Got Talent competition. In May, stilt-walkers will walk nonstop from Southend to No. 10 Downing Street, where they will present the Prime Minister with a letter from our good selves asking for Southend to become a city—[*Interruption.*] Unfortunately, we are not a city. It is 125 years since the inauguration of the borough, and I am delighted to say that we now have a town crier. We will celebrate a festival in Chalkwell park between 27 and 29 May.

I was delighted that Princess Anne visited Southend recently and paid tribute to all our volunteers at the citizens advice bureau. Members of Parliament really do benefit from such bureaux.

Following on from what the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) said, we recently visited the excellent Fire Service College in Moreton. I hope that the facility will be promoted as a national training service by the Department for Communities and Local Government, and that the Ministry of Defence seriously considers the college's bid to provide defence fire and rescue programmes for the armed services. My hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) joined me on the visit to that wonderful centre.

Uber is a delicate subject, but I for one am not very happy about the situation, which is certainly having an impact on the taxi trade in Southend. I therefore hope that the Policing and Crime Act 2017 will be amended accordingly.

Two constituents of mine, Valerie and Tony Rochester, have brought to my attention the situation regarding freeholders. They say that they have been mistreated by Gateway Property Management and the freeholders, Westleigh Properties. They were asked to pay £5,220 in February 2016 for building works that did not begin until 2 August 2016. The eventual work was unsatisfactory, and that is just one case of many in which leaseholders have been led to believe that they owned their property. Clearly the Government need to review the situation.

On 12 July, as I mentioned a couple of hours ago, the responsible pet competition will take place near Westminster. I hope that everyone will enter it.

I have the honour of being chairman of the all-party group on the Maldives. The Government occasionally send me on the odd trip to the Maldives, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment held a meeting recently about new trading opportunities.

The Made in Britain trade centres are absolutely wonderful. I recently hosted a reception for the Alliance for Human Relevant Science and Safer Medicines, which does wonderful work.

On funerals and bereavement, following meetings with Dignity funeral services and Golden Charter, I congratulate them on the high-quality services that they provide and their desire to ensure that people are adequately accompanied during times of bereavement. I was especially moved to find that Dignity does not charge funeral costs for anyone under the age of 17. Both groups raised concerns about the lack of licensing and regulation of

funeral services, which often leads to people being charged an unfair amount for funeral costs. I pay tribute to Rio Ferdinand, as I think that the recent BBC programme about his bereavement struck a chord with us all and I very much support what he wishes to do. His brother, Anton, whom I will be seeing later this evening, happens to be the captain of Southend United, who are back in the play-off zone.

Last week was Salt Awareness Week, and we need to do much more on the matter. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association roadshow visited Southend and I pay tribute to the secretary-general, who attended the event with me.

We are leaving the European Union. As a result, Borough Plating has already gained £9 million in additional business, which is excellent.

The Jazz Centre and National Jazz Archive have opened in Southend. Digby Fairweather is leading that project, which is truly wonderful. The YMCA "Sleep Easy", at which people raised money overnight, was led by our mayor, Mrs Judith McMahon, and Syrie Cox, the chief executive of Southend YMCA.

On lobbying, I really despair about social media. There are some low-lives who put the most disgusting remarks on newspaper comment sections as soon as an issue is mentioned. Why they are allowed to do that, I do not know.

Southend airport will benefit once again from duty-free goods.

I end with a tribute to two officers. John Wrighton, who has worked in our post office off Members' Lobby for 38 years, is retiring today. He has done an absolutely magnificent job. Alan Dickens is our longest-serving Doorkeeper, and he leaves the service of the House tomorrow. He has been a Doorkeeper since 1993 and senior Doorkeeper since 2004. He entered the Royal Marines Band Service in 1969, and he was invalided out of the service aged 24. He has been a loyal servant of the House. Apparently, he intends to spend his time caravanning with his wife of 41 years, Maureen.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish you and your team under the Speaker, and all colleagues, a very happy Easter.

3.57 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Before I start, I want to add my tribute to the many others that have been paid to Keith Palmer, who lost his life protecting us; and to his colleagues, who went straight back to work protecting us. Our thoughts are with all who were injured and bereaved in the incident last Wednesday, and our gratitude goes to those in the emergency services and the many others who responded so quickly. It was also helpful to get messages of condolence from our faith leaders, including our local Muslim leaders.

It is almost two years since I was elected to this House. It has been an honour, and it has sometimes been hugely rewarding, but too often it has not been a pleasure. Sadly, too much of my constituency casework has been about dealing with the impact on my constituents and their families of this Government's deliberate decisions. I and my small and overstretched team have dealt with more than 20,000 requests for help or support in the last 22 months. Although many people who contact me do so to seek my views on everything from Brexit to animal welfare, a very large—and growing—number of people

turn to me because they just do not know what to do to get the change that they so badly need. That includes the many people who are dependent on council services and other services, or on disability or bereavement benefits that are being withdrawn or rationed because of Government funding cuts.

In the short time that I have available, I will touch on some local examples that illustrate the Government's lack of interest in, and compassion for, my constituents and people across the country. First, though, I have been wondering why the Government hold children in such low regard. Children who have lost their mother or father, and whose family will lose bereavement benefits; third and subsequent children in families who benefit from tax credits, who will no longer be entitled to benefit for those additional children; and children in school, whose schools already face cuts and will be cut further when the national funding formula comes in, are just some of those who will be affected by this Government's policies.

The Prime Minister started her term of office by expressing concern for those who are just about managing and are worrying about paying the mortgage. In my constituency in west London, most people not already on the housing ladder worry about paying the rent, and having a mortgage is a distant and unlikely dream, given that the average sale price is two and a half times the average salary. The rent of a modest two-bedroom flat in Isleworth in the middle of my constituency costs three quarters of the take-home pay of an average Heathrow worker or even of a teacher. As such a family are considered to be adequately housed, they do not have any hope of getting a council house or a housing association flat. The income of those constituents is way below that needed for any of the so-called affordable housing schemes—shared ownership, starter home or 80% market rental—promoted by this Government.

I want to move on to the confluence of policy and bureaucracy, starting with the roll-out of universal credit. For those of my constituents who are on low incomes or who are unable to work at all, universal credit has been torture, on top of the punishment of ever lower benefit caps and the cutting back of support for people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. I do not know whether this Government are consciously driving through the enforced destitution of those on low incomes and the slightly better-off families who do not have benefits to fall back on, or whether civil service cuts mean that there is just no one to implement the system properly, but that means claimants have no money at all for weeks and families whose members are working have enough to buy food but worry about whether the money they are due for their rent will ever come through. There is the sheer bureaucratic mess: one form was on its 54th iteration when we last looked at it.

Sadly, crazy bureaucracy led by mendacious policies are not confined to the Department for Work and Pensions in my experience as a Member of the House. Over 40% of my constituents were born overseas, and I have lost count of the number of people in my weekly advice surgeries who have told me that their application to the Home Office has been turned down without Home Office staff even looking at their paperwork. For example, there was the woman whose application was refused on only one count of the many she had to pass. She was told she had failed the English test, despite the

fact that the certificate stating she had passed with distinction was right there as part of her application. There was the French citizen whose application for UK citizenship was refused because she failed the test of permanent residency. Why? Because she had had the temerity to go on a two-day break abroad exactly three years to the day before the date of her citizenship application. Both these cases illustrate how those affected and their families feel that they are victims of the rule about getting net immigration down to 100,000—a pledge dreamed up by the Prime Minister when she was Home Secretary. The last example leads me on to Brexit. I supported remain, and 60% of my constituents agreed with me because of what it means to their family, their work, their business, or their hopes and aspirations for the UK. For many, it is personal. The French national I have mentioned—her family had a referendum vote, but she did not—is worried for her future. She has now retired, but has lived here and paid taxes continually for 30 years. She has married a UK citizen, and has two UK children. She applied for UK citizenship, which she had never wanted to do, because, like 3 million others, she has been given no assurance that she can stay here and claim the pension—and, if needed, the social and health care support—that she has paid for throughout her working life in the UK. She would not of course be eligible for any of that support if she were forced to return to France.

I want to finish by mentioning the concern of our communities about the impact of the third runway at Heathrow. Heathrow is the major driver of our local economy, and it is and will continue to be vital to UK plc, but until we develop glider passenger planes, the expansion of Heathrow will mean more noise for many more people—300,000 people—in and around London.

I conclude by wishing you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and all Members and staff of the House a peaceful and happy Easter recess. I hope you will accept my apologies, but I have to leave before the winding-up speeches in order to chair a community meeting about station overcrowding.

4.4 pm

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I want to raise again the ongoing and tragic situation in Syria. Of course we want to help Syria, but equally we do not want to be dragged into another Iraq or Afghanistan situation. To date, our strategy has been carefully sculpted so as not to get committed on the ground, yet to provide help from the air and with intelligence. The stark truth is that President Bashar al-Assad, the 19th President of Syria, is going nowhere. His regime, which many predicted would topple several years ago, has been stabilised by Russian support, and the Russians are there to stay. They want to keep their port at Tartus and their airbase, Hmeimim, south-east of Latakia. Those are now strategic jewels for Russia and are unlikely to be given up easily.

Whatever we may think of the current Syrian Government, though, for many people in Syria, President Assad is their best hope, and it is all they have got. For those living in Damascus, he is their only choice. They believe that the stark option is between Assad and Daesh. In truth, such people would receive short shrift from Daesh. They also think, with good reason, that no foreign country would intervene to save them if Daesh arrived in their capital city. For them, Assad is all they have got, and they are probably right.

[Bob Stewart]

However, I feel that the circumstances could now allow for the establishment of a humanitarian safe zone. That would not be easy to achieve, but it is possible. If the international community was determined enough, it could happen. From what he says, President Trump and his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson are now also prepared to accept the establishment of safe zones. Maybe the Russians and President Assad might also agree to it, but Daesh certainly would not. Thus, it is clear that safe zones must be positioned where the chances of interference from Daesh, or indeed al-Qaeda, are reduced to a minimum.

The easiest of such areas to establish may be in the north of Syria. The first possibility appears to be in the north-west of the country, perhaps stretching from Kilis to Aleppo, then south to Idlib and thence to the Turkish border again, near Reyhanli. Another possibility could be in north-central Syria, bounded in the west by Azaz and stretching east to the Euphrates while extending south to al-Bab.

Let me focus on the north-west zone, which is around 1,500 sq km in area—about the size of Wales. There is a little al-Qaeda activity there, which would have to be sorted out by military action, but that may not be too difficult. Importantly, Daesh does not operate there. Nor is the region of great strategic interest to Russia or, really, to President Assad. Right now it is predominantly controlled by the Free Syrian Army and other moderate groups. It already contains about 500,000 displaced persons who really need help. The British charity Syria Relief has a few functioning schools there, and the Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations also runs several effective hospitals and clinics nearby. Both schools and medical facilities could readily be expanded if the safe zone concept were allowed to come to fruition. Personally, I would not be averse to using British soldiers for such a purpose. In my experience, they are quite good at that sort of thing.

In conclusion on Syria, I believe that the time is right for us to be more energetic there. Can we make safe zones work there? Of course we could, if the international community really wants it. In truth, the chances of success are greater now than they have been for the last six years.

May I end by quickly mentioning that I, too, like my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess)—who is not in his place at the moment—feel that Uber is taking the biscuit? It is under-regulated, its drivers undertrained, and it is putting very good, proper black cabbies out of work. That has got to be sorted. Perhaps Transport for London requires investigating on the matter.

I am desperately sad that Keith Palmer was killed last week—we in the House all feel that way. God bless him. God bless everyone in this House who has worked to make us safe over the last Session, and thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for all you and the House staff have done.

4.9 pm

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): I would like to use this debate to highlight three areas where I feel our national health service might do a bit better. The first, regular attendees of this debate will not be surprised to learn, is about the medical procedure of hysteroscopy.

To refresh our memories, a hysteroscopy is when a small device, often including a camera, is inserted manually through the cervix into the womb, usually to cut a sample from the tissue or lining which can be used to help to diagnose cancers and fertility issues. It is usually performed without any anaesthetic. I am told—reassured—by medical professionals that it rarely causes discomfort. However, as we have heard before in this House, it can also be horrifically painful.

This is the fourth time I have raised the issue and when I last spoke I asked for a letter from the Minister to address the issue. I must thank those on the Government Benches for ensuring that such a response was forthcoming. Unfortunately, the response from the Department of Health was, if I can put it gently, bland in the extreme and did not really move the issue forward. I have written again, this time to the Secretary of State for Health. I have asked him or one of his Commons team to meet me and discuss this issue in person. The Secretary of State is not a bad man, so I hope that with the encouragement of the Minister on the Treasury Bench I might be successful.

Since raising this issue in December, I have been contacted by even more women. Given how short the debate is, I will mention only one story. This is from a woman in Leicester, who said:

“The prior information leaflet suggested there would be minimal pain...it was so excruciatingly painful that I began to cry out, my body went into shock and I started to sweat profusely. I came over disorientated and dizzy, I felt heavily nauseous and I began to pass out. I have never experienced agonising pain like it in all my life...when arriving home, I spent a long time crying, curled up in a ball doubled over with pain...the use of no local anaesthesia in this procedure seriously requires investigation.”

**Bob Stewart:** I have heard the hon. Lady on this subject several times before. It deeply upsets me that doctors do not recognise the pain that women undergo and apparently continue to say, “There will be mild discomfort” when women are in agony. For goodness’ sake, this has to be sorted!

**Lyn Brown:** I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He has listened to me, wincing, through the many debates in which I have raised this issue. I know I have genuine support on both sides of the Chamber, so I am hopeful that his Secretary of State will come up with a solution that will enable us to move forward.

A colleague of ours in this place had to undergo this procedure and she was mindful of my words. She attended a central London hospital and, with no little trepidation, asked about anaesthesia. The doctor looked at her with disbelief and said, “They use anaesthesia as a matter of course, because to do anything else would be barbaric.” All we are asking for is that all women get the same care and attention whichever hospital they go to and whichever part of the country they live in.

My second issue is the speed of cancer diagnosis. West Ham has a relatively low incidence of cancer, but patients from my constituency are, unusually, likely to die within a year of being diagnosed. The essential research done by Cancer Research UK makes the primary reason for this clear: too many of my constituents die because successful diagnosis takes too long. To be honest, they also do not get to the doctors early enough to seek diagnosis. Less than half of cancers in the Newham clinical commissioning group area are diagnosed early,

significantly fewer than the national average. This problem was highlighted this Wednesday by the “Today” programme on Radio 4. Currently, many patients across the country go through a drawn-out, stressful and expensive process of diagnosis. They may be referred to an oncologist for testing too late, and there is clearly a role for better and more consistently observed guidelines to prevent that.

Even when patients are referred, however, they often face a series of appointments with specialists, waiting for test results between those appointments. Many symptoms of cancer are ambiguous, especially at the essential early stages. A shift in policy towards rapid testing for multiple cancer types could be expected to improve early detection rates, giving more patients a new lease of life, saving patients and healthcare staff a great deal of stress and time, and, indeed, saving the NHS money through the adoption of a more efficient process.

I have personal reasons for raising this issue today. Had such early detection been available a few years ago, my mum might still be with me today instead of leaving us far too soon, and completely unexpectedly, on a Mothering Sunday morning. I give notice that I shall be seeking a longer debate in the House, but, in the meantime, I should be grateful if the Deputy Leader of the House would ask the Department of Health to write to inform me of its current plans to move towards faster and more joined-up cancer diagnosis.

I also have some concerns about plans for a weakening of the link between the recommendations of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the availability of recommended treatments to patients. Access to treatments can already be delayed by 90 days, but under the new rules, approved treatments with a high overall cost—regardless of the cost per treatment—could be delayed by health commissioning authorities in England for at least three years, 13 times longer than is currently allowed. Colleagues in all parts of the House have argued in recent months that the right balance between affordability and equal access to effective treatments for those who need them has not yet been found. I echo that view, and I would appreciate any reassurance that the Government can offer that they are committed to re-examining these issues soon.

I, too, will be remembering Keith Palmer over the break, and I will be thinking of everyone and hoping that they are all safe. I say to all Members, and to all the members of staff who look after us so well: have a great Easter break.

4.17 pm

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) on her passionate speech. She speaks with great eloquence.

Let me join other Members in paying tribute to PC Keith Palmer, whom my hon. Friend mentioned, and who tragically lost his life in the attack on Westminster last week. His death was a reminder of the vitally important and dangerous work that our police forces do every day to keep us safe. I join others, too, in sending my deepest condolences to his wife, children, family and friends, and to the wider family of the Metropolitan police.

I also pay tribute to the Serjeant at Arms for what he did during that crisis. He was so cool, and he was able to calm the nerves of so many people in the Palace. I am grateful to him for the work that he did—and, indeed, I am grateful to the Deputy Leader of the House, who,

recognising that I had diabetes, approached me several times to offer me biscuits. It was the first time that he had offered me biscuits; he usually borrows chocolate biscuits from me at Norman Shaw North. I was very grateful for the concern that he showed for Members.

Sadly, attacks on our police officers are all too common. In February, the Police Federation of England and Wales revealed that more than 6,000 officers are assaulted every day on our streets, which means that a police officer is attacked every 13 seconds. That is a staggering statistic. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for the work that she has done in raising the issue of attacks on the police force. It is important for us to recognise that they are happening on a daily basis, and I commend her campaign.

When he responds to the debate, will the Deputy Leader of the House tell us what measures are being taken to reduce the number of such attacks, and to provide better protection for our police officers? He will remember all the excellent work that he did on the Home Affairs Committee when we considered these issues, but it would be good to know what the Government are doing.

**Bob Stewart:** I intervene very briefly just to remind people that nowadays some police widows lose pensions when they remarry. I think that the House should take action to deal with that, because it is totally unfair. It does not apply throughout the country—it does not apply in Northern Ireland—but we must get this right: police widows deserve justice.

**Keith Vaz:** The hon. Gentleman must have read my speech or hacked my emails, because he clearly knows that I am going to come on to the subject of police widows shortly, and I agree with him on that point. Let me first turn to the other issue of policing that I want to raise: the police funding formula.

Given the dangerous roles our officers play in keeping us safe, I am sad to see the damage done by reductions in police force budgets over the last few years. Of course I understand why this is happening, but it is right that we should point it out. This problem has been compounded by the continued failure of the Home Office to implement a new funding formula, something that affects every single Member of the House here today.

As a result, police forces cannot predict their future funding. At a recent meeting with the police and crime commissioner for Leicestershire, Lord Bach, and Chief Constable Simon Cole, Leicestershire MPs were told that constabularies like Leicestershire have complex funding challenges, that the funding they have is inadequate for a mix of urban and rural policing, and that forces cannot adapt and keep up with modern crime issues like cybercrime unless they know what is happening in respect of their allocations.

In November 2015 the former policing Minister, the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mike Penning), said the review on this was being paused until the National Police Chiefs Council carried out a capabilities review. Sara Thornton, chair of the NPCC, has said that this review does not stop the Government continuing with announcing the results of the funding formula. I ask the Deputy Leader of the House when the new funding formula arrangements will be published.

[Keith Vaz]

Another area that needs urgent review is police pensions—I am most grateful to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) for raising this point, because he is right to do so—particularly in relation to how officers' widows receive their pensions. Legislation passed in 2006 meant that the partners of any new police officers were entitled to receive a pension for life. Those falling under the 1987 regulations—the year I was elected to this House—were allowed to opt into the new scheme. However, the new rules introduced in 2015 effectively deny police widows in England and Wales who remarried before 1 April 2015 the right to move on with their lives and find happiness, as they cannot get this pension. The flip-flopping of legislation that has affected these families is totally unacceptable. How can it be fair that a widow who has remarried after 1 April 2015 can be awarded a pension for life, but one who has remarried before that date is denied that entitlement on a mere technicality?

**Bob Stewart:** And her children.

**Keith Vaz:** And, indeed, her children. There are disparities in how the pension regulations apply across the United Kingdom. The remarriage deadline applies only to England and Wales. There is no such cut-off date in Scotland. In Northern Ireland all survivors rightly keep their pensions for life, no matter how their former partner died. Can the Deputy Leader of the House explain why English and Welsh widows are treated in this way, while their Scottish, Northern Irish and other counterparts are not faced with that difficulty?

Finally, let me raise the issue of written parliamentary questions. The Deputy Leader of the House is a master at giving replies to difficult questions. I was reading a debate in which he was involved recently, and he used the following phrases when asked about the timetable for the restoration works on the House of Commons: “in due course”, “in the fullness of time”, and “shortly”. These are his favourite replies; he could star in his very own version of “Yes Minister”, playing both the Minister and Sir Humphrey.

I recently wrote to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), Chair of the Procedure Committee, to complain about the disappointing answers I had received to two written questions: from the Minister for Immigration and the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker). Parliamentary questions are about facts: we ask a question and we get a reply. I asked the Minister for Immigration how many entry clearance officers there were in Mumbai, and back came not a reply giving me the numbers but a press release on the wonderful work being done by entry clearance officers. I already knew about that. I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union how many civil servants had been seconded to his Department, and again I got a press release. I did not get the facts and figures, which are what we need. Will the Deputy Leader of the House look into the issue of written parliamentary questions? Let us get rid of all this “in due course” and “shortly”, and concentrate instead on providing factual answers to factual questions.

I do not want to delay my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) from beginning her speech, because it is her birthday today and I know

that she wants to go off and celebrate. I cannot end, however, without wishing Members of the House, the Serjeant at Arms, the Chair and all the Officers who do such fantastic work a very happy recess. There are three supporters of Leicester City football club in the Chamber: myself, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin). I do not know why I always think that my hon. Friend is the Member for Skegness; it is nearby. Leicester City are the only English team remaining in the Champions League. Forget about all the others that spend billions of pounds on their players; we are in the last eight, and on 12 and 18 April, we will be playing Atlético Madrid. Easter is a Christian festival, and we believe in rebirth and in the blessings of almighty God. We hope that those blessings will be upon the Leicester City team as they undertake the most important two matches in their entire football lives. I am sure that the whole House will be with me on that.

4.26 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). I should just like to thank him for blowing my cover; I was trying to keep my birthday quiet. He was the first person in the House to wish me a happy birthday today, however, and I am grateful to him for that—[*Interruption.*] Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I should like to echo my right hon. Friend's comments about PC Keith Palmer and to extend my sympathies to his family and to the families and friends of all those who died during the terrible events of last week. Two things have come out of those events. The first is that we are going to have a review of our response, which is the right thing to do. I will certainly be feeding in my views on what we could have done better. Some things were done very well, and I am grateful to all the staff of the House for protecting us, but we as MPs should have taken more responsibility for our reactions and for looking after the numerous visitors and children in the building. I did not know what on earth was going on, and the people I was with did not know either. I think that we could look after our visitors better.

For me, there is a second issue that has come out of last week's event. The Prime Minister has encouraged us as MPs to learn more about first aid, but I am struck by the fact that it was this Government who talked out a Bill to introduce compulsory first aid training in schools. Try as I might, I cannot see the logic of the Government encouraging people to learn first aid while putting a block on making it a compulsory part of our children's education. What better way could there be to teach children first aid skills that they can carry with them for the rest of their lives, so that they can feel confident about dealing with emergencies? With that in mind, I have written to the Prime Minister to ask her to revisit the question of teaching first aid in schools. I await her reply.

I want to take this opportunity to raise the issue of the Government's drugs strategy. Drug-related deaths in England and Wales have hit record levels, with cocaine deaths reaching an all-time high in 2015 and deaths involving heroin or morphine doubling over three years to reach record levels.



The Prime Minister is facing a barrage of criticism over the policies she pursued while Home Secretary, with Niamh Eastwood, the executive director of drugs charity Release, saying:

“The Home Office’s pursuit of a ‘tough on drugs’ strategy and refusal to acknowledge the evidence for best practice in drug treatment is quite literally killing people.”

Martin Powell, of the Transform Drug Policy Foundation, echoes that view and says:

“The Home Office—under the now Prime Minister’s watch—is responsible for the highest number of drug deaths ever recorded. That the Prime Minister keeps claiming her drug policy is working should send a chill down the spine of every parent and reasonable person in the country. She knows, from countless studies, what keeps communities safe, and it isn’t driving people away from help and into the hands of criminals. It is responsible reforms that take the drug market away from dealers, and puts it into the hands of doctors and pharmacists.”

Drug-related deaths are increasing, and new drugs and associated problems are causing problems in prisons and emergency departments. In February 2016, the Government confirmed:

“We will shortly be publishing a new Drug Strategy.”

At the Christmas Adjournment, my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon) reminded the House that, barring an unexpected delivery from Santa Claus, it was still not to be seen. She asked again in the new year and was told that it would be “soon.” So “soon” in Government terms, means months, and “shortly” means more than a year. Will Ministers please announce an actual date for the drug strategy, or would we be better off asking the Easter bunny?

Local Authorities have seen their funding for drug and alcohol treatment slashed by 42% since 2010. Many clients seeking treatment for addiction lead chaotic lives and many struggle with a whole host of difficulties that go far beyond their addiction. They might be embroiled in the criminal justice system and need advice, they might have housing problems or be struggling with trauma, or they might have been in care and survived institutional abuse. Positions for psychologists in drug and alcohol addiction teams who could provide treatment for complex trauma related to sexual abuse have also been cut.

Members of the drugs, alcohol and justice cross-party parliamentary group, of which I am a member, are today debating in the other place the cost of alcohol misuse to the National Health Service. There are more than 1 million alcohol-related hospital admissions each year, and alcohol is a contributory factor in more than 200 different health conditions. Our cross-party group will be discussing alcohol misuse and treatment after Easter, on 26 April. As one regular contributor to group meetings, John Jolly, has said:

“As Chief Executive of a drugs and alcohol charity I see the harm that alcohol does on a daily basis. I saw the impact as a police officer. I saw the impact as a probation officer. I saw the impact on children and families as a social worker. For this reason I would urge the Government to take urgent action to develop a national alcohol strategy”.

The shadow Health Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), whose father was sadly an alcoholic, has also called for greater recognition of the damage done by excessive drinking. Drug and alcohol abuse and addiction are not going to go away. Let us hope that both a drugs strategy and an alcohol strategy will be forthcoming as a matter of urgency.

4.33 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to speak in the House on any issue. I begin by joining those who have already conveyed their sympathies regarding PC Palmer and the innocents who were murdered just over a week ago. We also think of the injured, some of whom are critical even today, and their families.

I rise to speak not about the geological components of drought and what causes it, but about the suffering of men, women and children in Africa and what can be done to help them. We all know the issues, and we see them on TV. I will not be the only one in this Chamber who has seen the devastating images of children who are so malnourished that they cannot even stand. I read the report from Save the Children, which brings home the extent of the problem in Africa at present. It states that an estimated 6.5 million children could be at risk of starvation in the horn of Africa as a result of the back-to-back droughts in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya. Nearly 500,000 children in the region are already suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

What is malnutrition? It is a lack of nutritious food, which has an horrific effect on quality of life. Malnutrition increases the risk of infection and infectious disease, and even moderate malnutrition weakens every part of the immune system. For example, it is a major risk factor in the onset of active tuberculosis. Protein and energy malnutrition and deficiencies of specific micronutrients, including iron, zinc and vitamins, increase susceptibility to infection. All that happens to people who do not have food.

Malnutrition affects HIV transmission by increasing the risk of transmission from mother to child and by increasing the replication of the virus. Again, the complications are far-reaching. In communities or areas that lack access to safe drinking water, those additional health risks present a critical problem. Lower energy and impaired brain function represent the downward spiral of malnutrition as victims are less able to perform the tasks needed to acquire food, earn an income or gain an education. That is a massive problem, as several seasons of either failed or erratic rainfall have led to severe water shortages and the death of livestock, leaving nearly 15 million people across the three countries in urgent need of assistance. We have seen charities requesting help on TV, and the Government are doing a lot, but I urge them to do more.

With the next rainy season again expected to bring below-average rainfall across the region, the situation for already desperate children and families in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya will only get worse, leaving millions at risk of hunger, lifelong health problems and, worse, death. I take on board the urgings of John Graham, the Ethiopia country director of Save the Children, who in January 2017, ahead of the UN meeting in Addis Ababa, said:

“we urge them not to forget the plight of these children and families by stepping up their efforts to fund this response. The lives of millions are at stake. We must not allow many of the same past errors that resulted in the deaths of 130,000 children under five during the last Somalia famine alone, to be repeated.”

I continue that plea and look to our International Development Ministers. What have the Government done since January to help address this tragic situation? What is in place to ensure that aid reaches its destination

[Jim Shannon]

intact? And what more can we do in this place to ensure that that happens? Focusing attention in this debate is one way of doing it.

With 5 million people, nearly half its population, facing severe food and water shortages, Somalia is now on the verge of famine. Malnutrition rates across Somalia have already reached critical levels and are expected to worsen in the coming weeks. Thousands of families are on the move in search of food and water, and many are now crossing the border into Ethiopia, which is dealing with its own effects of the drought, in search of help.

After screening on arrival at Dollo Ado camp, 77% of children show signs of malnutrition. In Ethiopia, the drought is forcing many children to drop out of school, leaving them at risk of early marriage and forced migration, both of which we do not want to happen. Again, those are the side effects of drought. The Ethiopian Government are working to mitigate the effects of last year's drought, and the country is appealing for \$948 million of funding. Ethiopia itself has already committed some \$47 million to help 5.6 million people in need, but even that will never come anywhere near addressing the issue. In Kenya, more than 1.25 million people are in urgent need of food, with hunger levels expected to worsen over the coming months.

The level of need can be, and is, overwhelming, but the young man who threw starfish back into the sea was making a difference to as many as he could, which is all I ask today. Are we making a difference to as many people as we can? I understand that we are not able to solve all the problems of that nation, and that we are not able to solve all the problems of our own nation, but we can make sure that we do all we can to see that the aid we have to offer is going directly to the right places and ends up in the hands and the bellies of the children and others who so desperately need it.

I understand that the Deputy Leader of the House will be responding, but I hope my message will go to the Department for International Development either directly or through him. I hope that, either now or at a later date, there is a strategy in place to secure our goals. I seek assurance that we are doing all we possibly can, and in the best possible way.

I conclude by thanking you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this House on a regular basis, and I thank the other Deputy Speakers and Mr Speaker for also making that possible. I am very honoured to be the Member for Strangford and to sit in the greatest seat of democracy in the whole world. What a privilege it is to be able to sit in this place on behalf of our people. I say, with respect to everyone else in this House, that I know I represent some of the most wonderful people in the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—the people of Strangford. These are people I have known all my life.

I also wish to thank all the House staff and the right hon. and hon. Members for their courtesy and good manners. I thank the Deputy Leader of the House and the shadow Deputy Leader of the House in advance for the contributions they are going to make. I also wish to remind people of the real meaning of Easter, which is that our Lord and saviour was crucified on the cross and came into the world to save sinners.

4.40 pm

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): It is always a great privilege to respond from the Front Bench in these debates, where we hear an eclectic mix of issues and we realise the true passion that colleagues have on a great many issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) opened the debate and said he was going to offer some home truths from his north-east constituency, and he certainly did so. He painted a vibrant picture of the Haredi Jewish community in Gateshead celebrating Purim, and it crossed my mind as we move into the Easter recess that it is important to remember the connections between Easter and the Jewish Passover. Obviously much of the symbolism is the same, as is the position in the calendar, but in many languages the words for “Easter” and for “Passover” are identical or very similar. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has just reminded us about the true meaning of Easter, which is that the Lord loved us so much that he gave his son, who died for us but then rose again. Some hope can be offered to this House through that Easter message.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead had some banter with the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) about football. Unfortunately, the latter cannot be in his place at the moment, but he said he did not want to jinx Newcastle United's good season by mentioning them. I should point out that when I mentioned Barrow A.F.C. during the Christmas Adjournment debate it absolutely jinxed their great winning streak, and I apologise to all Barrow fans who might be watching this debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) came in with his shopping list, and he is a passionate co-chair of the all-party group on maritime and ports. He raised some important issues, as we leave the European Union, about the way in which we support and train the next generation of merchant navy seamen, and I supported his calls on that. I also support his calls for the fire and rescue service to have a statutory duty in respect of flooding, as our firefighters already respond to flooding incidents when called to do so.

The hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) raised the issue of the school funding formula, and I am sure that there is not a Member who does not have a case from their constituency where they feel their schools are losing out. I certainly have cases in my constituency; I was most surprised, given the Government's rhetoric on grammar schools, to receive a letter from the Lancaster Royal Grammar School outlining the huge cuts that it faces to its budget. It appears that no school is safe from these cuts. The hon. Gentleman was heading off to Southend's Got Talent competition and if he was in his place I would have wished him good luck with whichever talent it was that he was hoping to win the competition with.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) raised the issue of the 20,000 requests she has had for help and support in the past 22 months, which highlights the work of Members in serving their constituents, doing much of it behind the scenes. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) raised the issue of Syria and reminded us of the role that we all play as a country on the world stage when the answers do not always seem very obvious. This Easter recess might be a time for many Members to reflect on the role we can play.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) once again raised the issue of hysteroscopies. If Ministers think that she will be going away any time soon, they might want to think again. I suspect that if things are not resolved, she will be back at the next Adjournment debate before a recess raising the exact same issue, as she does at every opportunity she gets.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) talked about many issues relating to police matters and about the real need for justice for police widows. As we move towards the Easter Adjournment, we do so with a great sense of loss and sadness in our hearts, because last week we lost PC Keith Palmer, who was part of our Westminster village. That has affected every one of us. On behalf of the Opposition Front-Bench team, I add my condolences to PC Palmer's family, friends and colleagues in this place as they mourn his loss. We remember all those killed and injured in last Wednesday's act of terrorism and thank all those who work so hard to keep us safe, not only here in the Houses of Parliament but in our constituencies. We also thank all those who work for the security services doing work that goes unseen but that saves a great many lives.

I wish my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) a happy birthday; I suspect she will be getting many birthday greetings now that my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East has outed her birthday. She raised the important issue of compulsory first aid in schools. The issue came to light in my constituency recently when I was at a large gathering. I had just taken the microphone when somebody on the back row had an epileptic fit. It surprised me that there were just two of us in the room who knew what to do in that situation. It was a room full of 100 people, and just two of us responded as first aiders. I call on the Government to think again about the campaign for compulsory first aid in schools, which I fully support.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked about the issues in Ethiopia and Somalia. He is a great, passionate campaigner for global justice and against poverty, and I know he will continue his fight for justice.

As we move towards the Easter Adjournment, I wish you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Mr Speaker, the Deputy Speakers, the staff of the House, and all Members and their staff who work on this estate, a happy Easter. In particular this Easter, I wish the police and security staff—who work very hard and who may often have gone unnoticed but certainly not in the past few days—a happy and peaceful Easter. Happy Pesach to everyone.

4.47 pm

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Michael Ellis):** It is a real pleasure to be the Minister at the Dispatch Box for this debate and to follow the eloquent remarks of the shadow Deputy Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith). In the few minutes remaining, it falls to me to try to answer some of the points raised and sum up the debate.

My hon. Friend—he feels like a friend, but I should say the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, is not currently in the Chamber. I know what a powerful and effective Chair he is, and the charm with which he performs his functions really does help to get things done. He spoke movingly about Gateshead, its nightlife and the coast and surrounding countryside there. As the

shadow Deputy Leader of the House said, he spoke about the orthodox Jewish community in Gateshead and about Purim. I thank him for speaking so affectionately and welcomingly about his community.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about the National Citizen Service. To use its catchphrase, we should “Say yes to NCS”, because it is a wonderful organisation—a charity—that really is very popular with people. It has an extremely high success rate, and the last time I looked its approval rating was well above 90%. It is an organisation that is working very well indeed.

It is a shame that the hon. Gentleman is not present because I want to mention the Gateshead Millennium bridge. When he said that he pressed the button to tilt the bridge, I was reminded that he himself, I think it is fair to say, is a bridge linking his constituency so very effectively with this House. He is as much Gateshead as the Gateshead Millennium bridge is. I hope that a Minister complimenting him in that way will not adversely affect his credibility.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) has also had to leave the Chamber. I am tempted to call him Bob bhai, which is a nickname that he has affectionately been given by the Hindu community in Harrow East. He spoke of his Homelessness Reduction Bill, which he should be terribly proud of. Congratulations are due to him on getting that Bill on the statute book. It is always an achievement for any Member to get a Bill on the statute book, but that Bill, which helps homeless people, really is an achievement.

My hon. Friend told a very concerning story about the lifts at Stanmore railway station and about how his local council—Harrow Council—is so flushed with funds that it refused a £1 million gift to improve the railway station. No doubt, there will be some local questions about that decision. I can see the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) nodding sagely at that.

Next we heard from the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) who spoke about cochlear implants. I was particularly struck by the fact that no fewer than 600,000 people could benefit from them. I wish to reiterate what was said to him in an earlier debate, which is that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is duty bound to consider such matters and to make decisions on them. I wish him well in his campaign in that regard.

The Department for International Development is looking at small non-governmental organisations, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I recommend that he seek a meeting with the excellent Secretary of State of DFID, because she is a powerful voice and one of those people who regularly gets things done. He should certainly seek a meeting with her. If I can help in any way, he should speak to me.

The next Member to speak was my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) who most certainly is in his place. Traditionally, he puts on a tour de force at the end-of-term Adjournment debates. He spoke of Southend, the alternative city of culture, and about Southend's Got Talent competition, which is on tonight. I do not know whether he is a contestant—*[Interruption.]* I hear the words, “He should be.” He certainly is a talent in this Chamber and in this debate. He said that it was 125 years since the inauguration of his borough. I think that he has been the Member for

[*Michael Ellis*]

a large proportion of that time—certainly a fifth of it anyway—and that is a real achievement for him. He spoke of the recently appointed town crier. No doubt, that town crier can thank him for his remarks by shouting about how effective my hon. Friend is as MP for his area.

My hon. Friend very kindly mentioned two officers of this House who are retiring after very long service: Post Office member John Wrighton who has been here for 38 years; and Alan Dickens, a Doorkeeper since 1993 and senior Doorkeeper since 2004, who has been a loyal servant of this House, and I thank him for his services. Indeed, I wish to thank all our Doorkeepers here. During the recent terrible terrorist incident, they were remarkable and showed reassuring calm, dignity, professionalism and control. We thank them for their devotion to duty.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) made a party political speech about Brexit and many other things. Nevertheless, I feel sure that she will respect the wishes of the democratic majority, who, of course, voted in a referendum to leave the European Union. No doubt, she will join me in wishing the country and her constituents the very best deal that we can get—that we will get—over the coming months and years.

My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) spoke movingly about Syria. He is an authoritative voice in this House and particularly so on such a subject. The United Kingdom has, of course, pledged more than £2.3 billion in response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and the region generally. That is our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis, and it is right that it should be. We are co-hosting the forthcoming Brussels conference on 5 April, which will be an important opportunity to take stock of the situation in Syria and to reaffirm and build on the London conference commitments. I thank him for raising the matter at this time and in this place.

The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) spoke, as she has on previous occasions when I have had the honour to be at this Dispatch Box, about issues very close to her heart, including hysteroscopies. She said that she wishes to meet the Health Secretary about the subject, and I commend her for that. I found it disconcerting that apparently some areas consider anaesthetic to be routine, whereas others do not. No doubt, she will wish to raise that with the Health Secretary, and I wish her well in her campaign in that regard.

The hon. Lady also spoke of cancer diagnoses. I was moved by her description of the loss of her mother. She said that she has written to the Department of Health about faster and more joined-up cancer diagnoses. As she knows, more than £1.5 billion has been put towards the cancer drugs fund, which has helped more than 100,000 people. Although there is always more that can be done, £130 million has gone into modernising, for example, radiotherapy equipment across England, and more than £5.5 billion a year has been spent on other cancer drugs and treatments, and £2.5 billion on pathology services. Those are large numbers. Cancer affects us all in this House and this country in one way or another and people we know—family, friends, relatives and colleagues—so her remarks will certainly strike home.

The right hon. Member for Leicester East, in his inimitable remarks, spoke powerfully about police bravery and the appalling attacks that some police officers suffer in the line of duty. Before I was in this place, I practised at the Bar in criminal law, and I dealt with many such cases. Anyone who assaults our police officers in the exercise of their lawful duty commits a serious and aggravating offence and should be dealt with to the fullest available extent of the law. It is an aggravating feature in sentencing, and one that we will follow closely along with the individual cases that come to the attention of the House. The right hon. Gentleman also spoke about the police funding formula. He does not like the phrases, “in due course”, “shortly” or “as soon as possible”, so may I just say instead, “as soon as reasonably practicable”? I hope that he will be satisfied with that.

I wish the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) a happy birthday. She spoke about first aid in schools, which is an important issue. The events of the past week have brought home how important it is for people to know about first aid. Whether those issues and all those important things can be made compulsory is, of course, another matter entirely, as there are a lot of priorities for schools and schoolchildren.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke of the wonderful people he represents. I have no doubt of that. He then spoke movingly about the famine in east Africa. It is an urgent and severe crisis. More than 20 million people are at risk, but the UK is delivering life-saving support across South Sudan, Yemen, Somalia and Nigeria. We will not look the other way while they suffer, which is why we have already announced £200 million in aid for Somalia and South Sudan. The phenomenal public response to the Disasters Emergency Committee is testament to the British people’s unwavering generosity in response to suffering. The UK Government have matched that pound for pound—£10 million.

Several Members mentioned PC Keith Palmer. He protected and courageously defended our parliamentary democracy last week. He stood his ground, as one constable proudly described him to me earlier today. He did nothing less than save lives. He bravely defended us and Her Majesty’s Palace of Westminster. We will forever be indebted to him. Our thoughts are with his family, his friends and his colleagues. He was a hero. He was a national hero, and he was our hero.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION (COMMITTEES)

*Ordered,*

That the Child Tax Credit (Amendment) Regulations 2017 (S.I., 2017, No. 387), be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.—(*Heather Wheeler.*)

## PETITION

### Persecution of Christians

5 pm

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): I rise to present a petition signed by 306 parishioners of St John Southworth, Nelson, Brierfield and Fence, which was shared with me by Rev. Brian Murphy.

The petition states:

The petition of parishioners of the Parish of Saint John Southworth, Nelson, Brierfield and Fence, Lancashire,

Declares that the petitioners believe that attacks on Christians in 20% of the world's countries since 2014 is concerning and that more should be done to combat religious persecution.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take further action to prevent and raise awareness of attacks on Christians, worldwide.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002032]

## Sanitary Products

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

5.1 pm

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): I declare an interest as chair of the all-party group on women's health.

I am grateful to have secured the final debate before the recess to raise the issue of period poverty. I have touched on this matter before in this House in the context of homelessness. I wish to expand on that, and also to talk about the shocking recent reports of period poverty among school-age girls in west Yorkshire. The phenomenon of period poverty has gone under the radar for some time and is only now starting to be discussed after the successes of the campaign against the tampon tax. It is a unique challenge faced by women in poverty, who all too often face a choice between buying sanitary products or food. In the worst-case scenario, homeless women have been faced with a choice between stealing sanitary products and doing without.

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that women using sanitary products beyond their recommended duration are at risk of toxic shock syndrome, and that homeless women, in particular, self-ration these products at great risk to their health?

**Paula Sherriff:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I will be coming to the issue of toxic shock syndrome and other associated health conditions, but she makes that crucial point very well.

The horror of these choices cannot be overstated, and they are choices that women in one of the most advanced industrial nations on earth should not face. Period poverty represents nothing less than the affected women being robbed of their human dignity. As an illustration of this, the Salvation Army has relayed to me the experiences at its Darlington Citadel food bank, where women have turned up literally begging for sanitary products. With your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will quote its commanding officer in full, because I believe that the House really needs to hear this:

“Since we have started supplying”

sanitary products,

“with tears in their eyes many women have told us what they do when they can't afford them. They use rolled up socks, they rip up clothing, they even use newspaper, they stuff these into their underwear as makeshift sanitary wear—or they simply have to free bleed. These women however, struggle to pay for electricity and so doing laundry to a sufficient level to kill any bacteria is a problem and they are putting themselves and their daughters at risk of infection resulting in possible medical treatment with antibiotics or even hospitalization. Some women have informed us that they have needed dilation and curettage treatment and courses of antibiotics for infections, costing the NHS money and resources.”

Unfortunately, this testimony does not stand alone. An investigation by Amanda Ternblad of Goldsmiths University into period poverty in London has found that some women resort to using toilet roll, which can pose a risk of thrush infection, or using sanitary products for longer than they should be used—that follows on from the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins)—which can lead to

[Paula Sherriff]

fatal toxic shock syndrome and the risk of further long-standing health problems. Of course, that costs the NHS in the long run, but that should be as nothing compared with the desperation, indignity, humiliation and degradation visited on those women, who are already among the most vulnerable in our society. That should beggar belief in one of the wealthiest nations on the planet.

The problem is most pronounced for women who are homeless, who typically have no stable source of income with which to buy sanitary products. In the debate on homelessness on 14 December 2016, I mentioned that homeless shelters get an allowance from the Government to provide items such as condoms and razors, but they have no such allowance to buy sanitary products, leaving them reliant on charity donations instead.

When I last raised that point in the House, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), said that the Government provide funding for outreach services for homeless people, meaning that such facilities would ultimately be funded anyway. Unfortunately, the point is that there appears to be a shortfall in toiletries such as sanitary protection for women. In many places in the UK, condoms are given away for free, and there is a clear and well-understood public argument for that. Why, then, is that not commonplace for sanitary products, which every woman requires, and the absence of which can have grave health consequences? Although valuable work has been done in the past couple of years by organisations such as St Mungo's to ensure that homelessness services are gender-appropriate, the Government's allowance for such products does not appear to have kept pace and speaks to something of a male-dominated view of homelessness.

In reality, women who are homeless face numerous unique challenges, from their personal safety, to vulnerability and falling into prostitution. Those challenges, while grave, have in various ways been targeted before by the good works of homelessness charities. Period poverty, however, is one of the unique challenges for women that has been under-represented, which makes it all the more important that it is now taken seriously.

The reliance on charity is a problem in itself. Donations of sanitary products to food banks and homeless shelters are often not enough to keep up with demand, while supply is variable across the country, meaning that the donations are not always made in the areas with most demand. The Homeless Period campaign is an attempt to gain more attention for the problem and to secure more donations of sanitary items to homeless shelters and food banks so that their stocks are more readily available. I again wish to pay tribute to the incredible work of Laura Coryton, who campaigned so effectively with me on the issue of the tampon tax, for her work in bringing the issue to wider public attention.

As part of my support for the campaign, I have secured a trial of a donation point for toiletries at a Boots store in Dewsbury to go to the Fusion Housing charity, which supports food banks in the Kirklees area. It is a small step, but I hope that many more like it can be achieved in the near future and that they will make a difference.

If, as we sadly now find, the Government are content to let charity supplant welfare in providing for the needy in our society, I will call on other companies to follow the example of Boots. Every area will have similar problems, and similar charities will try to cope with them. Many companies that deal with toiletries could set up similar schemes as part of their wider corporate responsibility to their communities. I was encouraged by an example on a recent trip to Brussels, where a hotel chain was donating surplus toiletries to its local facility for the homeless. With a bit of ingenuity, companies can make a significant difference to the lives of some of the most vulnerable—as could this Government.

It is not, however, just homeless women who are vulnerable to period poverty. I was absolutely appalled—actually, I was heartbroken—by the recent BBC Radio Leeds report that a west Yorkshire charity called Freedom4Girls, which usually sends sanitary products to girls in Kenya, had been contacted by a school in Leeds to provide sanitary products to girls there. Concerns were raised after girls were found to be playing truant because they could not afford sanitary protection. I ask everyone to take a moment to consider what is happening in one of the richest nations in the world.

As with the homeless women in the examples I mentioned earlier, the same makeshift and risky remedies had been tried. We heard about 15-year-old girls sellotaping toilet roll to their knickers because they could not afford tampons or sanitary towels. Girls would rather not attend school than go through the indignity of doing so in a vulnerable state. There are related reports of teachers having to pay for sanitary products for their pupils. That, too, beggars belief. Schools are the perfect place for the Government to enact early intervention on matters relating to women's health, as has been borne out by the valuable human papilloma virus vaccination programme. I urge the Government to investigate how the problem of period poverty can be tackled in schools, for example by including menstrual health in sex and relationships education and by looking at the possibility of using eligibility for free school meals for the provision of sanitary products to vulnerable young girls.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate and praise her for the passionate way in which she speaks about the issue, on which she has campaigned for a long time. I have heard the BBC Radio Leeds report about the girls in school. I am a father to young girls, as she knows, so it was something that hit me. Has she thought about whether the tampon tax funds that are being distributed at the moment could be directed to support girls from low-income backgrounds with tampons and sanitary towels? Perhaps pupil premium money could be used, or boosted, to help to provide those much-needed products to girls so that they do not have to go through the horrible situation that the west Yorkshire girls faced.

**Paula Sherriff**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I note that the first time we debated the tampon tax in this House, he chose to vote to keep it, but I do take on board what he says about the tampon tax funds. I would much rather see the tax removed from sanitary products, but while it is still there—I appreciate that Brexit causes complications—I would absolutely support some of the money going towards schools.

**Jason McCartney:** I remember the night when the hon. Lady forced a vote on the tampon tax. As she is well aware, it is due to EU regulation. She had a lot of cross-party support, and this is not party political—it is about coming together to look after young, vulnerable girls, and homeless people. The Government are trying to address that with their approach on the tampon tax. As she knows, through cross-party working, we can help those vulnerable women, rather than scoring puerile, partisan points.

**Paula Sherriff:** The existence of this problem in our schools speaks to my grave concern that we are seeing just the tip of the iceberg. I dare say that if we looked hard enough, up and down the country, we would find examples of similar schools whose girls face the same problem. Leeds City Council has the same concern. It notes:

“This issue has happened in Leeds—a city where services for children are judged to be ‘Good’ and over 90% of schools are judged to be ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted—and as such could be happening in towns and cities right across the UK.”

The Salvation Army has said that

“it appears that this phenomenon may be more widespread”.

We need to ask ourselves what is so fundamentally broken with our society that the poorest families, even those in work and secure housing, cannot afford sanitary protection for their daughters.

When the House returns from the recess, the two-child cap under the Government’s universal credit will have come into effect. The poverty that led the girls in Leeds into this position existed even before that, but I ask the Government whether they honestly believe that their changes will not make the situation even worse. The Opposition have repeatedly said that any such limit to child tax credit will serve only to punish unjustly the children involved. I fear that we may be setting a time bomb of poverty, misery and indignity for the underprivileged girls of the future if we do not act now to ensure that period poverty goes no further.

My sense of sadness about this issue comes not only from the assault on the health and dignity of the women involved—as I have repeatedly said, they are some of the most vulnerable in our society—but from the fact that the whole situation is absolutely avoidable. It is no accident of history that these women are being left in such a vulnerable situation; it is a direct result of the obsession with austerity of this Government and their coalition predecessor, which is disproportionately hitting the poorest in society. Many families now experience in-work poverty because of increasingly insecure jobs and hours. That leaves thousands of women at risk of being unable to afford sanitary products, with many on the precipice of rent arrears or in danger of losing their home altogether.

This sorry state of affairs was not always the case. Under the previous Labour Government, rough sleeping was nearly eliminated, but last year it increased by 16%—the sixth successive annual rise. In the final year of the previous Labour Government, 41,000 people were given aid by Trussell Trust food banks, compared with over 1.1 million in 2015-16. It should go without saying that when more women are homeless and more are relying on food banks just to get by, period poverty is going to be an increasing problem.

I implore the Government today—I beg the Minister—to find the political will to ensure that these horrors are not visited on any more women in our country. In the words of Tina Leslie of Freedom4Girls, “we need to give these girls their dignity back.”

May I finish by taking this opportunity, Madam Deputy Speaker, to wish you, the other Deputy Speakers and Mr Speaker a very happy Easter? I thank all the staff of the House who, particularly during the past seven or eight days, have performed their jobs at the most incredible level. I also pay tribute to those affected by last week’s horrendous Westminster attack, especially the families of the bereaved.

5.15 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jane Ellison):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) on her continuing and committed work in ensuring the affordability of sanitary products. During the passage of last year’s Finance Bill, she and I had reason to discuss this issue on several occasions, not least in relation to her successful amendment to reduce the level of VAT on sanitary products. I of course stand by the pledges the Government made at the time. Those pledges have been legislated for, as she knows and has acknowledged. I recognise, as I think all hon. Members do, the clear and evident passion with which she spoke, and we know how sincerely she campaigns for the rights of women and girls. I hope to be able to respond to some extent, if not to all her wider points, at least to some of the specific points she made.

Before I narrow down to the specific points, let me turn to the broader ones. The Government have been clear that tackling disadvantage is a priority for us. That includes taking action to help the most disadvantaged, with a real focus on tackling not the symptoms but the root causes of poverty. We are determined to reform the welfare system to incentivise work and to help people to achieve their potential. We believe that, as we have seen during the past six years, our reforms have helped to improve lives and living standards for some of the most vulnerable in our country, most prominently by helping people to get back into work.

That is why in our approach to general taxation we are increasing the personal allowance to £12,500 by the end of this Parliament. Next week, increases in the personal allowance and higher rate threshold will have cut taxes for 31 million people and taken 1.3 million of the lowest paid out of income tax altogether, compared with 2015-16. A significant proportion of them will of course be women. Next week, we will increase the national living wage to £7.50 an hour, which marks a £1,400 a year increase in earnings for a full-time worker on the national minimum wage since the introduction of the national living wage in April 2016. It is also why we are reducing the universal credit taper to 63% from April, so people who progress into work can keep more of what they earn, which will enhance the support provided to working families in meeting day-to-day costs; why we will double free childcare to 30 hours a week, which is worth up to £5,000 a year for eligible working parents of three and four-year-olds; and why we will introduce tax-free childcare in the coming month. These are just some of a range of measures that we are taking to ensure that work always pays and that hard-working families can earn more and keep more of the

[Jane Ellison]

money they earn. It is by taking these steps that we are supporting ordinary working families, including the women about whom the hon. Lady spoke.

Let me turn to the tampon tax fund, because we have had a timely update from the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson), who is the Minister for Civil Society. I will take a moment—I think I have enough time—to update the House on some of the work that the fund is going to support. That is important, not least in the light of the hon. Lady's successful campaign to change the law so that we reduce VAT, as soon as we practically can, as has been mentioned, within the constraints of EU law. In the meantime, we have established the £15 million a year tampon tax fund, which, as hon. Members will know, is equivalent to the amount of VAT paid on sanitary products each year.

Since the 2015 autumn statement, £32 million of tampon tax funding has been allocated to women's charities. The majority of that funding is through grants to frontline charities that aim to improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls. Those include health, wellbeing and education initiatives and support services for vulnerable women. A significant proportion of this round's funding will focus on initiatives that help to tackle violence against women and girls—something that all of us across this House want to see borne down on—alongside a broader criterion to support disadvantaged women and girls.

**Jason McCartney:** I saw today's update on where the tampon tax funds have gone. Rather than point scoring, I want something positive to come from this debate. Will the Minister please consider using some of those funds to help with supplies of sanitary products for schools, to make sure that all girls, no matter what their economic background, have access to tampons, pads and towels?

**Jane Ellison:** I will certainly draw my hon. Friend's comments to the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East, the Minister for Civil Society, and I will come to some of the support available in schools and the work already under way as a response to recent questions in Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Civil Society has today announced the full list of funding for charities from the latest round of the tampon tax fund. That means that more than 90 charities are now set to benefit from the fund over this Parliament. The fund continues to benefit organisations in every corner of the UK, from Children North East to the Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre in Cornwall. It is helping to improve the lives of women and girls who suffer disadvantage, supporting our wider ambition to create a fairer society for everyone.

**Paula Sherriff:** I recognise that some excellent charities are receiving funds from the tampon tax, including Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, which I have been working with very closely. How will those charities be provided for when we finally see the abolition of the tampon tax, which I hope will come very soon?

**Jane Ellison:** Indeed; that is something we have explored in debates. We said at the time that while this is inevitably a time-limited fund by its nature, we will look at all

those issues in the round. It is, of course, only one of a number of sources from which we support civil society organisations. I am glad that the hon. Lady picked out Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, a charity that I greatly enjoyed working with when I was at the Department of Health and that does excellent work.

A number of worthwhile organisations are going to benefit from the money, and the Government have committed to continuing the fund until EU rules allow a zero rate of VAT to be applied on women's sanitary products, or until the UK leaves the EU—whichever comes first within the legal framework. The hon. Lady mentioned this in her speech, but I note that she has recently championed national retailers in her constituency to support the cause through charitable means, as she has outlined today, for those least able to afford sanitary products. I noted her work with her local Boots on that.

Turning to practical matters, like hon. Members on both sides of the House, I, too, heard the same BBC Radio Leeds report that has been referred to. It was a distressing listen. It was very difficult to hear about the girls in Leeds who were unable to attend school because they could not afford sanitary products. Of course, if this country is going to work for everyone, we clearly need an education system that enables people to achieve their potential. That is the Government's clear aspiration. If someone cannot attend school on the days that they are having their period, it is obviously much harder for them to reach their potential.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) talked about school funding. Schools do have discretion over how they use their funding. The Department for Education does not currently give schools guidance on this specific issue, as we believe that headteachers should be able to use their professional judgment. However, we do encourage all schools to use their resources to support their pupils to be safe, healthy and ready to learn each day, so schools are free to support girls in this way if they need to. The evidence is clear—we have all seen that every extra day of school missed can affect a pupil's chances of achieving good GCSEs, with a lasting effect on their life chances. We therefore strongly encourage all parents and schools to do everything they can to support children to attend schools.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury made a number of suggestions about funding. As one would expect, that question has been raised in recent days by a number of hon. Members. In fact, in response to the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland), the Secretary of State for Education acknowledged the importance of the issue and said that she is looking carefully at it, and she has undertaken to write to him. I think there is more to be said by the Department for Education on this subject. The Secretary of State was very clear about the seriousness with which she takes the issue and her own commitment to gender equality is well documented.

We touched on the support available through the education system and the wider welfare system. We talked about the legal commitment we have made to zero-rating sanitary products as soon as possible, fully recognising the importance of the issue. In the meantime, we are using the VAT we receive to benefit women's charities. I hope those responses go some way towards addressing the issues raised in the debate.



More widely, I believe the Government can hold their head up high on supporting women. The gender pay gap is at a record low and the number of women in work is close to a record high. We are one of the first countries in the world to introduce gender pay gap reporting, but we always acknowledge that we can go further. As I mentioned earlier, the national living wage will be increased to £7.50 an hour from next month. We expect that two thirds of those who will benefit from the rise in the national living wage will be women.

As well as continuing our efforts to get more women back into the workplace, we are providing an additional £20 million of funding over this Parliament to support organisations working to tackle domestic violence and abuse—a strong personal priority for the Prime Minister. She has committed to bringing forward a domestic violence and abuse Bill. The funding I have just mentioned increases the total funding for the Government's violence against women and girls strategy to £100 million over this Parliament.

The hon. Lady raised the additional vulnerability of homeless women, which I think we all acknowledge. In October, the Prime Minister announced a new £40 million programme to provide an innovative approach to tackling homelessness, with prevention at its heart, looking at the complex underlying causes that I think all of us as constituency MPs acknowledge can lead to a person losing their home. That includes a £10 million rough sleeping prevention fund and £20 million for local authorities to trial new initiatives for those most at risk.

I will draw the hon. Lady's particular concerns about the additional vulnerabilities of homeless women to the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones).

All in all, the Government are committed to supporting those who are struggling to get by. I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this important issue to the attention of Parliament. We feel that by taking steps to improve the living standards of ordinary working families across the country, committing to eliminating the VAT charge on sanitary products, and striving to provide greater equality more generally for women, the Government are showing they are sensitive to these issues. There are 200,000 fewer children in low-income households than in 2010, which is one of the ways in which we have demonstrated our commitment to tackling the root causes of disadvantage. I hope that in my response today I have shown that the Government take these issues seriously. We are looking carefully at the points raised today and will aim to respond further to them.

In closing, I echo the words of the hon. Lady in paying tribute to the actions of many of the staff of the House in recent days, and in wishing you, Madam Deputy Speaker, as well as hon. Members on all sides and all staff of the House, a restful Easter recess.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.28 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Thursday 30 March 2017

[MR DAVID NUTTALL *in the Chair*]

## BACKBENCH BUSINESS

### Local and Regional News

1.30 pm

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of local and regional news providers.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Nuttall. Is it in order for the debate to proceed without a Minister present on behalf of the Government, or is it simply a gross discourtesy to the House?

**Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair)**: It is in order for the debate to proceed. [*Interruption.*] The door opens, but there is no Minister. The debate will proceed, so there is no need to adjourn the sitting.

**Kevin Brennan**: Further to that point of order, Mr Nuttall. On the second part of my point of order, is it considered a discourtesy by the Chair?

**Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair)**: It is always considered best practice for the mover of the motion and the Minister who will respond to be in their places when the debate begins. I am pleased to say that the Minister is now in his place.

**Helen Goodman**: It is very nice to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Mr Nuttall.

I begin by thanking the National Union of Journalists for helping me to prepare for the debate, which forms part of its week of campaigning on local news, called Local News Matters. I must also point out that I chair the NUJ's parliamentary group. The arrangements for the group's secretariat are set out in my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I am sure that all hon. Members agree that local news is essential for our democracy. It is through local news that people like us get our messages across to our communities, but more importantly, it is the way that communities hold us to account. However, local news is not only about democracy and boring council meetings or boring court reporting, important though those are; it is about the way that communities are bound together. It is through local newspapers and radio stations that people know what is going on and identify with their local communities.

As it happens, my experience of the local news media in my constituency and in my part of the country is extremely positive. My local newspapers have not only covered issues that national outlets would not have been interested in covering; they have made a significant difference to the community. For example, in my constituency is the palace of the Bishop of Durham. When the Church Commissioners wanted to flog off its

paintings by Francisco de Zurbarán, it was a campaign that I ran with *The Northern Echo*, which put the paintings on its front page for several days in a row, that pushed the Church Commissioners back and made them realise that people wanted and loved those paintings. The upshot has been far greater than we could ever have imagined. The story came to the attention of a philanthropist, Jonathan Ruffer, who put £50 million into the castle, and we now have a whole regeneration project. That would not have happened without the initial support of *The Northern Echo*.

At the other end of the scale is a newspaper, owned by the sister of Lord Barnard, called the *Teesdale Mercury*. It has a small circulation of 10,000, but it has been running campaigns to save local village schools. In effect, it saved the Forest of Teesdale Primary School.

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes a compelling case for our local press. Over the past year, the *Liverpool Echo* and *Wirral News* have movingly told the story of the Hillsborough campaign for justice. The *Liverpool Echo* has been a campaigning newspaper on that issue, it has highlighted the local crisis in the NHS and it has mounted a food poverty action campaign called "Share Your Lunch", which has raised thousands of pounds from the generosity of local people and raised awareness of that important issue. Does she agree that, as she mentioned in her opening remarks, it is crucial for our national democracy that we have local papers that shine a light on the impact of what we decide here in Westminster and how that rolls out across the country?

**Helen Goodman**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I was about to point out the role that Bishop FM, the local radio station, is currently playing in the campaign on the sustainability and transformation plan and the possible closure of Darlington memorial hospital's A&E, which is a matter of great concern to my constituents. Bishop FM and the local and regional news outlets were also the only outlets to cover the potential closure of Vinovium House and the loss of 80 jobs there.

I agree 100% with my hon. Friend, but what she says applies not just to local newspapers, but to excellent local radio stations—both the BBC stations and the commercial independents, such as Star Radio, which operates from Darlington. I am sorry to say that one of the community stations in my constituency, Teesdale Radio, was forced to close. Will the Minister comment in his response on whether it is fair that community radio stations are not allowed to advertise? Every parish magazine has advertisements, but community radio stations do not. That does not seem right.

Local news outlets make a reality of localism. Communities are very diverse and different; they are not homogenous. This country is extremely diverse, which is reflected in our local newspapers. They are the voice of people, but they also reflect back to people what their community is like.

The NUJ has commissioned, and this week published, a piece of research, "Mapping changes in local news 2015-2017", by Dr Gordon Ramsay, who is part of King's College London's excellently named Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power—something I am sure we would all like to get hold of. He was supported in his work by the Media Reform Coalition,

[Helen Goodman]

the Political Studies Association and colleagues from Goldsmiths University. The research shows a continuing, if not accelerating, decline in the number of local newspapers. Some 200 local newspapers have closed since 2005. In the past 18 months, 22 have closed and 13 have been set up, which is a net loss of nine. Unfortunately, that involved the loss of 418 journalists' jobs.

**Margaret Greenwood:** The mayoral election for the Liverpool city region takes place on 4 May. Does my hon. Friend agree that the decline she so clearly describes is significant, given that, with the growth of devolution, we will need more journalism in our localities rather than less?

**Helen Goodman:** My hon. Friend makes another very good point. It is a matter of concern that 58% of people in this country have no local daily newspaper. That hollowing out is dangerous. Newspapers are not really local if they are run by such a small number of journalists that, in effect, they are four pages of local news wrapped around centrally-produced content, which is mainly lifestyle articles and listicles.

Where real journalists are involved in the production of local newspapers, they are becoming exhausted. I had a meeting with people from the *South London Press* before Christmas who were busy campaigning against reductions to their numbers. Such journalists also suffer significantly from low pay. This is a profession, and they need to be properly rewarded for their skills, energy and efforts.

It is a vicious circle. If we hollow out the quality of the local newspapers, they become more boring, so of course the readership will fall, whereas if we maintain the quality, people will want to keep reading them. The absence of local newspapers is dangerous too. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) said, people will lack information and will not be able to hold local institutions to account. Communities will suffer a loss of identity. That creates an environment in which fake news can flourish, because there is no real news. What we need, across the board, is good-quality information and journalism.

Another very interesting thing that came out of the research by Dr Ramsay is the growing concentration in our local newspapers. That, too, is dangerous. I do not suppose many people are aware that four publishers are responsible for three quarters of the local newspapers in this country: Trinity Mirror, Johnston Press, Newsquest and Tindle. One of the absurdities is that they take over local newspapers and then either close them or shed more jobs. Of the 400-plus jobs that have been lost, 139 were cut by Newsquest and 102 by Trinity Mirror.

While I do not wish to appear not to be a true socialist internationalist, foreign ownership in this arena can be quite dangerous. It means that decisions are taken about the way newspapers are run and the closure of newspapers in boardrooms in New York by people who have no idea that Sunderland and Newcastle are two different places. We need to get back better control of the way newspapers are run and restore the idea, most recently voiced by Harry Evans, that journalism is a sort of public service. It is not purely a commercial enterprise; it is also a public service.

Why have we got into this mess? Obviously technology is part of the reason. More things are moving online, and more advertising is moving online. There is a change in the readership and habits of the public. However, that is not the whole explanation. The problem from the newspapers' point of view is that 80% of their revenue comes from their print editions and some 12% from their online work. Facebook and Google are expected to have a three-quarters share of the advertising market by 2020. I wonder whether the Competition and Markets Authority ought to look at that, and whether it can look at the behaviour of these big international corporations after Brexit. It would be interesting to know whether the Minister has any insight into that.

Technology is not the only explanation for what is going on. Some people might call it greed, and others might call it unrealistic expectations, but too much money has been taken out of local newspapers. By way of contrast, Tesco—one of the most successful supermarkets in this country—makes a 7% return on its capital each year. These publishers are extracting between 20% and 30% each year. That is what they expect. If they cannot make that, they say the papers are uneconomic. Of course, the papers are not financially unsustainable; they are perfectly financially sustainable. They are making enough money to keep going and even to expand; they are just not making whopping profits of 30%. If these people were content to make the kind of profits that our supermarkets are making, we could have a flourishing of local news across the nation.

Let us look at what has been done so far about local news. We continue to require local authorities to put statutory notices into local newspapers. That is very positive, both financially and in terms of providing people with information. Newspapers have a VAT exemption as well.

The Government have done two things to try to provide direct support. The first was the initiative by the previous Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to set up local television franchises. I am sorry to report that the research shows that three quarters of those licensed areas sought a relaxation of the requirement for news provision. On every single occasion that relaxation was granted, so the initiative is not having the positive effect that was intended.

Now we have a new initiative: democracy reporters. The licence fee is being top-sliced, and the BBC is providing 150 local democracy reporters across the country. There is a question mark here. It is really important that there is a system to ensure that those posts are genuinely additional. We do not want the BBC to send two people into a local newspaper and for the managers of that paper think, "Fantastic! We can sack two of the people we were paying." We absolutely cannot have that, and we need a system to prevent it from happening.

The Minister must also ensure that the Government initiatives and all the things we want to do are not sucked up by the big four publishers. What we want is more variety, more diversity and more new ventures. We need to ensure that the things we do reach those people, not just the big multinational chains.

In addition, more measures can be taken. The Government introduced the Localism Act 2011, which enables people to deem an asset an asset of community value and run it themselves for the benefit of the

community. Normally that is done with pubs, but it would be a good idea if, before a newspaper closed a title, it was required to offer it to the local community as a community asset. As I have said, many local papers, such as the *Camden New Journal*, could be run on a financially sustainable basis—for example, by co-ops of journalists—and we need to put that option on to the statute book.

Many of us think it is reasonable, in the current climate, to tax the large social media organisations such as Facebook and Google, and others as well. I know everybody wants to tax them because they are evading their taxes and everyone has schemes for spending the money that would be raised, but I think some direct read-across to the very industries that those companies are undermining would be reasonable.

The House has taken a considerable amount of time over the last six months to consider the proposed Fox takeover of Sky. That is extremely important, and we are all very worried about it. However, we have not taken the same amount of time and care to look at what is going on in local newspapers. The concentration in local newspapers is also very serious. The final suggestion I would like to make is that we have a short inquiry that looks specifically at what is going on in local media.

1.49 pm

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall, and a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman). I had a fantastic season, while I was at BBC Radio Cleveland, reporting on the fortunes of Bishop Auckland football club. At the time, there was no ISDN line at the ground, so to report goal updates, I had to go into the clubhouse and on to a landline and wait for two minutes. Sometimes there would be a big cheer from outside while I was on air, and once the presenter back in the studio said to me, “Jason, has there been a goal?”, and I said, “No, Joe has just dropped the jackpot on the one-armed bandit.” That really is local news and local reporting at the heart of the local community—and I cannot remember whether Joe bought a round or not.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting our request for a debate on the future of local and regional news providers. We are in a great time of change. There are great challenges ahead, but there are also great opportunities. Therefore, it is more important than ever that as many people as possible have access to quality, trusted news sources. That means a big role for local and regional news.

I must declare that, as I have just suggested, I am a former BBC local radio reporter. I went on to work for ITV television as a broadcast journalist. I am now chairman of the all-party parliamentary ITV group and—just for balance—I am one of the vice-chairmen of the all-party parliamentary BBC group. I am a former National Union of Journalists member. I was father of the chapel at ITV Yorkshire and I took my members out on strike, because job cuts were being forced by the poor business decisions of the then ITV boss, who was still raking in his £9 million bonus. I am now a Tory MP and that fat-cat boss is now a Labour peer—what a funny old world.

I am a keen consumer of local news. I wake up in the morning with Liz Green on BBC Radio Leeds. I get a paper edition in my constituency office of the *Huddersfield Examiner* and follow it online—I also follow the *Yorkshire Post* online. When I am with my girls in the car, we are listening to Capital radio. It is great that that independent radio station has a news team. They often ask me and fellow Yorkshire MPs to record clips and send them via our iPhones. That is a good use of innovative technology. We have two excellent regional TV news programmes: “Calendar”, which I used to work on, and “Look North”. Sometimes, if there is a big local news story, I make a point of trying to watch both—one at 6 pm and the other at 6.30 pm—to see the different ways in which they cover their news stories.

We have a very local free newspaper, the *Holme Valley Review*, which has been around for about two years. Again, I have to declare an interest: I have a monthly column in the *Holme Valley Review*. It has an excellent reporter, Olivia, who is always ringing me and other people, asking for local news stories.

I would like to focus on local newspapers for a moment. As I said, I am very lucky to have in my town the *Huddersfield Examiner*, with its dedicated band of locally based journalists. They produce six editions a week, Monday to Saturday, and they are very good at holding Kirklees Council to account—it is run by Labour, by the way—whether the councillors are parking illegally while they go on holiday for a few weeks or damaging town centre trade with their disastrous bus gates scheme.

However, it is with their campaigns, as the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland said, that local newspapers come to the forefront of their communities. My local paper has also been backing an NHS campaign, the Hands Off HRI campaign, which is trying to prevent the accident and emergency department at Huddersfield royal infirmary from being downgraded and moved to Halifax to fund the disastrous private finance initiative deal that was signed there. That campaign is led by local campaigner Karl Deitch and, with the support of the *Examiner* and the community, we are still hopeful of getting our clinical commissioning group to listen.

More positively, the *Huddersfield Examiner* puts on two fantastic awards ceremonies every year. The *Huddersfield Examiner* community awards celebrate the best in our community—campaigns, charities and volunteers—and in the autumn the *Huddersfield Examiner* business awards celebrate the best in local small and medium-sized enterprises and bigger businesses, connecting up the business community. That means that we have an unemployment rate that is below the national average, and textiles and engineering are doing well in our part of the world. I commend the excellent coverage by the *Examiner* of my beloved Huddersfield Town. As we chase promotion to the premiership, every bit of injury news is followed closely by Huddersfield Town fans.

One big challenge that local newspapers face is changing technology—the changes in the way people get their news. However, the *Examiner* is responding to that. It is now very much a digital newsroom, producing strong stories not only for the print edition but for the website, which it updates regularly with videos. That is surely the future—print supported and enhanced by digital output, not replaced by it. The *Examiner* is recruiting a video production editor, but of course its big challenge is

[Jason McCartney]

providing engaging and challenging content for two very different audiences. With that in mind, the *Examiner* is also embracing social media.

The debate has been triggered by a worrying trend for local and regional newspapers. There was a net loss of nine regionals between November 2015 and March 2017. As Opposition Members have said, the number of UK local authority districts with no daily local newspaper coverage has risen to 273 out of 406. There is also the loss of plurality, which we are concerned about. The five largest publishers, including Trinity Mirror, which owns my local newspaper, now account for more than 77% of all UK newspapers. We need to halt the decline and to look at new models.

As a member of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, I have been questioning BBC bosses on their development of the plans for 150 local democracy reporters. I echo many of the excellent questions that the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland asked. Those reporters will be funded by the BBC and employed by qualifying local news organisations to cover councils and local public services, but will they enhance and be an addition, or will newspapers be tempted just to use them as a cut-price replacement for their existing services? The BBC has also announced the formation of the NewsBank, which will give online media organisations access to BBC video and audio. In total, that will be an investment from the licence fee of up to £8 million. I and others will be following those developments very closely.

For the vast majority of adults, their main source of news is still television, and we need a plurality of providers. I have talked about the BBC. I welcome ITV—as I said, I chair the all-party group—investing £100 million a year in national, international, regional and nations' news. As I said, in Yorkshire we are lucky to have two quality regional TV news programmes: "Look North" on the BBC and "Calendar" on ITV Yorkshire, which I used to work on.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): I am listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman and support what he is saying. Does he agree that local radio and local television are not the same, that they cannot provide the same detailed coverage as local newsprint, and that we need local newspapers as well as local television and radio?

**Jason McCartney:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I am saying that we need all the different news sources. We have talked about Sky and about the strength of the BBC in the regions, but we need plurality. We need different local newspapers—we need dailies and weeklies. We need them online, but we also still need the print editions. Obviously, many hon. Members are au fait with social media, but a lot of our constituents are not and they still need to know what is happening in their community—what is happening with charities, with their hospital and council, and with planning applications and so on.

Having worked in both the BBC environment and an ITV newsroom, I know that there was healthy competition between the two. There was an eagerness to be first with

the story and to cover it best, which increased the quality of journalism and drove up audiences. We need that kind of healthy competition.

I will bring my comments to an end to allow other Members to speak. I began by talking about challenges. One big challenge is accurate and trusted news sources. We are in an era of fake news and I am pleased to say that my Culture, Media and Sport Committee is starting an inquiry into it. By the way, I remind everyone that fake news is false news with false facts, and not just news that someone does not like—that gets bandied around a lot.

Finally, I echo the thoughts of the NUJ general secretary on the Localism Act 2011. Former council buildings in my patch are being taken over as community assets and I would certainly support ideas and developments on that model for taking over local newspapers. I am very open to innovative ideas for new local journalism models. I would look at levies on social media and online companies—the internet—tax breaks, investment funds and community trusts, because after all, for the sake of our democracy and our constituents, local news really does matter.

2.1 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn, Cadeirydd. As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall, and I thank my colleagues and the Backbench Business Committee for granting us this debate.

The uncertain future of local news providers is particularly significant in Wales. Unlike Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Welsh national press is relatively limited, confining Wales to getting much of its broadcast news and its newspapers from London. I am proud to say that I am a former news reporter with the *Holyhead & Anglesey Mail*, the *Caernarfon & Denbigh Herald*, *Herald Mo'n* and *Herald Cymraeg*. I, too, have memories, for example of putting photographs on the bus to get them to the head office.

Historically, Wales has a strong national and local press tradition. In 1966, the people of Wales could turn to a plethora of news publications, with 1 million morning, evening, weekly and bi-weekly local newspapers in circulation—that is, the total circulation. By 1990, that had fallen by a third, and now there are only six daily papers in any shape or form—morning or evening papers—in the country. The people of Wales have become increasingly reliant on the London-based media for their everyday news. To illustrate that, despite the *Daily Mirror* seeing a 50% fall in circulation between 2008 and 2015, it still has a daily readership of over 700,000 in Wales. However, the daily national paper of Wales, the *Western Mail*, sells only 17,815 copies a day. That gives hon. Members an idea of the newspapers' reach and the impact on democracy.

Despite the widespread readership of London titles, interestingly, those newspapers no longer produce Welsh editions and there has been a steady decline of journalists based in Wales for London newspapers. There is the question of how the stories that are relevant to the people of Wales reach them. Perhaps they are seeing stories that give them a different perception of what affects their lives.

Interestingly, Welsh-language journalism is experiencing a revival in the form of online content, with BBC Cymru Fyw and Golwg360 attracting over 57,000 readers a week between them. However, only two national Welsh-language newspapers are now in circulation. *Y Cymro* is based in Porthmadog in my constituency, although it was announced last week that that is at risk of closure unless new owners are found by June, and *Golwg* is a magazine based in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams). Both publications appear weekly.

The robust tradition of community-based Welsh language news continues in the form of papurau bro, and I must list them. These are voluntary activities, and I am honoured to record the hard work of teams of volunteers and dedicated individuals who work monthly to produce—forgive me, *Hansard*—*Llanw Lly'n*, *Y Ffynnon*, *Yr Wylan*, *Llafar Bro*, *Llais Ardudwy*, *Y Dydd*, *Dail Dysynni*, *Y Blewyn Glas* and *Pethe Penllyn*. Those are all in one constituency. We also have a weekly newspaper in Welsh, *Y Cyfnod*, although that is up for sale—it is looking for owners—so hon. Members can see the vulnerability.

Clearly, with the decline in commercial print media, Wales urgently needs redress through broadcast media. The UK Government have committed to having a “Scottish News at Six” programme, without considering making similar commitments in Wales. The media provide a crucial role in holding Government to account for their actions and flushing out weak policy, corruption and self-interest. Wales’s democracy and our national institutions will not flourish in darkness. Politics is strengthened by the light of scrutiny and grows stronger in weathering the storm of public interest. It is always a temptation for Governments to avoid the awkwardness of public accountability—it makes for an easier life—but the long-term cost is disengagement from democracy, which is a far greater threat. A “Wales Six” should be just the beginning. We need more opportunities to hear our own stories, and to celebrate and mourn with the world through our voices in both the national languages of Wales.

On the significance of local journalists and publications in representing the lives and needs of the communities they serve, Wales has seen its local newspaper groups being bought out by giant multinational companies, as has been mentioned of the UK as a whole. Our communities deserve better. Local newspapers play a fundamental role in keeping people on top of the issues affecting their communities. The *Cambrian News*—the local weekly bilingual newspaper distributed in mid-Wales—has managed more or less to remain an independent voice. Certainly, journalists such as Alex Jones do not shy away from posing awkward questions, and Arwyn Roberts, of the *Herald* newspapers, has portrayed the communities that he loves in his photojournalism over the years.

As a local MP and a former local news reporter, I recognise the democratic value of a regional newspaper to hold politicians and local councils to account. The local journalist, by recalling campaign promises and doing the mill work of attending council meetings, makes politicians accountable to the communities they purport to represent. Despite the *Daily Post* being the best-selling regional newspaper in Wales, it suffers from the perpetual problem of dwindling staff numbers due to “continuing tough business conditions”, to quote one of its reporters. Cuts have become the default

business strategy to survive amid the falling revenues and print sales and the boom in free online media. Its newsroom has been stretched thin, with journalists having to work longer hours under significantly more pressure to keep the publication alive. I am sure that that scenario is not unique to the *Daily Post*.

In conclusion, I call on the UK Government to hold an inquiry into the future of Welsh print media, to assess the current levels of distribution and the state of current publications. I also ask them to review the potential of an increased role for the Welsh Government in safeguarding the existence and independence of struggling community newspapers and ensuring media plurality. We cannot let print media outlets close down and do nothing about the serious void that that would leave in our communities. Their absence would be a major loss, not only to individual readers but to our civil society as a whole. I am sure you would agree with me, Mr Nuttall: democracy needs watchdogs with a powerful bark.

2.8 pm

**Rebecca Harris** (Castle Point) (Con): We are having this debate because of our deep concerns about the increasing erosion and loss of local news sources, but I am very blessed in Castle Point. I have a huge number of local papers, such as the monthly *Canvey & Benfleet Times*; at least three weeklies that cover my patch, the *Yellow Advertiser*, the *Rayleigh, Rochford & Castle Point Standard* and Essex’s *The Enquirer*; a small publication called the *District News*, which is exclusively for Canvey Island; and, still, a daily paper, *The Echo*, part of the Newsquest group.

*The Echo* actually produces two different editions for my constituency, including a specific edition just for Canvey Island, which is incredible when we consider that it is an island of fewer than 40,000 souls. Moreover, a daily paper is a hungry beast—it is very stretched, and it is hard work to keep filling a daily paper. As a politician, people might think that I am constantly trying to get my face in the press, but actually, on several occasions I have found myself apologising that I have not given papers news stories, which is a no-brainer and would have been helpful. I therefore feel a responsibility, in speaking up in support of local newspapers, to remember to ensure I give them news.

The success of the papers that we have kept is because they have the right local and community formula. The fact that they continue to be supported might be due to the strong sense of community, but it is clearly a two-way street, in terms of the local paper helping to reinforce a sense of community spirit, which is what makes them so important. As has been said, they carry information that would not otherwise be covered.

It is sometimes easy, when looking at other people’s local newspapers, to laugh and deride the total parochialism of the “cat stuck up a tree” story or, more often, the local councillor with a lanyard and high-vis jacket pointing angrily at a pothole, but without local papers and radio stations, a lot of issues that matter enormously to local people would get no coverage at all. As the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) pointed out, local media are often critical to important local campaigns. I have often had reason to be extremely grateful to my local media. I am indebted to them for their support of

[Rebecca Harris]

local public campaigns with which I have been involved, including saving the Deanes secondary school in my constituency. Although the suspension of postal deliveries on unmade roads affected few people, it was incredibly important locally. It would never have got any coverage except in the local paper, but that helped hold Royal Mail to account.

Local media are unbiased compared with some of the nationals. I have rarely read anything in a national paper about which I have known the inside track that has been accurate in every respect, but I have often been quite pained by the accuracy of my local paper, as have local residents. I do not understand why they want to report accurately the age of everyone mentioned in the paper, but they seem to get those ages right, which we do not always appreciate. That also relates to the issue of clearing up misleading rumours—fake news has been mentioned—which can easily prosper in online forums. If not for investigation by honest, trusted, dedicated local journalists who can be relied on to put the facts straight, there would be a lot of misinformation out there and a lot of harm caused by rumours.

I return briefly to the community function. In my experience, the value of local papers cannot be stressed enough. They keep democracy thriving, keep local organisations and businesses under proper scrutiny, support local charities and community groups, and provide a platform for issues and organisations that otherwise would not have one. Elderly residents find them incredibly important to countering the risk of loneliness and a sense of isolation. It would be an enormous loss if we did not have thriving local media in this country.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this important debate, which has given us the opportunity to highlight how valued, valuable and appreciated the work of our local newspapers and press is. After this debate, I will be able to go back to complaining about them.

2.12 pm

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I will not speak for long, because I know that others wish to speak.

I support the National Union of Journalists in its campaign. I am a member of the NUJ parliamentary group and, as a strong trade unionist, I think it is important to support it. I am concerned about the suffering of many NUJ members who have lost their jobs or the possibility of career advancement due to the decline of local newspapers, but I am equally concerned about the decline and loss of local news outlets and reporting. I am amazed by what the hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) said. In my town, which has 200,000 people, newspapers have declined, been squeezed and disappeared. They are not all gone, but they have certainly declined dramatically over a long period.

I was first a councillor in 1972, which makes me quite elderly. I remember those days well. It was typical for the local newspapers to send reporters along to council committees. I would be chairing a committee, and there

would often be journalists there from multiple competing newspapers. I knew them well. They were often highly skilled and knew their politics. I tried to ingratiate myself with them occasionally by saying nice things about them, but they said, “Don’t trust us. We’re all just the same.” It was a good, humorous, robust relationship with high-quality journalists who saw a future for themselves in journalism. One of them was Larry Elliott, who started at the local evening paper that we had in those days and went on to become economics editor at *The Guardian*. Not everybody reads *The Guardian*, but Larry Elliott, a very fine journalist, started his days at the *Luton Evening Post*.

Those were the career possibilities for journalists in those days. I suspect it is not like that anymore. However, local democracy is what I am really concerned about. It is important to have newspapers with different owners in the same town, so that they compete with each other. They are more truthful and accurate and try harder to get stories right if they know that another newspaper is covering the same issue.

Interestingly, all those years ago, we had an evening newspaper, which was very good, a weekly paid-for newspaper and a weekly free newspaper. The weekly free newspaper was owned by a wealthy proprietor who happened to be a member of the Labour party. I am not saying that our newspapers should have a political bias, but it was interesting. He was not just a token member—I do not want to upset my colleagues in the party—but leaned to the left as well, so we had a lot in common. Having a left-wing millionaire proprietor of a giveaway newspaper was an interesting experience. We got a genuine spread of opinion across the town. Democratic views were expressly, which was healthy.

That has changed. The free Sunday newspaper recently merged to become Bedfordshire-wide, with hardly any Luton coverage at all. We have a paid-for newspaper, but even there, the number of journalists has been squeezed and squeezed, so we do not get as much in the way of reporting. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) said in her excellent opening speech, there is a small amount of local news surrounded by national articles and massive amounts of advertising.

During the first 15 or so years of my time in this place, every five weeks, local MPs—Conservative and Labour—were given a column to themselves. That is all gone—doubtless the newspapers have no time to sub-edit our articles, or whatever they do—and local democracy has suffered tremendously from the narrowing of news. Fortunately, we have an excellent local BBC news station and very good local radio.

I support the NUJ in its campaign to save local newspapers. We have heard a summary of its survey, but I thought I would quote in full what Séamus Dooley, the NUJ acting general secretary, said at the launch of the report this week:

“Journalism is a pillar of democracy and this survey should be of major concern to anyone who cares about local, regional or national government. The stark decline in journalism is a direct result of disinvestment in editorial resources. This survey points to a deep crisis in local and regional news provision. There is an urgent need for government and media organisations to halt that decline, to examine ways of developing sustainable media business models operating in the interests of democracy and the public interest. The price of a continuous decline is too high for citizens to pay.”



That says what we need to hear today and I hope the Minister takes note. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland on launching this debate, and other Members who have spoken for the fine speeches that we have heard, all of which have been interesting. I have never been a journalist myself, although I used to write a 1,000-word article every month for the *Socialist Campaign Group News*. It did not have wide circulation, but some of us, including the leader of our party, have been regular columnists for it. I have done journalism in a sense, but I was not an NUJ member, and the paper circulated among people with my opinions.

I have said what I came to say. I hope that the Government take note; that the decline in local news coverage and local newspapers is arrested; and that they will flower again in future.

2.19 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Nuttall. I, too, thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting this debate, which really shows how the Committee responds to issues such as local journalism when they are at a crunch point.

I will focus on local media in York. We are well served in print by *The Press* and *The Yorkshire Post*, online by *YorkMix*, and in broadcast media by BBC Radio, Minster FM, ITV and BBC TV. We have already heard so much today about the excellence that local media bring. Local media are where stories are broken, where research is done, where we find out what is really going on in our communities and where people are held to account. They really prove that local news matters.

Local media are part of our local democracy and local citizenship. They strengthen the bonds across local communities such as those in my city of York. I thank the National Union of Journalists, Unite and all those who support people on the print side of media and across the industry so well. It is very hard for journalists to tell their own story about what is happening to their own industry, so today's debate is timely and important.

As we have already heard from hon. Members, it is clear that we need a proper inquiry into what is happening in the governance and structures of local media. I will return to that point shortly, but first I want to raise the importance of local media on a very practical level. In the floods of 2015, when my community was cut off—the phone lines went down and there was no means of communicating outward—BBC radio had to move location and work night and day to get out messages not only about what was happening across the community but about public safety. It made us think back to the public service ethos that Lord Reith wanted for public broadcast. I thank BBC York for the service that it provided to the community at that time; everyone said that it provided a lifeline at that crunch point.

I want to talk in particular about print and about what we are seeing in our local paper—a story that is echoed right across the country, as the NUJ report that was launched yesterday confirms. We have a great history, as so many towns and communities have. *The Yorkshire Evening Press* was first published in 1882. It used to have four publications a day; people used to get their papers literally hot off the press because they wanted

the latest edition with the latest news. Obviously the news process has moved on, but 17,342 people read the print edition of *The Press* daily, which proves that it still has a strong leadership. However, media are changing, as we know. Some 54,000 people now access *The Press's* digital content—the eighth highest readership in local news. The trends are changing, but the digital content is clearly not providing the revenue, because 80% of revenue comes from print. The industry is really challenged by the shift to an online presence.

We have heard about the importance of local papers and local media in providing a democratic solution and ensuring that stories are well balanced and investigated. We know that social media can often be an echo chamber for news, where fake news is often recirculated, whereas local media really work at the craft of reporting stories and getting to the heart of matters. We also know that the industry is challenged not only by digital changes but by changes in advertising: in the economic global recession, advertising in local media dried up significantly—another financial challenge for local papers—and the market has not picked up since. Advertising has moved more online, particularly because readership is higher there, but also because there are new means of operating.

We have to come back to the issue of ownership. As we have heard, the press in York is owned by Newsquest Media Group, which has 211 titles. Printing no longer takes place in York, and nor does the editorial function. That has taken away from the local community. Although there is excellent local content—community news and events, charities, political reporting, events in the city and, not least, sports news—a lot of the content is national. People do not necessarily want to read it, but we can understand why papers have moved to that model as a means of filling space. Thankfully, there is still a lot of local content, but those pressures are building.

We have seen real cuts in the number of local journalists. Since 2008, the number of journalists at *The Press* has fallen by 50%. They now have to work under incredible stress, trying to produce copy constantly to ensure that they get good cover in the paper. They have to churn out content at a really high level, so although they are incredibly industrious, they are more tied to their desk rather than out in the community building relationships and learning their craft. They are also constantly worried about what the future is bringing down on them. The pressure is there.

As journalists are being made redundant, trainees are losing mentors, so they are not able to learn skills or how to avoid errors. Instead of learning their craft from senior mentors, trainees are often left on their own because there is not enough time for a proper structure to bring them through the apprenticeship—if I can call it that—of learning the skills and craft of journalism.

We have also seen a cut in the number of editors. *The Press* has lost its subbing sub-editor and its page sub-editor. The checks and balances in producing copy have therefore been withdrawn, which puts more pressure on journalists to ensure that everything is accurate, along with the pressures of balancing news and finding time to research and dig into stories and get the other side of the story. They have to work incredibly hard, often on low pay, to get the right story into their papers.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** In my early life in politics, reporters went out and met people, spoke to them and interviewed them at length. They got to know the local politicians, the local community and the local areas; they were really in touch with the local community, and they were better for it.

**Rachael Maskell:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. That is exactly what journalists want—to be the people who are uncovering the stories, building the relationships and really getting that personal touch into their stories—but the limitations that are now placed on them are curbing their ability to do those things.

We are also seeing a reduction in the number of photographers—a profession that has not yet been mentioned today. *The York Press*, which would once have had six, seven or eight photographers, now has only one professional photographer, with others freelancing. A photograph tells a story, and there is an art in being able to get that photograph well. We are often requested to send in a photograph, so readers get the typical line-up instead of the creative story that a photographer can provide. We need to remember the essential role that photographers play and the pressure that they, too, are under when they contribute their skills to produce a paper.

We need to think about what we want for the future of our papers. We can all agree that the corporate ownership model has not delivered the local democratisation of news, and that we need to rethink it. That is why an inquiry would be so timely: it would ensure that we could look at all the options that are now open to local papers.

I have had some discussions about what a co-operative model looks like. I both agree and disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman); I think it is too late to start looking at that kind of model when a paper is failing. We need to look at it now. We need to build local co-operation from the community into papers, to ensure that there is a local eye on what is happening, not just a distant editor doing their best, possibly over a number of publications, or even just their own paper, but who is not based in the local community.

How do we bring that local voice right into the workings of a paper today? We need to raise the voices of journalists, the people working day and night on our papers, to ensure that they have real input into the shape and the future of not only their own publication but their industry, to make sure that they can use their professionalism in determining what a real community paper looks like.

I certainly support suggestions about hypothecated taxation being a means of supporting the industry in the future, ensuring that there is a real wall between content and income sources but ensuring that papers receive the injection of income that is obviously needed to keep alive the vital democracy that they provide.

We face the challenges that I have set out and we must ensure that we respond to them, because these papers and in particular their journalists, who are at the frontline, are looking to us. At the moment they are just part of the wider corporate picture, and if the money is not returned to these corporate giants, which we have heard

monopolise the sector, we could lose a real element of our social democracy and we will regret that when it is gone.

I thank the NUJ for raising this issue with Members of Parliament, I thank the Backbench Business Committee for recognising the urgent need for this debate, and I ask the Minister to ensure that there is a proper inquiry into what is happening now to our local media, particularly our local print media, so that we can sustain the sector and put a proper model in place for the future.

2.31 pm

**Corri Wilson** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): I start by saying that I believe local media should be seen as an asset to the communities they serve. They are vital for a healthy democracy, they benefit local businesses, they provide a platform for local campaigns, they hold local politicians to account and they shine a light on some of the important local issues that matter to our constituents.

The local press promote local fund-raising initiatives, highlight local government achievements and failings, and can be found at every gala and every community event. They are the voice of their readers, or listeners, and they act as a watchdog. People trust them and see them as somewhere to go when things goes wrong or when things need to be put right. Essentially, a quality local paper or radio station can supply part of the glue that holds local communities together, giving people a sense of themselves. So the crisis affecting local news is one we need to address urgently.

More than half of all parliamentary constituencies, including my own constituency, do not have a dedicated daily local newspaper. The geography of my constituency means that we benefit from three excellent local weeklies. Each publication focuses on a different part of my constituency, each one caters for the different demographics of their unique area, and each one offers timely and balanced reporting of current events. However, each one faces challenges in what is now an extremely difficult marketplace.

The declining circulation figures of local, regional and national papers across the country have resulted in editorial cuts, job losses and office closures. As more people move online for their news, the decline in the printed press has been partially offset by website growth. However, competition for advertising means that most UK local newspapers are seeing a fall in their overall revenue, and the impact of the BBC's expansion in online local news coverage is being felt by many local publications.

We have seen job cuts throughout the sector. The National Union of Journalists has highlighted surveys that show that journalists have been put under considerable pressure as a result of staff cuts and mergers. Some journalists have confided that they are being stretched more and more, and consequently mistakes are made and quality suffers.

In such challenging times, many local papers face the choice of shutting up shop or allowing themselves to be subsumed by a larger media group, and, as has been mentioned previously, just four publishers now account for almost three quarters of local newspapers across the UK. In my own constituency, two local papers are owned by Newsquest, one by Johnston Press, and one

by Trinity Mirror, with all the tabloid news values that come with that. That brings me to a personal gripe. I do not know about others in this Chamber, but when I arrive in a part of the country that I am unfamiliar with, I turn to the local paper to give me an idea about the area. Local papers are often a great way of finding out what is going on in an area, and what local events and attractions I can visit, and they can provide a taste of what the area is like. So, when a local paper focuses almost exclusively on a combination of crime and incompetence, scandal and conflict, and when it does little more than highlight all the negatives of the community it serves, the effect is to talk the area down. Local people can start to feel negative about their community and the visiting reader is left wondering how quickly they should leave the area.

I recently spoke to a friend who had been considering moving to a new town, but scouting around the local paper left her thinking that underneath the façade of what seemed like a nice enough area there lurked a dark underbelly of crime and corruption. Quality local news reporting should highlight problems, but it should also illustrate what is good about a community and indirectly promote the area to tourists and locals alike. However, if a paper's ownership has no vested interest in the community it serves and is only concerned with shifting product, it is inevitable that some publications will do more harm than good, and cease to be an asset.

Concern about the steadily increasing amount of news production accounted for by large corporations is nothing new, as it dates back to the rise of press barons in the days of Queen Victoria. Not only did the press barons own chains of newspapers but some of them had no qualms about using their papers to promote their pet cause or to dismiss ideas and people they disagreed with.

However, the rise of multimedia conglomerates that have significant stakes across a range of central communications sectors means that it is no longer just a simple case of owners intervening in editorial decisions or firing personnel who fall foul of their world view. News production is now strongly influenced by commercial strategies, which are built around the overlaps between a company's different media interests, and there is a growing trend whereby different publications in a group share resources. There is a high degree of co-operation between editorial units and the implementation of group-wide policies on many issues. The general effect of the monopoly of media ownership can be seen in research that concluded that those who work for large chains are less likely to have an attachment to the community in which they work. Editorial staff can be moved around a news group, flitting from one publication to another, and failing to put down roots in any one place. For some, the media organisation takes precedence over the local community.

There is a widespread debate in Scotland about the relationship between the media and democracy, but there is a strong belief that critical and well-supported journalism is essential to a thriving democracy. We need a media environment that values, respects and promotes quality news reporting.

Finally, in a contracting industry the economies of scale take over, but it is the duty of both the free media and the Government to ensure that the local media sector delivers robustly evidenced and well-balanced

news. Merging titles and laying off good journalists has an impact on local media's ability to support democracy and high-quality debate, but we all have a vested interest in supporting this vital sector.

2.37 pm

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I thank the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) and the Backbench Business Committee for tabling this debate, which has proven to be passionate and interesting in its discussion of all the social media, local newspapers and so on that everyone has talked about. It is a matter of some interest to me, in trying to sum up the debate, that I have heard the same issues being repeated from across the entire UK. Members will have to forgive me if I do not pick up on the particular points they made.

The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland referred to the National Union of Journalists and said that local news is essential for our democracy. I think everyone here would agree with that. MPs need to get messages out—we need to let our constituents know what is happening—and our constituents need to be able to hold us to account. The hon. Lady's local newspapers have run campaigns that helped her to help her constituents, and I think all of us in this Chamber have had the same kind of experience.

The main issue seems to be that local newspapers are no longer as local as they once were, and I say that from my own experience. I have two—I should say two and a half—local newspapers. The *Motherwell Times* and *Bellshill Speaker* are run by Johnston Press and the *Wishaw Press* is run by Trinity Mirror, but those local papers no longer have local newspaper offices. The *Wishaw Press* sends a journalist to the Wishaw library every week and asks people to contribute stories online by email, and Johnston Press has an office at the very top part of North Lanarkshire that runs our local paper, whereas Motherwell is very much in the southern part of the county.

There has been a lowering of both quality and pay, which has helped to drive down readership and led to the growth of fake news. Most local newspapers are owned by one of four publishers, as all Members who have spoken in the debate have said. It drives a wedge between newspapers and their communities when they do not have a footprint in the local area. The hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) referred to his time as a councillor. I, too, can remember when local journalists reported from local council meetings. That has stopped being the case, even since I was a councillor a few years ago. Journalists simply do not have the time.

Facebook and Google's advertising revenue is expected to grow, and that may need to be looked at, because if they are not taxed properly and that money does not go back into the newspaper industry or local media in all their forms, we are all much the poorer for it.

The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) regaled us with his experiences as a local radio journalist and as father of the chapel. It is pretty obvious that with fewer and fewer news journalists, the quality of news goes down. He also talked about a drop in the number of newspapers and staff in his area. He spoke

[Marion Fellows]

about how he uses his membership of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee to question how BBC local democracy reporters will be used. That is also an issue in Scotland, where we will have 80 of them. My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Corri Wilson) has already touched on how difficult the situation is and how they should not be used to replace locally based journalists.

The hon. Member for Colne Valley also talked about local TV. In Scotland, we are getting to the stage where we have local TV stations run by Scottish Television and the BBC. The hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) spoke about the Scottish Six. It will not be on the main BBC Scotland channel. It will be broadcast on a second channel that will only be on from 7 pm to 11 pm. It will therefore not necessarily get the viewership figures that we would want, especially in these times of constitutional debate and interest in Scotland, with Brexit and how it will affect our people. There is also interest in how the BBC will spend the money it raises in Scotland in Scotland itself. The BBC only spends about 55% of what it raises in Scotland in the country. In other areas, the figure is 75% or 80%. That is a real problem. The hon. Lady also talked about Welsh language media. In Scotland, there is an issue with the funding of Gaelic programming. I do not want to beat the drum for Scotland all the time, because what is happening there is happening across the UK.

It is important, as many Members have said, that local media are prevalent, as they are a bastion for local democracy. Local media really understand what is going on locally and can be a good force for local campaigning and fundraising. How many of us look at our children and our grandchildren in the weekly newspaper and sigh and feel very proud? I am really proud of my local papers. Last week, there was a local rally welcoming refugees to Wishaw, and the *Wishaw Press* turned up in force and had it on the front page. That is local democracy in action. The paper will also cover the proposed Scottish Defence League rally, and I hope it gives that the same amount of coverage, because we have to be balanced in what we say.

I may not agree with what local newspapers write, but their right to write it has to be preserved. The NUJ has highlighted that in its mapping exercise. We need to preserve and protect what we have. The Government should consider an inquiry into local media. I hope the Minister will listen to the calls that Members have made. I am not going to stand here and repeat everything that everyone has said, because although these things bear repetition, I do not think it would advance what has already been said this afternoon. This industry is vital for all of us and all our constituents, and we have to look at it in that light.

2.45 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. It is also a pleasure to sum up for Her Majesty's official Opposition.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on her speech and on persuading the Backbench Business Committee—I thank it, too—with other colleagues to grant this debate.

She made an extremely passionate case for local media. Her proposal about the importance of treating local media as a community asset was echoed by others. She also talked about models and ways that we can take that forward in the future.

The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) told us about his career as a local journalist. I am surprised he did not get a Pulitzer prize for his reporting of the football in Bishop Auckland, but he made some sensible suggestions on the way forward for local media, and his speech will bear careful study by the Minister following the debate.

We also had a very good speech from the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts). She listed Welsh language titles during the course of her speech. Fortunately for *Hansard* reporters, the Welsh language is highly phonetic, unlike the English language, so they will have no problem whatever in spelling all the names of the publications she mentioned in the course of her speech.

We also had a very good speech from the hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), who said how blessed she was with the richness of local media provision in her constituency. She castigated the local press for their accurate reporting of age, and I think we all had a tinge of sympathy with that pertinent point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) made a strong case for local papers and told us about his column in a socialist publication. It did not sound like it had a mass circulation, but he did have the consolation that he was trying to form a mass movement.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The paper did not have a mass circulation. It had a rather limited circulation, but it was not a commercial paper, so it was not in any way undermining journals across the country.

**Kevin Brennan:** I am sure the press barons of this country are mightily relieved to hear that.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) spoke with a great deal of wisdom about the role local media can play in local emergencies. She described how in the floods, the local media were a very important public service and not just reporting organisations. She was also the first Member today to mention the importance of photographers. She emphasised the value of adopting a co-operative model for local media not just when they get into trouble, but before that so that it is not just a response to a crisis. I thought that was an interesting point.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Corri Wilson) expressed concerns about the monopoly of media ownership, about which she made some good points. Speaking from the Scottish National party Front Bench, the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) spoke about the “Scottish Six”, BBC funding and the new channel that will be on the BBC in Scotland. I am on record being highly critical of the amount of money given to Wales in that same announcement. Scotland got £20 million and Wales should have got £12 million, but we only got £8 million. Additional investment is nevertheless important. She also mentioned Gaelic language provision. I am an avid

watcher of BBC Alba when it covers the Guinness Pro12 rugby matches. Despite the commentary being in Gaelic, I think I can pick up enough of it to understand what is going on. She made a useful contribution to the debate.

I was quite surprised that we were not joined by the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) this afternoon.

**Jason McCartney:** He is too busy.

**Kevin Brennan:** Perhaps he is too busy, as the hon. Member for Colne Valley says—we know that he has many jobs that he has to perform. I understood that the right hon. Gentleman's purpose in taking the editorship of the *Evening Standard* was to bring that experience from outside the Chamber into Parliament. I would have thought that this afternoon's debate might have afforded an appropriate opportunity for him to allow us the benefit of his wisdom and knowledge on this subject.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** My hon. Friend is making a very good point. I wonder if he might inquire if the right hon. Gentleman has joined the NUJ.

**Kevin Brennan:** I think it is more likely that he has bought the NUJ rather than joined it, having looked at his entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Nevertheless, we miss him. I hope that the Minister, who I know is very friendly with the right hon. Gentleman, will send him our warm regards and our regret that he was unable to join us. I am sure he is very fruitfully engaged elsewhere, rather than being here in this debate in Westminster Hall this afternoon in our House of Commons.

I should also thank the Minister for kindly gracing us with his presence, albeit slightly late. I am sure there was a very good reason why he was not able to be here. As a man known for his humility, I am sure he will explain that to the Chamber when he gets up to address us after I sit down.

[MIKE GAPES *in the Chair*]

Since other Members have given us the benefit of their experience, I will do the same. I started off after university as a news editor of a local community paper in my home town of Cwmbran. It was a fairly humble publication called *Cwmbran Checkpoint*, but nevertheless we did a lot of journalism of the kind that Members have talked about—reporting on local council meetings, holding the local council to account and publishing stories of local interest.

Of course, the media have been transformed in the 30 or so years since I performed that humble role—much more humble than that of the right hon. Member for Tatton, obviously. We had golf ball typewriters, we laid out the text using wax rollers and we had Letraset to make headlines. It was very different back then in the analogue world—the Minister is far too young to know anything about that, but he can read about it in the history books. It was a very different world than we have now. Hon. Members have rightly pointed out that the technological revolution that has taken place over the last few decades has transformed media and had a big impact on local media in particular.

We have all agreed this afternoon that regional and local media are crucial to the strength of our communities and the health of our democracy. It is, therefore, a pleasure to speak in this debate in the week celebrating Local News Matters. Whether on paper or on screen, local news has a wide readership, reaching 40 million people a week. People continue to trust local journalists, perhaps a bit more than they trust national journalists. In some ways, perhaps there is an analogy with politics: people are generally in favour of their local MP but not necessarily in favour of politicians in general. The same impact is seen sometimes in local journalism.

I am sure that every hon. Member—we have heard from many this afternoon—is able to name local papers, news websites, radio stations and even, these days, local TV stations in their constituencies that help create a sense of local pride and identity, and inform residents about local issues. In my city of Cardiff, there are many outlets, including Radio Cardiff, *Wales Online*, the *Western Mail* and the *South Wales Echo*, not to mention the local BBC productions and Welsh-language publications such as *Y Dinesydd*, all of which make an important contribution at a local level.

However, as we have heard, research by the *Press Gazette* suggests that local and regional news provision is reducing. Since 2005, 200 newspapers have ceased circulation and the number of journalists has more than halved. We can all wax lyrical about our constituency's local news provision and its contribution to our local communities, but the reason we are having this debate is that the future of those outlets is far from secure. There are fewer local papers, fewer local journalists and fewer local editorial teams, being run by an ever smaller number of conglomerates. As we have heard in the debate, about three quarters of the local press is owned by a mere four companies.

It is not just about the number of papers and reporters. There is also the issue of independence and the resources available to journalists and editors to hold authorities to account at a local level. Research by Cardiff University that followed the trends in local journalism in Port Talbot from 1970 to 2015 found that over time, as hon. Members have mentioned, fewer and fewer stories were informed by journalists attending meetings in person, while the use of managed media sources, such as press releases, rose to more than 50%. Journalists increasingly quoted high status sources, with less input from members of the public. Naturally, that affects the ability of local media to scrutinise those who make decisions about their communities.

I do not think anyone is suggesting that we can turn the clock back to the days when I and others started out—to an analogue age when local newspapers were pretty much the only source of local information. Modern technology, starting a long time ago with TV and radio and now with online media sources, social media and so on, offers huge opportunities for the democratisation of news and the diversification of views, but also for the potential proliferation of fake news, as hon. Members have mentioned. Even though we cannot turn the clock back, we need to ensure that current and future technological developments are working to benefit everyone.

Local and regional news provision is transferring from one format to another, but local and regional services on TV and radio need support too. The National Union of Journalists has been mentioned several times

[Kevin Brennan]

in the debate. It undertook a survey of the closures of BBC district offices covering local TV and radio. I would like to share the results of that with the House today. Pointing out that the BBC is due to announce another round of cuts to the regions in the near future of perhaps £15 million out of a budget of £150 million, the survey's results show that, over the past 10 years, more than 20 district offices have closed, and that, once the district office closes, the designated reporter is often close to follow. In many towns, the nearest BBC reporter is now over an hour's drive away, which makes localised news coverage increasingly difficult.

For example, 10 years ago, BBC Radio Gloucestershire had three reporters: one for Gloucester and Forest of Dean, one for Cheltenham and Tewkesbury and another for Stroud and the Cotswolds. Now, only one reporter covers all six constituencies in that area, and the post has been vacant since the end of September. There is no longer a day reporter covering drive-time stories. Instead, there is only an early reporter working from a satellite car for the breakfast show and a late reporter covering stories for the next day. Likewise, 10 years ago in Lancashire, there were four district studios. Now there is only one, and only two full-time and two part-time reporters. The Newcastle, Durham, and Sunderland offices all closed in 2011, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland is fully aware.

News services that have moved or begun online often have issues too. Companies are struggling to replace lost print revenue with new profits generated online. A News Media Association survey found that 81% of media organisations' revenue comes from print readership and only 12% from digital. However, the industry continues to close its newspapers in favour of digital formats. When one visits a modern local newsroom, as I am sure many hon. Members here today have done, one is struck by the extent to which stories and deadlines are driven by online clicks, with advertising revenue related to those trends. That sparks fear of a genuine danger that clickbait journalism will be encouraged and will replace real local reporting. It would be a genuine shame if all our local news outlets eventually mirrored the *Mail Online* sidebar of shame in their approach to reporting. That is the fear and the potential danger of that approach.

Be it in print or on screen, the trends that I and others have outlined are of course long term and have been developing over decades. I mentioned the NUJ's survey of the closure of BBC district offices. Other public service broadcasters are also crucial to regional and local news. The Welsh language TV channel, S4C—Sianel Pedwar Cymru—focuses on Welsh issues and consistently features local news and views from around the country. Again, rather than wholeheartedly supporting the channel, the Government's policies are creating uncertainty about its future. In my letter to the Minister on St David's day, I asked the Government at least to freeze S4C's funding until the independent review of the channel is completed, and to announce the review's terms of reference. Instead, they have offered only a six-month freeze and further talks mid-year, and they still have not launched the review. I am afraid the UK Government are dragging their feet on setting up the review, and we want to know why. S4C and Welsh audiences deserve better.

This gives me the opportunity the right to put the Minister right on his somewhat ludicrous rewriting of the history of the establishment of S4C, which we have heard him rehearse several times in the Chamber recently. Yes, it was established under Mrs Thatcher's Government, but only after a long and bitter campaign by Labour and Plaid Cymru, which forced them to withdraw proposals that would have breached their own manifesto.

**The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock):** Oh, give over!

**Kevin Brennan:** The Minister says, "Oh, give over!" from a sedentary position. Given that he has decided to challenge my assertion, let me read him the Cabinet note from 18 September 1980. The then Home Secretary, Willie Whitelaw, said

"that the Government would withdraw its plans to share Welsh language programme, between two television channels. Instead the programmes would, for an experimental period of three years, be broadcast on one channel, as had been proposed in the Party Manifesto. He still thought that the previous plans were preferable but he had agreed to change them in response to representations, put to him by Lord Cledwyn and others, of the views of informed and responsible opinion in Wales."

Lord Cledwyn was, of course, Cledwyn Hughes, the former Labour Welsh Secretary. I forgive the Minister, because he probably was not even born at the time of that great struggle, but it is wrong for him to glibly assert that S4C was established without a bitter fight, which some of us remember well.

**Helen Goodman:** Just to reveal how old I am, my first job was working for a Labour Member of Parliament in 1979-80, Phillip Whitehead, who was on the Committee for that Bill. What my hon. Friend says is absolutely right: there was a significant Labour campaign to achieve that.

**Kevin Brennan:** There was, and I acknowledge Plaid Cymru's contribution to that campaign. It is only right to put the historical record straight, rather than allow the hares that the Minister set running—

**Matt Hancock:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Kevin Brennan:** My dream has come true!

**Matt Hancock:** I am always very happy to contribute to the hon. Gentleman's dreams. To deal with this one right now, I am absolutely delighted that the hon. Gentleman has welcomed the Conservative Government's establishment of S4C and has accepted that, in fact, it was introduced by a Conservative Government. We, as Conservatives, welcome the cross-party support for it.

**Kevin Brennan:** Let me quote from another document from 1980. Wyn Roberts, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the Welsh Office, said:

"I travelled home yesterday with Lord Garonwy Roberts who told me that the Shadow Cabinet last week"—

that was the Labour shadow Cabinet—

"decided to put forward an amendment to the Broadcasting Bill in the Lords to concentrate all Welsh language programmes on the Fourth Channel...If the Lords were to carry the amendment, it would clearly weaken our position very considerably."

It was that pressure that led to the Government having to fulfil their commitment, which they wanted to renege on at the time.

I will not test your patience any further, Mr Gapes. As a former history teacher—[*Interruption.*]

**Mike Gapes (in the Chair):** Order. I would be grateful if the Minister confined his remarks to his winding-up speech.

**Kevin Brennan:** I accept your ruling, Mr Gapes, although I enjoy the Minister's sedentary remarks. They liven things up considerably.

That is evidence that S4C is not a priority for the Government. Meanwhile, the Welsh Government are providing a grant to it and supporting Welsh-language papers—the papurau bro, as the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd called them. That is because that Government understand the importance of local news to communities.

I do not want to paint too gloomy a picture. Regional and local news outlets continue to break very important stories, often of national significance, while both entertaining residents and informing them of community events and developments, but they do that despite rather than because of the Government's action. I encourage the Minister to do more after this debate. He has had encouragement from both sides of the Chamber to do something.

The BBC has announced the local democracy reporter programme, which hon. Members have referred to, and which is going to cost £8 million of licence fee money. BBC reporters will work with local papers. Superficially, that is a welcome initiative, but in effect the Government are outsourcing a complex issue to another body rather than taking charge of the situation. Against that background, we support the call for the Government to carry out a national review into local news and media plurality. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will commit to undertake such a review? Other hon. Members have also called for one.

The NUJ's research, "Mapping changes in local news 2015-2017: more bad news for democracy?", which was published this month, shows a net loss of nine regional papers since 2015, and a loss of more than 400 local journalism jobs over a 17-month period. In 2015, two thirds of local authority districts, encompassing more than half the UK's population, no longer had a local daily newspaper. Between November 2015 and March 2017, the number of local monopolies rose to 170 out of 380 in Wales, England and Scotland.

The Government are in a unique position to pull together views from across the industry—from multinationals to trade unions, civic society groups and the mutual sector—to judge the effect that these changes have on society and to discuss potential solutions. I would be interested if the Minister can tell us how he will respond to the demands set out in early-day motion 1109. Will the Government undertake to launch some kind of national review into what is going on? Setting party politics aside, we are all in agreement about the importance of local news in all its formats. It is crucial to safeguard these precious community assets into the future. The Government have a role to play, and we would be interested to hear from the Minister what role he will play in achieving that.

3.7 pm

**The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock):** I apologise for my earlier interruptions, Mr Gapes, but I wanted to correct that one point before I started my full response to this very thoughtful and interesting debate. I thank the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) for securing this important debate on the future of local and regional news providers.

**Kevin Brennan:** I do not want to labour the point too much, but while the Minister is in the mood for apologising, perhaps he could apologise to the House for being late to the debate.

**Matt Hancock:** Of course I am very sorry. I am glad that we managed to begin appropriately at the start of the debate.

The many Members who contributed to the debate have a clear direction of travel, which is to underline the importance of journalism and local media—especially newspapers, but also broadcast and online media. As the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland said, quoting Harry Evans, journalism is a public service. The point that was made about devolution meaning that there is need for more, rather than less, local scrutiny, which journalism obviously helps to provide, is important in this context. More decisions are being taken at a local level, and it is really important to ensure that they get appropriate scrutiny.

I thank the hon. Lady for raising a point during the passage of the Digital Economy Bill about the importance of ensuring that whistleblowers and journalists are protected from the tightening-up of the enforcement of data protection rules. The Digital Economy Bill is a very positive step, in terms of data protection. The hon. Lady and a couple of other Members rightly raised the important matter of ensuring that the law is explicit, rather than implicit, in the protection of journalism and journalists, and I am very grateful to her for bringing that to my attention.

As MPs, we all understand the importance of local newspapers in bringing communities together and providing a local voice to communities, as well as holding us and others in positions of responsibility to account. I am going to follow the trend in this debate. In my constituency, I am fortunate that the local press is widespread. There are 13 local titles that cover my patch, including the *East Anglian Daily Times*; *Eastern Daily Press*; *Newmarket Journal*; *Newmarket Weekly News*; *Haverhill Echo*; *Haverhill Weekly News*; *Thetford and Brandon Times*; *Brandon Life*; *Ely News*; *Bury Free Press*; *Bury Mercury*; and *Cambridge Evening News*, which just covers the corner of my constituency. That is just the press. I also have local radio stations, local BBC radio and TV, ITV, and Heart FM. So there is no shortage of high-quality local journalism in West Suffolk, but absolutely there is pressure, which is what has been highlighted by this debate.

Everybody has had a chance to mention their local newspapers. Mr Gapes, I am sure that if you were to speak, you would mention the *Ilford Recorder*, too. It is appropriate that the debate is this week because this is Local News Matters week, spearheaded by the NUJ. I welcome its report, published earlier this week, into this matter, some of which was referred to by the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), and which

[*Matt Hancock*]

highlights the importance of local news to communities across the country. Many important points were in the review, including how we get investment into good quality local journalism. One of the new ways to do that has been the initiative by the BBC to put in place 150 local democracy reporters.

Questions were raised about how the reporters were going to operate, and there was a lot of work and consultation by the BBC to develop criteria for the local democracy reporters, including making sure that they had a previous track record in public service journalism, with content provided in lots of different ways, and that the operation could work locally in practice. I heard the point about additionality clearly, and it is important that the 150 local democracy reporters are genuinely additional. I am sure that the BBC has also heard that point. Alongside that, the NewsBank will allow BBC video and audio material to be available shortly after transmission. Local newspapers have complained that they cannot use BBC material that is freely available on their websites to enhance their own material, but the NewsBank will enhance the online offering.

A data journalism hub will be created, with staff seconded from the local news industry to make data journalism available to news organisations across the media industry. The first wave of recruitment will start in the spring. So the BBC is playing its part, and I am glad that that has been welcomed. We should thank my predecessor as Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), who at the time of the charter review ensured that that happened.

We are about to bring in a different initiative: business rates relief for local newspapers to help with cost pressures. In our manifesto we committed to consult on a business rates relief for local papers. In the Budget in March last year we announced that that would be introduced from 1 April this year, so it will start in a couple of days' time on Saturday. Local newspapers in England with an office space will be eligible for a business rates discount. I am eager to see the impact of the scheme. I urge any of the titles that we have discussed today, and other local papers, to take advantage of it.

On the concentration of ownership, plurality of media ownership is an important consideration. Legislation was introduced to relax the cross-media ownership requirements, allowing local newspapers to be involved in local TV as part of our attempt to ensure that local newspapers are sustainable. Local TV has a role to play. Some £25 million of funding was set aside in the previous BBC funding agreement to set up local TV. Some stations, such as London Live and Notts TV, have close links with local newspapers, and a Kent local TV service is forthcoming. STV in Scotland has taken advantage of the local TV licences and is launching its STV2 services to bring together a network of its current services with localised news content as well. We have to look at local media and journalism in the round.

Commercial radio was also mentioned. Obviously, commercial radio is incredibly important and in many areas is thriving. It reaches a very high proportion of people. We are currently consulting on reducing some of the burdens on commercial radio. I was involved in a commercial radio station, Oxygen 107.9, when I was a student—I was minority sports correspondent. It attempted

to be a commercial radio station, but in fact it folded shortly after I left. It was more fun making the radio than it was listening to it. At least, that is what our advertisers must have thought.

Community radio has an important part to play. Several hon. Members mentioned its importance and we have taken action on it. The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland raised the question of community radio being able to raise money from advertising. Two years ago, in April 2015, we increased to £15,000 the amount that a community radio station can make without the limits on that being in place. There is a reason why there is a limit. Community radio station licences are genuinely for community purposes. We would not want them to be used for commercial radio squeezing out community providers. We increased the limit to £15,000, and I hope community radio stations will take advantage of the fact that they can now raise £15,000 of advertising revenue before any of the other limits kick in.

I want to stress some additional facts. The fact that 58% of people do not have access to a daily local press was raised, but if we take local press in print and online into account, 95% of the country is covered, according to NMA industry figures. Although clearly under stress, there is availability of local reporting, whether in print or online, right across the country. The challenge of new technology is to find a way to ensure that it provides a sustainable business model for local journalism. We cannot hold back the tide of technology. The key is how we can harness it in a way that provides for a sustainable business model, and allows citizens to access their news more readily than they could before when there was only print available. That is the big challenge we face.

The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland also asked about treating newspapers as assets of community value. The legislation on such assets, however, refers only to the land and buildings. That might potentially cover the physical assets of a local newspaper, but her point is that there is more to the assets of a local newspaper than the physical asset. I will therefore have a conversation with Ministers at the Department for Communities and Local Government, the lead Department, to see whether we can make any progress. We will have to look into the practical questions, but I understand her thrust.

Many other very good points were made in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) not only enlightened us with his experience, stressing again the importance of plurality and that the BBC proposals need to be an enhancement of and addition to what is already on offer, but raised the issue of fake news. The Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport is investigating fake news and I very much look forward to the results of its inquiry. In Government, we are well aware of it, as one might imagine, and it engages many interested parties, but we will wait for the report of the ongoing Select Committee inquiry before we come forward with anything.

The hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) was clear about the importance not only of English-language but of Welsh-language newspapers. That is a good point to take into account. As she said, democracies need watchdogs with a powerful bark—whether that bark is in English or Welsh, it must provide for the local audience.



**Liz Saville Roberts:** I emphasise that, although Plaid Cymru is expected to talk about Welsh-language matters, we need to bear in mind that 20% of Wales speaks Welsh and 80% of Wales speaks English. In terms of plurality of media in Wales, it is equally significant to look at the accountability of democracy in English as in Welsh.

**Matt Hancock:** I could not agree more with the hon. Lady. I am a strong supporter of the Welsh language and of S4C—I love it so much I even had an unnecessary argument about who came up with it. It is incredibly important that people are held to account in a language that is understood by local citizens. That is what democratic accountability is all about, and that includes in Welsh. I take her point. I thought that the additional support we have announced for S4C would get a warmer welcome from the hon. Member for Cardiff West. The millions of pounds extra for S4C underlines the Government's support for the Welsh language.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) and others made the point that local papers are often more unbiased, and are certainly perceived to be. They have to cater for the whole community to survive. She mentioned that they also campaign on behalf of local communities, whether about local deliveries on unadopted roads or elderly residents. In my case, a few years ago the *Haverhill Echo* campaigned to bring the Olympic torch to Haverhill. The paper also campaigned alongside the *Thetford and Brandon Times* to save the Brandon day care centre, which we successfully did this year. Engaging in campaigns of value to the local population is a classic role of the local newspaper.

The hon. Member for Cardiff West mentioned new technology. Indeed, many hon. Members have rightly pointed out that this industry is changing at dramatic speed. We need to ensure that the technology works for the public interest of journalism, and initiatives are under way to ensure that. Google's Digital News Initiative

was launched with €150 million to support digital local news journalism. A number of UK publishers, including publishers of local media Trinity Mirror, Johnston Press and The Ferret, are receiving funding from that. However, we have to see how the market develops and keep a close eye on it to ensure that it is sustainable, because local accountability matters.

On the call for an inquiry, we have to see how the BBC initiative beds down and how the business rates support, which comes in only on Saturday, works in practice. We keep this question under constant review. This area is of great significance and is of importance to the Government. Of course, I am happy to debate it in the House at any point. Rather than having a single fixed inquiry, we will keep it under constant review, and I will be surprised if the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland does not ensure that that is the case.

3.25 pm

**Helen Goodman:** We have had an excellent debate, and I am grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members who took part. This is a significant issue. There was consensus today about the significance of local news for democracy and communities, and agreement that we need to keep a watchful eye on this matter. Some positive action has been taken but more might be needed. I am grateful to the Minister for responding positively to the assets of community value idea, and to the Backbench Business Committee for giving us the opportunity to look into this issue in more detail.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the future of local and regional news providers.

3.26 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Thursday 30 March 2017

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Companies House Public Targets 2017-18

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James):** My noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Prior), has made the following written statement:

I have set Companies House the following targets for the year 2017-18:

- To digitally enable 99% of all possible accounts filings
- To achieve an 87% take-up of our digital filing services
- To maintain an availability of our digital services of 99.9%
- To reach a compliance level of 75% of confirmation statements filed early or on time
- To reach a compliance level of 95% of accounts filed early or on time
- To reduce the costs of our baseline activities by 3.5%
- To achieve a customer satisfaction score of at least 88%

These targets reflect the key priorities for Companies House in the coming year, with a focus on moving customers away from paper to digital channels, and ensuring the register is up to date.

[HCWS576]

### Intellectual Property Office: Performance Targets

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson):** As an Executive agency and trading fund of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, we set targets which are agreed by Ministers and laid before Parliament. For 2017-18 our targets are:

We will have ratified the Geneva Act of the Hague Agreement for international registration of designs by 31 March 2018 and be in a position to launch the service on 6 April 2018 (the common commencement date).

We will publish 90% of acceptable applications for national trade marks for opposition within 90 days of filing.

We will offer faster handling of patent applications, by providing an examination report with a search report when both are requested at the application date, and meeting at least 90% of requests for an accelerated two-month turnaround for search, publication and examination.

We will ensure that overall customer satisfaction is at least 80%.

We will work with industry and enforcement partners to build a co-ordinated response to the growth of illicit streaming, including robust analysis of current legal sanctions and developing proposals for change as appropriate.

We will increase the number of businesses that better understand how to manage their IP: at least 35% of an expected 100,000 businesses we reach will make an informed decision regarding management of their IP.

We will provide market-specific IP advice to 5000 current and prospective British exporters. As part of this work, we

will deliver bespoke one-to-one business support activity to at least 200 companies annually.

We will demonstrate our commitment to diversity by securing external validation for our approach to inclusion for under-represented groups.

We will achieve return of capital employed of at least 4%.

We will deliver an efficiency gain of 3.5%.

[HCWS575]

## CABINET OFFICE

### Cabinet Committees

**The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Ben Gummer):** Today the Government are publishing an updated list of Cabinet Committees and implementation taskforces. As part of the changes, the Prime Minister will chair two new Sub-Committees of the European Union Exit and Trade Committee.

The two new Sub-Committees are as follows:

European Union Exit and Trade (Negotiations) Sub-Committee: to oversee the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from, and future relationship with, the European Union.

European Union Exit and Trade (International Trade) Sub-Committee: to focus on issues relating to the UK's trading arrangements with non-European Union countries.

Copies of the associated documents will be placed in the Library of House and published on gov.uk.

[HCWS587]

## TREASURY

### Convergence Programme

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):** Article 121 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU) requires the UK to send an annual convergence programme to the European Commission reporting upon its fiscal situation and policies. The UK's convergence programme will be sent to the European Commission by 30 April. This deadline was set in accordance with the European semester timetable for both convergence and national reform programmes. The UK will continue to have all of the rights, obligations and benefits that membership brings up until the point we leave the EU, and as such the Government will continue to submit the UK's convergence programme until that time.

Section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 requires that the content of the convergence programme must be drawn from an assessment of the UK's economic and budgetary position which has been presented to Parliament by the Government for its approval. This assessment is based on the Budget 2017 report and the most recent Office for Budget Responsibility's economic and fiscal outlook and it is this content, not the convergence programme itself, which requires the approval of the House for the purposes of the Act.

Article 121, along with Article 126 of the TFEU, is the legal basis for the stability and growth pact, which is the co-ordination mechanism for EU fiscal policies and requires member states to avoid excessive Government deficits. Although the UK participates in the stability and growth pact, by virtue of its protocol to the treaty opting out of the euro, it is only required to “endeavour to avoid” excessive deficits. Unlike the euro area member states, the UK is not subject to sanctions at any stage of the European semester process.

Subject to the progress of parliamentary business, debates will be held soon in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. In order for both Houses to approve this assessment before the convergence programme is sent to the Commission. While the convergence programme itself is not subject to parliamentary approval or amendment, I will deposit advanced copies of the document in the Libraries of both Houses and copies will be available through the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office.

The UK’s convergence programme will be available electronically via HM Treasury’s website prior to it being sent to the European Commission.

[HCWS582]

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Business Rates: Plant Nurseries

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** Since at least 1928, plant nursery grounds have been treated by the Valuation Office Agency as exempt from business rates as part of the general exemption for agriculture. However, following a recent Court of Appeal decision, the Valuation Office Agency has started to bring into business rates buildings at nursery grounds including structures such as polytunnels.

The exemption for agricultural properties is an important part of the rating system. It ensures that large areas of agricultural land and buildings are not liable to a property tax which could have a significant impact on the cost of farming. I can confirm to the House that the Government’s policy is that land and buildings at plant nursery grounds should benefit from the agricultural exemption for business rates.

Therefore, we intend at the soonest opportunity to amend the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to ensure both agricultural land and buildings at plant nursery grounds are exempt from business rates. This will return the law to align with the practice followed by the Valuation Office Agency before the decision in the Court of Appeal.

[HCWS585]

### Architects Registration Board Review

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell):** The UK has a reputation for the high quality of its architectural profession. To maintain that reputation it is important that anyone who hires an architect can be

assured of their competence. This is partly why we have a system of regulation under the Architects Act where nobody can use the title of architect unless they are registered with the Architects Registration Board (ARB). However, it is critical that the board conducts its regulatory function in a way that is proportionate, cost-effective and transparent and does not impose unnecessary burdens on those wishing to practice as architects.

The ARB has been the subject of a periodic review, in line with Cabinet Office guidance for reviews of arm’s length bodies. I am today publishing the report of that review. This confirms the decision taken by the last Government to continue light-touch regulation of architects based on protection of title to provide protection for home owners, businesses, builders and others commissioning work from architects.

The ARB also acts as the UK competent authority role for architects under the mutual recognition of professional qualifications directive. While the UK remains a member of the European Union, ARB will continue to play that role but this will be kept under review in the light of any arrangements made as the UK leaves the EU.

We have been grateful for suggestions about how to modernise the operation of the board and the review has identified a number of opportunities to reduce costs and improve services. These include strengthening the board’s governance and accountability and improving the complaints handling and disciplinary processes. It is the Government’s intention to implement these recommendations.

The review also made a number of recommendations relating to the way in which qualifications are set which entitle people to register as architects. These recommendations could lead to extensive change for UK architects and architectural education but also relate directly to UK compliance with the EU mutual recognition of professional qualifications directive. The Government have decided that it would be premature to take forward these recommendations at this time, but as the UK leaves the EU, we recognise these will need to be addressed. This will minimise disruption and cost to business, architects and the educational sector.

The Government are grateful for the work of the board in delivering its role. The recommendations of the review will enable the board to serve both architects and their clients even more effectively and the Government look forward to working with the board on implementing them.

I am placing a copy of the review report in the Library of both Houses.

[HCWS583]

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### UK Anti-Doping Tailored Review

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** I am announcing today the start of a tailored review of UK Anti-Doping (UKAD).

The principal aims of tailored reviews are to ensure public bodies remain fit for purpose, are well governed and properly accountable for what they do.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tailored-reviews-of-public-bodies-guidance>

UK Anti-Doping is the UK's national anti-doping organisation responsible for ensuring sports in the UK are compliant with the world anti-doping code. UKAD is sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and implements and manages the Government's national anti-doping policy.

The review will consider UKAD's position and its status as a DCMS-sponsored non-departmental public body (NDPB), and if the functions of UKAD are appropriate. If they are found to be, then the review will go on to consider UKAD's efficiency, effectiveness and governance; and how it is preparing for the future.

The review process and findings will be examined by a challenge group, chaired by DCMS non-executive director, Matthew Campbell-Hill.

In conducting the review, officials will engage with a broad range of stakeholders across the UK (and further afield) in sport, science, medicine, law enforcement and education, and they will explore best practice in the public and private sectors. The review will follow guidance published in 2016 by the Cabinet Office: "Tailored Reviews: Guidance on Reviews of Public Bodies". The terms of reference for the review and a public survey consultation about the work of UKAD can be found on [gov.uk](http://gov.uk).

I will inform the House of the outcome of the review when it is completed and copies of the report of the review will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS586]

## EDUCATION

### Primary Assessment in England

**The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):** Last October, I made a statement to Parliament about the primary assessment and accountability system in England. In that statement, I reaffirmed the importance of a good primary education, and particularly the importance of mastering the basics of literacy and numeracy, to ensure that every child is given the best chance to succeed in life, whatever their background. I also recognised that we must move to a settled system which is ambitious, supports teachers to help every child to reach their potential, allows schools to benchmark their own performance, and enables them to be held to account in a way that is fair and accurate.

Since then, we have taken a number of steps to improve the operation of the assessment system. We have worked with the teaching profession to produce new guidance for the moderation of teacher assessment, to improve the quality and consistency of that moderation, and we have provided additional training for local authority moderators. We have also taken steps to improve the test experience for pupils this year.

We have also talked to headteachers, teachers and others about the longer-term issues that need to be resolved to establish a settled, sustainable system. We are today launching a public consultation on the primary

assessment system in England. Our consultation document, "Primary Assessment in England", sets out wide-ranging proposals for improving our primary assessment system. These include how the system can help to prepare children to succeed at school, the starting point from which to measure the progress that children make in primary school, how we can ensure that the primary assessment system is proportionate, and how end of key stage assessment can be improved, particularly in the case of the statutory teacher assessment frameworks.

It is important that our assessment system can assess the progress and attainment of children of all abilities. The report of the independent Rochford review, also published last October, set out a number of recommendations to improve the way that the attainment and progress of children working below the level of the national curriculum tests is assessed in primary schools. The recommendations, if adopted, would result in significant changes and it is important that we hear the views of those who would be affected, and particularly teachers and others working with children who have special educational needs. That is why we are today also publishing a consultation document on the Rochford proposals and their possible implementation.

During the consultation period, which will last for 12 weeks, we want to hear from as many headteachers and teachers as possible to gather their views and feed them into our final decisions. I would encourage all those with an interest in primary education to engage with these consultation exercises and to share their opinions and insights.

Copies of these consultation documents have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

[HCWS584]

## JUSTICE

### Justice Update

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss):** As I committed on 27 February, when I set the new discount rate, I am today launching a six-week consultation on how the personal injury discount rate, used to help calculate lump sum payments of damages in personal injury claims, should be set in the future. The consultation document is available at: <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/personal-injury-discount-rate/>.

It is a long-standing principle under our system that people who suffer injuries wrongfully at the hands of others should be compensated fully, and put in the financial position they would have been had the injury not happened. Where damages are awarded for future loss in the form of a lump sum, that award is adjusted to take account of the effect of the injured person being able to invest the money before the loss or expense for which it is awarded has actually occurred. The factor by which the award is adjusted is determined by the discount rate.

Under the Damages Act 1996, the Lord Chancellor has the power to set the discount rate from time to time. The rate must be set in accordance with the Act and the

applicable legal principles set out in case law, particularly the 1998 House of Lords case of *Wells v. Wells*. The principles in *Wells v. Wells* lead to the conclusion that the discount rate should be based on the investment portfolio that offers the least risk to personal injury claimant investors in protecting an award of damages against inflation and against market risk. A change to the current legal framework would need primary legislation.

The power to set the discount rate was used first in 2001, when Lord Irvine set the rate at 2.5% by reference to a three-year average of real yields on index-linked gilts (ILGs). Following a review, I announced a change to the rate on 27 February this year to minus 0.75%, which came into force on 20 March. In doing so, I pledged to review the current law to consider: whether the rate should in future be set by an independent body; whether more frequent reviews would improve predictability and certainty for all parties; and whether the methodology—which in effect assumes that claimants would invest only in virtually risk-free ILGs—is appropriate for the future.

The consultation document I am publishing today covers these points, and includes a call for evidence on how investors in the position of personal injury claimants are likely to invest. The consultation document explores what an appropriate investment risk profile could look like for such investors, and what the effect would be of moving from the current virtually risk-free model, to a low-risk model. While my responsibility extends only to England and Wales, the principles and method for setting the rate have read-across to all jurisdictions in the UK, and the consultation is produced in partnership with the Scottish Government.

We must have a justice system that works for all. I fully recognise the impact that the discount rate has, not just on claimants—including some of the most vulnerable in society—but also on defendants in both the public and private sectors, and the further impact this has on consumers' insurance premiums and taxpayers. The consultation I am launching today will look at the way the rate is set in future, and I am inviting anyone with evidence and expertise to take part. The consultation will close on 11 May.

[HCWS579]

## LEADER OF THE HOUSE

### EVEL Standing Orders Update

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington):** The Government introduced English votes for English laws on 22 October 2015 to address the long-standing West Lothian question. English votes for English laws has provided MPs with constituencies in England (or England and Wales) the right to consent to legislation that applies only to England (or England and Wales).

Upon introduction, the Government committed to a technical review of the Standing Orders related to English votes for English laws and the procedures they introduced. The Government launched the technical review on 26 October 2016.

I am pleased to announce the publication of the Government's report following the technical review. The Government report also responds to three parliamentary Select Committees which have led inquiries into English votes for English laws over the past 12 months.

The publication can be found through the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-votes-for-english-laws-review>

[HCWS581]

## TRANSPORT

### Light Dues 2017-18

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** A strong and growing maritime industry is vital to the economy of the United Kingdom and it is critical that we treasure and protect this vital artery if we are to remain a world-leading maritime centre.

The work of the general lighthouse authorities, which provide and maintain marine aids to navigation and respond to new wrecks and navigation dangers in some of the busiest waters in the world, is crucial to underpinning that vision while maintaining our vigorous safety record and continuously improving standards of safety.

Reductions in the three general lighthouse authorities' running costs has already enabled the UK to reduce light dues for three successive years.

For 2017-18 I intend to cut light dues by a further half a penny to 37½p per net registered tonne. This will mean that light dues will have fallen by 25% in real terms since 2010.

Light dues rates will continue to be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the general lighthouse authorities are challenged to provide an effective and efficient service which offers value for money to light dues payers while maintaining the highest levels of safety for mariners.

[HCWS578]

## MCA Business Plans

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** I am proud to announce the publication of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) business plan for 2017-18. The MCA does vital work to save lives at sea, regulate ship standards and protect the marine environment. The agency affects not just those working on the coast or at sea, it upholds the legacy of our great maritime nation.

The business plan sets out:

The services that the agency will deliver and any significant changes it plans to make;

The resources the agency requires; and

The key performance indicators, by which its performance will be assessed.

This plan allows service users and members of the public to assess how the agency is performing in operating its key services, managing reforms and the agency finances.

The business plan will be available electronically on gov.uk and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The business plan can also be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-03-30/HCWS577/>.

[HCWS577]

### Motoring Agencies Business Plans

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** I am pleased to announce the publication of the 2017-18 business plans for the Department for Transport's motoring agencies—the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA).

The business plans set out:

- the services each agency will deliver and any significant changes they plan to make;
- the resources they require; and,
- the key performance indicators, by which their performance will be assessed.

These plans allow service users and members of the public to assess how the agencies are performing in operating their key services, managing reforms and the agency finances.

The business plans will be available electronically on gov.uk and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-03-30/HCWS580/>

[HCWS580]

### WORK AND PENSIONS

#### Personal Independence Payment

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Penny Mordaunt):** The second independent review of the personal independence payment assessment by Paul Gray is being published today. This is the second of the two independent reviews as required by the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

Building on the recommendations from the first independent review, Paul Gray has explored how closely the ongoing implementation of the personal independence payment reflects the policy intent. He has considered:

- How effectively further evidence is being used to assist the correct claim decision, and the speed and effectiveness of information gathering;
- The degree of claimant confidence and transparency in the claim process; and
- How to further promote quality and consistency to produce fair outcomes for all.

The Government welcome the publication of the review and will consider its findings and issue a detailed response in due course.

[HCWS574]





# ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 30 March 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>TRANSPORT</b> .....	379	<b>TRANSPORT—continued</b>	
Bus Passenger Satisfaction .....	394	North Wales-England Transport Links .....	392
Congestion: Oxfordshire .....	391	Northern Powerhouse Rail.....	381
East Midlands Rail Franchise .....	393	Private Parking .....	384
European Transport and Safety Organisations.....	396	Rail Network: Investment .....	386
Heathrow: Noise Monitoring .....	389	Rail Ticketing .....	383
Kettering Rail Service .....	394	Road Collision Investigation Unit.....	391
Leaving the EU: Cabotage .....	379	Ship-to-Ship Transfers .....	395
Litter Removal: Highways England .....	395	Switch Island, Sefton .....	382
National Road Safety Targets .....	388	Topical Questions .....	396
Night Flights: Regional Airports .....	384		

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 30 March 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL</b>		<b>JUSTICE</b> .....	28WS
<b>STRATEGY</b> .....	23WS	Justice Update.....	28WS
Companies House Public Targets 2017-18 .....	23WS	<b>LEADER OF THE HOUSE</b> .....	29WS
Intellectual Property Office: Performance Targets..	23WS	EVEL Standing Orders Update .....	29WS
<b>CABINET OFFICE</b> .....	24WS	<b>TRANSPORT</b> .....	30WS
Cabinet Committees.....	24WS	Light Dues 2017-18 .....	30WS
<b>COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT</b> ..	25WS	MCA Business Plans.....	30WS
Architects Registration Board Review.....	25WS	Motoring Agencies Business Plans.....	31WS
Business Rates: Plant Nurseries .....	25WS	<b>TREASURY</b> .....	24WS
<b>CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT</b> .....	26WS	Convergence Programme .....	24WS
UK Anti-Doping Tailored Review .....	26WS	<b>WORK AND PENSIONS</b> .....	32WS
<b>EDUCATION</b> .....	27WS	Personal Independence Payment.....	32WS
Primary Assessment in England.....	27WS		

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  
Thursday 6 April 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**

**Thursday 30 March 2017**

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 379] [see index inside back page]**  
*Secretary of State for Transport*

**Business of the House [Col. 406]**  
*Statement—(Mr Lidington)*

**Legislating for UK Withdrawal from the EU [Col. 427]**  
*Statement—(Mr David Davis)*

**Backbench Business**

**Animal Welfare [Col. 446]**  
*Motion—(Neil Parish)—agreed to*

**Easter Adjournment [Col. 484]**  
*Motion—(Ian Mearns)—agreed to*

**Petition [Col. 511]**

**Sanitary Products [Col. 512]**  
*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Westminster Hall**  
**Local and Regional News [Col. 197WH]**  
*General Debate*

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

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

---