

Thursday
22 June 2017

Volume 626
No. 5



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 22 June 2017

House of Commons

Thursday 22 June 2017

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Members Sworn

9.34 am

The following Members took and subscribed the Oath, or made and subscribed the Affirmation required by law.

Nicholas Edward Coleridge Boles, *for* Grantham and Stamford

Emma Elizabeth Reynolds, *Wolverhampton North East*

Grenfell Tower

9.35 am

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the disaster at Grenfell Tower. I apologise to the Leader of the Opposition for the short notice he has had of this statement. In the hour before making it, I received an important update, which I felt was essential to bring to the attention of the House this morning.

What happened in the early hours of last Wednesday morning was one of the most unimaginable tragedies that our country has seen in many years. As of this morning, 79 people have been confirmed dead or listed as missing presumed dead, and with work still ongoing to recover the bodies, sadly the death toll may rise further.

We already know that many children are among the dead and that in some cases whole families perished. Those who survived have lost loved ones, friends, neighbours and, in many cases, everything they own. It should never have happened. In a few moments, I shall say how we will discover why it did, but, as I said yesterday, that initial failure was then compounded by the fact that the support on the ground in the initial hours was not good enough. As Prime Minister, I have apologised for that second failure and taken responsibility for doing what we can to put it right.

On my first visit to north Kensington, I met the emergency services. These extraordinary men and women put their lives on the line in an effort to save others, and my first responsibility was to check that they had all the resources they needed. I then visited Chelsea and Westminster hospital, where I met some of the most seriously injured survivors—it was from that experience that I decided to have an emergency fund. I also met a group of residents in Kensington whom I then invited to Downing Street last weekend. I returned to Kensington again last night to hear directly from them about the progress that we are making. What became clear very quickly was that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea could not cope, and it is right that the chief executive officer has now resigned. It is also why I set up the Grenfell Tower recovery taskforce, which I have been chairing personally.

This is about not just the steps that we take in the first few weeks, but a lasting commitment that we make to supporting the affected families, long after the television cameras have gone. Let me set out in detail the steps that we are taking to support the victims and to rehouse those who have lost their homes.

On Friday morning, the Government established a central command centre under the leadership of John Barradell, the chief executive of the City of London and former lead for London local government on resilience, and Eleanor Kelly, chief executive of the London borough of Southwark. On behalf of the whole House I thank John and his team for all the work that they are doing.

I also pay tribute to the London boroughs for their fantastic response, including a number of chief executives who are currently working at the command centre, as well as the Mayor of London and leading figures from a number of councils from outside London. I thank the army of volunteers who stepped in to provide shelter, sustenance, comfort and practical support. I also thank

[The Prime Minister]

the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the Ministers for Housing and Planning, for London and for Policing and the Fire Service for the work that they have been doing.

Currently, there are around 600 people working on the site and in the immediate area to provide support to the victims. The Westway sports centre has been transformed into an emergency community hub, staffed by 40 officials from six Government Departments. Those officials are making sure that people have essential documents such as driving licences and passports, which are fundamental to them carrying on with their lives. They have also been joined by experts from organisations such as Transport for London, Citizens Advice and the Red Cross, NHS mental health staff, nurses, care managers, and a GP. Anyone affected by the blaze can walk in and access the support they need, and so far there have been almost 700 visits to the centre.

The centre's on-the-ground work is supplemented by the victim support unit, whose emergency helpline provides a single point of contact for victims who need to deal with multiple Government services in the wake of the disaster. Each family whose home was destroyed is receiving a £5,000 down payment from the emergency fund so they can buy food, clothes and other essentials, and outreach workers are seeking to make sure everyone gets the money they are entitled to. We are also paying all additional adults over 16 in these households £500 in cash. Other cash payments are being paid out by the council on a discretionary basis, for example to those whose home has been severely impacted but not permanently destroyed. As of midday on Wednesday we had made payments of more than £700,000.

It is absolutely essential that people understand they can keep the money they receive; these grants are not loans and they will not be expected to repay a single penny. Neither are they waiving any legal rights as a result of accepting this financial help. The payments will be disregarded for means-tested welfare payments, so no one in receipt of benefits will see their benefits cut if they accept emergency support. I would like to reassure people that we will not use this tragic incident as a reason to carry out immigration checks on those involved or on those providing vital information to identify victims or those assisting with the criminal investigation. We will make sure that all victims, irrespective of their immigration status, can access the services they need, including healthcare and accommodation.

In terms of local schools, Kensington Aldridge Academy, the school right next door to the tower, remains closed. However, all its pupils have already been accommodated at other schools in the area. The Department for Education is working with Ofqual to ensure that children who are sitting their GCSEs receive an appropriate exam dispensation, and specialist counselling has been offered to local schoolchildren and also to teachers affected by the fire.

Turning to re-housing, 151 homes were destroyed in the fire, most in the tower itself but also several in the immediate vicinity. All those who have lost their homes have been offered emergency hotel accommodation, and all will be offered rehousing within three weeks. Already, 164 suitable properties have been identified and they are being checked and made ready for people to move into. In the longer term, everyone whose home

was destroyed will be guaranteed a new home on the same terms as the one they lost. Sixty-eight of those will be in a brand-new low-rise block that has just been built by Berkeley Homes. The developer has generously offered to turn over the entire block at cost price. Contractors are on site now, working 24/7 to speed up fit-out so that the first families can move in this summer.

Within the wider cordon area, many more homes were damaged by smoke or water or have lost gas, heating and hot water. Emergency hotel accommodation is available for anyone who does not want to remain in a damaged property and more than 100 hotel rooms have already been provided. We are also putting in place practical support to help to accelerate necessary repairs and yesterday drew on expertise from the Army to assist with this.

Some survivors have said that they want to leave the local area, and we will of course support that and help them find a home elsewhere. But I want to be absolutely clear: nobody is being forced to move somewhere they do not want to go, and if any hon. Member thinks they know of anyone being treated in this way they should contact my office in Downing Street with the details.

As the scale of the tragedy became clear we quickly decided there had to be an independent public inquiry. As I said to the House yesterday, it will be chaired by a judge to get to the truth about what happened and who was responsible, and to provide justice for the victims and their families who suffered so terribly. All those with an interest—including survivors and victims' families—will be consulted about the terms of reference, and we will pay for legal representation for those affected. Listening to survivors last night, it also became clear that they want support to come together as a group to have their voices heard, and the Government will play our part in helping them to do so.

For too long residents have been overlooked and ignored. We will ensure that they are involved in every step of this process. No stone will be left unturned in this inquiry, and there will be nowhere for any guilty parties to hide. I am clear that we cannot wait for ages to learn the immediate lessons, so I expect that the chair of the inquiry will want to produce an interim report as early as possible.

I know that many others living in tall residential buildings will have concerns about their safety after what happened at Grenfell. All social landlords have been instructed to carry out additional fire safety checks on tower blocks, and to ensure that the appropriate safety and response measures are in place. This is being done in co-operation with local fire and rescue services. We have also taken steps to make private landlords aware and have made our checking facilities available to them for free.

The House should of course be careful when it comes to speculating about what caused the fire, but the Government have arranged to test cladding in all relevant tower blocks as a precaution. Shortly before I came to the Chamber, I was informed that a number of these tests have come back as combustible. The relevant local authorities and local fire services have been informed. As I speak, they are taking all possible steps to ensure that buildings are safe and to inform affected residents. Immediately after this statement, the Department for Communities and Local Government will contact any MPs whose constituents are affected, and the Communities Secretary will provide a further update later today.

We can test more than 100 buildings a day, and the results come within hours. I urge any landlord who owns a building of this kind to send samples for testing as soon as possible. Any results will be communicated immediately to local authorities and local fire services. Landlords have a legal obligation to provide safe buildings. Where they cannot do that, we expect alternative accommodation to be provided. We cannot and will not ask people to live in unsafe homes.

It is clear that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea was not able to cope with the scale of the tragedy, so we will develop a new strategy for resilience in major disasters, which could include a new civil disaster response taskforce that can help at times of emergency.

Finally, we must learn some of the lessons of this and previous disasters where bereaved families have not had the support they need, so we will introduce an independent public advocate for public disasters—a strong independent voice for victims, acting on behalf of bereaved families and supporting them at public inquests and inquiries.

In the past week, a lot of remarkable people have gone above and beyond to help to deal with the fire and its aftermath. First and foremost, of course, are the incredible men and women of the emergency services who did so much to save so many lives. I cannot imagine the kind of bravery it takes to run into a burning building and head upstairs when any normal person would be heading for the exits. We have also seen sterling work from people across the public sector including teachers, nurses, staff from various local authorities and civil servants, who are doing all they can to help. We have seen incredible acts of generosity from private businesses, and we have seen the people of this great city and this great country stepping up to help in any way they can: donating money, clothes, toys and food, volunteering their time and so much more.

Above all, I pay tribute to the people of Kensington. They have opened their hearts and homes to people affected by the fire, coming together and showing what a real community looks like. The selfless actions of local people and the courage and resilience of the survivors should give us all pause for thought.

Right now, our focus is on supporting the victims, finding homes for those made homeless and making sure that the country's housing stock is as safe as possible. But as we move forwards, we must also recognise that for too long in our country, under Governments of both colours, we simply have not given enough attention to social housing, and that this is actually a symptom of an even more fundamental issue.

It should not take a disaster of this kind for us to remember that there are people in Britain today living lives that are so far removed from those that many here in Westminster enjoy. In this tower—just a few miles from the Houses of Parliament and in the heart of our great city—people live a fundamentally different life, do not feel the state works for them and are therefore mistrustful of it. So, long after the TV cameras have gone and the world has moved on, let the legacy of this awful tragedy be that we resolve never to forget these people and instead to gear our policies and our thinking towards making their lives better and bringing them into the political process. It is our job as a Government and as a Parliament to show that we are listening and

that we will stand up for them. That is what I am determined we should do. I commend this statement to the House.

9.49 am

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I acknowledge the Prime Minister's apologies for the very late arrival of her statement to my office, and I understand the reasons for it.

I met the survivors at Grenfell Tower, as have a number of colleagues in the House, as I did the very inspiring volunteers co-ordinating so much of the relief effort for families who had lost so much. There is grief, there is anger, and there is also great solidarity in that community. I hope the whole House will join with me in commending the community spirit and public support which helped so many traumatised families, and the amazing response of so many local people and faith groups who rushed to the scene to give clothing, to give food, to give help, and to provide a sort of online restaurant for just about anybody who was helping with the disaster relief. Our love, our condolences and our solidarity go out to those families again today, and in what will be the very difficult days and weeks ahead; many of them will be reliving the trauma of that dreadful night for a lifetime. They were, as the Prime Minister said yesterday, let down, both in the immediate aftermath and so cruelly beforehand, and the public inquiry must establish the extent and by whom.

At least 79 people are dead. It is both a tragedy and an outrage, because every single one of those deaths could and should have been avoided. The Grenfell Tower residents themselves had raised concerns about the lack of fire safety in the block. The Grenfell Action Group had warned:

"It is a truly terrifying thought but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord,"

the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation. The Prime Minister said that it is right that the CEO of Kensington and Chelsea Council has now resigned. It may be right, but why are the political leaders not taking responsibility as well for this whole dreadful event? From Hillsborough, to the child sex abuse scandal, to Grenfell Tower, the pattern is consistent: working-class people's voices are ignored, their concerns dismissed, by those in power.

The Grenfell Tower residents and the north Kensington community deserve answers, and thousands and thousands of people living in tower blocks around the country need very urgent reassurance. Our very brave firefighters must never have to deal with such a horrific incident again. The Prime Minister is right when she talks about the bravery of firefighters running into a burning building; I have spoken to firefighters on many occasions. But they are overstretched and they are traumatised—traumatised by dealing with London Bridge, traumatised by Grenfell Tower—yet they carry on doing it, overstretched and understaffed. We need to look at the whole issue of the security of our fire service.

Those of us with over 30 years' experience in this House would have struggled as constituency MPs under the pressure generated by an incident of this scale. As I said yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) deserves praise for the tireless and

[Jeremy Corbyn]

diligent way she has stood up for her constituents in the very short time since she was thankfully elected to this House. Her constituents need answers. The public inquiry must address, first, the appalling failure of the fire alarms at Grenfell Tower, which meant many residents reported that they were only alerted to the fire by the screams of their neighbours or by young Muslim men banging on the door who had broken from prayers in order to try to save life. Something went catastrophically wrong which lost life.

The inquiry must also address whether the advice given to tenants to stay in their homes was correct; what advice should be given to the people living in the 4,000 other tower blocks around this country in the event of similar disaster; why sprinklers were not installed and whether they now should be retro-fitted into all tower blocks—we need urgent answers to that question—whether the cladding used was illegal, as the Chancellor has suggested, and whether it should be banned entirely; and what wider changes must be urgently made to building regulations. As the Prime Minister indicated in her statement, this is obviously being urgently addressed. The inquiry also needs to address the fire prevention regulations, including the frequency and the enforcement of fire safety checks, because my suspicion is that many local authorities—strapped for cash after seven years of cuts—have cut back on fire testing and cut back on inspections because they simply have not got the staff to do it anymore.

The inquiry must address whether tenant management organisations are responsive enough to their tenants, and what greater powers tenants need, both in council or social housing and in the private sector, to ensure their own safety. It must address whether survivors and people evacuated from adjacent properties were rehoused promptly and adequately. The Prime Minister has addressed some of those matters, but I would be interested in her response to those living nearby who are equally traumatised by the event. Those people should of course be rehoused within the borough, and I hope there will be no increase in their rent.

The inquiry must also address the resources available to the fire and rescue service, and whether response times and capacity are adequate for all areas of the country, since the number of wards in which response time targets are not being met has increased tenfold since 2011. Lessons must be learned in the public inquiry, and a disaster that should never have happened must never happen again. The Government must delay no longer, and must now implement the recommendations of the 2013 inquiry report into the Lakanal House fire. The public inquiry into Grenfell Tower must also establish whether lives could have been saved if those recommendations had been implemented in full, and if the recommendations of the all-party group on fire safety and rescue had been heeded by the Government.

Fire safety measures cannot be left to a postcode lottery, and I therefore ask the Government to make available emergency funds, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) raised yesterday, so that councils can carry out immediate fire safety checks and install sprinklers. The timetable for that must be made known to residents. A huge cost is obviously involved in removing and recladding blocks that are found to have

flammable materials in them, but the resources—the money—must be made available immediately, because it is a huge job of work. The Prime Minister says that those people who are in danger must be moved out of their properties, but this is a massive undertaking and it will require a huge focus of Government resources.

Will the Prime Minister ensure that the counselling and mental health services that she said are now being provided at the Westway sports centre are made available to all the residents of both Grenfell Tower and the areas around it, such as those who witnessed the fire unfold on the Lancaster West estate, and to those in the emergency services who have been through such trauma during the last few days? Counselling and mental health services are important in the days and weeks after a tragedy, but they have to go on for a very long time, because the trauma does not end a few days afterwards.

The public inquiry must report as soon as possible, and changes that can and should have been made must now be made without delay. We must be aware that this has been a wake-up call to the whole country: the fire at Grenfell Tower has taken the lives of people who should be with us and alive and happy today, and residents of tower blocks all over the country are concerned, worried and frightened for their own safety. We need a step change in our attitude towards housing in this country to deal with the permanent housing crisis that so many of our constituents and residents face. We need Government intervention to support local authorities in bringing about safe solutions to the housing crisis so that this tragedy can at least change our attitudes and we can at least say that we as a country will seriously address the housing situation that so many people face. People have died and they will never come back. We have to learn the lessons to make sure that this tragedy is a turning point in our whole attitude, and that never again people die needlessly in a towering inferno, while living in poverty surrounded by a sea of prosperity.

The Prime Minister: May I first join the Leader of the Opposition in commending the work of his new hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad)? I am sure we all remember getting to grips with our first few days as a Member of Parliament, and having to deal with a disaster and tragedy of this sort in her constituency so early on must have been very difficult. I commend her for the work that she has done.

The right hon. Gentleman raised a number of issues, many of which will be matters for the inquiry to get to grips with. I would expect the inquiry to address the responsibility for this issue and the advice given by the fire service. As I said in my statement, we want to ensure that we are able to provide justice to the victims and survivors of this terrible tragedy. I expect the chair of the inquiry to produce an interim report so that we see early lessons. It is important that we know anything that needs to be learned and addressed as soon as possible and that we take action as soon as possible.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the Lakanal House coroner's report in 2013. All the coroner's recommendations from the Lakanal House inquiry have been acted on. It is important to recognise that the coroner did not propose any change to the building regulations. There were issues with the guidance to the building regulations and other issues were raised, and all of those have been acted on.

We will offer rehousing in the borough or in neighbouring boroughs. As I said, a significant number of properties—164 properties—have been identified and are being looked at. A significant number of people have been assessed for their housing needs and some have already been offered housing. It is, of course, up to them whether they accept it or whether other properties need to be offered to them. That process is in hand and I have set the commitment that people will be rehoused within three weeks.

The issue of the tenant management organisation, which the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, has come across loud and clear to me from my conversations with local residents. One of the first acts of the new chief executive of Kensington and Chelsea council will be to look at the tenant management organisation and any action that needs to be taken.

The Leader of the Opposition also referred to Hillsborough and the child sexual abuse inquiry. I was pleased to work with the families from Hillsborough. They should have had justice at a far earlier stage. The issues are ongoing, with the Crown Prosecution Service looking at potential criminal charges, but we have provided an opportunity for the Hillsborough families to know the truth of what happened to their loved ones and for the public to know the truth of Hillsborough.

I was also pleased to set up the child sexual abuse inquiry because, as I said when I did so, I agree that for too long, people have made assumptions about certain people in our society and how they should be treated, and those assumptions are wrong. We need to dig into that and find out why it has happened, and we need to change it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am keen to accommodate the level of interest in this extraordinarily important and grave subject. May I appeal to colleagues to help me to help them? There is a premium upon brevity, which I feel sure will be brilliantly exemplified by Mr Iain Duncan Smith.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister's statement and the actions she said that she and the Government will take. Our hearts and prayers go out to all those who have suffered so terribly and who will continue to suffer in the days to come.

I ask the Prime Minister to add one further remit to the public inquiry: to look at whether the whole process of retrofitting old tower blocks is viable at all and at whether there is a better way to house and support tenants in these areas without the use of the many incredibly badly designed and very faulty tower blocks. Will she ask the public inquiry to look carefully at whether it is feasible to bring some of the blocks down and provide more family friendly housing?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his remarks. He suggests that the inquiry should go a great deal further than looking into this particular instance. We will ensure that the survivors and local residents have an input into the terms of reference of the inquiry so that they can have confidence in it and know that it will produce the results and justice that they need. I will reflect on my right hon. Friend's comments, but it is important, primarily, that the local

residents have confidence in the terms of reference of the inquiry and feel that it will get to the truth as they need it.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): All of us in the House and, I am sure, throughout the entire United Kingdom, welcome the opportunity provided by the Prime Minister's statement this morning. We can all reflect on the scenes that we woke up to last week: the horror, suffering and pain that those who were living in the tower block must have gone through and the agony of seeing the fire spread through that building. I thank the members of the emergency services for putting their lives on the line, in this case and other instances that we have seen over the course of the past few weeks. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to them.

We in the Scottish National party want to work with the Government on these matters. I think the incident last week is a defining moment in the evolution of our society. However, I respectfully say to the Prime Minister that, although she apologised to the Leader of the Opposition for the short notice of her statement, the third party and all parties represented in the House should receive adequate notice. In her statement, the Prime Minister said that the initial failure was compounded by the fact that the support on the ground in the initial hours was not good enough. If the public inquiry makes recommendations on changes that have to be made, I ask that the Government accept those.

If the £5 million that has been put into the initial emergency fund is not sufficient, will the Government commit to doing what they need to in order to make sure that the appropriate financial resources are available? I welcome the Prime Minister's saying that the new housing block that has been built by Berkeley Homes will be made available to some of the families. She talked of families moving in over the summer, but can she be more specific as to when that will happen? Can we make sure that families who wish to live in the local area will have that commitment that housing will be made available? That should be done on the basis that there will be consultation, and that if the first offer is not acceptable, alternatives will be put in place.

Does the Prime Minister agree that the public inquiry should be empowered to consider all the steps that were not taken leading up and contributing to this incident? All those with a legitimate interest must be able to participate. That has to include bereaved families and survivors as well as individuals and organisations with an interest, such as the residents' campaign and local representative organisations. This needs to be about Parliament recognising the significance of what has happened. We should never be in this position again as a country.

I welcome the Prime Minister's remarks about social housing. Let us make sure that we invest in social housing. I grew up in social housing and I fondly remember my childhood. I want people to have the same opportunities that we had to live in social housing of which we can all be proud.

The Prime Minister: I take this opportunity to make clear that the testing facilities that I referred to are open to the devolved Administrations as well. I obviously

[*The Prime Minister*]

encourage anybody in the devolved Administrations to send in samples of such buildings so that they can be tested.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the £5 million fund. If necessary, more money will be made available. As I said, something like £700,000 has already been paid out, and further moneys will be paid out, but we will look at that sum over time.

The planning conditions attached to the Berkeley Homes development have been relaxed to enable work to take place over longer hours, so that the work can be speeded up. The current expectation is that the homes could be available by the end of July, but that is caveated, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman and others will recognise. It is dependent on the work being completed.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the inquiry. It is absolutely crucial that the inquiry looks at how this happened, and part of that will be looking at what led up to the fire, the immediate response to the fire and the aftermath. We need to know why this happened and who was responsible for it. The judge who will chair the inquiry will have a role in determining how the inquiry is handled, in terms of the witnesses that he wishes to take and so forth. As I said, I am clear that we need to ensure that people can have full confidence in this inquiry, which is why I want to see residents involved in setting the terms of reference, so that they know that it is an inquiry that will meet their needs.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Will the Prime Minister encourage local authorities to follow the lead that Barnet Council showed, with an immediate re-inspection of its high-rise blocks and the announcement of a programme of investment in new safety measures to be guided by the fire service, and to include sprinklers where they are needed?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for drawing that to the House's attention and I commend Barnet Council for its action. The Department for Communities and Local Government has asked every local authority to undertake those tests, ensuring the safety of the properties in which they accommodate people.

Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for her kind words—words that must be followed by deeds. I speak on behalf of a traumatised and frightened community, who have little trust in authority. Early reports suggest that there may have been issues with the fire safety audits and that fire regulations were not sufficiently robust. While we wait for the results of the inquiry—I hope it will not be too long—will the Prime Minister commit to providing adequate funds to enable emergency services, particularly the London fire brigade, to be fully funded to carry out their work, and reverse the cuts to the funding of fire services that have made their lives so difficult? Those people have, quite literally, our lives in their hands. In short, where is the funding?

The Prime Minister: When I spoke to the emergency services on my first visit to Kensington, one of the challenges I gave them was whether they had the resources they needed to do the job that they were doing. They

assured me that they did. Obviously, as I have said, the inquiry will have to look at the whole question of how it was possible for this to happen. I am sure that it will look at the adequacy of the tests that took place on the tower, and the adequacy of any response to the issues. I want the inquiry to find those things out as soon as possible because that could have implications for other local authorities and other blocks around the country, and we want to ensure people's safety.

Mr Speaker: Perhaps I may be the first person publicly to congratulate the hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) on her election to the House, and on being, albeit in the most grave and traumatic circumstances, the first newly elected Member to put a question in this Chamber—and she has done so to the Prime Minister. I congratulate the hon. Lady on her contribution.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for her statement and the reassurance that she has provided. I also take the opportunity to thank my two boroughs—Richmond and Kingston—on conducting urgent reviews and providing reassurance to residents.

There will be people in positions of authority who probably fear the implications of a proper public inquiry, and there are likely to be people in the affected community who fear that, consequently, there will not be a full public inquiry. That scepticism will exist, for obvious reasons. I therefore ask the Prime Minister to say a little more about the terms of reference for the public inquiry and explain how local residents will have meaningful input into the way in which they are set.

The Prime Minister: I fully recognise the picture that my hon. Friend set out about the inquiry. That is why it is important that it is judge led. The judge will be completely independent and it will be up to them to determine the witnesses who are called and how they manage the inquiry. That is important, because we want people to have the confidence of knowing that, when the inquiry reports, it will bring out the truth. We also want people to have the confidence to know that actions that arise from the inquiry's findings will be taken and that those responsible will be held to account. On the terms of reference, as I have said, residents will be involved. We are in the process of looking at how that is possible. The judge who leads the inquiry will want to reflect on how they want to speak with and hear from residents. The message that I have had from residents about bringing a survivors' group together as a single voice is important and will be helpful in this regard.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for her statement. The news she has given the House today—that the cladding was indeed combustible, as testing showed—is chilling, and will be horrifying confirmation of what we all saw on our television screens; but it will be even more frightening for others. There are 58 tower blocks in my constituency, and there are thousands all around the country.

May I suggest that the Prime Minister get a grip on this personally, right away, and that what she does—[*Interruption.*] I am just going to make a suggestion, if I may. I suggest that the Prime Minister uses Cobra to call together all local authorities and require them, within a certain timeframe, to check the cladding on every one of their tower blocks. If she has done so

already, I look forward to hearing that, and to hearing about the timescale. She should also give authorities the resources that will enable them to conduct their inspections within a certain timescale, and commit resources that will enable the cladding to be replaced within a certain timescale when others find that it is combustible. That is exactly what Cobra should be used for. It is not good enough just to congratulate or encourage other councils; the Prime Minister must get a grip on this personally.

The Prime Minister said that the Lakanal House coroner's inquest findings had been acted on, but I can tell her that they have not. In 2013, the coroner said that those deaths had been avoidable, that there should have been sprinklers, that there should have been a change in the fire instructions, and that there should be greater supervision of contracts and fire inspections. The Prime Minister said that this was an "unimaginable" tragedy, and that those deaths should not have happened. They would not have happened if the Government had acted on the Lakanal House coroner's inquest rulings.

The Prime Minister: First, let me clarify what I said in my statement. I said that local authorities had been invited to send in samples of cladding on similar buildings; they have done so, and some of the samples have been found to be combustible. It was in relation to that testing that I used the term "combustible". I think it important that I clarify that. As the right hon. and learned Lady suggested, we immediately took the precautionary measure of asking all local authorities to go out, identify blocks with similar cladding, and take measures, together with their local fire and rescue services, to ensure that people in those buildings were safe. Part of that process has involved the testing. As I have said, we stand ready to continue to test for all local authorities that wish to send in samples.

As for the right hon. and learned Lady's description of the coroner's report on Lakanal House, the coroner did not, as I understand it, say that there should be sprinklers in every property of this type. What is important, and what underpinned what she said, is the necessity of ensuring that people living in similar blocks are able to feel reassured about their safety. We have taken the steps: local authorities have been working with fire and rescue services. Once the tests on the cladding have been given to local authorities, they are acting immediately to ensure the safety of people within. There are a number of steps that they can undertake, and we expect them to do what is necessary.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): In recent years, London has seen many high-quality high rises being built, often financed with hot foreign money, and then left empty for years, sometimes with their kitchens clingfilmed and pristine. We all understand that a landlord will need to leave an apartment empty from time to time, but does the Prime Minister think that when brand-new properties are left empty for many years it is right that she discuss with her right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer changing the taxation regime so that, as happens in New York City, such people face punitive taxes?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. During his time in the House, he has taken a long interest in issues related to housing. I understand that the number of empty homes is currently low, but, of

course, we always look to see what we can do. We want to ensure that people are housed, and that properties are being used for the purpose for which they were built.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): If the building regulations are fit for purpose, all of us, whether rich or poor, should be protected from fire in our own homes. What assurance can the Prime Minister give that the review of building regulations and Approved Document B, as recommended by the Lakanal House coroner, will be carried out as urgently as possible, and that the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, which has historically undertaken this work, will be recalled as a matter of urgency? That could be done in tandem with the public inquiry; it would not be necessary to wait until the end of it.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman, given his background, has a particular interest in these issues. The coroner's recommendation was in relation not to changing the regulations but to the guidance that followed the regulations. That work is indeed in hand. My understanding is that the fire regulations have not been changed since 2006. Obviously, that will be one of the issues that the public inquiry will want to look at.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The amount of remedial work that may need to be carried out on a limited timescale will possibly mean that great pressures will fall on the workforce that are capable of carrying out that remedial work. Will the Prime Minister ensure that her colleagues in government will make all the necessary funds and resources available if we need to recruit or train further personnel to carry out remedial work on those blocks that fail the test?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend raises an important point. We need to ensure that the resources are there in every sense for the remedial work that is necessary. We are looking at a variety of ways in which we can ensure that that is indeed the case.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): All Members, across the House, will have mentored and employed young people and want to see them flourish. My wife, principally, and I mentored, employed and encouraged a young woman called Khadija Saye, who, with her mother, lost her life on the 20th floor of Grenfell Tower. I spoke to her father on Tuesday and he described, with anguish, obviously, losing his only daughter. We had a discussion about how he would cope in going to the mortuary to visit his daughter in the state that she is clearly in. On their behalf, and on behalf of all the people who died, I urge the Prime Minister to say something more about the criminal investigation that was announced last week. She has talked about the public inquiry, but she understands that most people see this as a crime and they know that rich and powerful organisations get away with crime. Can she say what resources have been brought to bear for the Metropolitan police? How big are the teams, and why is it that we have not had any commentary about charges, arrests or the seizure of documents?

The Prime Minister: May I first say how sorry I am to hear that the right hon. Gentleman lost a friend in this terrible tragedy? There are obviously many people in that position, but it brings it home to this House and right into the Chamber.

[*The Prime Minister*]

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the issue of bereavement. A family bereavement centre has opened, which provides a suitable place in which people can be counselled. A great deal of thought and care is being undertaken in relation to those families who will, obviously, want to see the bodies of those who died in the fire. This is a very sensitive and difficult matter, as I am sure Members will recognise, and every action is being taken to do this as sensitively and thoughtfully as possible, in consideration of those who have lost loved ones.

A criminal investigation has been opened by the Metropolitan police. The right hon. Gentleman invites me to comment on that in a variety of ways. As he will know, this is an operational matter for the Metropolitan police. It is for them to determine any point at which they have evidence that could lead to charges or prosecutions. We must let the Metropolitan police do their job. They are doing it carefully and properly. I assure him and others that they will get to the truth and leave no stone unturned. If there are charges and prosecutions to be made, they will be.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I attended an understandably heated group discussion with local residents in the shadow of Grenfell Tower last evening. There seemed to be confusion about the coroner's recommendations on the retrofitting of sprinklers. I think that the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) is also unclear on that. The coroner recommended that we should encourage housing providers to retrofit. Despite the fact that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea carried out an £8.7 million refurbishment, it did not retrofit sprinklers. Does the Prime Minister agree that perhaps now is the time to provide incentives for local authorities to retrofit when they carry out such refurbishments?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has rightly identified the recommendation that the coroner made, which was that encouragement be given to landlords to retrofit sprinklers, but I would just say to Members that the situation is not as easy as it would perhaps appear, in that the retrofitting of sprinklers will not be the thing that makes the difference in all cases. There is a whole variety of reasons why that may be the case. Some work has been undertaken on testing the retrofitting of sprinklers in a number of tower blocks in different parts of the country. As I say, it is not just a case of assuming that you can go in and do it and that it is automatically going to work and do the job that is necessary. This is an issue that is being looked at, and it continues to be looked at, but it needs to be done carefully to ensure that any work that is required is genuinely going to operate in a way that will help to keep people safe.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I should like to express my condolences and that of my party to those affected by this disaster, and our praise for the local community and the emergency services, who stepped up in the immediate aftermath when, unfortunately, the local and national authorities failed to do so. I also thank the Prime Minister for this statement today and for setting up the public inquiry. Can she confirm when the work on the guidance on building regulations and

fire safety will be completed? Can she also confirm that as much focus will be put on private blocks—perhaps particularly those that have been converted from office blocks into residential blocks—as is being put on to local authority and housing association blocks? Can she confirm that the Government will immediately ban the use of combustible materials to ensure that such a tragedy cannot happen again?

The Prime Minister: The building regulations set out the materials that are compliant and those that are non-compliant. As we go through this process of looking at the materials that have been used in various blocks, the question of whether they comply with building regulations will need to be looked at. That issue will need to be looked at in relation to the public inquiry.

Work on the guidance for the building regulations is ongoing and, I would expect, imminent—it is not just a question of producing something; various organisations need to be consulted. We need to ensure that when the fire services and police have done their investigation, any action that is necessary immediately as a result of the identification of the cause of the fire and the reason it took such hold—the issue of particular concern—should be taken, and will be taken.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): My right hon. Friend might be interested to know that I spent about three hours on Monday quietly walking around the Grenfell Tower area talking to people. I met traumatised victims who did not want to go into the centres to get help, so clearly people need to go out to them. They were angry that there was no clear housing policy on when and where they were going to be rehoused. Above all, I found an enormous amount of work being done by voluntary bodies—all sorts of bodies—but there was a clear lack of co-ordination on how those bodies were to move forward together. I strongly support what my right hon. Friend has said this morning about establishing a high-level Government taskforce that is able to go into a similar disaster. It should be available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to take over from the immediate Gold Command.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for the work he has done and the feedback he has provided to Ministers following his conversations with residents and victims on the ground. He is absolutely right: the point has been made to key workers that they need to go out to see people, to ensure that they know what is available to them, rather than just expecting them to come into the centre. I can assure him that we are looking actively at what further resilience we can put into the system by establishing the sort of taskforce that he and I have both spoken about. None of us wants to see a circumstance like this happen again, but we must ensure that there is full resilience, where disasters take place.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): While many of the questions that those affected by this disaster want answers to will have to await the outcome of the inquiry, it is surely possible to answer one factual question now. Was cladding of the type used in Grenfell Tower compliant with the fire safety and building regulations applicable when the refurbishment was undertaken—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: My understanding is that the fire service and BRE, which was on the scene early to look at that issue, have been identifying the cause of the fire and any contributory factors. They are testing the cladding on the building, and they expect to make the results public in, I think, the next 48 hours.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm whether the firefighters who attended this harrowing scene, and their families, will get the psychological support that they may well need in the months and years ahead? Will she commit to report back to the House on how that will be set up for them?

The Prime Minister: Yes. My hon. Friend raises an important issue, which the Leader of the Opposition also touched on. I can confirm that we are ensuring that that support and counselling will be available. There will be further updates to the House on the response to the Grenfell Tower fire, and that will be an issue to be included.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Further to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), the cladding on the tower is a standard product that is available for sale. I do not understand why the Prime Minister cannot tell us whether that product is compliant with the building regulations for a tower that is this high. Why can she not tell us the answer? Will she also confirm that the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, which should be looking at part B of the building regulations on fire safety, has not yet actually met to look at how the regulations could be improved?

The Prime Minister: I will add to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), and I ask hon. Members to remember that a criminal investigation is taking place in relation to this matter. The testing of the cladding and of the materials used is being undertaken, and a statement will be made by the police and the fire service within the next 48 hours.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): The London Resilience Forum has a number of multi-agency plans for things such as mass shelter, mass fatalities and mass casualties. Can we confirm whether those plans were fully implemented? Can we also ensure that what lessons we learn from the inquiry process are fed back into resilience forums, both in London and around the country, to ensure that the lessons are promptly implemented?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He obviously has experience from when he was on the London Assembly and took a particular interest in the London Fire Brigade and fire service matters. I can indeed confirm that we have already looked at the whole question of resilience forums around the country. We will ensure that any lessons learned from the Grenfell Tower fire are fed into those resilience teams and forums, but we also need to ensure that resilience forums around the country are as resilient as they need to be in providing support should any disaster happen. We have seen this issue in relation to other

disasters, such as flooding. We need to ensure that resilience forums are operating as they should at every local level.

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister please confirm when the judge will be appointed? Following the comments from my Opposition colleagues, I would be grateful for some clarification on whether she is advising us that she does not know whether the cladding was compliant with building regulations. The question that she has been asked is about whether the material was compliant; is she advising us that it needs to be tested before she can give us a reply?

The Prime Minister: As I have said, the material is being tested. The results of those tests will be—*[Interruption.]* The information that the fire service and police are able to give publicly they will give; this is part of the criminal investigation. *[Interruption.]* It is. Hon. Members may shake their heads, but let me make this point: they want to ensure that if there are criminal charges to be brought, those charges are indeed brought, and we must therefore ensure that we give the police the opportunity to do the job that they undertake and that nothing we do prejudices that.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to the publication of an early interim report. After the Croydon tram crash last year, the Rail Accident Investigation Branch published two interim reports within three months, which identified the immediate cause of the crash and so action could be taken. Will she assure the House that a similar approach will be taken with this interim report?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for that. It was very important that interim reports came out quickly in relation to the Croydon inquiry. I can confirm that I fully expect the judge to bring out an interim report. May I say to the hon. Member for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya) that I am sorry I did not answer her first question about the judge? I would expect within the next few days to be able to announce the name of the judge. We very much want to ensure that when the judge takes charge of this inquiry people feel, as I said earlier, that they can have full confidence in it, and so we are taking steps to ensure that that is the case.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Sympathies are not enough but, on behalf of my party, I offer them to all who have suffered. I also express my gratitude to emergency services officers, who showed the dedication of heroes in unimaginable conditions. Criminal investigations are only to be expected, but penalising individuals is partial retribution; those in government should search their souls. Will the Prime Minister commit to ensure that future policy, legislation and resources will mean a disaster of this magnitude can never happen again in a 21st century, first world country?

The Prime Minister: First, may I congratulate the hon. Lady on her appointment as leader of the Plaid Cymru Members in this House? I assure her that we are doing everything we can, and, obviously, the inquiry will play an important part, through its identification of action that needs to be taken, in ensuring that a disaster such as this can never happen again.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if the cladding is found to be illegal and other research finds that other towers have been similarly clad, the public inquiry will extend its remit to look at investigations into all towers that are similarly clad?

The Prime Minister: If illegal activity has taken place, that is a matter for the police and it is part of the criminal investigation they will be undertaking. It is not just a question of what the inquiry does; it is a question of what we are doing now in relation to other tower blocks, which is why we are encouraging local authorities, housing associations and indeed private landlords to send in their material for testing.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): As the leader of a party that is responsible for seven years of austerity, which has cut 56% of the cash available to my local authority in the past seven years, and has spent its time talking about regulation as a bad thing, is the right hon. Lady now going to apologise to the country for the state of local government, when the richest borough in London could not cope with this emergency, while at the same time, it was giving money back to its council tax payers?

The Prime Minister: We are dealing with the aftermath of a terrible disaster that has led to people losing their lives and others losing their homes and everything that they owned. We are ensuring that we are putting the steps in place. As I have said, I recognise that initially the response was not good enough, which is why we have stepped up that response. It is why—I did not respond to the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), but I said this in my statement—I have indeed been chairing the Cobra meetings myself. And it is why we have been putting extra resource in, to ensure that that response is suitable. This will be an issue of looking at the regulations. As I said, my understanding is that these regulations were established in 2006, and we will be looking at those. The inquiry will look at them and at how they were applied; it will look at the actions of the local authority; and I am sure it will look at the issues that have been raised about the residents' complaints in advance of this disaster about the tenant management organisation, and it will get to the bottom of who is responsible.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. As befits the occasion, these are thoughtful and solemn exchanges, but I must advise the House that progress thus far has been very slow. I am keen to try to accommodate the extent of the interest, and therefore I appeal to colleagues now to confine themselves to pithy, short, single-sentence questions, of which the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) is a notable exponent.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

At the end of her compassionate and comprehensive statement, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that we had to think about the people living very different lives from ourselves. As I am sure she knows, in opinion surveys going back over decades people

never said they wanted to live in tower blocks. Can we change public policy so that tower blocks can become a thing of the past?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. There are many people who do not wish to live in tower blocks, and there are some who are perfectly comfortable living in tower blocks. What we have to look at, however, is the approach taken to social housing; that is one of the lessons that comes from this disaster.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I do not want there to be an outbreak of sibling rivalry, so I must now call Maria Eagle.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): The Prime Minister confirmed in her statement that testing arrangements have discovered combustible cladding on some tower blocks in other parts of the country. Given that people living in those tower blocks are perhaps going to fear more than others the consequences of that discovery, what steps can the Prime Minister take to ensure that the landlords and the local authorities where these tower blocks are located can deal swiftly with the consequences of this discovery?

The Prime Minister: That work is already being undertaken. First, local authorities and housing associations have undertaken the testing work of their blocks, and we encourage private landlords to do that, too, to ensure the fire safety. We encourage everybody to send in samples so that we can undertake this checking by lab testing. Local authorities are immediately informed if the material is combustible. They will then be looking, with their local fire services, at ensuring the safety of those buildings. That will be done in a number of ways, but of course there is a responsibility to ensure that people are housed safely, and the Government are working with local authorities to ensure that.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend's statement and the extraordinary degree of personal responsibility she is taking in this response. Have she and her officials had the opportunity to look at reports by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and its predecessor Committee under Dr Tony Wright, which repeatedly recommended that the House of Commons should have more of a role in the setting up of such inquiries? Will she consider asking the House to establish a special Select Committee very quickly, to look at the terms of reference, to have a pre-appointment hearing of the chair of the inquiry, and to set the budget and the timetable, and make sure this public inquiry has cross-party and public confidence, which so many public inquiries have failed to have?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important issue about inquiries, and of course we always look carefully at the reports of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and its predecessor Committee. What is important is that that we get this inquiry up and running with appropriate speed and, most importantly to me, that the residents affected

have confidence in it. Ensuring that the residents feel this inquiry is genuinely going to get to the truth for them is key.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): I am still waiting to hear the Prime Minister say that she will underwrite the costs to local authorities of inspection and urgent remedial action, given the cuts of up to a third and a half in local authority budgets and housing providers being required to implement a rent cut, which has squeezed their budgets. We must not have a postcode lottery in safety provision, and that requires a commitment now from the Government to underwrite these costs. Will the Prime Minister do that today—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: We are providing testing facilities to local authorities and working with them to identify their needs, their requirements and the response that they need to take. We will work with them to ensure that they can respond in the way that is necessary.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): Will the Prime Minister please confirm that residents will be housed as close as possible to where they lived, to ensure that they are close to friends, family and support networks?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can give that reassurance. It is about being close to friends and family, but it is also important for children to be able to go to their local schools.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister talked about looking to the future and about those whose lifestyles are far removed from the lifestyles enjoyed by many here in Westminster. That is the reality in my constituency, where there is overcrowding, with two families living in many homes, and where homelessness is the worst it has ever been. Will she live true to her word and take a personal lead in taking forward plans to ensure that we deliver not just more housing, but more genuinely affordable housing for the people who need it?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government published proposals on housing before the general election. We want to ensure that there are more affordable homes and that more houses are being built. We are putting half a billion pounds into dealing with homelessness.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): May I thank the Prime Minister for her detailed and compassionate statement? Does she agree that, although there are obviously legitimate questions surrounding the Grenfell tragedy and it is absolutely right that they must be asked, we should exercise caution in attributing blame or condemnation before we know the facts? As a former journalist, I feel really strongly about this. Scaremongering does not help anybody; getting to the bottom of things does.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right: it is important that the evidence is identified, that the issue is properly considered, that everybody is able to give their views and evidence to the inquiry, and that the inquiry is able to get to the truth, find the result and find out what happened. Obviously the fire services and the police are looking at the immediate cause of the fire

and will make public any statements that they are able to, but the inquiry will get to the truth. It is important that we allow the inquiry to identify responsibility.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): Leeds City Council has responded swiftly by communicating with tenants and residents in all 116 blocks and testing the cladding, none of which uses the same material as was used in Kensington. Following on from the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), we now need to know that whatever recommendations are made on sprinklers, cladding, fire alarms and other remedial work, it will be central Government who provide the funds to ensure that tenants and residents in all the thousands of tower blocks throughout the country are safe.

The Prime Minister: I thought I had responded to a number of questions on this. The Government are working with local authorities. We will ensure that any essential works in terms of remedial action necessary for the safety of these blocks in relation to fire are undertaken. We will work with local authorities to identify how that—

Maria Eagle: Just say it!

The Prime Minister: There will be different circumstances in different local authorities. We will ensure that the work can be undertaken.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): May I commend the Prime Minister for her statement and for talking about the public inquiry? From my experience of the public inquiry in my constituency that lasted for two and a half years, I know that it is vital that the inquiry is thorough but also as swift as possible. I urge whomsoever is appointed to talk to people such as Sir Robert Francis, who chaired the public inquiry in my constituency, to find out from his experience how that can best be achieved.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point, and I will certainly pass that on. I absolutely agree that it is important that this is done as quickly as possible.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I welcome the Prime Minister's statement that the Government will pay for legal representation at the inquiry for those affected by the fire. Will she confirm that that means that not only victims but tenants' groups will be given public funding for independent and separate legal representation sufficient to enable them to have a voice equal to that of local and national Government and the private management company? I ask because I understand that the tenants association was not allowed legal representation in the Lakanal House fire inquiry.

The Prime Minister: One of the experiences that came out of the Hillsborough inquiry was the importance of ensuring that those who were affected had appropriate legal representation, and the Government did fund that legal representation to enable them to have the strength of voice that they needed in that inquiry. Of course, as the hon. and learned Lady will be aware, with respect to the way in which the inquiry is conducted, the witnesses who are called and the representations that will be

[*The Prime Minister*]

received, there will be an element of the judge deciding how he wants to conduct the inquiry. For those who require legal representation, that will be funded by the Government, and I have not set any limits in relation to the types of body or the individuals for whom that will be available.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): My right hon. Friend was absolutely right to highlight the incredible work of the brave firefighters who attended the scene in the immediate aftermath of the incident, but will she ensure not only that they are properly recognised for their herculean efforts, but that any welfare needs that arise are met immediately?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Support is being given to the firefighters, and indeed to the police and others who attended the scene, because they, too, could potentially suffer trauma as a result of what they have seen, so that support will be available.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Prime Minister, in concluding her statement, said that we should

“resolve never to forget these people”.

I would like to ask her who she thinks forgot these people. Was it the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer, who defunded local authorities, including my own, which is still struggling with the consequences of the New Ferry explosion? Was it former Ministers who ignored pleas from this House on fire safety? Or was it her, who has seen other people in Britain as “these people”, rather than as our friends and neighbours?

The Prime Minister: I think that the best response I can give the hon. Lady on that matter is to refer her to the remarks I made on the steps of Downing Street when I became Prime Minister about a country that works for everyone.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I note that the Prime Minister said in her statement that all social landlords have been instructed to carry out additional fire safety checks, but that private landlords will be advised that they have the option of taking up the same facility. Can we ensure that the inquiry looks at both private and social tower blocks, because all citizens should be equal when it comes to safety and assurance?

The Prime Minister: The inquiry will obviously focus on what happened at Grenfell Tower, but any implications of the inquiry may very well affect not just social landlords, but private landlords.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): The Prime Minister has already been asked this question several times and failed to answer it, so I will give her another opportunity. Will the Government fully commit to meeting the cost of proper and appropriate safety checks, to fully funding the recommendations and schemes for retrofitting sprinklers, and to meeting any other associated costs?

The Prime Minister: I have answered that; I have made it clear that where work is necessary, resources will be available to ensure that it can be undertaken. But it is for the Government to work with local authorities to ensure that that takes place.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The families of the victims are entitled to the truth—not speculation or conjecture, but the truth, based on evidence—so my right hon. Friend was absolutely right to set up the public inquiry, but can we ensure that an early date is agreed for publication of an interim report? In this case, perhaps more than any other, justice delayed is justice denied.

The Prime Minister: I would hope and expect that the judge, when appointed—obviously, that individual will be independent—will indicate publicly when they expect to be able to publish an interim report, so that people can have that confidence.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister confirm that the 68 flats in the Berkeley Homes Kensington Row development that are to be allocated to the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire are already designated as social housing? What we need in places such as west London, where for many people social housing is the only affordable housing, is large investment in new affordable housing, not rearranging the same pot. Opposition Members will remain very sceptical about her conversion to social housing until she starts providing it, not just talking about it.

The Prime Minister: The important point about the Berkeley Homes development is that it is being ring-fenced for people who have been affected by the Grenfell Tower fire. That is the significance of this; it will be available purely for the people who have lost their home and been displaced as a result of this tragedy.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): We have heard that the residents of Grenfell Tower had spoken out about their fears but not been listened to, like so many of our constituents, on whose behalf we, as MPs, frequently write to organisations asking for them to be given a fair hearing, despite the dedication of many thousands of staff. I ask my right hon. Friend to look at the management systems and culture in organisations that serve the public to work out what needs to change to ensure that every citizen of this country, whoever and wherever they are, are not just heard but listened to.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important matter. We must ensure that organisations that have a responsibility to the public do indeed listen to the public. With regard to any future disasters that should take place, I am considering the concept of an independent public advocate—somebody who can ensure that answers are given. They should ensure that people get not just the support that they need, but the answers that they need.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Obviously, many have paid tribute to the fire and rescue workers who put their lives in danger and who may still be feeling the trauma from that. As a surgeon of more than 30 years, I wish to highlight the fact that NHS staff will also be traumatised, because there is nothing more horrific than dealing with the victims of burns. In the autumn statement of 2015, the former Chancellor identified £800 million to be taken from the new housing bonus scheme to make up the shortfall in social care. Will the current Chancellor now reverse that?

Mr Speaker: The erudition of the hon. Lady's inquiry was equalled only by its length, and we need to be shorter from now on.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. As I have said, I visited one of the hospitals that had taken in victims and can say that, obviously, those NHS staff did a wonderful job as well. Here in London NHS staff have dealt with not only the Grenfell Tower disaster, but the terrorist attacks that have taken place. As she said, those NHS staff deserve support as do others in the emergency services to whom we referred earlier.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): As a representative of an area of the country that has no tower blocks, I know that the overwhelming wish of my constituents is for us to have timely implementation of any recommendations that come out of a public inquiry in a non-partisan manner. They recognise that that may come at a considerable cost to the public purse. Is the Prime Minister aware that, across the country, that is the will of many people, and that is an acceptable cost?

The Prime Minister: Yes, and it is absolutely the case with any recommendations that come out of this public inquiry, because those recommendations will be about keeping people safe, and action will be taken on those recommendations.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am keen to accommodate the remaining interest, but it must be pithily conveyed.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I have a very quick question. Will the one-in, two-out approach to the regulatory “burden”—so-called—now be abandoned for fire safety?

The Prime Minister: We have always taken the issue of regulations in relation to safety very, very seriously indeed. The hon. Lady might know that when I was Home Secretary I was very clear that all regulation is not bad regulation; there is good regulation, which we need to ensure that we get right. The public inquiry will be asking that very question about fire regulation.

Mr Speaker: I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) on her succinctness. It is clear that she has now volunteered to author the textbook for distribution to colleagues.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I am sure that the Prime Minister will share my view that it seems almost inconceivable that an organisation should spend £8.7 million on refurbishing a tower block and not include inflammable cladding and a sprinkler system. Will she confirm that, when we have the outcome of the public inquiry, there will be an opportunity to debate it on the Floor of the House, and time made available for any necessary legislation?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I am happy to say that it would be appropriate for this House to have an opportunity to debate the outcome of the public inquiry and to look at those issues.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We will have to wrap up at 10 past 11, so we will do what we can between now and then.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Residents of Grenfell Tower warned the housing provider of the dangers and said that it would take a fire in a tower block for notice to be taken. Will the Prime Minister relook at the Localism Act 2011, which currently requires residents to allow for eight weeks before they can make a complaint to the ombudsman for a matter to be taken up through their Members of Parliament?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising an issue that has not been raised with me before. I will look at the Localism Act. I think that there are reasons why that period of time was put into the Act. She is right that the issue of the response of the tenant management organisation has been raised, and that it needs to be looked at by the inquiry as it looks into the reasons for the fire.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Will the results of the individual examinations to which the Prime Minister referred be produced as they become available, or will they all be subjected to the public examination? If the former, may we have a timetable for that?

The Prime Minister: I assume that my hon. Friend is talking about the tests on the cladding—

John Howell *indicated assent*.

The Prime Minister: As regards the tests on the cladding, as soon as the results are available—the test can be done within hours of the samples being received—the local authorities, housing associations or private landlords will be informed of them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. A single sentence, and a short one, from Jack Dromey.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Fire sprinklers save lives. May I correct the Prime Minister, because actually the inquest recommended that the Department issue guidance to all providers of high-rise blocks that they should retrofit sprinklers? There are 213 blocks with 10,000 households in Birmingham. Will the Prime Minister agree now to act on the advice given four years ago, retrofit sprinklers and have the Government pay for it?

The Prime Minister: I point out to the hon. Gentleman that the recommendation was that the Department “encourage providers of housing in high rise residential buildings containing multiple domestic premises to consider the retro fitting of sprinkler systems.”

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): May I ask my right hon. Friend whether the inquiry will look at the safety of tall buildings in which people work as well as those in which people live?

The Prime Minister: I think it is important that when the inquiry looks at the implications of the fire, it assesses them for all tall buildings, not just those in which people live. Indeed, we are ensuring that we

[*The Prime Minister*]

consider other tall buildings that might have been clad in a similar way, which might not be residential properties but used for other purposes.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister please tell us why she will not choose to show leadership, require all councils to retrofit flats and provide the resources?

The Prime Minister: I made the point earlier that we need to ensure that any accommodation provided by local authorities or housing associations is safe. People are making assumptions about the work that needs to be done to ensure that. What needs to happen on the ground is for the local authority or housing association—the landlord—to work with the fire and rescue service to ensure that they can provide that safety.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): When the Prime Minister considers her suggestion of a civil disaster taskforce, will she bear in mind one of the lessons of the severe Gloucestershire floods of 2007, which was to have a single leader at gold command responsible for co-ordinating all the different groups and controlling the media and information?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. We will consider that. Putting it in place here, with John Barradell as gold command, has helped to move things forward and ensure that the response has improved.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): When an independent safety review of a block of flats recommends retrofitting sprinklers, or major refurbishment, will the Government fund it?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's question seemed to be about any blocks of flats in the country, whether they be in private or public sector ownership—
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: What we are doing is ensuring first of all that the fire service and landlords—local authorities and housing associations—assess what is needed for the safety of those properties. Where action is needed and work is needed, the Government will work with those landlords to ensure that that can be done.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): The Prime Minister concluded her statement by saying that it was the Government's job to show that it is listening. Will she listen to the experts in the Fire Brigades Union and reverse the cuts to the fire and rescue service as well as retrofitting sprinklers in all high-rise residential accommodation?

The Prime Minister: As I have already said on the issue of sprinklers, some tests on retrofitting have been undertaken across the country, but it is not as simple as saying that retrofitting sprinklers is the one thing we need to do. There are a variety of ways in which action needs to be taken in blocks and what needs to happen is for the experts to assess that for every block.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Communities Secretary has demanded that the chief executive of Kensington and Chelsea Council resigns. Should Councillor Paget-Brown resign?

The Prime Minister: That matter will be considered by the appropriate group on Kensington and Chelsea Council.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): If Bristol City Council comes to the conclusion that essential work is needed on its tower blocks, will the Government fund it? If so, how soon will we get the money?

The Prime Minister: If the decision is made, in conjunction with the fire and rescue service, that work needs to be done on those tower blocks, there will be a discussion between the authority and the Department for Communities and Local Government about how that work can be undertaken and the provision of resources for that work.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I know that the Prime Minister believes that politicians should be accountable for their actions or their inactions. On that basis, has she told the leader of Kensington and Chelsea Council that he should go because of the appalling way in which this tragedy has been handled?

The Prime Minister: I have had a conversation with the leader of Kensington and Chelsea Council. I told him that he needed to ensure that residents, victims and survivors of this terrible disaster were being given the help and support they need. We have now added more help and support to ensure that that is happening on the ground.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In paying more attention to social housing, will the Prime Minister pledge to review the right-to-buy discount policy, the implicit message from Government that renting is not aspirational enough and how the one-for-one replacement process is managed, and will she allow greater building of council houses?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the housing White Paper produced by the Government earlier this year, he will see that we clearly expect there to be a diversity of ways in which people will be in their homes. Some wish to own their homes and some wish to rent. Some wish to have rent-to-buy schemes and others wish to have shared ownership schemes. I want there to be diversity to suit people and their circumstances.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): Both the fire stations in my constituency are closing as a direct result of Government cuts, so will the Government now take action and increase funding to Merseyside fire and rescue service?

The Prime Minister: Fire services across the country are ensuring that they have the appropriate response to the fires with which they are dealing. Importantly, urban search and rescue as well as the London Fire Brigade were available for the Grenfell Tower fire. The resources were there and they were able to take the action that they took.

Mr Speaker: Short sentences—Matt Western.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I have heard the word “encouragement” used a lot today. In my experience, that word is not necessarily useful when we are talking about a tragedy of this magnitude. Markets do not work with encouragement; they work with regulation. There has been an explosion in the number of student properties built in the private sector in recent years. I suggest that it is incumbent on the Government to make it mandatory for not just the public sector, but the private sector to use their facilities and test all these properties.

The Prime Minister: There are fire safety and building regulations in place. Landlords have a responsibility for ensuring the safety of their properties. We are ensuring that facilities are available to them free of charge. I say, once again, that local authorities and housing associations are sending in samples. I encourage them and others to do so. As I said, the checking facilities are also available to the devolved Administrations.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister assure me that she will work with the devolved Administrations on the lesson-learning process, including with the Welsh Government, who have announced an expert group to do just that in recent days?

The Prime Minister: We are already talking to the devolved Administrations about the lessons and anything that is coming out so far, and we will continue to do so.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It has already become apparent that landlords do not always know who occupies their properties, and the vulnerabilities of certain tenants. Will the Prime Minister ensure that we investigate opportunities for data sharing between, for example, local authorities, social services departments, schools and registered social landlords?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises an interesting issue. At the heart of this is ensuring that the service given to people interacting with various Government Departments is focused on and identifies their particular needs. I will consider the issue of data sharing.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Cuts have consequences. According to Home Office figures, the number of home fire safety checks has fallen by 25% since 2010. Will the Prime Minister now give the service the funding it needs to carry out 100% of the checks required?

The Prime Minister: The fire and rescue service obviously does conduct checks. It does that in relation to residential properties of these sorts of tower blocks owned by local authorities and housing associations. It does so in conjunction with those landlords, and some of those checks will be conducted by landlords themselves.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister meet urgently the fire and rescue service to discuss the advice given to residents of tower blocks as, sadly, it would seem that the advice given to the residents of Grenfell Tower to stay in their flats may have been erroneous?

The Prime Minister: The fire and rescue service has representation at the meetings that I have been chairing in relation to the response to Grenfell Tower. The issue of the advice that has been given to residents has been raised with it. Obviously this matter will need reflection and consideration, and I would expect it also to be one that the inquiry will look at.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): May I ask that as part of the inquiry an assessment is carried out of the capacity of the fire service to respond to incidents such as this, particularly with reference to crewing and high-reach appliances?

The Prime Minister: The fire service was able to respond in this instance, but of course when the inquiry looks at these issues I would expect that to be one that it considers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Mr Shannon—15 seconds maximum.

Jim Shannon: There are 32 high-rise tower blocks in Northern Ireland where safety tests have been carried out. When it comes to the lessons learned and the suggestions and recommendations made, may I ask that the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive be made aware of those?

The Prime Minister: We will indeed do that. This allows me to say to the hon. Gentleman that I hope that the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive will be formed such that they are in a position for us to give them that information.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Prime Minister very warmly for her time this morning, and all colleagues for their spirited co-operation on this very important and grave occasion.

Terror Attacks

11.11 am

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the terrorist attacks we have seen since Parliament last sat.

There has been no summer like it. When we rose seven weeks ago, we left this House in the wake of the worst terrorist attack our country had seen in over a decade, with Khalid Masood trying to strike at the heart of our democracy. He was foiled that day by one of our brave police officers. But tragically it has proved to be the first of many attempts to bring terror and hate to our streets. Two months later, a cowardly and devastating attack in Manchester left 22 people dead and 59 injured after a suicide bomber targeted children at a concert in the Manchester Arena. On 3 June, a van was deliberately driven into pedestrians on London Bridge before three men got out of the vehicle and began stabbing people in nearby Borough Market. Eight people were killed and 48 injured. And then on Monday, almost exactly one year after Jo Cox was brutally murdered in Birstall, we woke to the news of the return of far-right terror, with a man viciously driving into a group of Muslim worshippers in north London. One man who had fallen ill before the attack died, and nine others were treated in hospital. Westminster, the Manchester Arena, London Bridge, and now Finsbury Park: 36 innocent people dead and over 150 hospitalised; a tragic loss of innocent life.

Last week, I met a mother and father who had lost their daughter in the vicious attacks on London Bridge. She had been stabbed while out celebrating her new job with a friend in Borough Market. Just under two weeks before, she planned to be at the arena in Manchester where Salman Abedi committed his heinous crimes, but she decided not to use her ticket. She had come to London to enjoy a wonderful trip away—a once-in-a-lifetime experience. But instead it was the last trip she ever made. I know everyone in this House will want to join me in expressing our sorrow for the pain her family will be feeling, and all those families who have lost loved ones will be feeling, as well as passing on our thoughts and prayers for those victims who are still trying to recover from the trauma and tragedy of these events.

I also know that the House will want to join me in acknowledging the incredible efforts of our emergency services during this difficult period. The events of recent months serve to remind us of the bravery, professionalism and, above all, incredible sacrifice made by those who work to keep us safe.

As Home Secretary, there is nothing more saddening than standing before Parliament to deliver a statement like this. These acts of terrorism represent the very worst of humanity. They seek to spread fear, intolerance and hate. Countering this threat has always been a crucial part of the work of this Government. That was why we introduced measures to disrupt the travel of foreign fighters, and why we passed the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, which gives the police and intelligence services more powers and the tools they need to keep the public safe. It was also why, just seven weeks ago, we legislated to strengthen our response to terrorist financing with the Criminal Finances Act 2017.

We have protected overall police funding in real terms since 2015, increased counter-terrorism budgets and funded an uplift in the number of armed police officers. We are now in the process of recruiting over 1,900 additional security and intelligence staff. The Channel programme, which offers voluntary, tailored programmes of support to people assessed as being at risk of radicalisation, has supported over 1,000 at-risk individuals since 2012. Following referrals from the counter-terrorism internet referral unit, social media providers have removed 270,000 pieces of illegal terrorist material since February 2010.

However, we are entering a new phase of global terrorism, and many of the challenges that we face are unprecedented. We now believe we are experiencing a new trend in the threat we face. Between June 2013 and the Westminster bridge attack in March this year, the security services foiled 13 plots linked to or inspired by Islamist extremists, but just since then, we have seen five plots prevented as well as three such Islamist extremist plots succeed, and of course the appalling attack at Finsbury Park earlier this week.

We must therefore do more. We must do more to defeat ideologies of hatred by turning people's minds away from violence and towards pluralistic British values. We must make sure that these ideologies are not able to flourish in the first place. We must do more to force tech companies to take down terror-related content from their platforms. We must also do more to identify, challenge and stamp out the extremism that lurks in our communities. That is why we will set up a commission for countering extremism. For just as the Labour Government in the 1970s set us on a course to tackling racial inequality in this country by setting up the Commission for Racial Equality, we need to—and must—do more to tackle the extremists who seek to radicalise and weaponise young people in Britain today.

Doing more also means asking difficult questions about what has gone wrong. In the light of the terrorist attacks in London and Manchester, Britain's counter-terrorism strategy will be reviewed to make sure that the police and the security services have what they need to keep us safe. In addition, there will be a review of the handling of recent terror attacks to look at whether lessons can be learned about our approach, and I am pleased to announce that David Anderson, the former independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, will oversee it.

What we have witnessed in Manchester and London are the depraved actions of murderers intent on tearing our country apart, but each act of hate has been met by overwhelming defiance. In Borough Market, I recently saw stallholders dishing olives out into plastic pots, shoppers searching for delicious treats and tourists flicking through guidebooks in the shadow of the Shard. Rather than being divided by recent violence, people seemed even closer together. We should follow the example of the traders and the shoppers of Borough Market. Terrorists want us to fear and to turn on one another, but we will never give terrorists what they want. We will stand together, and we will make the point that terrorists will never win, and that our values, our country and our unity will prevail. I commend this statement to the House.

11.18 am

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Opposition are grateful to the Home Secretary for her statement. We would like to offer our condolences to all the families of the victims of the Westminster, Manchester, and London bridge and Borough Market attacks and, most recently, the Finsbury Park attack—36 innocent people dead, 150 people hospitalised, with too many families to whom children or parents will never come home, too many people, particularly children, who have seen sights that they may never be able to unsee, and whole communities traumatised.

The Opposition commend all the emergency services, including the police, the fire service, the British Transport police and NHS staff, for their swift action, for running towards danger and for coming in off shift, which undoubtedly prevented worse injuries and saved lives.

I would like to say a word about the imam at the Finsbury Park mosque. He put himself at risk to protect and defend the alleged assailant, who had driven over so many people outside the mosque. I believe that this imam exemplifies the best of the values of Islam, such as peace and justice, as well as the best of British values.

I would also like to say a word about the community around the Finsbury Park mosque. I was there this week and I met people of all faiths—Christian leaders, Jewish leaders, including my constituents Rabbi Gluck and Rabbi Pinter, and of course Muslim leaders—working together to heal the community and take the community forward. I believe that the way in which multi-faith and inter-community co-operation is working in practice in that area of London shows us the way forward in the long run in contesting the ideology of fear, violence and terror.

The variety of the attacks and the varied backgrounds of their perpetrators reveal that we face multiple threats. No single type of person and no single community is the sole source of these attacks. We all face these attacks and we must all face them together. Of course, the blame for the attacks lies solely with the perpetrators and any murderous supporters and enablers they may have had, but it is reasonable for this House to say that the role of Government is to secure the safety of our citizens, and it is reasonable for the House to ask whether everything has been done that could reasonably have been done.

I noted the actions that the Government have taken in the Home Secretary's statement. Largely, the Opposition support them, but we warn against an emphasis on more legislation, rather than looking at resources. We will look at all legislative proposals that the Government bring forward on their merits, but we believe that resources are at the heart of this matter, not just new legislation. In that view, we are supported by Max Hill, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation. His objective view is that the current powers are sufficient. He told the BBC after the Prime Minister's speech in which she called for more powers:

"My view coming into the scrutiny which we are told the prime minister wants to conduct is that we do have the appropriate laws in place, and that essentially the police and security services, and those whose job it is to keep us safe, do have the powers at their disposal."

He added that there was a case for increased use of terrorism prevention and investigation measures.

On the question of resources, it is one thing to talk about specialist policing and security resources, but the Opposition do not believe we can overstate the importance of neighbourhood policing. It is that neighbourhood engagement at all levels, often in what seem to be simple ways, that builds a community's confidence in officialdom and the Government, and that encourages people to come forward with the information that may help us to stop future terrorist activity. We have said and continue to say that it is wrong that since 2010, we have lost 20,000 from police numbers. We oppose the further cuts to the police budgets that are in the pipeline.

The Home Secretary keeps saying that the Government have protected police budgets. I have to tell her that no policing stakeholders, including the Police Federation, support her in saying that police budgets and resources have not been hit. We are being told that austerity must end, so will the Home Secretary now commit to halting these cuts, or does austerity still apply to our safety?

Senior retired officers have said that police cuts have gone too far. I have heard that Mark Rowley, the assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, has written to the Home Secretary saying that counter-terrorism is not able to operate effectively because of demands in other areas of policing, and that if resources were diverted to counter-terrorism, other areas of policing would suffer. He is saying that cuts have consequences, and that the Home Secretary's cuts run the risk of putting us all in danger. The Opposition's understanding is that the Home Secretary is going to cut again.

Mr Speaker: Order. At this early stage of the Parliament, can I just say something that I think is quite important for future reference? There are time limits for questioning on statements, which, in the last Parliament, were very substantially disregarded. That cannot happen in this Parliament, because it is not fair to Back Benchers. That is my first point.

My second point—forgive me; the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) is extraordinarily articulate and very experienced—is one that Opposition spokespersons frequently just do not seem to understand: in responding to a statement, the Chair is not expecting to hear a counter-statement. The Chair is looking to hear, as provided for in our procedures, a very brief response, followed by a series of questions. That should be the character of the response.

On this occasion, I will allow the right hon. Lady to finish, but I hope she will be sensitive to quite a widespread feeling in the House that she is approaching her peroration. Thereafter, we must observe these limits. If they are not observed, I will regretfully have to ask the spokesperson concerned to resume his or her seat.

Ms Abbott: So can I ask the Home Secretary, does she accept that resources are as important as new institutions and new legislation? The Opposition welcome the measures to get internet companies to block and take down content that promotes terrorism, but does she accept the need for a review of the Prevent programme and the need to reframe the debate around it as relating not only to the Muslim community but to far-right terrorism?

The Opposition believe that there is considerable unity on these issues in the country as a whole. We believe that the country as a whole wants to know that

[Ms Abbott]

we will not play into the terrorists' hands by stoking divisions, demonising communities or rescinding our hard-won freedoms under the law.

Amber Rudd: I thank the right hon. Lady for her comments and the constructive way in which she is approaching this. The Government look forward to working with her to make sure that we have a constructive, united approach to this enemy that is trying to attack us.

The right hon. Lady asked particularly about new legislation. She is right that Max Hill has said that he does not see the need for new legislation, but he also said that he does see the need for a review of sentences, so we will certainly look at whether we can have tougher sentences. On our potential new legislation and approach, I ask her to hold fire for now on concluding that to be the case until we have done this review. Looking backwards, our review over the next few months into why so many terror attacks took place will be critical. For that, we will have independent assurance in the form of David Anderson. We will also have a review looking ahead to what else we can do.

As I said in my statement, we feel we have entered a new phase. That may mean that we need to introduce new legislation, but we will not rush to do that based on the attacks. We will look at doing that depending on what we find out from these reviews. I ask her to keep an open mind on that, depending on what conclusions the reviews reach.

I yield to no one in my respect for the work of the police, particularly the work of the counter-terrorism police in the past few months. We all recognise the enormous extra work and effort that has gone into following up on the attacks and keeping us safe. We have protected the police budget from 2015. There has been a lot of scaremongering about changes to the budget, and I repeat here, in the House, that it will be protected. We will ensure that we always give the security services and the police who work to keep us safe the resources that they need.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I greatly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I want to raise just two or three points. First, I particularly welcome the review of the sentencing guidelines. That should happen because of the evidence that individuals who commit acts preparatory to terrorism may be receiving sentences that are insufficient, although clearly they need to be proportionate.

The second issue concerns the response and how our security services work to deal with the threat. My right hon. Friend will know that the Government have invested considerably in that. The money spent and the number of officers available have been greatly enhanced. Equally, it is right that, because of the classified nature of the work, some details cannot be given to the House. That emphasises to me that one of the problems in the past three and a half months has been that we have not had an Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament to provide the sort of scrutiny that might be helpful to hon. Members in understanding what has gone on, what should happen in the future and whether any improvements could be made. I therefore gently urge my right hon. Friend to make representations to the Prime Minister that that should be given priority.

Amber Rudd: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his comments. He is very experienced in the matter, having been Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee. He makes a good point and I will follow up his suggestion that we establish that Committee as soon as possible so that we can give the House the confidence of knowing that Members from both Chambers will look at the matter and provide assurance.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I add the voice of the Scottish National party to those who condemn the terrible attacks, and extend our sincere condolences to the families and friends of the dead and our best wishes for a full recovery to those injured.

I welcome the Home Secretary back to her place and look forward to working with her on this and other important issues.

The Finsbury Park attack reminds us that terrorism is a threat to all communities in the United Kingdom and it is therefore important that measures to counter extremism never segregate or stigmatise communities.

I have three questions for the Home Secretary. First, I am concerned that, while commendable, the Government's plans to establish a commission risk, without legislation, bypassing parliamentary scrutiny and the need for legal certainty about the definition of terms such as "extremism" and "British values". How will she ensure that Parliament gets to scrutinise those matters?

Secondly, we in the SNP believe that to fight terrorism effectively we can use existing legislation, and that what really matters is that the police and security services have the necessary resources to act effectively under that legislation. Will the Home Secretary confirm that such resources will be made available in the future?

Thirdly, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister spoke of ripping up human rights to fight terrorism. Will the Home Secretary confirm that there is nothing in the Human Rights Act or the European convention on human rights to prevent us from taking a robust approach to terrorism? Will she therefore confirm that there are no plans to tear up human rights and that we can tackle terrorism and uphold the standards of this society without doing so?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her question and her kind welcome.

The recommendations that the commission on extremism makes will need to be brought before Parliament. I therefore expect full scrutiny of the recommendations when they are brought to Parliament to be taken forward.

I can confirm that we will always provide the resources necessary to keep our citizens safe. We have already announced substantial uplifts to the security services. There will be 1,900 new people joining the security services up until 2020, and an increased number of armed officers are being made available in the country.

I can also tell the hon. and learned Lady that later this year we will conduct a full-scale counter-terrorism exercise involving Police Scotland and forces from the north of England. We will always work with the Scottish Government and police to ensure that we keep all parts of the United Kingdom safe.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will there be an opportunity to give evidence to the commission for countering terrorism and extremism, based on the

lessons that we have learnt in the past to counter other totalitarian ideologies such as communism and Nazism? Does my right hon. Friend accept that organisations like ISIL/Daesh and al-Qaeda rise and fall, but the underlying doctrine of what ought to be called un-Islamic extremism persists? Does she accept that that is what must be countered, and that an active Government agency to counter it is what is required?

Amber Rudd: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. Extremism comes in many different forms. “Un-Islamic extremism” is one way of describing it, and it is a perfectly reasonable description. I would expect the commission on extremism to ask people to give evidence, so that we can be sure to collect the best possible information in order to do the best possible job for our communities.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I join the Home Secretary in remembering the victims, and in paying tribute to the immense bravery of the emergency services and the public. I also join her in saying that extremists and terrorists must never divide us, be they Islamist extremists or far-right extremists, and wherever that violence comes from.

I welcome the proposal for a review by David Anderson of the attacks, but will the Home Secretary also tell us a bit more about them? For example, the Manchester attacker is reported to have been known to the intelligence services, and also to have travelled repeatedly to Libya. Will the Home Secretary tell us whether the man who committed that vile attack was on a watch list, and whether he was ever stopped by Border Force in the course of those journeys? Will she also ensure that the relationship between the intelligence services and Border Force is looked at as part of David Anderson’s review?

Amber Rudd: The right hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the relationship with the border forces and the security services. I would expect that to be looked at as well. I cannot, at this stage, give the right hon. Lady the additional details that she seeks. It is, of course, part of the nature of the security services that they do so much good work and we are not really at liberty to talk too much about it. However, I hope that the work that David Anderson does with them—which will start almost immediately—will help us to find the answers to some of those questions: for instance, quite how much the security services knew about that man, and whether there were instances that were missed, or whether this was just part of the much higher level of attacks that we are sadly witnessing at the moment.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Will the Home Secretary join me in expressing condolences to the family of Elaine McIver, an off-duty police officer who was killed in the Manchester attack, and who had worked at the Winsford police headquarters in my constituency? Will she also join in the praise for the Cheshire police, who went to the aid of their Manchester colleagues during a desperate attack which had a devastating effect on the local community, and will she confirm that the additional armed officers will be allocated to areas across the country, including Manchester and Cheshire?

Amber Rudd: Of course I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the immense bravery of, in particular, the off-duty policewoman whom she mentioned, and

that of other members of the public who joined in to protect people. The work that Manchester did in responding to the attack was heroic. I particularly commend the chief constable, Ian Hopkins, who did such good work. It was part of a very well-practised and well-operated scheme. Other forces came in to assist: they “surged” their assistance to ensure that, in both police and emergency terms, the resources were there to protect people and look after them in the future.

Mr Speaker: I call Mrs Margaret Hodge.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary’s statement. In the days following both the Manchester and London Bridge attacks, a number of my constituents were arrested, with suspicions around terrorism. This is the first time that that has happened in Barking and Dagenham. Most of my constituents, of all religions, creeds and ethnicities, share with all of us the horror at the outrages, the praise for the services and the feelings of empathy for those who have been affected by the attacks. However, the Home Secretary said in her statement that those who perpetrate terrorism seek to spread fear, intolerance and hate, and I have concerns that, in the aftermath of the attacks, that is precisely what could happen in my constituency. The Muslim community in particular are feeling very vulnerable and isolated, and the police have not been able to give them the reassurance that they want. Will she take steps to ensure that police resources are made available so that there is a police presence there, the allegations of race hate crime, which are already growing, are dealt with, and other measures that will provide security for all communities in my constituency, and therefore promote tolerance, are put in place rapidly and not left to fester?

Mr Speaker: I have long known that the right hon. Lady is a magnificent woman, but I had momentarily forgotten that she is a Dame. I hope that she will forgive me.

Amber Rudd: I thank the right hon. Lady for her question. I share her concern: we must ensure that we do not see an increase in Islamophobia. We must be a country that can deal fairly with all communities. My hon. Friend the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service is meeting the Met commissioner, and he will raise that matter with her, thinking particularly of the right hon. Lady’s constituency of Barking.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and through her the people in the police and security services, who put their lives on the line to keep us all safe. Following on from the question from the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), I think that the Home Secretary acknowledges that all our communities, and particularly our Muslim communities, including the Muslim community in my constituency, need to have confidence in the protections afforded by those services. Will she therefore ensure that all our police forces have the resources to provide the continuous training that is required for the officers who are needed to provide those assurances throughout our communities?

Amber Rudd: My right hon. Friend builds on the question from the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) about hate crime and what

[Amber Rudd]

more we can do in our communities. I agree with my right hon. Friend that we must ensure that our police have the best training, so that they are aware of the best way to approach what could be sensitive issues. We have the College of Policing, a national body that provides such training to ensure that police officers have the information and that they can learn the best way to approach sensitive situations. Last year, we published the hate crime action plan to ensure that people have the confidence to report such incidents and that we have the procedures to follow them up. We are in no way complacent about the need always to be on the front foot to reassure communities that we will take seriously any incidents of hate crime.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I associate myself and my party with the Home Secretary's expressions of sorrow and condolence for all the victims of the horrific terrorist attacks in Manchester and London. During my visit to Muslim Welfare House in Finsbury Park on Tuesday, one of the key messages from the Muslim leaders was that there is a strong feeling that Government action on counter-extremism has so far failed to bring together all voices in the different communities. Therefore, will she today guarantee that the new commission for countering extremism will engage with all representative groups and that no group that wants to help the Government to defeat extremism will be excluded?

Amber Rudd: It is essential to ensure that people are aware that the Government's counter-extremism initiatives, their Prevent initiatives and their initiatives through Channel are focused on all extremism. The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) asked me about Prevent, and I would like to remind people that 25% of the Channel referrals—Channel is the additional part of Prevent that some people are put on—are extreme right wing. In fact, there are some parts of the country where the extreme right wing is the real danger, rather than radical extremist Islamic terrorism. I would like to reassure the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) that we will listen to all parts of the community and to different bodies, to ensure that the counter-extremism commission has the opportunity to gather all the necessary information.

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): During the recent terrorist incidents, we all saw images on our TV screens of desperate families and friends going from hospital to hospital clutching pictures of their loved ones and trying to get more information on their whereabouts. I fully appreciate that telephone helplines were set up, and I understand that in such instances people can sometimes have injuries that make them unrecognisable. Also, people often do not carry identification with them. Nevertheless, given modern technology, is it possible for the Home Secretary to work with her Government colleagues to establish a central point that families and loved ones can go to, and to which hospitals can provide information, so that people do not have to go from hospital to hospital?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for his suggestion. I saw those photographs and pictures as well; it must have been very distressing for the families involved, not

knowing what had happened to their loved ones. We have to make sure, despite that, that the safety of the people involved is the first priority when the police and the emergency services arrive to secure the scene. I will certainly take his suggestion back to the counter-terrorism unit.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Two members of my immediate family were present at the Manchester Arena bombing, and my contempt for that bomb is heightened by the fact that this was not a thrash metal gig; it was Ariana Grande, and the targets were little girls. Does the Home Secretary share my concern about the continuing presence of far-right hate preachers in organisations such as the English Defence League, and does she agree that we ought to be tightening up on some of their activities as well, in order to prevent further Islamophobia?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We must root out extreme right-wing violent hate, as well as radical Islamic terrorism, wherever we find it. I was the first Home Secretary to ban a far-right group, National Action, which was proscribed last year. That has given the police a legal basis on which to go after people who join it. We will continue to be vigilant.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I should like to thank the Home Secretary for coming to the Chamber today and giving us this statement and our first opportunity in this new Parliament to ask important questions about these horrific attacks. My question is very simple—and short, Mr Speaker. Can she update us on the progress in recruiting the extra armed police officers?

Amber Rudd: Yes. We have done, I think, 650 so far, and we are on schedule to do the rest as planned. Given the circumstances in which we now find ourselves, I will ensure that we do that.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Time is tight, so I shall focus on Borough Market in my constituency. The horrific attack there was met with a community spirit, business action, and police and NHS responses that were truly second to none. This makes me even prouder to be re-elected to serve the area. The Home Secretary has said again today that the terrorists will never win, but that will require more action. How are the Government ensuring that tourist and leisure hotspots such as Borough Market are better protected? What budget is being made available to fit barriers and bollards to protect civilians? How will the Government ensure that the NHS is not a victim of major incidents? Southwark hospitals are struggling financially, so what additional budgets are being made available to ensure that their tremendous efforts are covered? How are the Government going to ensure that the police have not just the numbers but the resources and powers to prevent atrocities and to act when they occur? This short, brutal attack at Borough Market was over quite quickly, but the market remained closed for over a week, costing some of the small traders tens of thousands of pounds. What are the Government doing to make insurance companies pay out on their business interruption clauses, given that some are, outrageously, withholding payment?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. May I say how much I enjoyed my recent visit to Borough Market? It was a pleasure to see it so

vibrant and active, and I hope that people will show their support by continuing to visit or by shopping there for the first time.

We have put additional resources into the security services and will continue to do that, and additional money is going into the armed police uplifts. It is essential that we wait for the review to happen, rather than rush in now, so that we can find out where we have holes and where we should be putting in additional support.

After the memorial ceremony at Southwark cathedral, I met some of those who had been at the hospital in Southwark, and it was a great honour and privilege to speak to them and to hear about the fantastic work that they have done.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): At the weekend, I drove my family back to London from my constituency. My wife and daughters are Jewish. We were met by a protest where there were anti-Semitic banners and chants and where people were waving Hezbollah flags—for those unfamiliar with the flag, I should add that it has a big machine gun on it. To make a mockery of the law, somebody had put a post-it note on one of the flags saying, “You cannot arrest me because I support the political wing of Hezbollah, not the military wing—this time.” If enough really is enough, will the Home Secretary take action against such rallies, ban them, so that they can never happen on the streets of London again, and ensure that the whole of Hezbollah is a proscribed organisation?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. It is always distressing to see that sort of march going on, and the provocation that he describes must have been very upsetting for him and his family. I will certainly consider what he has suggested and come back to discuss it with him and, if needed, the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a balance of obligations today. On the one hand, I am keen to accommodate the extensive interest in this matter. On the other hand, I should advise the House that the business statement follows, in which there is usually interest, and that no fewer than 29 colleagues wish to speak in this afternoon’s debate on the Gracious Speech, of whom five are would-be maiden speakers. I would like to accommodate them, so brevity is imperative.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): First, I have one bit of advice for the Home Secretary: please be very careful about language. Many people feel alienated by talk of “stamping out” and “enough is enough”.

Secondly, will there be just one commission? As a west Yorkshire MP, a neighbour of Jo Cox’s constituency and as part of a brilliant group of hard-working MPs who work with their communities, I know that Muslim communities are absolutely disgusted by these terrorist outrages. Could we have local commissions up and down the country that work together? There will be one national commission, but having local ones would be a great advantage.

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his suggestion. When the commission gets started, I can put that suggestion to it to see whether that would enhance its work.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I am fortunate to know the Muslim community in west Oxfordshire well, and I wonder whether the Home Secretary can provide further details of how the commission will work with local communities to our mutual benefit.

Amber Rudd: We have an open mind about working out the best way of approaching the commission for countering extremism. We will ensure that it covers all parts of the country, as has been suggested, and that it applies itself to rooting out and discovering information about extremism, wherever it is found. When we have more information, I will come back to my hon. Friend.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): According to security sources, some 150 ISIS terrorists are living in Northern Ireland and the Republic, either working together or alone. Will the Home Secretary ensure that security forces in Northern Ireland, the UK mainland and the Republic work together to monitor and resource the police efforts to ensure that those people do not become a threat to all of us in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. Our working relationship with Northern Ireland and the security services is very good. I will certainly take his suggestion under advisement to ensure that everybody is aware of his concerns and that we continue to step up that work.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary’s statement, given in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), that she believes that she is on target to recruit the number of armed officers that she is seeking. I have been speaking to the armed officers who protect us on this estate, and interestingly, however, there is one common piece of feedback: they are worried about the quality of potential recruits due to the disincentive of automatic referral to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. I wonder whether it is time to consider whether that should still apply in terrorist attacks.

Amber Rudd: I can reassure my hon. Friend that for certain attacks, such as marauding firearms attacks, which are sometimes declared as a terrorist attack, as occurred here, the IPCC immediately states that such a referral is not necessary. A particularly different approach is taken when there is a terrorist attack, but in general the IPCC does an important job in creating that clear line, which is as useful to the police as it is to the rest of us.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I join the Home Secretary in her congratulations to Ian Hopkins and all our public services in both Manchester and London on what they did during the recent attacks. I set the budget for Greater Manchester police for this current year and I was faced with cuts from central Government. If she wants to bring us all together to fight terrorism, she needs to recognise that combating terrorism, like other things, places real strain on our police service. We need more police officers to combat not just terrorism, but the things that we need a modern police force to do.

Amber Rudd: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to the House. We have protected the police budget from 2015 to 2020. We will be conducting the review to find

[Amber Rudd]

out what else we could do better to combat terrorism. The security services are leading on the review, looking at what has happened in the past. We will have an open mind as to what is needed, depending on what that review reveals.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): At present, a person who pleads guilty to possessing a well-known extremist publication, which includes instructions for making home-made bombs, will typically be sentenced to just 14 months. So they will be out in seven months, and will still be radicalised and a danger. Does the Home Secretary agree that the time has come to toughen up sentences under sections 57 and 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000?

Amber Rudd: It is fair to say that that is exactly the sort of instance I was referring to in my comments earlier. We must look at tougher sentencing, as Max Hill has suggested, in those sort of instances.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): On behalf of my constituents, may I express our deepest condolences to the victims of the terror attacks and their families? We utterly condemn the horrific attacks, as most people in our country do. Will the Home Secretary heed the warnings of the Mayor of London and the head of the Metropolitan police about the £400 million cuts, which would put prevention at risk? Will she also update the House on where she has got to on ensuring that internet companies immediately take down religious extremist and far-right sites that promote violence?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Lady for her important question. I have had several meetings with the Mayor of London and I commend him on the work he has done. He has been working closely with us to make sure that we are really united on getting the right approach. Again, let me say that there have been no plans for police cuts and we have protected the budget; I hear the numbers she gives but I simply do not recognise them. In terms of the internet, we are making good progress. We have set up, in the UK, an internet forum to try to get more action. The companies are taking down—after we ask them to do so—2,000 pieces of hate material a week. There is more to do and we are hopeful of having a constructive international agreement with them so that we can get a really proactive approach from them.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement. I know she will agree that the people who committed these atrocities and the idiots who stoned Torquay mosque in reprisal are just two sides of the same coin of hate. How does she see the commission for countering extremism being able to deal with both those threats?

Amber Rudd: That is a very good point to make. I hope that our commission will do exactly that; it will make it clear that extremism in any form is, as my hon. Friend says, two sides of the same coin and is unwelcome in this country. We need to find out what else we can do to make sure that we reduce it.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for her statement. If reports are correct, the recent attack on Finsbury Park mosque was a

premeditated attack by a self-radicalised extremist. My constituency knows more than most about the devastation that one extremist can bring. I welcome the Home Secretary's statement that 25% of the referrals to Prevent have been for far-right extremists, but how many of those referrals have been acted upon?

Amber Rudd: Let me take the opportunity to commend the work that the Jo Cox Foundation did on the Great Get Together last weekend. Like many Members—many Labour Members as well—I took the opportunity to show that something good had come out of Jo's horrible, terrible death. I am so sorry, but I have forgotten the hon. Lady's question.

Tracy Brabin: I was asking how many Prevent referrals are acted on.

Amber Rudd: The Prevent activity comes from referrals, usually from schools, universities or community groups. They are mostly acted on. Only a smaller portion of them go through to the Channel programme. A disproportionately larger number of far right-wing referrals go through to the Channel programme—about 25%. I can come back to the hon. Lady with more numbers if she would like.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Is the Home Secretary receiving sufficient co-operation from the tech giants and social media companies in her efforts to thwart terrorism? Are they putting sufficient resources in particular into removing inappropriate content quickly enough?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend knows a little bit about this issue; I am grateful for his question. A lot of this is about making sure the tech companies resource sufficiently—that they do not just wait for us to ask them to take down hate material, but take action to make sure that it is not put up in the first place. We are working with them; there are signs that they will take action, and they are making progress, but I do not underestimate the difficulty and the challenge of making sure we get a truly international agreement, which is the big prize.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Rightly, last week there was concentration on resources in London for policing, but terrorism does not respect police authority boundaries. It is not scaremongering but a fact that next year Durham Constabulary will have its budget cut by £1.1 million, and that is before inflation and wage increases. What is the Home Secretary going to do to ensure that Durham and other regional forces have the resources to keep the communities they serve safe?

Amber Rudd: I do believe that areas such as Durham have the resources they need to keep people safe. They are all making good progress in changing their arrangements so that they can save money and put more police officers on the frontline. If the hon. Gentleman has any particular concerns, I recommend he sees the police Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), who I am sure will want to hear them.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I am confident that the Home Secretary will agree with me that we have the best emergency services in the world, and frankly their efforts in the past few months particularly have been nothing short of heroic. Will she therefore use her considerable influence to try to ensure that the public sector pay freeze is ended so that these workers are treated with the dignity and respect they surely deserve?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Lady for her helpful contribution to any future conversations I might have with the Chancellor.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the question asked by my friend and constituency neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), houses next to constituents of mine were raided by the police over recent days, and there are links between the people who carried out the vile murders at London Bridge and Borough Market and several parts of east London. We know that radical so-called preachers such as Anjem Choudary were recruiting within our community for years before they were eventually jailed. What are the Government going to do to deal with, as the Home Secretary said, the ideological issues?

Amber Rudd: That is the nub of what we are trying to address. The fact is that people are becoming weaponised by the crazed ideology of Daesh, often over the internet while they are at home, and by all the hate material. The message from Daesh is not to join them any more in the so-called caliphate, but instead to become weapons in those people's communities. We are making sure we work with the internet companies to take that information down, and that we have a programme that reaches out and tries to protect people in those communities so that they do not become radicalised. We are also looking at what else we can do. That is why we are taking part in a review, looking at both the past and the future. We want to make sure that we stop that radicalisation taking hold in people's communities.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): May I praise the united response of Cardiff communities, particularly faith communities, to the recent attacks, both through condemnation and in solidarity with London and Manchester, especially given the shocking news that the alleged attacker in Finsbury Park was living in Cardiff?

The Home Secretary mentioned a forum to tackle the internet issue. The fact is that there is still far-right and Islamist content on the internet today on platforms like YouTube and Twitter. When is she going to get serious about sanctions for companies that are failing to deliver on their responsibilities to remove this content?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we are trying to work with them on a voluntary basis, and we are making progress. If we abandon that voluntary basis and go straight to sanctions, there is always the danger that the hate material will just move elsewhere. We want to make sure that we have a resolution to this problem. We are not frightened of moving to sanctions, if that is where we have to go, but a better outcome would be having those companies working with us and, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Policing and the Fire

Service has said, putting the resources in and making sure they are used to ensure that the material does not go up in the first place.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I have previously asked the Home Secretary about the number of UK-born fighters returning from Syria and what happens to them. Bearing in mind Max Hill's comments and the very low number of TPIMs at the moment, does she expect that the number of TPIMs will go up considerably?

Amber Rudd: TPIMs form an important part of the tools we have to deal with returning foreign fighters. We do track foreign fighters very carefully, where we can, and we recognise that they are potentially the most dangerous cohort of people returning here. TPIMs are one of the tools and they can be used when necessary. I am involved in all the decision making around them. It currently seems correct that those tools are available and can be used when they are needed. If it becomes necessary to use them more, we may need additional legislation, in which case I will come back to the House and ask the hon. Lady to make that case with me to the shadow Home Secretary.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Will the Home Secretary join me in wishing a full recovery to Lisa Bridgett, of Mynytho, who suffered multiple injuries in the Manchester attack while waiting for her daughter? Of course, we sympathise with all victims of the recent atrocities. I note the Home Secretary's recent announcement, but will she commit to consider undertaking an independent review of policing resources as a whole, not only to maintain public confidence in counter-terrorism and efforts to tackle cyber-hate, but to underpin essential community policing?

Amber Rudd: I will join the hon. Lady in wishing Lisa Bridgett a swift recovery, but I cannot see the need for an independent review of policing. The police are doing an exemplary job, and they need all the support that we in the House can give them at this difficult time.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): The uplift in the number of armed police officers in West Yorkshire has come directly from neighbourhood and response policing, making day-to-day policing that bit tougher. Is the Home Secretary in a position to update the House on when the review of the police funding formula will be published? Will she accept that the issue is not exclusively about powers; it is also about the number of police officers who are able to use such powers?

Amber Rudd: I understand the hon. Lady's curiosity about the police funding formula. We are currently still reviewing its position, so I will come back to her when we have made a decision.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, extend our thoughts to the victims of the recent terrorist outrages, those who were hospitalised and their families. The attacks were indiscriminate. People of all faiths were killed and injured. People of all faiths went to help, whether that was on the scene or in our hospitals and throughout the other emergency services. We know that there is a ripple effect of hate crime that

[Seema Malhotra]

carries on afterwards, and that reaches much wider and affects other communities. Muslims in my constituency and throughout the country have told me about how they feel more vulnerable and less secure. Does the Home Secretary agree that it is important for MPs to reiterate the message that Islam is a religion of peace? Can she reassure the House that, in the final days of Ramadan and Eid, if more support is needed for Muslim communities, she will ensure that it is provided?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Lady for those comments; she is absolutely right. On her specific request for more support, we already have a £2.4 million fund for places of worship, to which a number of mosques have applied to make sure that they are safe. I can announce that next week I will open up an additional £1 million for places of worship. That addresses the concern from some people, including the shadow Foreign Secretary, that in order for a place of worship to apply for the funds there had to have already been a hate crime in the area. We are now making sure that additional funds are available so that people who are concerned about their mosques can apply for money to support their endeavours to keep those mosques safe.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The police have been magnificent, the faiths in this House have stood together in unity, and the Home Secretary is absolutely right that we face a uniquely awful generational threat from terrorism, but may I ask her this question? The four most senior police officers in this country have written to her to express their concern. They have put in place an emergency plan to protect the public, but they say that it is simply not sustainable. They are having to hollow out neighbourhood policing and divert officers from serious and organised crime and historical inquiries, including in relation to child sexual exploitation and abuse. The first duty of any Government must be the safety and security of their citizens. Does she therefore accept that the time has come to reverse those deeply damaging cuts of 20,000 to our police services?

Amber Rudd: I have of course received that letter from the four senior police officers outlining their concerns about resourcing. I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that the emergency matters to which they refer were part of a well-organised plan for this type of situation, such as Operation Temperer. The system is working. They needed additional support because, of course, in these circumstances resources have been pulled very tightly, given the additional work that is needed. There are different ways of addressing this. Before rushing in with additional money, I want to ensure that we get the right target and the right answers. I recognise what they are saying, and I recognise the fact that we cannot carry on at that emergency level indefinitely, so we will be working with those police officers to ensure that we get the right response.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary confirm that she has received a letter from Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, on behalf of the three police and crime commissioners in the north-west, pointing out the impact on services of the drastic cuts in police

numbers? Those three areas are affected by terrorism, rising gun crime and daily fracking protests in Lancashire. The three PCCs have said—indeed, Merseyside's chief constable said this on television—that if the reductions are not put right and if there is not a commitment to further funding, policing as we now know it will deteriorate even further.

Amber Rudd: I will of course be responding to that letter, and I take very seriously the points that have been made. We must ensure that people are kept safe. I commend the new Mayor for the work he did after the atrocious attack in Manchester. If the hon. Lady would like, I will copy her in to my response to that letter.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Prevent training programme has come under much criticism. Can the Home Secretary say how that will be critiqued, and will the Anderson commission address it?

Amber Rudd: Prevent has been a great success for many families. I refer, in particular, to the 150 people who were prevented from travelling to Syria last year, 50 of whom were children. I have met families who have managed to stop their children travelling to Syria or becoming radicalised because they engaged with the programme. However, I recognise that there is always more to learn, so we will ensure that we build on Prevent and improve it where necessary, and part of our review will be seeing whether it works. We have two reviews: one looking at what has happened with the security forces and one looking forward. We are not complacent and we do not think that Prevent has all the answers, but please do not underestimate the fantastically important work it has done in many different communities up and down the country.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Does the Home Secretary agree that the terrible events of recent months show the need now more than ever to continue to promote tolerance between people of different faiths, and between people of faith and people of none?

Amber Rudd: Absolutely. The more we can do in this House to reiterate that message, the better.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): As has been said, overseas travel is frequently a factor in radicalisation so I was very interested to hear what the Home Secretary has just said about trying to prevent that travel, rather than just using monitoring and TPIMs when people return. She spoke about families. Will she say a little more about what she can do to prevent young men being influenced by extremist ideology, travelling overseas, becoming radicalised and being turned into terrorists as a result?

Amber Rudd: The best examples I have seen—in Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham, for example—have been led within communities, often by Muslim men and women, giving a clear direction and reasons not to become radicalised, by talking to people on their level and engaging them in activities that they are interested in. That is the sort of successful work that Prevent does. It is about motivating and resourcing community leaders and people with good ideas about how to de-radicalise, right at the source of where those young men are. I think that is the best work we can do as a Government.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Community and faith leaders in my community have been outspoken in their revulsion at and condemnation of the attacks in Manchester and London, but there is also consternation at reports that members of the Didsbury mosque, which Salman Abedi and his family attended, had reported his radicalisation, but it appears that that was not heeded or acted upon. What can the Home Secretary say about that, and what assurances can she give the community that such reports will be acted upon, and that lack of resources will not present a barrier?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady asks a very fair question, and naturally I have been asking that of the security services. We should not rush to believe everything that is said about what was and was not done during that period. That is one of the reasons for having this review. It has not been about resources; really it has sometimes been about the number of calls coming in. However, we should still encourage people to use the terrorist hotline to make those calls. It is up to us to lead in that respect, and to do everything we can to ensure that people call out, as strongly and as often as possible, the types of activity that can lead to terrorism.

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

12.16 pm

Mr Speaker: In accordance with Standing Order No. 2A, I will now announce the arrangements for the ballot for the election of Deputy Speakers. The ballot will be held in Committee Room 8 from 10 am to 1.30 pm on Wednesday 28 June. Nominations may be submitted in the Table Office and in the procedural hub in Portcullis House from 10 am to 5 pm on Tuesday 27 June. Nomination forms, and a briefing note with more details about the election, are available in the Table Office, the procedural hub and the Vote Office. I hope that is helpful to colleagues.

Business of the House

12.17 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week. The business is as follows:

MONDAY 26 JUNE—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech on Brexit and foreign affairs.

TUESDAY 27 JUNE—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech on Education and Local Services.

WEDNESDAY 28 JUNE—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech on Health, Social Care and Security.

THURSDAY 29 JUNE—Conclusion of the Debate on the Queen's Speech on the Economy and Jobs.

FRIDAY 30 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 3 July will include:

MONDAY 3 JULY—Second Reading of the Air Travel Organisers' Licensing Bill.

Colleagues will also wish to know that, subject to approval by the House today and the progress of business, the House will rise for the summer recess on Thursday 20 July and return on Tuesday 5 September. The House will then rise for the conference recess on Thursday 14 September and return on Monday 9 October.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): May I start by welcoming the Leader of the House to her new post and to her first business statement? I also wish to pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington). He was an excellent Leader of the House and will make a fine Lord Chancellor, protecting the independence of the judiciary as we uphold the rule of law.

One of the conventions in this place is that when a statutory instrument is prayed against, the Government will provide time for a debate. Because of the general election, the personal independence payment regulations, the tuition fee regulations and the rape clause were not debated, although they were scheduled for debate on 19 April. Will the Leader of the House find time for debates on those regulations?

This wonderful resilient country of ours is grieving—from Manchester to London Bridge, Westminster to Finsbury Park, and Kensington to Batley and Spen. The pain of loss may lessen, but it never goes away and lives are changed forever. As we hear about those lives, we mourn the loss of talent for this country.

Earlier today, the Prime Minister made a statement on Grenfell Tower. I am not sure why it took a week for her to confirm that all the people who were affected could finally be housed nearby and that any payments made to them will not affect any other entitlement.

May I ask the Leader of the House to confirm—perhaps she could do it in a letter and place it in the Library—that the number of counsellors for firefighters was reduced from 14 to two under the previous Mayor of London—now the Foreign Secretary? Kensington Council has the reserves but not the staff to deal with the disaster. Other local authorities are helping. Ealing Council, for example, is running the rest centre in Westway. Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that the disaster was the fault of the state at local and national level, but it is the elected

[Valerie Vaz]

members of the council and the Government who are responsible and accountable. The state, through its public servants, has responded brilliantly. It is blameless.

There seems to have been some confusion about the review of building regulations. The review, which was recommended by the coroner in 2013, was announced by the former Member for Croydon Central—now the Prime Minister's chief of staff—in October 2016, but when asked when it would take place, we were told that it would be in due course. Will the Leader of the House make time for a statement on that before the inquiry?

The Government want to consult again on social care, but the independent Dilnot commission reported in 2011. Will the Leader of the House tell us whether the Dilnot report will be part of the consultation, or will it now be abandoned? Will it be yet another report that is not actioned? Dilnot costed his proposals at £1.7 billion. Simple maths tells us that the £3 billion top-down reorganisation could have saved the Government money.

It is unclear how Parliament will be kept informed during EU negotiations. Yes, we do want a running commentary so will the Leader of the House ensure that there is a timetable for a debate on the report-back on where we are with the negotiations? That is particularly important as the Chancellor appears to be providing a running commentary of his own, setting out his own different policy.

The Queen's Speech mentions a new industrial policy. My hon. Friends the Members for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) want a statement or a debate on the Government's position on the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, which is part of the old industrial policy. Without a decision from the Government soon, the project may collapse, putting at risk 2,000 local jobs. Will the Leader of the House please say whether we can have that debate?

I want to welcome new Members and say goodbye and thank you to former ones. Some Members used to turn up regularly to business questions and they are no longer here. I want to make a special mention of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad). The people put their trust in her and she has repaid it, showing them what a great MP she is.

This time last year, we all came together to remember another brilliant colleague. We will have a permanent reminder in this Chamber of her campaigning zeal, her energy and her love for humanity. Helen Joanne Leadbetter Cox will be a permanent reminder to us that we will not be divided by hate as we work in this place for the common good and in the public interest of our United Kingdom.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr George Howarth): I call—
[*Interruption.*] I call Andrea Leadsom.

Andrea Leadsom: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I fully understand that it is early days for all of us. Hopefully, you will bear with me as I make mistakes too.

May I welcome the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) to her place? I have always admired her enormously. It will be a great pleasure to work together, and I am sure that we will do that very well. I thank her for her kind tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), who is a fantastic colleague and who, I am sure, will be absolutely committed to his new role as Secretary of State for Justice.

The hon. Lady asked for time for a debate on carry-over regulations from the last Parliament. I will absolutely take that away and look into it. I am sure that it is in hand, but I will make sure that it is. She mentioned the appalling loss of life in recent weeks due to the deliberate and evil actions of terrible people who are either misguided or evil, and she was exactly right to raise that matter. Everybody across the House shares the horror at some of the actions that have been perpetrated against innocent citizens. She also mentioned the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower. I saw for myself what devastation it has caused. Our hearts go out to those poor, poor people. I hope that colleagues were reassured by what the Prime Minister had to say in her statement today, which is that we will leave no stone unturned in getting to the bottom of what has happened and in doing everything possible, including of course looking closely at building regulations, to see whether more can be done to ensure that such a thing never happens again.

The hon. Lady asked about resources for firefighters. We will of course review that situation. She will be aware that, fortunately in recent years, the number of fires and lives lost due to fires has reduced quite dramatically. The harrowing events at Grenfell Tower put a very different complexion on that and will require that we look again at those resources. I can assure her and all hon. Members that this Government will ensure that our emergency services have the resources that they need.

The hon. Lady asked about the Dilnot commission and the review of social care. She will be aware—as indeed are all hon. Members—that we have an ageing population. There will be more than 2 million over-75s within the next decade, which requires us to tackle this situation. We need to look holistically at how we can best balance the needs of an ageing population with the need to pay for what is becoming increasingly expensive.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the Queen's Speech, which included our new industrial policy. I hope that she shares my excitement about some of the measures, which will see the UK leading the world in electric vehicle technology. Some of our commercial space flight programmes will be very exciting, creating new, well-paid, high-technology jobs. I will absolutely take away her requests about where we are on the Swansea bay tidal lagoon.

I wish to pay my own tribute to all those colleagues who did not win their seats this time. It is always a great sadness to say goodbye to so many good colleagues. It is also wonderful to have new blood coming into the House. I welcome all new colleagues right across the House. I am really looking forward to working with them and hearing their views. I ask them to please come and talk to me at any time. My office is just down the corridor.

Finally, as the hon. Lady said, the memorial to our dear colleague, Jo Cox, will be unveiled tomorrow, and all colleagues are very welcome to attend. I thank the hon. Lady for her opening remarks.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr George Howarth): The unveiling is on Saturday. As the Leader of the House said, Mr Speaker will be glad to receive any applications.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): May we have a debate in Government time about the ways in which society lotteries can increase the amount of money being channelled to local charities?

Andrea Leadsom: That is an excellent idea. The work that all of the jackpot-oriented lotteries do in raising money for charities is absolutely valuable. It sounds like an excellent bid for an Adjournment debate.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business and warmly welcome her to her new Front-Bench role. I very much look forward to working with her in the future. Being awarded the position of Leader of the House suggests that she is either on her way up the greasy pole or on the way down. I am pretty certain that she is in the former category.

May I thank the right hon. Lady for announcing the recess dates? Scottish National party Members are profoundly disappointed that, somehow, we cannot design a summer recess that accommodates school holidays in all parts of the United Kingdom. I hope that we can work together to resolve some of the difficulties around the conference recess.

By God, Mr Deputy Speaker, has the right hon. Lady not got a job on her hands? This is a Government who arrogantly and unnecessarily called an early general election to secure an overwhelming majority only to find themselves humbled, diminished and without any majority whatsoever. As this is now a Parliament of minorities, does she agree that consensus must be the key for getting business through the House and that it will mean working with the devolved Assemblies and Parliaments throughout the United Kingdom?

On that and on the confusion around the great repeal Bill, will the Leader of the House confirm what the Prime Minister said yesterday, which was that the Scottish Government could have a role when it comes to legislative consent motions? Will she confirm that, in fact, the Scottish Government will have an LCM when it comes to these issues?

Looking around the Chamber, one can see quite clearly that English votes for English laws—probably the biggest innovation of the last Parliament—no longer commands a majority in the House. It is almost impossible to see how a minority Government can get their business through while being dependent on a party that is subject to the EVEL procedure. When will the Leader of the House introduce plans to get rid of this unnecessary and divisive measure from Standing Orders?

I am glad that you are back, Mr Deputy Speaker, with a reasonably good majority—I got through by the skin of my teeth, with a majority of 21. What is appalling about my situation is that the Conservative candidate whom I defeated will soon be ennobled as an unelected Lord, drafted into government as a Scotland Minister. That is a total affront to democracy and an insult to my constituents, who so recently rejected him. Will the Leader of the House pledge never to use the House of Lords as a receptacle for cronies, donors and failed leadership candidates?

Andrea Leadsom: Likewise, I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place. I congratulate him on hanging on to his seat—unfortunately, a number of his colleagues did not; we on the Government Benches are delighted by the outcome of the general election in Scotland—and I look forward to working with him.

I shall consider the issue of recess dates. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that dates are also set to try to work around some of the challenges posed by this building and the work that is already scheduled, but I will speak to Mr Speaker and the Chief Whips about whether more can be done in future to accommodate the Scottish National party conference.

As the hon. Gentleman says, we called the general election, and we do not have a majority. We have been very clear that we accept that result. We are very disappointed, but nevertheless we have a commitment to consulting widely across parties. As the Prime Minister has said, we want to be a listening Government. We seek the support of Members across the House and I very much hope and wish that the Scottish nationalists will support the democratic decision of the United Kingdom in last year's referendum to leave the European Union. On the hon. Gentleman's point about a legislative consent motion, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has made it clear that he wants to consult the Scottish nationalists and other devolved Administrations on the repeal Bill. A decision will be taken on whether an LCM is needed at that point.

The EVEL measures, as the hon. Gentleman knows, were an attempt to ensure that when English-only matters are being discussed, only English—and perhaps Welsh—MPs can take part in those discussions. That is very important. Finally, decisions on who should be ennobled are taken on merit, and on the grounds of political contribution, regarding people who have given many years' service, across the public sector. That is a matter not for us but for discussion at another time.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I warmly welcome the positive engagement between the new Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House. Between them they can achieve a great deal for Back Benchers through these sessions. The Leader of the House will be aware that a number of Select Committees, including the Select Committee on Defence, had to publish reports in great haste because of the suddenness of the announcement of the general election. As there is a hiatus and no Select Committees scrutinising Departments at the moment, will she ensure that at least those Departments that are obliged to produce responses to reports will get on with the job so that Committees can consider those responses at the earliest opportunity?

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. Of course, Departments will respond just as soon as they can.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I welcome the Leader of the House to her place. Has she seen a copy of the letter that I, as the then Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, sent her predecessor asking whether, if there is any time for general debates before the Committee is established, the Leader of the House would consider giving time to Back-Bench business that was residual—debates that had not yet been held—from the previous Parliament?

[*Ian Mearns*]

On another matter, the Standing Orders of the House of Commons say that in a parliamentary Session the Backbench Business Committee will be given 35 days of debating time, 27 of which will be in the Chamber, but this will be a two-year parliamentary Session. Will the Leader of the House give us a guarantee that that will be pro-rated over the two years, rather than our being limited to that time limit?

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his questions and, if there is Back-Bench time available, I will consider whether those outstanding subjects for debate can be prioritised. On the hon. Gentleman's other point about extending the time available, my understanding is that the amount of time is set out in Standing Orders, but we will certainly look at whether it can be extended.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Will the Leader of the House meet me and any other colleague who so wishes to discuss the erection of a permanent memorial to PC Keith Palmer, who fell defending us and our visitors before the general election, perhaps taking as inspiration the memorial in St James's Square erected to PC Yvonne Fletcher?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is right to remind us of the tragic murder of Keith Palmer and to say that we need to consider how we can remember him and his sacrifice. I shall certainly take that up with Mr Speaker.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): May we have a debate in Government time on how to tackle the problem of persistent illegal Traveller encampments in public parks and other community facilities? This involves a costly game of cat and mouse, as these people are evicted but just move in a circle. It is expensive for cash-strapped councils and it is only a matter of time before it leads to a major incident unless the concerns and frustrations of law-abiding people are recognised.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue that comes up time and again for many colleagues across the House. I have certainly had problems in my constituency, and I know that many local authorities would like different arrangements so that they can act much faster. It sounds to me like a very good debate for the Backbench Business Committee to consider, but if the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me with some proposals, I will be pleased to receive them.

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her appointment as Leader of the House, and I wish her well in all that she does. This week, there has been absolute misery for thousands of motorists in my constituency. It has arisen because of a decision by Highways England to close off a slip road at junction 17 leading on to the A1(M). That decision was taken by Highways England without any consultation with local stakeholders, with inadequate notice to motorists and with ill regard for a diverted route. May we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Transport in which he can urge Highways England to act in the best interests of the community rather than unilaterally?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises another issue that is pertinent to all our constituencies: action being taken on roads without due notice. If he wants to write to me, I will be happy to pass that on to the Secretary of State for Transport so that appropriate action can be taken.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): Is the Leader of the House aware that yesterday Tesco announced that it will axe 1,100 jobs in my constituency? It was done with no consultation with either the UK or Welsh Government and some workers found out through social media that they were losing their jobs. That is shocking and wholly unacceptable behaviour, and will be devastating for all those concerned and for their families. Will the Leader of the House provide an urgent debate or statement on the issue so that we can hear what help the Government can provide and, at the very least, will the Department for Work and Pensions be dispatching a full emergency taskforce to support my constituents at this difficult time?

Andrea Leadsom: May I first welcome the hon. Lady to her place? She tells a very sad story. It is always terrible to hear of such situations, particularly when there is a large loss of jobs because that is incredibly unsettling for the whole community. The fact that the matter has been conducted in such a way is completely unacceptable. If the hon. Lady writes to me with her thoughts, I will seek a response from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr George Howarth): Order. As Members will know, the next debate is heavily subscribed, so I implore people to make a single point. If you find yourself about to use the word "and", resist the temptation.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): May we have a debate in Government time on housing, especially on leaseholds and commonholds? The former Housing Minister, Gavin Barwell, who is now the Prime Minister's chief of staff, wanted to reform LEASE, the Leasehold Advisory Service, paying attention to exploitation. It is time to do that with a debate on what the Government are going to do about Travellers. They have needs, but they do not solve them by coming into urban areas and camping on public parks.

Andrea Leadsom: As luck would have it, the very next debate on the Queen's Speech is on the subject of housing. My hon. Friend may well want to take part in that debate later today.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Last year the Department of Health laid its accounts before the House on 21 July, the last day the House sat before the summer recess. Will the newly appointed Leader of the House—the champion of this place in Cabinet—ensure that this does not happen again? Could the accounts of not only the Department of Health but all Government Departments be laid so that we can scrutinise them?

Andrea Leadsom: I appreciate what the hon. Lady says. As she will appreciate, Departments move heaven and earth to ensure that they get reports out on sitting days. There is always a rush to try to get them out before the recess begins. I have some sympathy for Departments trying to meet those deadlines and trying not to deliver

during recesses, but I certainly take the hon. Lady's point and will ask colleagues to try to ensure that there is time for parliamentary scrutiny.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Last year, the Secretary of State for Transport commissioned Chris Gibb, a rail expert, to deliver a report on the appalling performance of Southern rail. That report has been published today and it is excellent. It identifies the unions as the primary cause, but all parties have a role to play. On that basis, can we have a debate in Government time on the report and its impact across not just my constituency, but the entire rail network?

Andrea Leadsom: The plight of rail travellers on certain lines has been so bad for some time now. The report highlights that a great deal needs to be done to put that right. I will happily write to the Secretary of State for Transport to urge him to review that report fully and, if possible, will find some parliamentary time in which colleagues can debate it.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I have a constituent who was mugged in Ibiza, losing her passport and her money in the process, which, as hon. Members can imagine, was really upsetting. She wanted emergency documentation so that she could fly home with her friends and return to her family, but unfortunately the consulate was shut for three days for the Whitsun holiday, a time when demand is obviously higher. That is unacceptable for someone in an emergency situation. Will the Leader of the House commit herself to arranging a statement reviewing how such emergency situations are dealt with by consulates abroad and looking to put in place an improvement plan?

Andrea Leadsom: That was obviously a difficult time for the hon. Gentleman's constituent. I am absolutely sure that the House would want to address such situations. If the hon. Gentleman writes to me, I can pass the specific details on to the relevant people.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Given the Prime Minister's comments yesterday that every child deserves a place at a good school, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the plans of South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust and my local clinical commissioning group no longer to diagnose children with autism? The decision would mean that there will be no opportunity for a special educational needs statement and no opportunity, therefore, for an appropriate school place.

Andrea Leadsom: The issue of children's mental health is very dear to my heart. It sounds as though the hon. Lady should apply for an Adjournment debate. I am sure that all hon. Members will be interested to hear about the issue. On the face of it, the hon. Lady's desire for that decision to be overturned is one with which I am extremely sympathetic.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): May we have a statement from a Health Minister on NHS funding as soon as possible, particularly in the light of the savings that areas up and down the country, including mine in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, are being asked to make, which are entirely impossible to effect without having a drastic impact on patient services?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Government are committed to significant real-terms increases in funding for the NHS. There are programmes in place to try to improve the efficiency of particular CCGs and hospitals. If he writes to me about the situation in Staffordshire, I will refer the matter to the Secretary of State for Health.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): We have seen developers across London reducing their commitment to provide affordable homes. Yesterday, the Battersea Power Station developer in my constituency announced that it is reducing its affordable homes commitment by 250. It is using viability assessments as a loophole to reduce the number of affordable homes provided. To tackle the housing crisis in London, we need to ensure that developers are held to account in providing a decent level of affordable homes. Is it possible to have a debate on how viability assessments are being used?

Andrea Leadsom: May I first welcome the hon. Lady to her place? She is exactly right that affordable homes are vital to a thriving economy and a society that is fair to all. We have delivered more than 313,000 affordable homes since April 2010. Our target is to deliver 400,000 new affordable home starts by 2020. As I mentioned to my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), the debate on the Queen's Speech this afternoon covers housing, so the hon. Lady might well wish to make some interventions during that.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will the Leader of the House consider my request for a debate in Government time in the next few weeks on the Royal Navy's aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, and our continued NATO commitment as we return to a carrier strike capability?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an important subject. Billions of pounds are being invested in a growing Royal Navy with new aircraft carriers, frigates, submarines, patrol vessels, aircraft and support ships. The Royal Navy and the nation will reach a significant milestone this summer when HMS Queen Elizabeth commences her sea trials. She will be accepted into the Royal Navy later in the year. It is an exciting moment, and I am sure that the subject would make for an interesting Adjournment debate.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in your place, Mr Deputy Speaker, although I, for one, will greatly miss the former Member for North East Derbyshire, who was a good friend and colleague.

Since 2010, the previous Government were rather random in their use of pre-legislative scrutiny. For the Wild Animals in Circuses (Prohibition) Bill, for example, it was clearly just a delaying tactic. To what extent will the seven Brexit Bills be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny and when can that start?

Andrea Leadsom: First, may I say that I will also miss the former Member for North East Derbyshire? She was very good in the House, like many Members who lost their seats. Although we are delighted to see new colleagues, we will miss those who are no longer here.

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

There will, of course, be a need for broad consultation on our whole legislative programme. As I said earlier, we do not have a majority in this House, so there is a real need to take colleagues with us. There will be a lot of consultation with many opportunities for colleagues to give their views and thoughts.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): A number of my constituents are concerned about the news that Easton Garford Endowed Church of England Primary School is to be relocated across the county boundary into Rutland. Can we have a debate next week about the need for statutory processes to be followed properly and for full consultation with parents before any such changes are made?

Andrea Leadsom: I am very sympathetic to my hon. Friend's concerns. Again, this sounds as though it is a prime candidate for an Adjournment debate. If he would like to write to me, I will be very happy to take it up on his behalf with the Secretary of State.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the Leader of the House to her place and wish her every success in her new position. She will be aware of my interest in human rights and equality issues. Only last week, Taimoor Raza was convicted of blasphemy by the Pakistani anti-terrorism court and has been handed the death penalty. That is a flagrant violation of international law, and it is the first time that someone has been charged under article 295-C of the penal code, which prohibits blasphemy, for an offence on social media. The sentence also sets a deeply worrying precedent from the anti-terrorism court and raises serious questions about the use of anti-terrorism legislation to deny citizens their right to freedom of religion or belief and expression. Will the Leader of the House agree to have a statement or a debate on this very important issue?

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this case. I am sorry to say that I was not aware of it, but if he would like to write to me, I will certainly be happy to take it up.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As a new Member of this House, I was struck yesterday by the excessive pomp and ceremony of the Queen's Speech. I just wish that the British state had put half as much effort into making sure that children in Glasgow East did not go to bed hungry last night. May we therefore have a debate in Government time on child poverty?

Andrea Leadsom: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place. I absolutely share his concern about child poverty. He will be pleased to know, as will all Members, that child poverty has reduced as employment in this country has reached much higher levels and the number of workless families has reduced significantly. Nevertheless, he is right: it is an incredibly important subject, and he may well want to raise it as a Backbench Business Committee debate in due course.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I welcome the right hon. Lady to her new position. In the light of the statement made earlier by the Prime Minister about the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, I have been contacted by a constituent about the hospital in Hull, which is a

tower block that had cladding put on it a couple of years ago, who raised concerns about whether that cladding is safe. Would it be possible for the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement about all NHS buildings that the public may be concerned about?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will be aware that the Prime Minister said that any samples of cladding on high-rise buildings should be sent to the Department for Communities and Local Government, which is arranging for their combustibility to be tested. I am not sure whether that extended to public buildings other than residential buildings, but I will get back to the hon. Lady on that point.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): At least four minority political parties in this House fought the election opposing Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs office closures. Can the Leader of the House confirm that during purdah—the election period—HMRC signed new contracts for new regional centres? If so, may we have a statement or a debate in Government time so that Members of this House can discuss the provision of services that deal with tax avoidance and non-compliance with the national minimum wage?

Andrea Leadsom: HMRC has done a superb job since 2010 in raising the amount of money that it is recovering from those who seek to avoid paying their taxes. We should absolutely pay tribute to it for the billions of pounds in extra revenue that have been collected legitimately for the Exchequer. It is very important in dealing with our deficit that we do everything possible to reduce tax avoidance and evasion. As to the hon. Gentleman's specific point about office closures, I am afraid I am not aware of the situation that he describes, but if he would like to write to me, I can take it up with the Treasury.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I second the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin), who it is great to welcome to this House, about the shameful decision of Tesco, which affects nearly 100 of my own constituents. I also pay tribute to USDAW, which is working to support those workers.

May I ask the Leader of the House for a debate in Government time on historical injustices, particularly the historical injustice faced by those who were affected by the contaminated blood scandal, by the nearly 4,500 women in my constituency affected by the state pension age changes, and by the hundreds of people still suffering injustice from the Allied Steel and Wire pension scheme? These historical injustices need to be righted, and we should be debating them urgently in this House.

Andrea Leadsom: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that quite wide-ranging question. He is right: there are injustices from the past that this Government, since 2010, have sought to deal with. For example, the contaminated blood situation was absolutely terrible. I had two constituents who suffered from that injustice. Great steps were taken by the coalition Government to try to right that wrong. I guess that he is asking to reopen that and other injustices, as he describes them. I think that would have to be subject to a Backbench Business Committee debate when the Committee is up and running, and I would certainly be very interested to hear it myself.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): High Court judge Mr Justice Collins ruled this morning that the Tory Government's benefit cap was "unlawful" and "discriminatory", also stating:

"Real misery is being caused to no good purpose."

Will the Government now act immediately, not duck the matter as they did with the statutory instrument on the rape clause, and stop wasting public money on appeals on this? Will they make an urgent statement on scrapping the rape clause and the two-child policy?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises an incredibly important point. All I can say is that the Government will be looking very carefully at the judgment and deciding on their position.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Following seven years of delay and four court cases that found the Government wanting, the Government published the draft air quality plan on 5 May. This was after Parliament had risen, and the consultation ended before Parliament met. The final air quality plan needs to be in place on 31 July. May we therefore have an urgent debate in Government time on this issue, which really does impact on my constituents who die prematurely because of poor air quality?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is right to raise this very significant and serious public health issue. As Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs until recently, I was very closely involved in the enormous amount of work that has gone into producing the air quality consultation. She is right that the plans will be published at the end of July. The Government are firmly committed to improving the UK's air quality. That is why we have committed more than £2 billion since 2011 to increase the uptake of ultra-low emission vehicles and committed to support greener transport schemes with a further £200 million in the 2016 autumn statement. There is a lot that needs to be done, and it is a complex scenario, as she, too, knows very well, but I do believe that we will be able to make strong progress very soon.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Like many returning Members, I was contacted by several constituents just prior to Dissolution concerning the Roadchef employee benefits trust and the compensation due to its beneficiaries. Now that Parliament has resumed, may we have a statement or a debate in Government time regarding the HMRC and tax liability situation, when we could also look at future regulation of EBTs?

Andrea Leadsom: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern on this point. I suggest that it would be a very good candidate for an Adjournment debate, at least in the first instance.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): On the matter of tower block cladding raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), it is not just about flammability and the type of cladding, but how it is fitted, whether it has been compromised by later alterations, and whether it is compatible with the existing structures. This morning the Prime Minister was clearly struggling with that issue and who was going to enforce this and pay for it. May we have a full statement on those specific issues of fire safety, because nothing is more important now than the safety of the hundreds of thousands of people living in tower blocks?

Andrea Leadsom: Yes, I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman that nothing could be more important than getting to the bottom of this. I think he will agree that the Prime Minister has made it very clear that she is herself committed to absolutely getting to the bottom of all these questions. I cannot answer the specific points that he raises, but I can assure him that everything that could possibly be done is being done to understand whether it was a problem with the type of cladding or the way it had been fitted, and so on. The Prime Minister has also confirmed that all similar types of high-rise building are being inspected. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there is a lot of work going on. We all have thoughts on what more needs to be inspected, but the Prime Minister is personally committed to ensuring that we do everything possible to get to the bottom of this.

Point of Order

12.59 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. You will have seen in your copy of *The Guardian* newspaper this morning, and indeed yesterday, the leaked reports of a new capped expenditure process for the NHS, revealing plans to cut services, close wards and ration treatments. So far, we have had no response from the Department of Health. Has the Secretary of State for Health given you any indication that he plans to come to the House to update Members and to tell us whether he approved these plans—and if so, when—and why the plans were drawn up in secret, with no consultation with patients, staff or local people?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr George Howarth): As far as I am aware, no such request has been made. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that is not a point of order. However, he has used the opportunity to draw attention to the point he is seeking to make. I think that that is the end of the matter, and there can be no further point of order on that issue.

BILLS PRESENTED

AIR TRAVEL ORGANISERS' LICENSING BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Chris Grayling, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Amber Rudd, Mr Secretary Lidington, Secretary Greg Clark and Secretary David Mundell, presented a Bill to amend sections 71, 71A and 84 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 1) with explanatory notes (Bill 1-EN).

EUROPEAN UNION (APPROVALS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Greg Clark, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Secretary Lidington, Dr Secretary Fox and Secretary David Davis, presented a Bill to make provision approving for the purposes of section 8 of the European Union Act 2011 draft decisions under Article 352 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on the participation of the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Serbia in the work of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and on the signing and conclusion of an agreement between the European Union and Canada regarding the application of their competition laws.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 2) with explanatory notes (Bill 2-EN).

Debate on the Address

[2ND DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 21 June).

Question again proposed,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Housing and Social Security

1.1 pm

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): Before I open today's debate, I want to reflect briefly on the horror that unfolded at Grenfell Tower last week. My thoughts are still very much with the victims, their families and their friends. All hon. Members will have heard the Prime Minister's statement earlier today and, having visited the site for myself and met some of the bereaved families, I want to echo her determination to get to the bottom of whatever went wrong. I will also write to hon. Members shortly with a detailed update on what we are doing to support the people who have been affected by this tragedy, the progress we are making in rehousing people and the steps we are taking to improve fire safety at similar tower blocks across the country.

In the longer term—this point is perhaps more pertinent to this debate—it is clear that any changes in the wake of this tragedy should not just be technical or legislative ones. What happened at Grenfell also showed us all that we need a change in attitude. We all need to rethink our approach to social housing, and we need to reflect on the way in which successive Governments have engaged with and responded to social tenants. We do not yet know for sure whether this disaster could have been avoided if the people who called Grenfell Tower their home had been listened to, but we do know that for far too long their voices fell on deaf ears. If nothing else, let the legacy of Grenfell be that such voices will never, ever be ignored again.

It is good to see the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) in his place, to which I am delighted to welcome him back after the general election. I am even more delighted that we have not swapped places. I know that we have a great deal in common—perhaps we use the same barber—and it is always a pleasure to debate with him. I look forward to doing so regularly during the next five years. Like other hon. Members, I have heard the right hon. Gentleman talk about his party's policies on the big issues facing the country, especially the issue of how we can build more homes, and we will no doubt hear him set out some of those policies.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): On the point about building more homes in the context of what the Secretary of State has said about social housing, does he accept and will he now confirm that, since 2010,

the Government's record on building social homes has been deplorable, with, in fact, a 97% fall in social housing starts?

Sajid Javid: There was a deplorable record on building social homes, but that was the record of the previous Labour Government. As the hon. Lady will hear shortly, as I rightly talk about their record, during the 13 years that Labour was last in office we saw, for example, a decline in socially rented homes of 420,000 units.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): We of course have a Labour Government in Wales who are committed to building 20,000 new homes, and who are building new social and council housing in Cardiff as I speak. Does the Secretary of State agree that lessons also need to be learned from Wales about its different approach to fire safety, including the fact that we introduced measures requiring sprinkler systems to be fitted in new high-rise buildings and converted buildings? There are a lot of lessons to be learned from Welsh Labour. Will he listen to them?

Sajid Javid: When it comes to fire safety, I think we should learn lessons from wherever we can—whether Wales or elsewhere. The hon. Gentleman will know that, since 2007, there has been a requirement for new buildings to have sprinklers.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I am intervening, at the suggestion earlier of the Leader of the House, having spent three and a half hours in the Chamber. This debate is largely about housing, but is it possible for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to hold a debate on leasehold? He could then look at whether the Government can intervene on the Mundy decision, which affects the extension of the leases of 2 million leaseholders, and carry on the work of his former deputy Gavin Barwell in reforming Lease, the Leasehold Advisory Service, so that leaseholders who, frankly, should be on commonhold can get a better service and avoid being abused, intentionally or unintentionally, by managing agents and freeholders.

Sajid Javid: I agree very much with my hon. Friend. It is important to continue the work on leasehold reform, and we will certainly take it forward. Let me take this opportunity to thank him for all the work he has done and the contribution he has made to the debate on that reform.

During the general election, we heard from the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne and his colleagues about Labour's housing policy, and no doubt we will hear more shortly. Let us be clear, however, that it was not just an attempt to wind back the ideological clock to the 1970s; it would have undone so much of the progress that we have made during the past seven years.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Since 2012-13, when the Government introduced the increased discount for right to buy, 51,352 homes have been sold, but for so-called one-for-one replacements over that period, there have been only 9,344 starts—starts, not completions—on site. Is that what the Secretary of State means by a new attitude to social housing?

Sajid Javid: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, he will very clearly hear the Government's track record on social housing.

This is the progress that the Government have made since we first took office in 2010: we have a resilient, growing economy; the labour market is in its strongest position for years; and the claimant count is at its lowest level for 45 years, with millions more people in work compared with 2010. That is thanks in part to our wide-ranging process of welfare reform: 520,000 people are receiving universal credit, which is helping to transform lives and to make sure that people are always better off in work than on benefits. In the past year, the number of disabled people in work has increased by more than 170,000. The Department for Work and Pensions has launched tailored support for people with a disability or ill health through our personal support package. We of course remain committed to a strong, humane welfare safety net. Every year, we spend some £90 billion supporting families, people with disabilities, jobseekers and people on low incomes. By 2020, we will have given local authorities £1 billion in discretionary housing payments for residents who need extra help.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): The Secretary of State mentioned extra money for people on disability benefits. Does he agree that changing the work-related component so that from April this year people in the work-related activity group have received £30 a week less is hardly the most intelligent way to persuade disabled people to get back into employment?

Sajid Javid: Where that happens, we will compensate people in other ways and make sure that the welfare policy remains fair to everyone.

In the last year, we spent £24 billion on housing benefit, helping people to cope with the ever-increasing cost of housing.

We are not just tackling the symptoms of our broken housing market; we are taking action to fix the causes. Our housing White Paper, which was published earlier this year, set out exactly how we will go about that: releasing more land where people want to live, building the homes that we need faster, getting more companies involved in the housing market, and supporting people who need help now. The Queen's Speech, which promises proposals to

"help ensure more homes are built",

marks a significant step in turning that blueprint into bricks and mortar.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): The Secretary of State mentioned the housing White Paper, which I thought was a terrific document, but in his little list he neglected one thing. Given that the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 is now on the statute book and was strengthened by the Government in the Housing and Planning Act 2016, does he think that serviced plots and land pooling may have an important role to play?

Sajid Javid: I agree very much with my hon. Friend about the importance of self-build and factory-built housing, and making sure there are enough plots for that. That was why a key part of the housing White Paper was about working on how we can diversify the market further. I thank him for the work he has done and continues to do in this sector. He has made a significant contribution.

[Sajid Javid]

We are investing more than £7 billion through the affordable homes programme, which will provide funding to housing associations, local authorities and other providers to deliver 225,000 affordable housing starts by March 2021. We are making the affordable homes programme more flexible so that it funds a range of affordable homes for rent, as well as home ownership. That will enable providers to build a range of homes to suit people's needs.

My most urgent priority continues to be getting rough sleepers off our streets. We will establish a homelessness reduction taskforce, pilot Housing First and implement the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 so that more people are helped earlier.

In the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, it is more important than ever that we continue to support housing associations and local authorities with their plans to regenerate housing estates. We have paid out some £32 million in grants to support early phase work with local residents. We are providing practical support and guidance to ensure that tenants are at the heart of all new regeneration schemes, and that their rights are protected. We shall continue to assess bids to allocate £290 million of project finance.

But that is not all: we are determined to make all types of housing more affordable and secure for ordinary working people. That is why we will legislate to stop tenants being charged fees for renting a property. That will mean that tenants will be able to see at a glance exactly what an advertised property will cost them, with no hidden or upfront charges. It will also stop unscrupulous agents who rip off tenants with unjustifiable and opaque fees. The full details will be in a draft tenants' fees Bill, which we expect to publish during the first Session of this Parliament.

Can we deliver all this? Yes we can. Just look at our track record. Since 2010, we have delivered 893,000 additional homes, including 333,000 affordable homes.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): To help the Secretary of State with delivery, I suggest he looks at the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, which was passed by the Welsh Labour Government. It sets out an additional duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness. Would it not be worth the Government following the lead of Welsh Labour on that?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman may be aware that the Homelessness Reduction Act was passed in the last Parliament, thanks to the hard work of Members across the Chamber, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). Trying to prevent homelessness in the first place is precisely what that legislation does. I am sure that the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) would welcome that measure.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the news that thousands of new homes are being built in Cannock Chase, with new homes built every week? Does he agree that sites such as the Rugeley B power station are ideal places for new homes?

Sajid Javid: I have visited home building sites and potential home building sites in Cannock Chase. I commend the record so far and the proactive attitude that is taken, certainly by the local Member of Parliament, to ensuring that local people have the homes that they need and deserve.

Since 2010, house building starts have increased by more than three quarters. More than 382,000 households have been helped to buy a property through schemes such as Help to Buy and the reinvigorated right to buy.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The Secretary of State is telling us about his record. In these changed times, is it still Government policy that housing associations should be required to sell off homes faster than new homes can be built?

Sajid Javid: It is Government policy that people should have the right to buy their home, whether it is a council house or a housing association property. The hon. Gentleman will know that we are piloting how the housing association right to buy programme works. We will then work on how we can take it forward.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): On that point, the housing associations in London have made it very clear collectively that they are willing and able to massively ramp up the number of homes they are building. The one thing they ask from the Government is to accelerate the release of publicly owned land so that they can do so. Is that still very much part of the agenda?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend touches on a very important point. The public sector land programme is designed to do just that. In the past seven years, it has released record amounts of land for hundreds of thousands of new homes. There is always more to do. That is why we set out plans in the housing White Paper to achieve even more from that programme.

I can tell Labour Members one more thing that has happened since 2010: more council housing has been built in the past seven years than was built in the previous 13 years. Going back to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), enough public sector land has been released to deliver at least 130,000 new homes, which is equivalent to a city the size of Nottingham.

More than 300,000 new homes were granted planning permission in the year up to March, which was up 15% on the previous 12 months. New build dwelling starts rose by 15% compared with the previous period. Once people are in their homes, they are staying in them because mortgage repossessions are at their lowest level for 35 years. This Government can offer an ambitious, far-reaching plans for the future of house building, built on solid foundations of real success.

I want to contrast that with what is on offer from the Labour party. Let us look at what happened last time Labour was in charge of housing. When Labour came to power in 1997, the average house cost 3.5 times the average salary. When it left office 13 years later, the average house cost seven times the average salary—a massive collapse in affordability and the biggest the country has ever seen. That hit ordinary working people the hardest.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): We are discussing this year's Queen's Speech, not 1997's. Does the Secretary of State accept that the 13 years of the last Labour Government saw 2 million new homes built in this country, 1 million more people becoming homeowners and the largest investment in new affordable housing for a generation by the end of that period?

Sajid Javid: I will come to the right hon. Gentleman's record in particular in just a moment, and then I will let him know what I will and will not accept. Let me remind the House that, on Labour's watch, the number of social rented homes fell by 420,000. In fact, the only thing about social housing that actually grew under Labour was the waiting lists—by a massive 70%.

Ms Buck: I am looking at the live tables—published online yesterday, I believe—concerning the record of the Government that the Secretary of State represents. It shows that the number of social rent starts was 39,492 at the end of 2009-10 and had fallen to 944 by 2016-17. Can he explain that?

Sajid Javid: Over the past six years, 330,000 new affordable homes have been built, which is a record in a six-year period and is certainly higher than the last six years of the last Labour Government. For every 170 right to buy sales, Labour built just one new council house—a replacement rate of less than 0.6%.

In 2010, when house building completions hit their lowest peacetime level since the great depression, who was the Minister in charge of housing? I will let hon. Members know: it was the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne himself. You will forgive me, Mr Deputy Speaker, for being a little bit sceptical when the right hon. Gentleman stands up and claims to have all the answers.

What is the great answer to housing shortfalls and rising unaffordability? What is Labour's magic bullet to fix the broken housing market? It is a Ministry of Housing. Young people struggling to get on the housing ladder or people who cannot find a place big enough for their growing family should not worry if nothing in their area is affordable because Labour is going to create a new Government Department. It is the typical Labour prescription: there is no problem that cannot be fixed with a bit more bureaucracy.

That is the difference between Labour and the Conservatives in a nutshell. We want to build more homes for hard-working people; they want to build more offices for civil servants. Moving the furniture around Whitehall may create the illusion of action, but it does not get any homes built. Only this Government can deliver the housing and market reforms that this country needs. Only this Government can provide the economic strength we need for house builders to thrive in a post-Brexit world. Only this Queen's Speech takes the first steps towards fixing our broken housing market. That is why I am delighted to commend it to the House.

1.23 pm

John Healey: I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker; I think this is the first time that you have been in the Chair in the Chamber. May I also welcome almost all of my Labour colleagues back to the House after the election, and all 87 new Members from all

parties? As elected Members of the House, ours is a special job with special responsibilities. Last but not least, may I welcome the Secretary of State and his old team back to the Front Bench? There is a new Housing Minister, but, sadly, he comes with no new ideas or plans to deal with the housing crisis in this country.

These are extraordinary times. There is a Government Bench without a Government, a Prime Minister who cannot even seal a deal with the DUP—I mean the DUP. [*Interruption.*] She might have better luck with the DUP; she cannot seal a deal with the Democratic Unionist party. There is also a Queen's Speech with no guarantee of getting the number of votes needed to approve it. This is the first minority Government in this country for 38 years, but this Prime Minister is no Jim Callaghan. She called the election expecting a bigger majority and saying she wanted a stronger mandate. She now has no mandate, no majority and no authority.

Normally, the Queen's Speech sets out what the Government will do; this Queen's Speech sets out what they won't do, can't do and daren't do. They will not make the economic changes to invest for the future and protect our public services. They cannot put forward a full programme for government, because the Prime Minister cannot yet do a deal with the DUP. They dare not even implement their own manifesto, and have taken it down from their website.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): A Queen's Speech with, I think, 21 Bills in it, and draft Bills, is not a thin Queen's Speech. May I just point out that the mandate from a 42.5% vote share in this high-turnout election is rather better than, say, Tony Blair's mandate in 2005, when he got only 35% of the vote?

John Healey: To come up with that number of Bills, the hon. Gentleman has to incorporate anything that can be loosely described as a draft Bill or flagged as potentially coming to the House in the next two years. The Prime Minister promised she would not call an election, but then did so because she wanted a bigger majority, a stronger mandate and greater authority. I am sure the Secretary of State will accept that the Prime Minister has none of those things at a time when our country is facing—I know he will appreciate this being such a strong Brexiteer—some of the biggest challenges we have faced for decades at home and abroad. At a time when we need a heavyweight Government, we have an interim leader and a set of lightweight Government Ministers.

Mr Bacon: There are plenty of heavyweight people around. Indeed, there are plenty of heavy people around, although I should say that I have lost two stone since the beginning of the election campaign. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will get on to housing at some point. Does he agree with the Redfern review, which he commissioned, that Help to Buy has the potential to be inflationary? Does he further agree that it might be better to switch the money towards help to build, which, unlike Help to Buy, would in every single case result in extra housing being built?

John Healey: We need to do both, of course. The major flaw with Help to Buy is that nearly a fifth of the people being helped to buy through the scheme are not even first-time buyers. Nearly 4,000 being helped by

[John Healey]

Help to Buy are on incomes of more than £100,000. It is not well targeted and it is not good use of public money. It could be spent much better, especially on helping younger people on ordinary incomes to get their first foot on the housing ladder.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman says that a £100,000 income should be too high to qualify for Help to Buy. What level would he set it at?

John Healey: We would be happy to consult on that. My main argument is with Ministers. They are making the wrong judgments and they are not putting in place the help that young people need in particular. That is why—the hon. Gentleman may know this—the number of homeowners under 45 has fallen by 900,000 since 2010. Young people's hopes and dreams of ever owning their own home are being completely dashed, and the Government have no plan in this Queen's Speech or in their manifesto to fix that.

In truth, the Prime Minister is locked in place by her party only until its members judge that they can dump her without facing the British people again in a fresh election. It was Margaret Thatcher who said:

“Minority Governments can only struggle on from day to day with a series of short-term measures. They can't and don't tackle the longer-term questions that affect the future of our nation and the wellbeing of all of us.”

The question for the Queen's Speech is whether the “short-term” will be days, weeks or months. On 8 June, the Prime Minister asked the people for their judgment on seven years of Conservative Government, and they gave it. Real wages have fallen, Government debt has risen, investment in new transport and housing has been slashed, the NHS is in crisis, schools are cutting teachers and last year, more than a million people used a food bank. At the same time, there have been big income tax cuts for the top earners, with more tax cuts to come for the richest on wealth that they do not even earn. We have had seven years of failure and a party with no answers to people's problems, no hope for the future, and no plan to change the country for the better or to make government work in the interests of all.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman talks about our having no plan, but only a few days ago I was at the new Bexhill business park, which has been funded by Government money. There is a new road, which will open up new land not just for housing but for employment sites. Does that not sound like a plan?

John Healey: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman's constituency of Bexhill has seen the benefit of some Government investment and support in recent years. The part of the Barnsley borough in my constituency certainly has not. The Government seem simply to overlook large parts of the country.

I now turn to housing, the theme of today's debate, and to Grenfell Tower. The Prime Minister was right today to apologise, to admit that local government and national Government were too slow, and to take charge herself. However, in a set of important commitments, which we welcome, she set several hares running and failed to answer a number of important questions.

Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) made the point that the safety checks that are imperative for all 4,000 tower blocks around the country are about not just cladding but all aspects of fire prevention and fire safety. The Secretary of State needs to make it clear that the checks will be comprehensive and rapid and that if local authorities need support and resources to carry them out, the Government will make that available. He also needs to make it clear—the Prime Minister did not—that if remedial work is needed to make the blocks safe and funding is required for that, the Government will provide it to ensure that the buildings are safe for their residents.

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Gentleman is right: the checks need to be comprehensive. Everyone agrees about that and local authorities are carrying out those checks. Many have already done so. My Department contacted every single local authority and we have made it clear that we will make the testing facility available for free—we have said that we will pay for all the tests. We have also made it clear, as the Prime Minister did today from the Dispatch Box, that if a local authority needs support and help to implement any necessary changes, we will work with it to provide that.

John Healey: Support, help and funding if local authorities need it: is that what the Secretary of State is saying to the House, yes or no?

Sajid Javid: We have made clear exactly that if a local authority needs support, including funding support, we will work with it to provide that.

John Healey: I am grateful for that and I think that the House is, too. It has taken a dozen questions to the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House to get that statement, but it is of course welcome.

I paid tribute to the Prime Minister for her leadership, having acknowledged that the Government were slow to get a grip of the matter and appreciate the scale of the tragedy. I also pay tribute to the Mayor of London, who has given a strong voice to the concerns of local communities and residents and strong leadership to the emergency services that struggled to deal with the tragedy. I pay tribute, too, to my new hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad). She has been simply magnificent in her first week in the job as a Member of Parliament. I thank my less new hon. Friends the Members for Westminster North (Ms Buck) and for Hammersmith, both of whom know the area well and, as neighbouring MPs, spent much of the past week with my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington.

I was with our Labour leader in Kensington the day after the fire. Firefighters with more than 30 years' experience told us that they had never seen anything like it. The police commander was right when she said to me, “You have to be here to appreciate how truly apocalyptic this fire was.” It was not a natural disaster, but man made. It should never have happened and must never happen again. Hon. Members of all parties have a deep responsibility to ensure that it does not.

Some have said, “Don't try to score political points from the tragedy,” but it is about politics: ideology and policy, which the House exists to debate and decide. The

residents and communities affected by the terrible tragedy want us to tackle precisely the political and policy decisions that those in power took. The Prime Minister has talked about the lessons to learn and promised that all necessary action will be taken after the investigation. As the official Opposition, we will not rest until those who need help and a new home have it, until anyone culpable has been held fully to account and until every measure is in place to prevent such a thing from happening ever again.

Surely what has happened must shock the country and us into changing the policy, ideology and responsibility of government. When a country as decent and well off as ours fails to provide something as basic as a safe and decent home to all our citizens, things must change. When this happens in one of the richest parts of the country, it offends our sense of living together as one nation, with each and every person equally treated and valued by our society and our Government. Things must change.

For decades after the second world war, there was a cross-party consensus about the value of social housing. There was also a recognition that, in only one year since then did we build more than 200,000 new homes without councils doing at least a third. In 2015 we saw the first year since the second world war when central Government provided no new funding to build new social rented homes. Labour's decent homes programme to overhaul and upgrade social housing has been stopped. Last year, Ministers ended secure long-term tenancies for new council tenants.

The Secretary of State talked about the Government's track record on social housing. My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North exposed it. Perhaps the Secretary of State could ask his officials for table 1012. My hon. Friend gave the figures for the number of starts; I will give the figure for social homes completed that people can live in. It was 37,000 when Labour left office. Last year, it was just over 1,000. That is the Government's track record on social housing. It must change.

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Gentleman referred to the decent homes standard for social housing. The programme has not been ended. Since 2010, £1.7 billion has been provided. As a result of the Government's work, the number of homes that fail to meet the decent homes standard is down by 41% from its peak in 2007.

John Healey: Will the Secretary of State confirm exactly how much is in the Homes and Communities Agency programme this year and last year for Government investment in the decent homes programme?

Sajid Javid: I shall be happy to write to the right hon. Gentleman and give him the exact number.

John Healey: Good. It is a small number, and it has a zero in it—and nothing else.

Let me return to the serious points that I wish to make. Secondly, let me say to the Secretary of State that all markets, organisations and consumers need regulation to guarantee safety, ensure fair practices, safeguard standards and stop abuse; yet that is not the mindset of current Conservative Ministers. Never again can a Minister who is challenged on fire safety measures say, "It is not

the Government's responsibility," and justify it by citing the Government's "one in, two out" rule on regulations. That must change.

Kevin Hollinrake: The right hon. Gentleman must accept that it was this Government who introduced improved regulations insisting on the installation of smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors in homes in the private rented sector, and, for the first time, required electrical safety checks and checks on appliances from this autumn.

John Healey: But my goodness, didn't people—including us—have to argue hard for those basic regulations? Why did the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, when the Bill that became the Housing and Planning Act 2016 was going through the House, reject intervention and regulation to ensure that all private landlords at least made their homes fit for human habitation before letting them? This is a Government whose mindset can see regulation only as red tape, and who do not see what the Prime Minister described as the important role played by good regulation in the public interest.

Mr Jenkin: May I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that the last thing people want to see now is parties turning this into a party political argument? It would be equally easy for us to point out that the present Government inherited the 2006 regulations from his Government. If there has been a failure of regulation, I think that it is shared. I think that what the public want to see is the House taking full and shared collective responsibility for what has happened and putting it right, rather than Members trying to accuse each other in order to score political points.

John Healey: This is precisely about politics. This is precisely what the House should do, and, in fact, it is precisely about what the Prime Minister said this morning. Indeed, my third point follows on from the point that she made when she talked about the fundamental issues that underpin the detail of what we have also been discussing.

Sections of our people feel marginalised and ignored, and that is what happened to the tenants at Grenfell Tower. It is no good the hon. Gentleman huffing and puffing; the Prime Minister said that this morning. She recognised it. However, this is a Government whose housing regulator has now dropped any real requirement for the voice and views of tenants and residents on governing boards to be heard, and who, in 2010, abolished the National Tenant Voice, which we had set up. Its establishment resulted from a report called "Citizens of equal worth". Many Grenfell Tower residents, and other social housing tenants, will feel that that rings hollow in this day and age.

Let me now deal with the specific failures on housing. Two thirds of people now believe that the country is experiencing a housing crisis. Everyone knows someone who is affected—people who are unable to obtain a home that they need or aspire to. Many of the housing decisions made by Ministers since 2010—decisions that the Secretary of State boasts about—have made the problems worse. Because Ministers have done too little for first-time buyers on ordinary incomes, home ownership has fallen to a 30-year low. They have given private landlords a freer hand and rejected legislation requiring properties to be fit for human habitation, so 11 million private renters have fewer consumer rights than they

[John Healey]

have when they buy a fridge-freezer. They have stripped away protections for people who need help with housing, so the number of people sleeping rough on our streets has more than doubled. They have cut investment and outsourced responsibility for building new homes to big developers, so, on average, fewer new homes have been built since 2010 than under any peacetime Government since the 1920s. That is the track record of the Secretary of State and his colleagues.

After seven years of failure, it is clear that the Conservatives have no plan to fix the country's housing crisis. Some of what the Secretary of State has said this afternoon, and has said before, about house building and tenants' fees is welcome, but there is nothing in the manifesto or in the Queen's Speech to tackle the wider causes of the housing crisis.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

John Healey: I have given way twice to the hon. Gentleman, and I want to finish my speech so that others can speak.

There is nothing to change the scandal of rising rough-sleeping homelessness. There is nothing to deal with the lowest level of new affordable house building in 24 years, nothing to reverse the rapidly falling level of home ownership among young people, nothing to secure supported and sheltered housing for the future, and nothing to scrap the hated bedroom tax.

However, there is an alternative, as we showed in our Labour manifesto. It is possible to fix the failings in the housing market and in housing policy. I am not just talking about a fully-fledged new Department for Housing to reflect the seriousness of the crisis, to spearhead our new deal on housing and to tackle the crisis. I am talking about a new deal for first-time buyers, with no stamp duty, guaranteed "first dibs" on new homes built in their local areas, and 100,000 new FirstBuy homes at a discount price linked to local average incomes. I am talking about a new deal for homeowners to stop leaseholders being ripped off, and a new homeowner guarantee to help people to pay the mortgage if they lose their jobs. I am talking about a new deal on house building, with at least a million new homes built over the current Parliament, and a new target for 250,000 new homes a year to be built by 2022, a level that should then be sustained each year for the five years of the next Parliament.

I am talking about a new deal on affordable homes. I am talking about building at least 100,000 genuinely affordable homes to rent and buy a year, with the biggest council house-building programme in more than 30 years. I am talking about a new deal for private renters to establish new consumer rights, with legal minimum standards, as well as making three-year tenancies the norm, with an inflation cap on rent rises. Finally, I am talking about a new deal on homelessness, involving a new national mission and plan to end rough sleeping—not some time in the future, as the Secretary of State says, but during the next Parliament.

Ministers have no domestic programme in the Queen's Speech, and no majority in the House of Commons. I offer them our new deal on housing: a deal between the

people of this country and the Government, and a bold, long-term plan to start to fix our country's housing crisis and meet people's housing needs and aspirations. If they too are willing to offer people that hope, I offer them Labour's support as they put it into practice; but if they are not, they will have to make way for a party that can change the country for the better, and can make government work for the many and not the few.

1.47 pm

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker—on a temporary basis—and thank you for presiding over yet another day of debate on the Gracious Speech.

Let me, at the outset, associate myself with the remarks of both Front Benchers about the recent tragedies that have affected all of us, throughout the country, and will continue to do so. Let us hope that, after all the bad things that have happened, good things will come. I think we can all share that view.

I also think it apposite, on a day on which we are continuing our debate on the Gracious Speech, to welcome the fact that the Duke of Edinburgh—who, sadly, could not attend the State Opening of Parliament—has, I believe, left hospital today. I am sure that we all wish him a speedy recovery. I know that he would not have wanted to miss standing at the side of Her Majesty the Queen yesterday, but he was ably represented by his son.

I welcome not just the reflective way in which the Prime Minister announced the legislative programme, but, in particular, the way in which she has approached the recent tragedies. The parliamentary arithmetic that we have been given in the House will require restraint and, I believe, a great deal of thoughtfulness on the part of all politicians on both sides of the House as we steer our country out of the European Union, and increase our engagement across the wider world. It is against the sombre background of those national tragedies, which we have been discussing at such length in the Chamber since we reconvened, that we face a very daunting period as we negotiate Brexit.

The voters made the decisions for us in the House. I think we must all agree that, in the referendum and the general election, we have learnt a lesson in democracy. You cannot second-guess the electorate. None of us expected the outcome of the referendum or the general election. In welcoming the Gracious Speech, I think we all acknowledge that it is set against an extraordinary backdrop that no one truly expected.

It is natural that the legislative timetable is dominated by Brexit but it is crucial that, during Brexit, we do not lose the economic momentum that is delivering for the whole country, and in particular for my county of Buckinghamshire. Let us not forget that, over the lifetime of the last Government and the Government before, we cut the deficit by more than two thirds. We have the highest employment on record and, in 2016, we had the fastest-growing economy in the G7.

My local economy in Buckinghamshire has benefited greatly from the Conservatives being in government since 2010. Since May 2010, unemployment in Chesham and Amersham has more than halved: it has gone from 1.9% to 0.9% in May this year. Youth unemployment is down from 3.4% to 1.4% and almost 1,000 new businesses have started since 2010.

The health of the business environment is crucial to our nation's success. Locally, we need to ensure that it is driven hard to provide not only the income that we require as a country, but the security that our citizens require. May I issue a word of warning, however, on the drive to create more housing? Particularly in Chesham and Amersham, we are finding that valuable business premises are being converted into residential properties. I do not know about the constituencies of the rest of my colleagues, but in Buckinghamshire there is a demand to start businesses, and people who want to start businesses in Buckinghamshire tell me that they cannot find the premises in which to start them. If we are losing business premises to housing, that is not the right way to create the balance in our society.

There are several Bills in the Queen's Speech to build a stronger economy. I particularly welcome the automated and electric vehicles Bill, which I think grabs all our imaginations. I am also particularly pleased to see the space industry Bill. This country has a £13.7 billion space industry. I have to declare an interest. My husband is a long-retired senior civil servant, but he was the director general of the British National Space Centre. Thirty-three years ago, when we got married, we cancelled our honeymoon because the then lady Prime Minister was due to decide on the space plan. She failed to do so. Perhaps it will take this lady Prime Minister to decide the way forward for the space industry, which has been undervalued but is one of this country's leading sectors. We have great expertise that can benefit us here and in the rest of the world.

I also welcome the smart meter Bill, although it raises a bit of a problem for me. I tried to have a smart meter put into my house but was told that the signal where the smart meter was supposed to go was so weak that it was impossible to install it.

Communications is vital to industry. The impediment to business in Bucks is not just the lack of premises but the lack of superfast broadband. I do not think we can expect our businesses to flourish in a post-Brexit world unless we have that vital infrastructure to support them. Sadly, we seem to prefer to put money into what I consider to be rapidly ageing technology.

There is no prize—my hon. Friends are all smiling on the Conservative Benches; I think there are a few smiles on the Opposition Benches, too—for guessing my next point. It is inevitable—I cannot rise to my feet in the Chamber without mentioning it. I welcome everything in the Queen's Speech, except the announcement of the HS2, phase 2a Bill.

HS2 will be written on my heart and my tombstone when I leave this world. I have to say that my heart fails me when I see that the Government are about to introduce what could be another hybrid Bill—a form of legislative torture for the House and the people who have to sit on the Committee that considers it—before we know that phase 1 is in the bag, so to speak.

We have heard today that there are three contenders to provide the rolling stock. Much is made of the fact that one of the bidders is Chinese, but HS2, phase 1, which is starting its construction phase, is in an appalling mess. It has haemorrhaged its senior management. Beth West is the latest person to leave the senior management of the company. Its governance and procurement policy has failed. It has failed to take into account conflicts of interest; the company CH2M pulled out of a £170 million contract. It has failed remarkably badly in its community engagement, particularly in Buckinghamshire.

I ask the Government to carry out, before any new legislation is brought forward, a complete and full review of phase 1 to date. I want them to revisit the business case, examine the governance of the project and decide whether it is good value for money for the taxpayer. That is the correct thing to do.

Of course, I would like the project to be cancelled. I make no secret of that. However, I think it is unrealistic, after so much money has been spent on it, to expect the Government to do that, but they do need to take a firm grip of the project. I would hope that, if the review showed that it was not good value for money for the taxpayer and that the technology was rapidly going to be overtaken, the Government would have the courage to bring it to an end.

I have still not given up hope that the Government, whatever their complexion, will honour their environmental principles. Although I have been grateful for the extra tunnelling that I have obtained under the Chilterns for the area of outstanding natural beauty, it still does not completely protect the whole AONB. The whole purpose of a national designation for an area of the country is to protect it from being violated by major infrastructure projects such as HS2. The Government have done only half the job. They could do extra tunnelling to the end of the AONB, which would greatly relieve Wendover, which is going to have vast noise barriers inserted in a rural environment. It would also show that the Government were putting their environmental credentials firmly at the centre of their legislative programme.

I am truly delighted that in the Queen's Speech we have had confirmation that the mental health legislation and how it is delivering for people will be reviewed. I know that the Minister is aware that mental health provision is a huge issue for people on the autism spectrum. Research suggests that more than 70% of children on the autism spectrum develop mental health problems during their childhood. It is important that they and autistic adults are able to get good mental health support when they need it. I hope that, in responding, the Minister will be able to fill us in some more on the scope of the review. Will it just be about access to services, which Members on both sides of the House will agree is important, or will it be a root and branch review of all the legislation and how it is delivering for people? In any case, having been privileged to serve as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on autism in the previous Parliament, I look forward to working with the Government on where we can strengthen rights and entitlements for people with autism.

Social care has been much talked about, including the provisions that were in our manifesto but perhaps are absent from the Queen's Speech. Improving our social care system is also a huge issue for people on the autism spectrum. I was glad to hear that the Green Paper with further proposals will be out soon.

I would like the Minister to confirm that the Green Paper will look at the whole system of adult social care, and to ensure that if any reform is brought forward, it addresses the needs of both the elderly and the working-age disabled populations. Much attention is rightly focused on the needs of our growing elderly population, but it is important that the needs of working-age disabled people, such as those with autism spectrum disorders, should also be looked at. The system is currently not working for them either.

[Mrs Cheryl Gillan]

In his opening remarks, the Minister alluded to the 170,000 disabled people who are in work. The Government have rightly made a pledge to halve the disability employment gap by getting 1 million more disabled people into work, and much good work was done in the previous Parliament through the “Work, health and disability: improving lives” Green Paper. However, as the House has heard me say before, the autism employment gap is even wider, and that work was not mentioned in the Gracious Speech. I hope that when the Minister winds up, he will be able to assure disabled people and those on the spectrum that the work to reduce the gap is still going forward and is still a priority for the Government.

I do not think anyone would disagree that the focus on mental health is welcomed on both sides of the House. However, speaking as a constituency MP, I can say that accessing effective help for people in crisis is still challenging, not least because of the multiplicity of agencies involved in the care of an individual. I hope that we can evaluate this and, in the case of the review, let us have a look at how we can simplify accessing help for problems for all concerned.

Finally, I would like to touch on education. Quite rightly, our programme is focusing on technical education, and we want to see educational standards improve across the board. However, I have to say that the funding of schools remains a major issue, particularly in my constituency. Buckinghamshire has seven out of the 10 lowest funded schools in the country, and I believe that it is necessary to ensure fairer funding to help with equality in education. I therefore urge my colleagues on the Front Bench to re-examine the funding of schools very carefully, and to ensure that sufficient funding comes to schools such as those in Buckinghamshire that have been grossly underfunded for many years.

This Queen’s Speech introduces a two-year programme. It contains 27 Bills and draft Bills, and it forms a great basis for this Government to move forward. It will provide the basis for a period of consolidation and enable us to grasp the opportunities for the whole of the country as we leave the European Union. We now have to establish the UK as a close friend of Europe, but a friend that, when it leaves the European Union, will once more be in charge of its own destiny. I commend the Queen’s Speech to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr George Howarth): Order. Before I call the Scottish National party spokeswoman, I must tell the House that because of the pressure on time and our wish to get as many people in as possible, I shall introduce a six-minute time limit on Back-Bench speeches once the next speaker has sat down. That limit might have to be reduced further later, but I hope not. If people stick to the time limits, and if possible even undershoot them, we might be able to stick at six minutes.

2.3 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): I should like to associate myself with the comments made by right hon. and hon. Members across the House about the tragic incident at Grenfell Tower. We on these Benches welcome the inquiry and believe that lessons must be learned from this event.

This Queen’s Speech seems to me to be one of the most shambolic and lame legislative programmes in my lifetime. The Tories, cowed by their unnecessary election defeat, are working on a weak mandate with no authority. Since the start of the month, we have seen promises ditched as they face defeat across the House. Pledges on introducing an energy price cap, disastrous social care plans, a free vote on foxhunting, the introduction of grammar schools and the setting of an immigration target have all been dropped—and yesterday we witnessed no mention of the deliberately harmful plan to scrap the triple lock on pensions.

Yet again, this Queen’s Speech proves one thing: the Tories will continue their obsession with austerity in spite of a sea of evidence against it. Let me be clear: another Parliament of cuts is a choice, not a necessity, and it is a choice that has been decisively rejected by voters across the country. The Resolution Foundation has warned that the continuation of austerity will drive the biggest inequality since the times of Margaret Thatcher. Much of the power to legislate on housing has been devolved to the Scottish Government. We ended the right to buy some time ago, taking the view that unless housing is replaced, many people are left disadvantaged and lacking the opportunity to obtain affordable housing. That is something that this Government have failed to learn.

Today’s debate also focuses on social security. The High Court ruling on the benefit cap highlights the fact that it causes real damage to single families. When will this Government learn their lesson? The incomes of the poorest third of working-age households will fall by 10% over the next four years, driving a further 1 million families across this country into poverty. By 2021, there could be more than 5 million children across the UK—a number equivalent to the total population of Scotland—living in poverty. This is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and that is a disgrace.

We on these Benches choose to take a different approach. Unlike those on the Government Benches, and many on Opposition Benches, the Scottish National party has consistently and unapologetically opposed austerity. Our approach to the public finances would balance the UK budget for day-to-day spending by the end of the Parliament. It would set debt on a downward path and, crucially, free up an additional £118 billion of public investment. With our plans, we could stop the further £9 billion of additional social security cuts that this Government will inflict. That would mean that those on low incomes who rely on in-work social security, and the vulnerable and disabled, would not have to face further punishment. Despite the rhetoric from the Labour party, its plans fail to provide the same protections.

In my constituency, the cost of welfare reform is clear. Despite my constituency’s assets, almost 25% of the children in Lanark and Hamilton East grow up in poverty. Under this Government, my constituents have had to endure a reduction in employment support allowance, a freeze on in-work support, cuts to their personal independence payments and the removal of their mobility cars. Worst of all, they are now subject to a family cap and a despicable rape clause. Austerity has failed my constituents in Lanark and Hamilton East and it has failed constituents up and down the country. However, we are, for now, in a better position than some.

My constituency is yet to face the massive ramifications of the roll-out of universal credit. Later this year, the UK Government intend to introduce universal credit in South Lanarkshire. Only a few weeks ago, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations highlighted the policy as a key concern in tackling homelessness across the country. The Scottish Government have plans to mitigate some of the worst elements of the UK Government's welfare reforms, including the roll-out of universal credit, but that will not help families across the rest of the UK. It is completely unreasonable to suggest that we should spend nearly £400 million mitigating poor decisions made by this UK Government. Universal credit will make some of my constituents homeless, and despite the work of the local authority and the third sector, the UK Government are intransigent and unrelenting in their approach.

It is clear that austerity has failed the economy and failed society. It has driven the people we should protect into poverty, hunger, humiliation and crippling debt. I had perhaps naively hoped that their defeat earlier this month would make the UK Government reflect on their approach to social security, listen to the experts, and inject the investment necessary to genuinely rebalance the economy and create a fairer society. At its very heart, that is what a social security system ought to do, yet that is exactly what this UK Government have failed to do.

Alan Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that austerity has failed and that the social security system is not providing the necessary safety net. Does she agree that the application of a proposed cap on housing benefit for supported accommodation is another issue that this Government need to reflect on? Otherwise, this austerity will hit the most vulnerable: those in women's refuges and other vulnerable adults in supported accommodation.

Angela Crawley: Absolutely. Statistics already show that over 80% of the cuts fall on women. That is simply not good enough.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Crawley: I need to make some progress.

The UK Government are fixated on a failed Brexit strategy and intent on damaging the economy and threatening jobs—so much so that they have cancelled next year's legislative programme. In closing, my call to Government Members is this: stop being fixated on fighting with the EU and get on with your day job of governing this country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir David Amess): Order. I remind the House that the six-minute time limit starts now.

2.11 pm

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Deputy Speaker. I always think that a time limit is good for focusing the mind and generating extra productivity, so I will adhere to your strictures.

The Government said in their Queens' Speech that they want to build more houses, which is an approach I strongly support. The title of the recent housing White Paper is "Fixing our broken housing market"—an important title and an admission of something that has been increasingly clear for many decades under Governments of all parties: our housing market simply does not work properly. The supply of housing does not rise to meet demand. *[Interruption.]* I see the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) nodding, and I am glad that he is nodding; I hope to persuade him of some of the solutions on which he is still resisting my charms. I am sure that I will get there over the course of this Parliament.

The fact is that our broken housing market is failing to meet aspirations. In effect, demand is unable to influence supply and drive volumes in the way that it does in markets that operate successfully. Some years ago in a Committee room upstairs, the presenter of "Grand Designs", the famous Channel 4 television programme, told our all-party parliamentary group on self-build, custom and community housebuilding and place-making:

"The consumer has been on the receiving end of a pretty poor deal. We build some of the poorest, most expensive and smallest homes in Europe. That's not something to celebrate."

At the core of the housing debate is a key intellectual problem: is development good or bad? We often see the word "development" used as a pejorative term, yet the instinct that we all have to nest and to build a home is a response to one of our deepest human needs. Mr Deputy Speaker, if you were to go on a survival course, you would be taught that without food you would die within seven to 10 days and that without water you may last three days, but you can die without shelter in 20 minutes. However, we often talk about development, which means providing enough shelter for everyone, as if it is a bad thing.

During a general election debate, one of my opponents said that housing—although she admitted that it was necessary—was a "heavy price to pay". I understand that language even if I disagree with it. The reason people so often speak about development in that way is because it is driven and brought forward in the wrong way. It should be obvious that without enough housing the chances of our children and grandchildren finding a home that they can actually afford are rapidly fading from view. In order to make "development" a good word, we have to have good development.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that one way of driving forward house building is through neighbourhood plans? They are delivering more houses than originally set out by the district councils that instructed the building of houses.

Mr Bacon: I thank my hon. Friend for that and agree with him, although the caveat is that some developers are good at getting around neighbourhood plans, undermining their basis and confidence in them. The Government need to address that.

The key to getting the right kind of development is more choice and beauty. Now, that may sound airy-fairy, but it is the exact opposite, something which the Prince of Wales noted in his BIMBY or "Beauty-In-My-Back-Yard" campaign. We must have better, smarter, beautiful

[Mr Bacon]

development that offers a wide range of real choices to consumers and is actively welcomed by existing communities, including the grandparents and parents who so often oppose development with arms folded saying, “We don’t want any houses in our area.” They want to see the next generation flourish and do well, and see their own grandchildren adequately housed. We must allow our communities greater voice and choice about what gets built, where it is built, what it looks like and who gets first chance to live there.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some extremely important points that resonate in my constituency. Does he agree that one way to ensure acceptance and, indeed, the welcoming of development in our communities is to allow for the increased availability of self-build, of which he is a great supporter, and to ensure the diversification of housing providers? Small local companies should be able to benefit from building, which brings jobs and work to the area.

Mr Bacon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As recently as 1988, 66% of housing in this country was built by small local builders. There has been a huge change that has benefited a small number of large companies, but not our communities or most of our constituents and society as a whole.

My hon. Friend mentioned self-build and it will not surprise him to know that I promoted, got through this House and the other place and secured Royal Assent for the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, which has now been strengthened by the Housing and Planning Act 2016. Some 53% of people in this country would, at some point in their lives, like to build their own house or have someone build a house to their design. Government policy should not just take account of that, but embrace it and make it as easy as possible.

All my Act does is require local authorities to keep a register of individuals and what are called “associations of individuals” who want to get a serviced plot of land to build a house. An “association of individuals” could be anyone: a group of friends; the governors of a school looking to provide accommodation to help recruit and retain teachers in difficult-to-fill subjects; or the Royal British Legion or a similar veterans’ body, such as Help for Heroes, working with veterans to fulfil their accommodation needs—[*Interruption.*] I see my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) nodding and I am pleased to see her in her place. An association of individuals could include the directors of a social services department looking to provide accommodation to help to recruit and retain social workers in parts of the country where jobs are difficult to fill. My act has now been strengthened by sections 9 to 12 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, which require local authorities not only to keep a register but, crucially, to provide enough suitable development permissions to meet the demand on the register.

I turn again to the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne, because I do not think that he is fully persuaded of how powerful such measures could be. The Dutch expert group will be imitated by the right to build expert taskforce being launched at the end of the month at a housing conference in, funnily enough, my

constituency. The taskforce will take the lessons that have been learned in the Netherlands. If we were building as many units of self-build and custom house building as there are in the Netherlands now, we would be creating 60,000 extra units a year on top of what is currently being delivered, which could make a significant difference.

I have two requests of the Government. First, paragraph 2.19 of the housing White Paper states:

“We will target the £2.3bn Housing Infrastructure Fund at the areas of greatest housing need. We will open this capital grant programme to bids in 2017... We will fund those bids that unlock the most homes in the areas of greatest housing need.”

Amen to that, but we need the details to be announced. I understand that they have not been announced due to the general election, but it needs to happen soon.

Secondly, the Government should adopt the 10-point plan of the National Custom & Self Build Association—point 2 in particular—which calls for a help to build equity loan scheme to help people get their own house. A deposit of just 5% is required to buy a home under the Help to Buy scheme, although that does not create any more dwellings; it just helps volume house builders to sell the houses that they have already built. I will happily provide the Government with what NaCSBA has proposed. A help to build scheme would ensure that an extra house was built. Moreover, one could recycle the money because, in most cases, as soon as the house is built the owner could re-mortgage, and the equity loan could be paid back and would be available to lend to somebody else.

The final thing that I want to say in the 30 seconds that remain is that our party did not reach out during the recent general election to young people in the way that it should reach out. However, it is true that all people, but young people in particular, need somewhere to live. It is absolutely fundamental. In many cases, young people have given up on the prospect of ever having their own place. We have to make owning a house a reality. The architect Rod Hackney once said:

“It is a dangerous thing to underestimate human potential and the energy which can be generated when people are given the opportunity to help themselves.”

2.20 pm

Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) (Lab): As the first Labour MP for Kensington, I am walking in the footsteps of giants. Although the boundaries have changed over the years, the charismatic figures of Alan Clark, Michael Portillo, who shares my Spanish heritage, and Malcolm Rifkind have created their own legacy, and I am grateful to my immediate predecessor, Victoria Borwick, for showing the way with her impressive social and organising skills, which I will never emulate.

I was born in Chelsea, went to school in Hammersmith and have lived in North Kensington for half my life; the constituency is in my DNA. As MP for both Harrods and the Notting Hill carnival, I hope to ensure that all my communities are cared for. I know, because I have spoken to many of them, that the good people of South Kensington have had their eyes opened in the past week and are asking the same questions that we are asking in North Kensington. The horror and fear of this man-made catastrophe will be etched in all our hearts forever. The tears may never stop, and I know that from the grief etched on the faces of people in Ladbroke Grove and from the total strangers approaching me for comfort,

reassurance, a question, a hug, to share their fears and disbelief that such horror could be visited upon our neighbourhood. The burnt-out carcass of Grenfell Tower and all that it represents, lours over us, and we have the Red Cross managing a relief programme—in Kensington.

It has been said before that tenants of Grenfell, and of other council and housing association properties, have been voicing their very serious and evidenced concerns about poor and diminishing housing standards, and about how appeals, complaints and petitions have been ignored and discredited. I have witnessed over the years the deterioration, and perhaps even the deliberate managed decline, of social housing; the frustration of a minority party councillor is huge. Eleven Labour councillors in Kensington and Chelsea Council listened to the concerns, put them forward and shouted out for their residents, but they are a minority; decisions are made in cabinet, where Labour has no representation. In my 11 years as a councillor in the community where I was born and bred, I have seen housing conditions that are simply shocking: homes growing toxic black mould; five children squeezed on mattresses in one bedroom; homework done in relays; chronic health problems such as asthma, with children being carted off to hospital at night; malnutrition rife; and the simple day-to-day organisation of clean clothes, food and personal cleanliness being carried out in rotas to allow a semblance of respectability. Child poverty in Kensington is just the same as child poverty in Lanark and Hamilton East. It is 25%—in Kensington.

People are proud. I have seen families coming out of disgracefully overcrowded and unhealthy homes who seem organised, clean and in control, however stressed and tired they are. I have had late night emails from one teenager who had been sitting on the stairs to complete her GCSE homework when her family had gone to sleep—this was the only time she could do it. I have visited a proud and ambitious family where four children, including teenagers of opposite genders, shared a bedroom. I have visited a very dear and confused elderly woman who had been living in darkness for weeks as her electricity ring main had blown and she was too afraid of strangers to let repair workers in. All these issues and more occurred in Grenfell Tower, including power surges that blew all the electrical devices, yet the residents' protestations were ignored, and the so-called "frequent complainers" were blacklisted. By what process of deregulation and the bonfire of red tape was this disaster allowed to happen?

Some people seem to think that social tenants have no right to live in an area such as "desirable" Kensington. Some people demonstrate a total lack of empathy or even respect for those not born to a world where basic human comforts and a good education are givens. Some people think that social tenants should simply move away if they don't like what they've been "given" and that housing people on low incomes in the inner city, which they serve through their labour, is not a public good, but some kind of privilege to which they are not really entitled.

So we have heard, after this disaster, that voluntary groups and charities have "stepped up" to deal with this and that they are wonderful—and indeed they are. But I want to live in a world where charities do not exist, and where volunteers are not needed to fill the yawning gaps where local services have been cut or withdrawn, to be

replaced, as they are in Kensington, by prep schools. People of all backgrounds should be safe in their beds, and have food in the fridge and shoes of the right size on their children's feet; the basic human needs cannot be met in a world of charities, food banks and handouts. In a council with a third of a billion pounds in reserves, I do not understand how this can be.

The burnt carcass of Grenfell Tower speaks for itself and has revealed the true face of Kensington—the mask has dropped. We have poverty, malnutrition, overcrowding, poor maintenance and, underlying this, a lack of care. The people who have been failed want justice and accountability, and an honest and transparent process to achieve it. We all now have to step up to ensure that we live in a world where a terrible and avoidable tragedy such as the fire of Grenfell Tower never happens again. South Kensington has stood with North Kensington, and we will work together to achieve that, as I will, as the first Labour MP for Kensington.

2.25 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): First, I wish to praise the words of my new colleague, the hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad). What a week it has been for her to start as a new MP. When I first started I had to deal with the possibility of the hydrographic UK business moving out of my constituency, which I thought was a big job to deal with, but it is as nothing compared with what she has had to deal with. I can only reiterate the comments made this morning by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition crediting the fine work that the hon. Lady has done, and so I thank her.

Let me turn to today's debate. Although we face issues in places such as Kensington, on the whole this Government's record on housing has been good, and I want to talk about that. Investment in housing has now doubled to more than £20 billion to support the largest affordable housing programme by any Government since the 1970s, and we have seen this in my constituency. The Government have delivered more than 300,000 affordable homes since 2010. When the coalition Government came into power in 2010, house building was at its lowest level since the 1920s. We cannot escape the fact that for years the Labour Government did not address that, which has exacerbated the situation we now find ourselves in. However, I always say that there is always room to do more, because everybody deserves a home of their own. While on the issue of housing, I want to pay tribute to the former Housing Minister and Member for Croydon Central. I had the pleasure of working closely with him during the last Parliament and he was a fantastic champion for the housing industry. He will be sorely missed, but this is only Downing Street's gain.

I want to talk about the renewed commitment to housing supply in the Queen's Speech. Thousands of new homes are being built in my constituency, many of them in new estates. I knocked on the door of hundreds during the election campaign, from Monkton Heathfield to Killams, Wellington to Wiveliscombe, and I was very struck by the type of people benefiting from Conservative policies and the investment in housing that has enabled the building of all these properties. Undoubtedly, the people living in them are, on the whole, first-time buyers; they are young people, often with young families. Those

[Rebecca Pow]

are the kinds of people this Government are helping, especially through our Help to Buy schemes. There are all manner of schemes under which one can now get into owning a property—or a bit of it or a share of it. There are so many different schemes and they are very popular. There are great advantages to buying or moving into a new home, because they are energy-efficient and they cost less to run.

Let us not forget that the people living in all these houses, particularly those around Taunton Deane, all have jobs and are all working in the constituency. They are all contributing to the economy and paying their taxes—low taxes I might add, to which we are committed in the Gracious Speech, unlike the Labour party. All of this is working for the economy as a whole. One thing I have noticed is that among these new housing developments we need to address the infrastructure and the traffic generated by all these new homes. We need to make sure we get the right facilities in the right places to accompany all these houses. I am very pleased that in the last two years I have been able to be part of a group of stakeholders that has managed to attract an incredible £300 million to Taunton Deane, largely for these infrastructure projects. That will make these developments much more viable. We have the developments at the Toneway, Creech Castle and the railway station, and they will all help to make the economy work and to make people's lives more sustainable. We also now have garden town status, which I played a role in securing. With that, Taunton Deane will now be able to bid into the £2.3 billion housing infrastructure pot of money, to make these homes and the whole infrastructure around them more sustainable. So it is very important that we build the right homes in the right places and make them sustainable.

The excellent housing White Paper contains lots of ideas about the types of homes in which we might live: should we have container homes, or homes on water, for instance? We need to take great care if we are going to build up, as we know from the recent tragic events. Careful thought needs to be given to these matters, but we have got the building regulations and building controls. We have established an effective, new, high-quality system that will enable us to live in the homes that we want, and with sustainable drainage, because in Somerset flooding is a big issue so I urge the Housing Minister to be very conscious of including that as well. I applaud the introduction of the electric vehicles Bill, because all these initiatives will help to make our neighbourhoods better places in which to live.

Finally, I look forward to the introduction of the agriculture Bill. I hope we will build into this new Bill not only a Brexit that works for all our land use and agriculture—because this is a huge industry—but measures that work for the environment, too. We must attract and bring in all the environmental protections that we need to make our country sustainable. That brings us back to housing, because, of course, without a sustainable environment we do not have a sustainable future.

I welcome the Queen's Gracious Speech; I welcome everything in it to make Brexit work and the fact that we will have the tools in place to continue to have a positive economy moving forward.

2.32 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Like many others, I had expected a little more from this Queen's Speech. On the key point regarding the repeal of the European Communities Act, the certainty and assurance my constituents want to see is that there will be no loss of rights or protections as a result of leaving the EU. The last thing our country needs right now is a bunch of "here today, gone tomorrow" Ministers blundering around undoing the rights and safeguards on which the British people depend for protections at work, human rights, environmental security and economic wellbeing.

One thing is clear: we do not need to hear any more nonsense about extensive use of secondary legislation or Henry VIII powers, as this Parliament has plenty of time to debate these issues. As we reflect on whether contempt for regulation played any part in the Grenfell tragedy, the last thing we want is to see our water and air standards reduced and food safety compromised because of the behaviour of those who fundamentally reject precautionary principles or the idea that the polluter pays.

If part of my job is to reflect the concerns of my constituents, it is only fair that I point out that in a recent survey I undertook with the people of Selly Oak, they were very clear that their No. 1 concern was housing and homelessness. That is perhaps not surprising when we can barely move in Birmingham these days without coming across someone sleeping in a shop doorway. The problem is not confined to the city centre; it is rife across the suburbs and the same all over the country. It is a consequence of an obsession with austerity. In some cases it is a direct result of the Government's pointless meddling with the Supporting People programme, heartless and botched attacks on local authority spending, and ill-considered welfare changes. My advice centres are full of people with housing problems: a mother with two children who has been forced to sleep on the floor of her parents' two-bedroom house for over three years; the man whose bedroom is covered in black mould; repairs that never get done; or the woman who contacted me to say that she and her three-year-old son had been subjected to carbon monoxide poisoning courtesy of a flue that had not been properly connected to a boiler despite the work being signed off by the landlord's gas engineer.

This Queen's Speech should be setting out to make these problems a priority. We need the law to be simplified so that there are powers to utilise land that has been banked by individuals or organisations. We need permissive powers to encourage funding opportunities so that, as well as traditional build, there is scope for smaller developments, community build, and high-quality, healthy and environmentally modern systems. We need to be certain that this Government are now serious about building such housing and ending the scandal of homelessness.

Of course, rather than being shy of regulation, we need to tackle rogue landlords and developers, whether we are talking about council and social housing or the private sector. Last year, the Government had an opportunity to look at my Protection of Family Homes (Enforcement and Permitted Development) Bill, which warned of the dangers of rogue building and conversions. Perhaps if the Government had spent a little more time

listening and a little less time talking it out, their minds would have been a little more focused on safety and regulation. I hope that I will be able to give them another opportunity in this Parliament, but we should not be waiting for a private Member's Bill; providing protection for tenants and homeowners against rogue landlords and developers should be a Government priority.

Of course, with so little else to address in this Queen's Speech, I thought we might have seen an offer to revisit the plight of the WASPI women. If transitional arrangements in the form of pension credits are not the answer for these women, who are being punished through no fault of their own, what is the answer? It surely cannot be to wait until their numbers dwindle through age and ill health. This is an injustice for all to see. Why not have a short piece of legislation to tackle it now? And while we are at it, where is the promise to straighten out the mess that is affecting disabled people and the scandal of personal independence payments? How many people have to go hungry, suffer a breakdown, get into mountains of debt and lose their entire self-respect before this Government recognise that there is a world of difference between helping those who can work into work and setting arbitrary targets based on bonus payments for private companies that strip the poor, the sick and disabled of support to which any civilised society would see them as rightfully entitled?

We heard a bit yesterday from the mover of the Gracious Speech about his wish for a fairer, more just society. I want that as well. So how am I to explain to my constituents that the average chief executive of a FTSE 100 company now earns 144 times the average salary? How do we compare that with cuts to in-work benefits and pay freezes for low-paid workers? Why are the Government not doing something to tackle that? What about introducing a compulsory living wage—and these people on high salaries can certainly afford to pay tax on a salary of that level?

2.38 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to deliver my maiden speech during such an important debate on the future of our country. The challenges ahead of us all are indeed profound.

Representing much of the Scottish borders for 10 years in my previous role as a Member of the Scottish Parliament was a great honour and privilege. Now, as the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk, I find myself once again humbled by the trust and confidence placed in me by my constituents. I am deeply grateful for their support and promise to work as hard as I possibly can to represent them, regardless of their party politics.

I count myself very lucky to live in and represent one of the most beautiful parts of the United Kingdom—if not the most beautiful. Due to the rural nature of the constituency, it is one of the larger areas represented in this House. With size, comes great diversity: fishing communities like Eyemouth on the Berwickshire coast, paired with distinct and historic towns such as Duns, Coldstream, Hawick, Selkirk, St Boswells, Jedburgh, Newcastleton and Kelso; and then out to the valleys of the remote communities of Etrick and Yarrow.

My new constituency includes the towns of Galashiels, Melrose, Earlston and Lauder, which I did not have the pleasure of representing in my previous role in the Scottish Parliament. For those who do not know this part of Scotland, all these border towns, and the lands that surround them, are famed for their beauty. Their history runs deep, as is clearly apparent in the centuries-old common ridings and festivals that are held every year in many towns throughout the borders. We also have the glorious home of Sir Walter Scott, Abbotsford house, on the banks of the mighty River Tweed.

Of course, the rural and diverse nature of the constituency provides us with many challenges. I will make it my mission in this place to improve broadband connectivity, thus ensuring that businesses can thrive and compete with the more urban areas of these islands. Similarly, I will make the creation of an environment that allows for job creation a priority. In my view, creating good and well-paid jobs is the best way of lifting people out of poverty. Effective and sustainable transport links—including the extension of the borders railway to Hawick and on to Carlisle—together with better broadband connectivity and improvements to other infrastructure, will be the key to pursuing that aim.

The challenges and opportunities thrown up by Brexit for my constituents—especially export businesses, farmers and fishermen—will be of fundamental importance over the coming years. I will work tirelessly to help to ensure that we come out of the process even stronger and even more together than we are now. Specifically, I look forward to working with the Government on establishing the borderlands growth deal, which will not only secure economic prosperity but deepen ties between communities in southern Scotland and northern England. Our communities may be divided by a border line marked on the map, but we share many of the same challenges, and the borderlands growth deal will give us the opportunity to tackle them together.

Speaking in this great Chamber today, I am struck by the importance of effective parliamentary democracy. Most of all, though, I am reminded of the significant contributions that my predecessors have made to this place. I know that my immediate predecessor, Calum Kerr, worked hard to ensure that the voice of Borderers was heard. We had differing views on big political issues of the day, but he is proud of his border roots and his contributions here were evidence of that. I wish him and his family well for the future. Before him, Michael Moore represented the constituency for 18 years. Such long service and loyalty to the borders will not be forgotten any time soon. His time as Secretary of State for Scotland at such a crucial time in our Union's history, and his successful private Member's Bill on the international aid target, show that his influence was not confined to the borders. I pay tribute to him, too.

As I mentioned, the borders is steeped in history and tradition. The foremost examples of this are our common ridings and festivals, which are currently getting under way throughout the borders. All the towns have their own distinct form of celebration and commemoration. However, one thing remains constant: all are a celebration of identity and pride, and all allow those who gather a chance to reflect on those who have gone before them. Although a celebration of individuality, the events that take place in each town tie the people of the borderlands together in a show of pride and commonality.

[John Lamont]

In Selkirk's common riding, which took place last week, the focus, as at many of these events, is on the battle of Flodden in 1513, when 80 people from Selkirk—known as Souters—went to fight for King James IV against the English. The King was killed in battle, becoming the last monarch from these isles to die in battle, and only one Souter returned. That reminds us that for centuries, whether at war with each other or side by side in war, the nations of our great country have always been intertwined, and our deep, lasting ties are impossible to disentangle.

Our common ridings and festivals, which display such pride in one's identity yet symbolise an overarching feeling of unity, are striking. Pair that with the rich history that all the nations of our Union share, and it is clear to me that we have much more in common than not—that we are, together, worth more than apart. Perhaps that is clearer now than it has ever been in recent times. Such values are what we all must fight for. I look forward to playing my part as the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk. Once again, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to you for allowing me to speak today, and to my constituents for electing me to this place. I hope to do my best in this Parliament for the borders, for Scotland, and for all of our United Kingdom.

2.44 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) on his maiden speech. As an Ulster Scot who has a very strong relationship with those on the mainland, it is always good to have a Scottish cousin in the House. I invite him to come to Strangford—then we will see whether he still thinks he has the most beautiful constituency in the whole United Kingdom. It is a pleasure to have him in the House, and we wish him well in all that he does.

It is no surprise that the Queen's Speech mainly included issues relating to Brexit. This is the most crucial time in recent British history for good legislation, and it is clear that there must be a focus on getting the best approach to our exit from Europe. This debate is on housing and social security, and when we talk about housing, we should also focus on where that housing is. Where we have housing we need good healthcare, so we need to ensure that there is investment in GP practices nationwide—the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who is not currently in the Chamber, referred to the lack of investment in his area. We need to encourage young students to commit to service as a GP. We need to strengthen the ties between GPs and their local surgeries, and we can give GPs the support they need in the form of initiatives such as treating minor ailments in chemists, thereby using the available professionalism and capability to the fullest.

Returning Members will know about one of my passions in this House, and new Members will hopefully know shortly: I am well known for being the Democratic Unionist party spokesperson for human rights and for my concern about persecution throughout the world. Sadly, this has been exemplified on our shores recently with terrorist attacks against freedom and democracy—attacks on the very core of our communities. The world

is changing. As chair of the all-party group on international freedom of religion or belief, I believe that understanding the religious dynamics playing out in different communities must be of the utmost importance when Her Majesty's Government form any internationally focused policy. I appreciate that the Government are committed to that.

Some 80% of people worldwide live in countries where social hostility and restrictions on religion are high or very high. Freedom of religion or belief is a human right that is often overlooked. In 2016, nearly 90,000 Christians were killed simply because of their religious beliefs. In more than 100 countries around the world, more than 215 million Christians continue to face intimidation, imprisonment, forced conversion or assault.

Stephen Lloyd: Does the hon. Gentleman, like me, support Open Doors, an organisation that publicises some of the shocking discrimination and prosecutions against Christians around the world, and that urges Her Majesty's Government to step up and make it absolutely clear that this is unacceptable, as it would be against any religion?

Jim Shannon: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that Open Doors does excellent work, and I am aware of it day to day. There are many organisations in the House, but Open Doors also takes the opportunity to stand up for and talk to people around the world.

So-called Islamic State has nearly succeeded in its attempt to eradicate the Christian communities of Iraq and Syria; the Christian population has plummeted from 1 million to 200,000 in Iraq, and from 1.25 million to 500,000 in Syria. Many Christians remain displaced and face discrimination that prevents them from gaining equal access to food, shelter, education and work. In May, 122 Christians in Eritrea were rounded up from their homes and detained, including disabled people and entire families. That escalation in the crackdown on Christians coincides with the Orthodox archbishop's 10th year under incommunicado house arrest.

In April we saw the Russian Supreme Court's decision to declare the Christian sect Jehovah's Witnesses an extremist organisation, banning their headquarters and all 395 local organisations from operating and ordering their property to be seized by the state. That shows a clear escalation.

In Pakistan, only last week a Shi'ite man, Taimoor Raza, was charged with blasphemy and handed the death sentence, contrary to international law. That underlines the issues there. In Myanmar, since 2012 over 168,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled the country because of attacks by the military, including the burning of homes and the raping of women. Those are vile, evil, wicked deeds, and in some cases they are carried out by its Government.

Advancing freedom of religion or belief between faith communities helps to build tolerant and cohesive communities. I believe that it is a crucial component of Government policy, not only in preventing further violent attacks on people because of their faith, but in preventing violent extremism and achieving the sustainable development goals. There is a role to play for the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and, I believe, the Ministry of Defence. I am pleased to see the Minister for Disabled

People, Health and Work on the Government Front Bench. This is not her responsibility, but I know that she will take my points on board.

The Government's recent manifesto declared that they would

"expand our global efforts to combat...violence against people because of their faith".

The Prime Minister has made a commitment to stand up for the freedom of people of all religions to practise their beliefs openly and in peace and safety. Perhaps the Minister responsible will clarify what those measures will be. For example, will they ensure that displaced communities in Iraq and Syria can return home safely? I offer the Government the APPG's assistance in taking those measures forward.

As part of its membership of the EU, the UK has routinely asserted its commitment to promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief as part of its global human rights diplomacy. The UK regularly reports on its implementation of the EU guidelines for freedom of religion or belief and has made further commitments within the EU human rights framework. I ask the Minister responsible whether Her Majesty's Government will retain the commitment to monitor and report their implementation of freedom of religion or belief through their representatives globally. I urge the Government to deepen their work with multilateral organisations such as the Commonwealth and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

I believe that the Government are committed to that in some of their policies, but I am seeking an assurance because it was not mentioned specifically in the Queen's Speech, and I think it is important that we put down a marker now. There are many things that we would wish to see happen. This matter is very close to my heart, as it is to the hearts of many people across the whole United Kingdom. The fact that people are intimidated because of their religious beliefs, having to live in endangered neighbourhoods, or even killed, indicates how important this issue is.

I want to mention a few other things that also concern me. There are many aspects of Brexit that we wish to support and take forward. I commend the financial guidance and claims Bill. Age UK recently contributed to the Government's consultation on the future of the Money Advice Service, the Pensions Advisory Service and Pension Wise. I support the proposal to create one agency, which I think would be a step in the right direction, as the Government have recognised. I also welcome the smart meters Bill, which I believe will help older people to manage their energy costs. We should support that initiative. There are many other issues that we also need to work on.

The votes are in and the Government are in place. The agreement between the DUP and the Government is not done just yet, so let us see how that goes, but we look forward to carrying out the business of this House for all our constituents in the years to come.

2.52 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is a genuine pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I also congratulate my new colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), on his excellent maiden speech. Well done; brilliant!

Violence driven by hatred and intolerance have blighted our country in recent weeks, and the ghastly fire at Grenfell Tower has only heightened a growing sense of unease. I have to say that this feeling has been exploited shamelessly by some for political gain, and I find that totally inappropriate. I would like to place on the record the fact that I have the highest admiration for the Prime Minister, who was knocked first one way and then the other by events over which she had no control. Her apology to the House yesterday and today for the failure of both local and national Government to respond appropriately to the fire was delivered with great humility and should be welcomed.

Naturally, Brexit dominated much of the Queen's Speech, and rightly so. We have a challenge ahead of us over the next two years, and one that we will rise to. I am a little tired of the siren voices, both in this place and in the media, for the decision to leave the EU has been made, and now it is time to get right behind UK plc. Of course jobs and our future prosperity must be key factors in future negotiations, but which idiot of a bureaucrat or politician would purposefully punish the UK by placing obstacles in the way of the free trade on which both we and the EU rely so heavily? I am confident that common sense and pragmatism will prevail against those wishing to prop up a failing political project. Let us face it: scores of countries already have access to EU markets, so why can't we?

The future is exciting and prosperity beckons as we reach out to countries around the world for new trade deals. I was saddened that we did not hear more from the Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade during the election. He has much to sing about and all of it encouraging.

To ensure that our overseas exploits are a success, we really must secure our finances back home. The elephant in the room is our massive debt of about £1.9 trillion. The interest alone to service this elephant is circa £47 billion—just imagine what we could do with that money.

I also wish that we had a simplified tax system, as it gets more complicated with every Budget. The easier the taxes are to collect and the lower they are, the more money the Government will find. I welcome the Government's commitment to spend at least 2% of our national income on defence—the NATO minimum—but, as I have argued in this place for the past seven years, that is not enough. It was over 5% in my time, and even then retaking the Falklands was touch and go. We often hear people say that the UK tries to punch above her weight. Yes, we do. As a beacon of freedom, hope and democracy, we have frequently been called on to do our duty around the world, which does not come cheap. I call on the Government to spend more on defence, especially as we face uncertain times and do not want to be caught napping again.

Internal security also concerns me. As a former soldier who served in Northern Ireland on three operational tours, I know how important it is to have a uniformed presence on the streets. It not only reassures residents, but dominates the ground on which the terrorist wants to operate. Similarly, more police on the streets would do the same. I appreciate that the nature of crime has changed. Online crime, for example, consumes much police time and officers, but community policing is just as important and, frankly, it is where much of the intelligence should and must come from to tackle crime.

[Richard Drax]

On education, I must repeat my call for fairer funding for schools, especially in a rural constituency such as mine in South Dorset. I accept that there are now more good and outstanding schools, and that is to be recognised—people must be congratulated on that—but the current funding formula is really not fair. We do not want all the cake in South Dorset, just a fairer share of it.

The vexed question of climate change is my next observation. Although no one would argue with the need to break away from our reliance on fossil fuels, there has to be an affordable and workable alternative that keeps our economy turning and the lights on. Yes, renewables must play a part, but phasing out our coal and gas-fired power stations could be a “monstrous act of self-harm”, according to Nick Timothy, the former aide to the Prime Minister. Interestingly, the Office for Budget Responsibility says that soaring green subsidies and levies are due to virtually double during this Parliament to £14.7 billion a year. Those are paid through our energy bills. We really need a credible approach to our future energy needs, and setting unrealistic and potentially damaging targets is not a sensible way forward.

On overseas aid, I am afraid that I do not agree with the arbitrary 0.7% target. Yes, we should help those who need help, but we need help in this country, too. Charity starts at home. I want the money that we send—taxpayers’ money—better targeted, and the money that we do not send spent on very good causes in this country.

2.58 pm

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): I wish to associate myself with the earlier comments from the Front Benchers on the Grenfell Tower tragedy. I also wish to congratulate the right hon. Member for South West Hertfordshire (Mr Gauke) on his appointment as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. I am glad to be back, and, as I have been appointed the Liberal Democrat spokesman on work and pensions, I shall be having numerous conversations with him. Today, there are four particular aspects of social services on which I want to focus. There is an awful lot to cover, but I shall restrict myself to four: universal credit, WRAG, WASPI and PIP.

When I was thinking of those four this morning in preparation for my speech—I was involved with all of them during the coalition, to a greater or lesser extent, often trying to improve or change things—I saw that they were shocking combinations of poor quality. Universal credit has poor-quality policy. I remember years ago, under the coalition Government, when it was first mooted, that I supported the concept of bringing all benefits together to one point of contact. That would be more sensible for the recipient. The key, though, was the taper. I was very disappointed that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, who now edits the *Evening Standard*, insisted on an absolutely ludicrous taper that means that people on universal credit are barely better off in a low-paid job than they are on benefit, which defeats the whole purpose of universal credit. I look forward to the new Secretary of State using his charm with his close colleague, the current Chancellor, to get a more intelligent taper. Without that, universal credit is doomed to fail, and we all know in this Chamber the problems people already face with its delivery. The taper was bad policy.

WRAG is an acronym for work-related activity group, and is meant for disabled people who have had a disability or have had a disability for quite some time and believe that they can—and the DWP believes that they can—get back into jobs, with the correct levels of support. That is something that I am passionate about, and that I was passionate about when I was last in this House. From April this year, the Government took a decision to reduce the income of those in the WRAG by almost 30%. Anyone with any experience of disability at all will know that if someone has been disabled for quite some time, they can get out of the habit of getting into work. It takes a bit of support to get them back into employment, so they go into the WRAG. To then cut their income by 30%—folks, we know what will happen. People will do their darnedest to stay in the support group, which means that they do not get back into jobs. I think that that was a stupid decision by the Government.

Thirdly, on the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign, this decision was profoundly unfair. My partner, if she will forgive me for giving her broad age to the Chamber, is one of those affected. Many women between 55 and 58 across the United Kingdom are affected and it is profoundly unfair. We hear that under the new consensual approach to government the Conservatives are ready to loosen the austerity strings, to listen more to people and to be fairer, and I would urge them to have the WASPI women at the top of the list for reconsideration.

Last but not least is PIP, or the personal independence payment. Again, I am very frustrated because I worked hard with Lord Freud in the other place to try to get PIP to work. The concept is about individual personal income, allowing people with disabilities to control the money they have and use it in the right way. The concept is good, but then guess what happens? I go and lose the election in 2015—I am sure that I am far too insignificant to have made any difference at all, but PIP has not improved things. We are still getting a high rate of people failing the work capability assessment and going to tribunal; more than 80% of them are winning, which means that PIP is not working and the delivery of PIP is not working.

Over the coming years—however long this Parliament lasts—I am looking forward to working with the Government in a spirit of compromise to improve these areas of the DWP and its remit so that it delivers what it is supposed to deliver: fairness, equity and ease of access. The latter is terribly important when someone has been on benefits for a long time, as there must be a smooth transition of funds.

On the pension side, I am delighted that the Conservative manifesto pledge to get rid of the triple lock was dropped in the Queen’s Speech. I remind the House that it was the Liberal Democrats in coalition who brought in the triple lock pension, so I am glad that despite those halcyon days the Conservatives are finally listening to the Lib Dems and have retained the triple lock.

Most importantly of all, it is good to be back. I pay tribute to my predecessor, who I know fought valiantly for Eastbourne. For me, it is a pleasure.

3.4 pm

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), and I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the

Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) on his very fine maiden speech.

When Her Majesty Queen Victoria granted permission to her military command in 1854 to establish a permanent training camp for the British Army at the village of Aldershot, the foundation was laid not just for a successful garrison, but for a remarkable tradition of service to this country. Since that time, my constituency of Aldershot has been the home of the British Army and, since its foundation more than 160 years ago, thousands of servicemen and women have passed through the garrison while doing their loyal duty to the Crown. Today the garrison is still home to thousands of soldiers and their families: the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, the Queen's Own Gurkha Logistic Regiment, 4 Rifles and my own regiment, the 1st Battalion Scots Guards. These regiments, as part of 12th Armoured Infantry Brigade, form one of the country's most deployable and experienced combat units, with distinguished service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For many years, Aldershot was home to the Parachute Regiment and British airborne forces. It was from Aldershot in 1982 that the airborne battalions of 2 and 3 Para joined the British taskforce sailing to the south Atlantic to liberate the Falkland Islands from the Argentine invasion. Last Sunday, to mark the 35th anniversary of their victory, our town was honoured to welcome back the surviving veterans of 2 and 3 Para, and the families of the fallen. They were joined by a new generation of serving soldiers and many local people from across our community in a demonstration of the high regard that Aldershot has for the armed forces community and the strong civic bond that exists between the military, the town and the wider borough of Rushmoor. Indeed, the borough has taken creative measures to support our veterans—for example, enabling a £10 million investment from Stoll to provide social housing for vulnerable veterans and help to reduce the alarmingly high levels of homelessness among that group of people.

Another group whose history is intertwined with that of Aldershot and the surrounding area is that of former Gurkha soldiers and their families. Their historic loyalty to our monarch and their immaculate record of courageous service is second to none, and they play a much valued and respected role in our community today. The Nepalese community is particularly active when it comes to charitable fundraising, and many other groups across the borough do exactly the same thing. Our football club, Aldershot Town, is more than just a club. It is a community hub that raises tens of thousands of pounds every year for good causes—as too, do the Rotarians, who are justifiably proud of the annual Rotary club donkey derby in Farnborough, which I recommend to all hon. Members.

Although my constituency is the home of the British Army, it is also the birthplace of British aviation. When Samuel Cody made the first British flight on the heath at Farnborough in 1908, it was the start of a remarkable story of courageous and determined innovation that has now blossomed into a huge global industry. Today, companies such as BAE Systems, TAG Farnborough, QinetiQ and a plethora of highly innovative defence aviation and hi-tech companies in Farnborough and the Blackwater valley employ thousands and earn millions for our Exchequer.

I did not start my life with a particular interest in politics. I started my career as a soldier and I am humbled to come to this place as a parliamentarian. I

know that in my predecessor, Sir Gerald Howarth, I have very large shoes to fill. Sir Gerald is a man of absolute integrity who has dedicated his life to public service, and I have been hugely fortunate to benefit from his kindness and his wise counsel.

The strength of the military presence in my constituency is mirrored by the strength of civic society across Rushmoor borough, and I am proud of that. I am proud that we have a great history and a great future. We are diverse and dynamic. I am proud that we now have the youngest ever mayor of the borough, Councillor Sophia Choudhary, who also happens to be a young Muslim woman of Kashmiri heritage. I hope to serve my constituents with the same sense of public service, energy and compassion that they themselves display every day of the week across Aldershot, Farnborough, Blackwater and Hawley.

Anyone familiar with my constituency will know that one figure who literally towers over us is the Duke of Wellington. The Iron Duke sits on horseback in massive bronze relief on top of Round Hill. The Iron Duke, never one to be over-patient with politicians, would, I think, have agreed with this nation's other greatest soldier-turned-statesman, Sir Winston Churchill, who, as a young cavalry officer, lived in Aldershot cavalry barracks before deploying to India. Churchill famously said:

“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

On that note, Mr Speaker, I will resume my place.

3.10 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) on a fine maiden speech, and congratulate others who have made maiden speeches today.

I hope I may be forgiven for particularly singling out my hon. Friend the new Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad), who not only made a fine and moving speech but has had to rise to the kind of challenge that I am not sure anybody has ever had to rise to so soon after being elected to Parliament. Kensington needs her, and she has certainly risen to that challenge in these days. I hope we will all do what we can to support her in the times ahead. I speak with particular feeling because some of the wards in the northern part of her constituency were in my constituency under previous boundaries, as was Grenfell Tower. What she said was therefore particularly powerful and moving for me.

I echo what my hon. Friend and others have said about the extraordinary community response at a time of serious failure in the institutions of the state in the aftermath of the tragedy, including from many constituents in north Westminster, a sister community who have been working tirelessly over the past week to help the victims and survivors of the disaster.

Along with very many other Members of Parliament, my hon. Friend and I have residents living in other tower blocks, many of whom are deeply concerned. I hope that few will have anything like the equivalent level of reason to be concerned, although they will still need reassurance. However, some may need more support and assistance than reassurance. It is absolutely incumbent on us to rise to that challenge.

Steve McCabe: Is not the one single bit of reassurance that everyone needs the knowledge that if local authorities

[*Steve McCabe*]

are going to carry out inspections and take remedial action, there will be funding from the Government to deliver it?

Ms Buck: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I and others pushed for that during the statement and at other opportunities. The local authorities, the arm's length management organisations and other providers must have a guarantee. They must have the bills underwritten both for the inspection process and for any remedial works. I think we have nudged closer to that commitment this afternoon, but we still do not have it unequivocally. This is important because local authorities have had their budgets cut very severely, Kensington by 38% in the past five years and my own borough of Westminster by 46%. Local authorities, including the environmental health teams who are so important in this context, have had their budgets cut, and social housing providers have had a rent cut imposed on them, with an impact on housing revenue accounts and on management and maintenance in social housing. That has to be recognised. It was a policy imposed by the Government and it has implications that they need to respond to. That action has to be forthcoming.

The Government will need to demonstrate to us how quickly they can respond to the findings of the inquiry, which cannot be prejudged, of course, but actions need to be taken even before that. We have spoken about social housing in this context, but we need to remember that many residents in towers and high-rise blocks, even those built by local authorities, are not actually local authority tenants. In many cases, about a third are either leaseholders, or are legally subletting their properties to private tenants. Those people are all in different situations and subject to different regulatory arrangements, and there are real concerns that the fire safety and other standards applying in social housing do not automatically apply to private owners and leaseholders in social housing blocks. That must be urgently addressed by the Government.

In my view, we need to bring into force section 38 of the Building Act 1984, which would allow victims of breaches of building regulations to sue for damages. The Government could move on that. We need to introduce a statutory consultation process applying to tenants when there are major works in buildings. Such a process currently applies to leaseholders, but not to tenants. We need to amend the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to allow landlords to go into tenanted properties and ensure that fire safety standards are comparable. We also need to impose new obligations on leases to enable landlords to require access for the purpose of making fire safety improvements, and so forth. There are regulatory changes on which the Government could act immediately and urgently—and they must do so—without in any way prejudging the findings of the inquiry and the separate actions that they will need to take afterwards.

I ask the Government to revisit a revised version of the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Bill—I introduced the proposals as a private Member's Bill, and the Opposition put them forward as amendments to the Housing and Planning Act 2016—because, particularly in an age of cash-starved local authorities, we need to enable tenants to enforce standards in law when there is substandard accommodation, as they can

currently do with respect to properties in disrepair. This is not about having a new regulatory burden; it is about tenants being able to enforce such standards.

In my last remaining minute I want to raise one other matter. The absolute first priority today must be to house the survivors of the Grenfell Tower tragedy adequately—we must provide them with decent local accommodation—but that must not be at the expense of the needs of other people who are homeless and in desperate housing need, whether in Kensington, Westminster or other parts of London. At the moment, we are in the dire situation that homelessness is rising fast: it has risen by 17% since 2010, and just yesterday we saw figures showing that the number of households in temporary accommodation has risen by a staggering 61% since 2010. As has happened in Kensington and Westminster, many of those families have been moved away from their homes, their children's schools and their support networks. Social housing is not part of the problem; social housing for these and other people is part of the solution, provided it is properly funded, decent and affordable.

3.18 pm

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I want to place on the record my apologies for disappearing from the debate last night: I had a meeting with the Brexit Secretary, and that was unavoidable. I echo the comments made by Government and Opposition Front Benchers yesterday in offering their sympathies and condolences to all those who have died, been injured or been terribly affected by the horrendous recent events in Manchester and London.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck). She quite rightly said that the hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) has had the most extraordinary introduction to her career as an MP. She has conducted herself extremely well, and I commend her for her maiden speech. I also commend my hon. Friends the Members for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) and for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) for theirs. All three have made a very fine start to their parliamentary careers, and I am sure that we will hear much more from them in the future.

Mr Speaker, you and I were elected 20 years ago. I am proud to return to the House as the Member for North Shropshire, with a record number of votes and a record percentage of the vote. I put that down partly to my very clear line that I want decisions about our laws and our money to be taken in this place by directly elected politicians. I am very proud to follow my predecessor—the, sadly, late John Biffen—who voted against the European Communities Act 1972, and it is tremendous to be present for a debate on a Gracious Speech that states, among its first lines, that we will repeal the European Communities Act. We will be delivering what 17.4 million people voted for, which happily was announced on my birthday at about this time last year.

Members on both sides of the House had better realise that for the first time, a massive vote in a referendum has gone against the wishes of the establishment. That is a constitutional novelty and all of us in this House had better wake up to the catastrophic damage that will be incurred to the integrity of the whole political establishment if we do not deliver.

I am delighted to say that in the election, 85% of the electorate voted for the Conservative party and the Labour party, both of which said in their platforms that we will honour the vote, we will leave the European Union, we will leave the single market and we will leave the customs union. The Liberals, bravely and quixotically, said that they would not and did extremely badly. They got only 2.4 million votes. I believe that we have a very clear mandate in this Parliament to deliver. The Gracious Speech makes it clear that that is what we will do.

About three years ago, I made a speech saying that we should nationalise the acquis. That was my expression for adopting the whole corpus of European law and filleting it at a later date. The idea goes right back to the reception statute of Virginia of 1776, the reception provision of the Delaware constitution of 1776, the moves to make Australia and New Zealand independent, the Irish Free State Constitution Act 1922 and the Indian Independence Act 1947, all of which adopted existing UK law but said that from the stroke of midnight, any further provisions made in this Parliament would not apply.

That is effectively what we will say. We are going to take back control of our laws for the elected Members of this House. We are going to take back control of our money. There is much debate among Members from every part of the House. Every one of us knows how we would like to spend public money in our constituency. Happily, we will have £10 billion, which is our net contribution, to play with. We can decide in this House what to do with it. If we make bad decisions, we will get kicked out and people who might make better decisions about money will replace us.

Leaving the single market will deliver on the political imperative and the economic imperative. Opposition Members rightly say that we should have a Brexit for jobs. They go on about the single market, but do they realise that in 1999, 61% of our trade went to the EU, today it is 45% and in a few years' time it will be 35%? The growth is in trade with the rest of the world. That is where our future lies. That is why I am delighted that we will leave the customs union. The Secretary of State for International Trade is in the States at the moment.

The EU is pathetic at striking trade deals around the world. I was involved in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations with Secretary Vilsack in the States. The whole £100 billion deal was stuck on the Greek definition of feta. The EU moves as slowly as the lamest donkey in the caravan. We can now do trade deals with countries that are hungry to trade with us. That is the future. Do not forget that that will help many in the developing world. It is a disgrace that because of the common external tariff, Germany earns \$3.8 billion from coffee and the whole of Africa, where they grow the stuff, earns only \$2.4 billion because of the tariffs on worked coffee. Ending that would bring huge benefits, probably bigger than many aid budgets.

Looking quickly to the clock, Northern Ireland brings all this together, with the need for seamless borders and trade that is as free as possible. Critically, we have the ability to bring that about with modern technology. Today, 10,000 trucks will go from Canada to Detroit and they will not stop. With automatic number plate recognition and electronic invoicing, problems at the border are surmountable.

I will speak rapidly about the right of abode. I am delighted that the Prime Minister will make a commitment today on the 3 million EU citizens and the 1 million UK citizens.

Lastly, it is tremendous to see in the Queen's Speech that we will have a UK agriculture policy and a UK fisheries policy right out to 200 miles, decided by elected politicians in this House. I support the Gracious Speech.

Mr Speaker: I do hope that, with the passage of time, the right hon. Member for North Shropshire will learn to overcome his natural shyness and to tell us what he really thinks.

3.24 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make my maiden speech today, Mr Speaker. I start by paying tribute to my predecessor, David Burrowes. He dedicated more than 23 years to public service, first as a councillor and then as an MP, showing his commitment and affection for the area. I wish him well in the future.

I also pay tribute to our emergency services, across London and the UK. The recent terror attacks have been abhorrent and terrifying, but our emergency services have responded each and every time with the utmost courage and professionalism. For this they deserve both our praise and gratitude, as they do for their response to the awful tragedy at Grenfell Tower in Kensington. All London grieves deeply for the family and friends of those who sadly lost their lives. I join in thanking and praising the brave people from our emergency services in London who once again ran towards danger.

I am of Cypriot heritage. My parents came here from Cyprus, and English was not my first language, but we made a home in London, and we were welcomed with tolerance and warmth. That is what allowed me to be here today in Parliament to give my maiden speech as the proud new MP for Enfield, Southgate. That is the same welcome that the people of Enfield, Southgate extend to everybody from other nations who lives, works and studies locally. I am proud of our diverse, tolerant and inclusive community, which brings out the best in people. It is precious to us all in Enfield, Southgate in these difficult times, or in any times. We will not allow the preachers of hate to drive a wedge between our community.

Along with the majority of my constituents, I voted to remain in the European Union. I believe, as they do, that we are better off working together, and I believe that people from countries across the European Union should be allowed to live, work and study in London. I wish the result had been different, but we must now face the reality, and I will do all I can to campaign for the best deal we can get.

We are very proud of our local history and institutions in Enfield, Southgate. We are lucky to have the Chickenshed theatre, set up by Jo Collins and Mary Ward, with the assistance of John Bull, which has been running for more than 40 years. What a success story. It leads the field in breaking down barriers, promoting diversity and tackling discrimination. Chickenshed has given many young people hope, a fantastic experience and the confidence that they can succeed irrespective of background, ethnicity, or disability.

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

Many people know the Piccadilly line in London, with its iconic art deco stations at Arnos Grove, Southgate, Oakwood and Cockfosters in my constituency. Designed by the renowned architect Charles Holden, they were built in the early 1930s, and these transport links, along with the Great Northern rail line joining Bowes Park, Palmers Green, Winchmore Hill and Grange Park, led to the subsequent housing boom that made Enfield, Southgate the place it is today—the place I am beyond proud to represent, here in the mother of all Parliaments.

Those transport links were one reason why many people flocked to Enfield in the 1930s; later, in 1971, when I was just three years old, my parents made Southgate their home. At school in Enfield, encouraged by some incredibly dedicated and knowledgeable teachers, I developed a love for reading that has stayed with me. Enfield, Southgate has been fortunate in having a connection to a string of literary figures, including Sir John Betjeman, Thomas Hood, Leigh Hunt, Jerome K. Jerome and, of course, Stevie Smith. However, contrary to what I told my teachers, I do not admit to having read them all.

Education is the cornerstone of success in life. It plays a key part in breaking down inequalities and promoting tolerance and understanding, but unless we invest in our schools and our children, those aims will be lost. We have some fine schools in Enfield, Southgate, including both St Michael at Bowes Church of England Junior School and Eversley Primary School, for both of which I am a governor, and Hazelwood Primary School. However, the majority of our schools face Government funding cuts that will harm the prospects of many young people in my constituency. All children get only one chance to have a decent education. I was lucky enough to get that opportunity and I seized it. I want the same chances for our young people, which is why I will challenge the cuts to education funding and champion a properly funded education system.

Enfield, Southgate also has a place in suffragette history. When Hazelwood Primary School opened in 1908, its first headmistress was Laura Goulden, the sister-in-law of Emmeline Pankhurst, founder of the Women's Social and Political Union. It is no coincidence, then, that between 1910 and 1913 there was a well-established and active local suffragette movement that gathered at the famous Palmers Green triangle. I am proud that the people of Enfield, Southgate played their part in supporting votes for women—but votes are not enough. We still have huge inequality, women still earn less than men, and in Enfield, Southgate, just as elsewhere, women have borne the brunt of the Government's austerity agenda. I will do my utmost to push for fair and equal pay and a decent living wage for everyone.

Inequality is also increasingly prevalent in our health services. It was a body blow for our area when Chase Farm hospital's accident and emergency unit closed. Since then, mounting pressure on North Middlesex hospital's A&E unit is pushing it to breaking point. This cannot go on. The people of Enfield, Southgate deserve better. I will not sit back and allow our precious NHS to be destroyed. It needs a massive tonic, and it needs it now.

I am here because my constituents have put their faith in me. They know I am one of them. I grew up among them, I live among them and I will not let them down.

3.30 pm

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (*Bambos Charalambous*) who made a brilliant maiden speech. I am grateful for having been here for most of the maiden speeches today. I wondered whether I qualified to make one, but apparently not. I see Mr Speaker shaking his head—this is therefore not a maiden speech. [*Interruption.*] Absolutely right—you can't be a maiden twice.

Before I say a few words about housing, today's main topic, I want to join hon. Members in sending my condolences to the families who have been torn apart in the disaster that affected London only a couple of weeks ago.

Housing shortage is undoubtedly acute. The word "crisis" is often overused in politics, but it is a crisis, particularly in London, where the demand is highest. We have reached a point where someone could be earning double the average London salary and still have no prospect of owning a home. The average home here costs around £500,000, which is 12 times the average income in this city. Young people in particular have been locked out. The fact that they have to pay exorbitant rents means that they are even less likely to realise their dream. Without urgent action now, the problem will get even worse—the population of London is likely to hit 10 million in around 15 years.

I was therefore pleased by the emphasis in the manifesto on tackling the problem: the commitment to deliver a million homes by 2021 and to double the housing budget to £20 billion. However, we need to get on and do it, and there are some clear priorities. We need to deal with the fact that there are so many empty homes. It is true that, as we heard from the Prime Minister earlier, the number is at its lowest for many years, but it is still too high. The Empty Homes Agency puts the figure in London alone at 60,000, and it may be higher.

We need to get more competition into the sector, which has become effectively an oligopoly—a tiny number of giant developers accounting for the vast bulk of the development and demanding huge returns based on often spurious viability tests. We need to accelerate the release of publicly owned land. Developers always press Governments to relax protections of our green spaces, but we do not need to do that, and we should not. In London, where the need is greatest, we have huge tracts of publicly owned brownfield land that could be developed. Transport for London alone has the equivalent of 16 Hyde Parks. As we build on publicly owned land—land that we own—we can and must ensure that the new homes are not simply sold off to overseas investors and left empty. We have to solve the problem that we face in this country.

There is something else that we need to do—something that has taken on a grim new relevance. Across the capital, we have tower blocks that were rushed and poorly designed, many of which are coming to the end of their lives. There is a growing realisation that we now have an obligation to rethink our approach. I want to focus briefly on one aspect of that.

We know that a low-rise, high-density, street-based design provides more homes because it makes better use of the available space. The estate agent Savills did a detailed report a couple of years ago. It estimates that rebuilding just one fifth of London's run-down estates

could produce up to 350,000 more homes. Every survey shows that residents more often than not prefer that approach. With so many tower blocks needing serious investment, surely now is the time to look at a different way of doing things. We can avoid the mistakes of the past and build in a way that breaks down barriers, strengthens communities and provides homes that people want to live in.

One reason for the sensitivity of the issue is that the approach has been so ham-fisted in the past. Areas have been improved, but existing residents have effectively been pushed out to make way for newcomers. That is the consequence of bad policy and bad decisions. In my own constituency, we are at the very early stages of a major regeneration scheme to remove 1960s blocks and replace them with low-rise, street-based, beautiful homes—and there will be more of them, even if the design makes it appear that there are fewer. That process is underpinned by a cast-iron residents' guarantee: no one living there today will be unable to live there tomorrow, no one living there today will have to pay more tomorrow, and no one will have to move twice, which is particularly important to elderly residents and young families with children at local schools. The provision of that guarantee made it possible, immediately, for residents to engage in the process and take ownership of it, without needless anxiety. I think it is a process that could be replicated and emulated through the capital, and beyond.

Planning is nearly always a deeply divisive issue. If we are to have any hope at all of securing people's consent to the delivery of the sheer quantity of homes that we know we must deliver, the planning system itself must become more sensitive, more open and more consensual. It needs to work with, rather than against, people and communities, who need to feel that they own the process. People know that we need more homes; if not for them, for their children. If they feel they are in the driving seat, they will be much more open to the challenges—and that, I think, needs to be absolutely at the heart of this great enterprise.

3.36 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith). I congratulate him on his non- maiden speech, and I congratulate all Members who made their maiden speeches during this debate.

It is a great privilege to have been re-elected as the Member of Parliament for Torfaen, and to have the opportunity once again to speak for the eastern valley of the south Wales coalfield in the House of Commons in the days and months ahead. Torfaen, like every other part of the country, will face great challenges, and I fear that those challenges will not be met by the weak minority Government that we see before us on the Conservative Benches.

I have been a historian in the past, and I tried to find some parallels in history to give me some optimism at this time. What I found was an account of the general election of 6 December 1923, which was called by the then Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, at a time when he did not need to call an election at all. He lost his majority and his authority, and ended up making a statement in the House announcing that the Government would resign, only 42 days after the date of that election.

Perhaps we can look forward to the present Government's staggering to their inevitable end a bit sooner than they may think.

On a more serious note, I must say that, along with my constituents—many of whom have contacted me in recent days—I send all our condolences and solidarity to those who have been affected by the terrible events of recent weeks and months: the terrorist atrocities in Manchester, at London Bridge and in Finsbury Park, and, of course, the terrible Grenfell Tower fire. I should also put on record my admiration for the great work done by the emergency services in all those instances.

Let me now turn to one of the specific topics of today's debate, social security. I shall begin by talking about the issue of personal independence payments, because it has been raised in my surgery so frequently over the past two years. I am glad that the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work is present, because the letter that she kindly sent me back in March illustrates very well why the system is not working. The mandatory reconsideration system is simply not effective. During my time as a constituency Member of Parliament, I have found that not enough decisions are overturned at that stage.

The Minister's letter states:

"Of the Mandatory Reconsiderations cleared, 42,400"—
just 15%—
"led to a change in the claimant's award".

As for the appeals statistics, the letter states that in the period between April 2013 and September 2016,

"125,564 appeals were lodged; and 55,495...were overturned".

In other words, there was a 44% success rate on appeal: nearly half the number who appeal have their awards overturned, so people are not getting what they were entitled to in the first place. They are being driven through this highly stressful process of having to go all the way to a tribunal to get what they should have received in the first place. I urge the Minister and the Secretary of State to get a grip on that. Whatever one's views on the Government's policy on social security, this shows that the system is not working as it should. They should redouble their efforts to ensure that it does work properly.

Because of the record levels of in-work poverty that have arisen in the past seven years, it is not the case anymore that we can say that a job is a route out of poverty. However, quality jobs are a route out of poverty. That is why jobs should be at the heart of our Brexit negotiations. In recent weeks, I have visited the ArvinMeritor factory that produces brakes in my constituency and seen what can be done by the workforce, management, owners and the Welsh Government working together to create a successful business. However, in Wales, we still need, at the heart of the UK Government, a proper industrial strategy that looks at specific sectors, that helps the steel sector, which would be of particular importance in south Wales, and that promotes manufacturing. Manufacturing is where we could have the quality jobs. If we want to improve productivity, the easiest way to do it is in the manufacturing sector. If we want to have export-led growth, manufacturing growth is going to be the most durable example of that. The Government should be focusing their efforts there.

Over the past two years, I have found that my constituency of Torfaen has enormous potential. The statistics provided to me by the Children's Society show

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

that, of the 17,353 children who live in my constituency, 29.5% live in poverty, when housing costs are put to one side. That is because of the policies that the Government have followed over the past seven years. To unlock the potential of my constituency and others, the reality is that this Government have to go.

3.41 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I congratulate all new Members who made their maiden speeches in the House today. May I take the opportunity to pay tribute to David Burrowes, the predecessor of the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous)? David made a remarkable contribution to the House. The hon. Gentleman has big boots to fill. I wish him well.

It is right that the Queen's Speech, which I welcome, focuses on Brexit, on strengthening the economy and on investing in infrastructure, but I want to speak about other aspects that I welcome: those that emphasise promoting social justice, tackling modern day slavery further, taking action to protect victims of domestic violence, prioritising mental health, and tackling discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of faith. Time prevents me from speaking on more than two of those, and I would like to focus initially on mental health.

I am repeatedly told by experts that many mental health problems in young people stem from fractured and dysfunctional family relationships. Indeed, the Government's own research by Professor Gordon Harold has clearly established that couple conflict and family instability gravely affect children and young people's mental wellbeing. Those are major drivers of our current epidemic of poor mental health, which cannot be ignored any longer. The demand on mental health services for young people could be addressed—indeed, I believe reduced—if the Government grasped the issue and put in place policies to strengthen family life, the breakdown of which is sadly at epidemic proportions in this country.

A great number of colleagues are concerned about that. Shortly before the election, several of us made a detailed submission to our Government, with practical proposals as to how family breakdown could be addressed. We would appreciate a meeting with the responsible Minister to go through those proposals at an early date.

Building tolerant, open communities in which people have the freedom to practise their own religion or their own beliefs, combined with the promotion of greater understanding of other faiths, is an important issue. It can help to prevent extremism in our country as well as elsewhere. Improving religious literacy to counteract extremist ideology needs more attention in our country, including by the Government. I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to drive extremism and hatred out of our society.

With reference to the proposals in the Gracious Speech for a commission on countering extremism, may I sound a note of caution? First, Parliament must have an effective say on the scope and powers of the new commission and continue to review its efficiency. Secondly, we must be very careful about how we define extremism. That is something that the Government have yet to satisfactorily undertake. Again, Members of this House must be engaged in this much more than they have been to date.

Violent extremism is abhorrent, but it is very different from the peaceful expression of thoughts, ideas and beliefs that might be unacceptable to some, or even to the majority in society.

As you have said, Mr Speaker, we in this House enjoy the precious privilege of free speech, and the constituents we serve should enjoy nothing less. We must be vigilant in protecting and defending that. To give one example, we should be expressing far deeper concern about no-platforming at universities. People in our country today should not be constrained, or feel constrained, from expressing non-violent views or views that could in no way be considered to incite violence, even if they are not currently mainstream views. Nor should people of faith feel inhibited or be prevented from engaging in public life, either in this place or elsewhere. The privatisation of religious belief must not be the price we pay in this country for tackling extremism. If that were to happen, the terrorists would have won. Religion contributes significantly to our nation's common good and, in countering terrorism and extremism, it is critical that we also ensure that the basic human rights of freedom of belief, speech and association are not eroded for peaceful citizens. Put simply, religious rights are human rights, and this House must safeguard them vigilantly.

3.47 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), rightly pointed out yesterday that this Queen's Speech would be a thin, anaemic document had it been for one parliamentary year, but that as a two-year programme it is a positive embarrassment. Fortunately, however, we are unlikely to have to wait two years before the electorate is able to put it and this Government out of their misery. I suppose we should be grateful that the disastrous general election campaign means that much of the Conservatives' toxic programme for government has now been shelved, but that does not mean that we can rest easy.

The general election result in my constituency and many others was in part a rejection of the extreme hard Brexit peddled by the Conservative party. Equally, however, it is a rejection of its determination to continue the destruction of our key public services. Hammersmith residents were being asked to vote for the demolition and downgrading of their main hospital, Charing Cross; for cuts of up to 25% in schools budgets; for further cuts of £400 million to the Metropolitan police; and for the refusal by central Government to invest in genuinely affordable homes. They decisively rejected that, preferring the message of hope offered by Labour, yet there is every indication that the automaton in No. 10 will plough on with hard Brexit and austerity.

Given the tragic events of last week, I will turn now to the consequences of the Grenfell Tower fire. This is not only a terrible disaster for all those involved and the west London community; it also has implications for the safety of hundreds of thousands of families living in high-rise buildings around the UK and draws attention to the neglect of social housing over many years. Yesterday, the Prime Minister apologised for letting down the people of North Kensington, but that apology appears already to have been forgotten, as she fails to give clear commitments on some of the key issues arising from the disaster.

The Government must lead on the programme of making tower blocks safe and giving reassurance to their occupants across the country. The issue is not just the type of cladding and its flammability, but how it is fitted, whether it has been compromised by later alterations and whether it is compatible with the existing structure. If the cause of this fire turns out—as in the case of the Shepherd’s Court fire in my constituency last August—to be a faulty electrical appliance, it will be a further indictment of the lack of any effective system of product registration and recall in the UK. Insufficient means of escape, the lack of sprinkler systems, poor maintenance, inadequate alarms, fire service cuts, and outdated building regulations—all are complex, difficult matters that need to be addressed.

My council wrote to everyone in a high-rise block in Hammersmith and Fulham the day after the Grenfell Tower fire assuring them that every one of those blocks had a fire-risk assessment, but we cannot rely on every housing provider to carry out a full inspection of its stock and to act on recommendations made, not least because they do not have the necessary funds after years of cuts. The Government must lead on those matters and enforcement.

This week, figures showed that the number of social homes being built in England has fallen by an incredible 97% since Labour left office. In one of London’s biggest housing schemes, at Battersea power station, the developer is seeking to cut the number of affordable homes from the agreed 636 to 386. That is not a coincidence. Tory Governments and councils have systematically undermined and devalued social housing over more than 30 years. I think of the example in my constituency of the West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates, where 750 affordable and social homes were sold off to a private developer as part of a scheme promoted by Tory councils in Hammersmith and Fulham, and Kensington and Chelsea. I will add that residents from those estates have been looking after five Grenfell Tower families who were unceremoniously dumped in a bed and breakfast hotel by Kensington and Chelsea without any means of support.

I put it to the Prime Minister this morning that the 68 so-called luxury homes that have been made available at Berkeley’s Kensington Row development were already allocated for social housing. They are not additional homes. It is of course right to give precedence to Grenfell Tower residents, but why should it be a zero-sum game in which affordable housing is not being provided? It is exactly that issue which has led to the loss of trust among Grenfell Tower residents.

The public inquiry must restore that trust, but the disaster relief, which was so appallingly handled by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, has added to the sense of gloom and suspicion across west London. I do not know why the Prime Minister could not answer this, but if it is right for the chief executive to go—the Prime Minister said it was—why is not also right for the council’s political leadership to go due to the disastrous way in which it has behaved?

I end by commending the work, effort and maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad). She and my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), whose constituency used to cover North Kensington, have cared and looked after the population of that area, but that cannot be done without the necessary resources. The Prime Minister

has to make good her pledge not only to the residents of Grenfell Tower, but to everyone in need of social housing. It must again be a main form of tenure in this country with proper Government support.

3.53 pm

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): It was Harold MacMillan who said:

“Except for ‘going over the top’ in war, there is hardly any experience so alarming as giving one’s maiden speech.”

I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) and for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) for giving such excellent examples today. MacMillan, like me, was a Teesside MP, sitting for Stockton South, which was so ably represented by James Wharton until this election. I pay tribute to James, who was a great champion for Teesside, a staunch ally of Brexit, and an excellent constituency Member of Parliament.

What the electoral gods take away with one hand, they give back with another, and I stand here today having won Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland after 20 years of Labour control, which provides an opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor, Tom Blenkinsop. Tom arrived in Parliament following the tragic death of Ashok Kumar just a few weeks before the 2010 general election. Tom is a proud Teessider, and an even prouder member of the Labour party, but he was always perfectly decent with me. Indeed, during the campaign, I found myself in a bizarre situation: the only person in my constituency who had a lower opinion of the Leader of the Opposition’s aptitude for Downing Street was in fact the sitting Labour Member of Parliament. Tom made his position perfectly clear and reconciled the situation by doing the honourable thing and resigning, and I wish him well with his return to the trade union movement.

If Tom was fire and brimstone, that was in marked contrast to Ashok Kumar, who, as Members who knew him will attest, was quiet and studious but inspired fierce loyalty from his constituents. It was inspiring for me, as a new MP, to see this high regard, and indeed love, which I found on doorsteps right across the constituency. That is a powerful testament to the importance of constituency work. That quality is also true of his predecessor, the last Conservative Member for the seat, Michael Bates, now a long-standing Minister in the other place. I pay particular tribute to Michael, who joined me at 6 am in Coulby Newham, in the rain, on election day, for a dawn raid. That was typical of the man: unassuming, shrewd, funny and passionately committed to public service.

So what is this constituency that inspires such loyalty from those who represent it in this place? For me, it has the happy advantage of being home; it is where I was born and where I grew up. I did so in Marton, in Middlesbrough, a few hundred yards from the birthplace of Captain James Cook, and I can think of few better ambassadors for a new global Britain than the man who discovered large parts of our world. Cook’s cottage stands in the grounds of Stewart park, which was, in turn, originally the grounds of Marton hall, home to Henry Bolckow, the pioneering ironmaster and Middlesbrough’s first mayor and Member of Parliament. He was one of a generation of industrialists who prompted Gladstone to christen Middlesbrough England’s “infant

[Mr Simon Clarke]

Hercules”, and the proud industrial heritage of my constituency continues today. We have world-leading engineering firms, the iconic brand of British Steel, mining and the industrial might of Teesport. Lest we forget, the north-east is the only net exporting region of England. We can add to that the huge potential of the new South Tees Development Corporation, which is being introduced under our new Conservative Mayor of the Tees Valley, Ben Houchen.

That is the narrative I am keen to champion in this place: a successful north-east and a successful Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland as part of a successful UK after Brexit. We need to challenge the tired narrative of decline and betrayal, which at its worst has proved self-fulfilling and has held Teesside back. Anyone who knows my constituency will attest to the fact that we have more than our fair share of social challenges, with lives blighted by the circumstances in which they begin. We face stubborn unemployment; poor education outcomes; family breakdown; drug and alcohol abuse; and communities that feel isolated and ignored, such as Loftus, Liverton and Lingdale. This is a powerful moral mission worthy of any generation. As a Conservative, passionate about helping people to help themselves, I am proud that our Government have a strong record in this area, but it is clear that there is much more to do.

That is not the whole, or indeed the end, of the story. The communities that face those challenges also throw up so many quiet community heroes, such as the vicar of Hemlington, Robert Desics, and the members of the Loftus ACCORD group, whom I had the pleasure to meet during the campaign. They support charitable activities, ranging from providing summer holidays for deprived kids who would not otherwise have one to backing the elderly. So many of my campaign team would be encompassed in that group; they serve quietly but dutifully as magistrates, they help to support Gisborough priory, and they manage gardening clubs and local primary schools, and they are the real heroes.

There is another side of the constituency, too—the side that people who do not know it may not appreciate so well. I am talking about Roseberry Topping, the beautiful hill that Cook climbed as a child; the North York Moors, to Scaling Dam and Cowbar; the East Cleveland coast, viewed from Brotton or from the hills above Skelton, with its thriving Victorian seaside resort of Saltburn; the prosperous market town of Guisborough; and the affluent southern suburbs of Middlesbrough itself.

As with any constituency, there are competing narratives and competing truths. The fact that there are so many positives about Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland has led to massive recent housing development. Some lovely new developments have been built, but we urgently need to ensure that the accompanying infrastructure follows and that the best possible use is made of brownfield land. Transport links will be a key part of my work in this place, be it linking rural communities in East Cleveland or ensuring that the traffic in south Middlesbrough can flow properly.

Middlesbrough’s motto is “Erimus”—we shall be. In closing, let me say that I am immensely proud and grateful to have the opportunity to champion my area on the next stage of its remarkable journey.

3.59 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke), whose maiden speech was very funny and insightful, and commended some of his predecessor MPs: well done.

Housing, and especially social housing, has been shown up in sharp focus as a result of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Indeed, in her statement this morning the Prime Minister admitted that “for too long in our country”—meaning England—“under Governments of both colours, we simply have not given enough attention to social housing.” That is in stark contrast to what is happening in Scotland, where the Scottish National party Government are committed to spending over £5 billion by 2021 to build social and affordable housing. The UK Government have allowed the sale of housing association properties; the Scottish Government have ended the right to buy, to protect the existing stock of social rented homes.

The UK Government do not really help 18 to 34-year-olds, and the Government’s tremendously difficult housing benefit recall for 18 to 21-year-olds is causing real hardship across the country. The Scottish Government welcome the fact that the UK Government are now looking into protecting vulnerable people in private landlord lets, but in Scotland we have made a real issue of this, because we want our younger people and tenants to be well protected. The SNP welcomes a full public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire and believes that no stone should be left unturned in order to ascertain the causes, ensure appropriate lessons are learned, and get justice for the many families of the victims and survivors.

The Scottish Government resilience operation has met to discuss any potential impact for Scotland of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Building standards are devolved and Scottish Ministers are in discussion with local authorities today. The Cabinet Secretary for Communities has convened a short-term ministerial working group to review Scottish regulations, and the Scottish Government will work closely with the UK Government and learn any lessons relevant to construction practices following the subsequent investigation.

Moving on to social security, I call for an end to austerity. If one thing came out of the recent election campaign, it was that the Tories’ cost-cutting austerity agenda, especially where it impacts on our older citizens, is not wanted. The Prime Minister paid a heavy price for her suggestions on the dementia tax and on restricting winter fuel payments. Even Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Tory leader, could not swallow that bitter pill and announced that there would be a different policy in Scotland.

In Scotland, we value all of our citizens, whatever their age or ethnicity. Many constituents have approached me in desperation and disbelief. I have a long list and I do not have time to go through it, but during the election campaign I was approached by a grieving grandmother whose son had just been widowed. The so-called simplification of bereavement support resulting in cuts for widows and widowers when they are at their most vulnerable is scandalous. I ask Members to try to imagine how someone who is grieving must feel when having to give up their employment to deal with a young family and finding out that the financial support they expected because of their circumstances was no longer there. That happened in April of this year.

The SNP is opposed to any increase in national insurance, especially at a time of low consumer confidence and squeezed household budgets. We need a freeze on NI contributions and VAT. The SNP here in Westminster will fight for a moratorium and review of the closure of HMRC offices in Scotland and across the UK, for beneficial ownership of companies and trusts to be made public, for measures to improve the transparency of tax paid by major international companies, and for further action by the UK Government to tackle international tax avoidance. If these measures were taken, there might be no need for austerity cuts at all, or at least they could be lessened.

The SNP will fight for an end to benefit sanctions, to the roll-out of universal credit and to charges from the Child Maintenance Service, and we will fight to end private company involvement in social security benefits. Finally, we will fight to abolish the premium-rate telephone charge for those seeking advice or claiming benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions. Not only do the Government cut benefits, but they charge people increasingly large amounts to access what is rightfully theirs. We must help the worst off and most vulnerable in our society, not impose further cuts on them.

I cannot finish without mentioning the WASPI women. I made it—I got my state pension—but anyone who was born a year after me did not. Women have retired expecting to get what they paid in. They were not told that the changes would happen, and they are now living in straitened circumstances as a result of them. The Government need to stop the austerity and cuts and look after the people in this country much better.

4.5 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, as Deputy Speaker Sir David—albeit fleetingly, perhaps. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). I did not agree with all her points, but I thought that the collaborative tone of her response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy set the tone that the public want and expect to see in the House.

I commend the Gracious Speech. I am not going to labour the point on Brexit, except to make two brief points. First, the ex-remainers who continue to increase the demands that we should make on our European partners for concessions as we leave the European Union are actually making it harder to get any deal at all, because the more we demand and the more concessions we want, the more we will be accused of cherry-picking. The EU has made it very clear that—to paraphrase Michel Barnier—we cannot enjoy the benefits of membership and not be in the EU. Perhaps the ex-remainers have a plan to make so many demands that will not be granted to us in the hope that the country will decide, “Well, maybe we shouldn’t leave the EU after all.” I put it to them that if there is any idea that we are going to try to reverse the decision taken by the British people in the referendum, that would be an incendiary decision for the House to take.

Secondly, we keep hearing about a cliff edge. What is this cliff edge? It seems to me to be a continuation of the fear campaign that is now so discredited. There is obviously not going to be a comprehensive trade agreement within two years—to that extent, we are not going to have a deal—but are we seriously suggesting that the

EU is so insane that it will not make the same kind of arrangements on aviation, data protection, intellectual property, customs facilitation or product recognition on standards that it makes with 100 or 150 other countries with which it does not have a trade deal? I prefer to regard the EU as a bit more constructive than that; indeed, the EU has said that it wants to be constructive and does not want to punish us. If we leave without a comprehensive trade deal, we will have an agreement about lots of detailed things that will enable goods to flow across the Northern Ireland border, just as goods flow across the border between Canada and the United States without the lorries stopping, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) said.

I commend the Gracious Speech because I am delighted to see that it contains a draft patient safety Bill, which is the result of a 2015 recommendation on clinical incident investigation by the Public Administration Committee, which I chaired at the time. I had hoped to see a draft Bill on reform of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, which the Committee described as “stuck in time” in our report entitled, “Time for a People’s Ombudsman Service”. If we are going to introduce a public advocate for public disasters, is it going to be a statutory body? Would it not be a good idea to combine ombudsman reform with a new public advocate statutory function?

I wish to talk about the response to the Grenfell Tower fire and to raise some issues relating to how a public inquiry could be established. Just this year, in February, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee produced a report called “Lessons still to be learned from the Chilcot Inquiry”. We drew on previous reports produced under the chairmanship of Dr Tony Wright. Public confidence in public inquiries is not to be taken for granted. As well as Chilcot, we looked at other inquiries that lost public confidence, including the child sex abuse inquiry, and at the length of time that it took for the Saville inquiry in Northern Ireland to report. We recommended that a public inquiry should not be established unless the House has voted for it, on an amendable motion dealing with the remit, the timetable and the chairmanship, and that before such a motion is debated a special Select Committee should be established to consider those matters and report back to the House.

Everyone wants to set up this inquiry as quickly as possible in response to public anger, which is very understandable, but so many public inquiries are set up in haste before their terms of reference are properly considered. The Leveson inquiry, for example, has been regretted because not enough thought was put into it. I do not belong to the tradition of democracy that believes that the elected Government are necessarily the fount of all wisdom, however much I admire the Prime Minister herself.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Is it my hon. Friend’s position that were a Select Committee to look into a terrible tragedy such as this, there might be a better chance of getting a non-partisan analysis that would lead to more information coming forward on the Floor of the House?

Mr Jenkin: I am glad that my right hon. Friend has made that intervention, because I want to be absolutely clear. I fully support what the Prime Minister is doing in

[Mr Jenkin]

setting up a public inquiry; what I am suggesting is that a special Select Committee should be established to supervise the setting up of the inquiry, to monitor it and, essentially, to set some timelines. These inquiries take so long because lawyers can always think of new questions and new points to make. We need to put a sense of urgency into these inquiries so that they report on time and do not drag on and on.

I submit that the terms of reference should not be about finding blame. If there are to be prosecutions, there will be prosecutions, but we will not make life better by creating an atmosphere of blame, however understandable it is. I remember that after the Paddington rail crash there was so much blame, but in the end the report did not blame people. The Cullen inquiry was a good inquiry that resulted in far-reaching institutional changes in how safety is managed on the railways. I suspect that we need the same kind of far-reaching reforms on fire safety. We heard from the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) about the different regulatory arrangements that are scattered across the landscape of housing management.

All those arrangements need to be brought together and considered as a whole, and possibly there should be one new body supervising the safety management of residential property. There should probably be an independent investigatory body to determine the causes of accidents, rather like the air accidents investigation branch of the Department for Transport or the rail accident investigation branch. The healthcare safety investigation branch of the Department of Health is to be established in statute to do the same kind of thing in health. We want to know who is accountable and what lessons need to be learnt. The whole landscape is very confusing at the moment, and that is what this inquiry really has to resolve.

4.13 pm

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): May I begin by congratulating those new Members who have made excellent maiden speeches today? I wish to join other Members in paying tribute to the many people who died in the Grenfell Tower disaster. I also pay tribute to my constituents, particularly those who, through Borehamwood synagogue, have made an extraordinary effort in fundraising and in the provision of goods and services to help those most in need. It really is an example of the whole community coming together.

I would like today to address the question of housing. I am a proud capitalist. I believe that capitalism is the most efficient way of allocating resources and that it is what has driven prosperity in our society for so many generations. However, in order to believe in capitalism, one must first either have capital or have a reasonable expectation that one will be able to acquire it. The problem we have with housing is reflected in a wider problem of the capitalist system in this country. A failure or an inability to expect to acquire one's own home would lead us to question our interest in maintaining this capitalist system, which is so effective for our country. In my remarks, I wish to address how we can deal with that problem.

First, let me say that, as a Government, we have made progress on this matter. I am proud of some of the

things that I did during my time in Downing Street as an adviser to the Prime Minister. For example, our work on allowing the conversion of offices to residential property has increased supply. Help to Buy has allowed many families without a sufficient deposit to acquire their first house. We have also made considerable progress in deregulation, which has allowed people to extend their own homes. People do not recognise it, but deregulation is a way of increasing supply in the housing market, because it allows them to expand their own home and provide more space for themselves and their families.

Clearly, though, there is a lot more to do. At the heart of this matter lies the conflict between the generations, which is so evident in my own constituency. We are very fortunate in Hertsmere. We have a beautiful constituency, which has built-up areas and green belt land—80% is green belt. There is an understandable reluctance to encroach on that green belt land. Certainly, it is essential that we maintain and protect that land. If we are to do that, we have to look creatively at how we can draw consent for further house building.

Members have raised a number of valid points in this debate. First, we have to get consent for housing, which means maintaining the central role of councils, which know where housing can be best placed. It is right that the housing White Paper maintains that central role for local government. Secondly, we need to ensure that we get the infrastructure in place. We cannot expect communities to agree to additional housing if they do not have the schools, hospitals, roads and railways to go with it. In places such as Borehamwood where there has been a lot of housing, one frustration is the lack of infrastructure to go with it. We need to maintain pressure on that.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), the former candidate for Mayor of London, that we should not overlook aesthetics. Low-rise housing is denser than high-rise housing, but it is much more pleasant for people to live in. Certainly, one regret from my time at No. 10 was that we started to pioneer the idea of replacing high-rise with low-rise—[*Interruption.*] I should hasten to add that I was an adviser to the Prime Minister. If we continue with that agenda, we can get more buy-in for more housing.

We should look at design, because people are much more willing to accept housing if it is aesthetically pleasing. People will forgo some green space if it is replaced by something good. What people do not want is green space being replaced by ugly urban sprawl. Certainly, I will continue to resist that ugly urban sprawl, as I want to ensure that we maintain the character and unique charms of our towns and villages. If we can buy in communities with better design and local consent, we can get more housing, thereby ensuring that young people have a genuine hope of accessing capital. We would reinvigorate their faith in the capitalist system and ensure that, once again, we have a generation of home owners. That is what brought me into politics in the first place. My parents were able to buy their own social housing through right to buy. They got their first stake. The next generations must get that first stake too. If we are creative about this, we can do it and provide opportunities for the next generation.

4.19 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow such excellent maiden speeches from Members on both sides of the House. I was here to listen to the tremendous contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke)—the first, I am sure, of many in this House.

I must draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I have been involved in the property market for 25 years and am still involved. I am deeply passionate about it, and I am very pleased by the Government's clear and ambitious plans to increase house building by 1 million homes between 2015 and 2020, and by 500,000 more by 2022. Those are very ambitious plans.

I am delighted to see that the shadow Secretary of State is back with us in the Chamber. I tried to intervene on him earlier to question one or two of the facts that Opposition Members keep repeating. They keep saying that since 2010 house building has fallen to its lowest level since the 1920s, but the House of Commons Library shows that some 100,000 houses were built in 2009-10, and 153,000 in 2016. Where do these figures come from? The claim is that affordable housing building is at a 24-year-low—the shadow Secretary of State can intervene on me on this point—but we know that in the past six years we have built 304,900 affordable homes, and in the last six years of the Labour Government, 294,000 affordable homes were built. Members can choose their own opinions, but they cannot choose their own facts.

Ms Buck: Is the hon. Gentleman querying the Department for Communities and Local Government's own statistics, on its website, which show that there has been a 97% drop in the number of social housing completions since 2010? Those figures are there on the website now to be inspected.

Kevin Hollinrake: The hon. Lady raises a valid point. There is a different definition. Social housing is part of the overall definition of affordable housing—that is true. The shadow Secretary of State will tell the hon. Lady that that is true. It is also true that we are building more affordable homes than the Labour Government were in their final six years in office.

Building more homes has to be our objective and Members on both sides of the House will agree that we must reform the planning process to deliver more homes and release more land, whether that is brownfield or greenfield. That must take up some of the slack to deliver the amount of housing we need.

We need not just to deliver more land but to reinvigorate some of the sectors of house building on which we have come to rely. Some of that is about our local authorities, and the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government reported on that just before Dissolution. We believe that local authorities should be given the opportunity and more levers to increase house building to previous levels—they were building about 100,000 homes a year back in the 1970s—but only if those houses are properly designed and communities are designed properly around those developments.

The key element of reforming planning to deliver more homes is the role of small and medium-sized enterprises in house building. In 2008, SMEs built

44% of new homes delivered in this country. Today, they deliver 26% of homes. It is not just about land; it is also about capacity. The difficulty for small house builders is that they cannot find the land. That is the primary difficulty: finding access to the land and to the finance.

A White Paper from the Department has accepted that we need to deliver more housing for more small sites, and proposes that in the future, instead of local authorities simply allocating a huge site that is ideal for a huge house build and drawing a big red ring around it, which is probably easier for those local authorities, a certain number of sites in that local plan must be allocated for smaller sites and for small and medium-sized enterprises. It recommends that 10% of those sites should be half a hectare or less. That is good progress, but we need to go further if we really want to get small builders back into the business of building houses. It is critical that they do that.

The other principal problem is finding finance. It is almost impossible for an SME house builder to get finance for their developments. The Government have recognised this with their £3 billion home building fund, but we need to go further. We need to ensure that the mainstream high street banks lend to those SMEs. Those banks are their first port of call, but that is a difficult conversation at the moment. In Germany, the state-backed bank, KfW, sits behind the loans to SME house builders, meaning that builders can keep building. Through that, Germany has been far more successful in ensuring that there is a mixed delivery of house building.

For the next couple of minutes, I will focus on something else of huge significance to the industry: the tenant fees ban. I am still involved in the business and I am told by my finance director that the ban will cost us around £800,000 a year, so hon. Members might think that I am against the legislation, but I support the fee ban. I recognise that there is a problem. It cannot be right that when a tenant finds a property they want, they are susceptible to charges of which they were not aware and which can vary wildly between different letting agents.

All legislation that we bring forward in this place cannot just be about the measures. Delivery—the oversight and enforcement—is also needed. My concern is whether the measure will be delivered with that proper oversight and enforcement. The team that currently manages that within the sector is the National Trading Standards Estate Agency Team near Bangor. That team does not have the capacity to deliver the necessary oversight. We need to ensure that if this legislation is brought forward, it drives out the cowboy operators, who will try to find a way around the rules, which cannot be right. If the legislation is well thought through, it can include new measures about rental property standards. We need to ensure that the rented property sector delivers an appropriate standard of rented accommodation.

4.27 pm

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I will keep my comments brief so that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) gets a chance to have her voice heard.

I wanted to raise the issue of roads in Herefordshire at the very first opportunity. Herefordshire has the most roads per capita of any county in England, and

[Bill Wiggin]

those roads are deteriorating. The joke is that in England we drive on the left-hand side of the road, and in Herefordshire we drive on what is left of the road. It has now got to the stage where something needs to be done. I am grateful to the Secretary of State, who is coming to visit my constituency tomorrow to see the state of our roads.

The issue is not inextricably linked to our adult social care problem. It is appropriate that we are talking about housing today. People work all their lives in the prosperous cities and then retire to the beautiful countryside in seats such as mine, and they need and deserve proper adult social care. Every penny of council tax raised in North Herefordshire is spent on looking after the elderly and looked-after children. They deserve to be looked after properly, but counties and constituencies such as mine cannot cope with this burden. We need it to be shared across the nation.

The Queen's Speech is interesting in many ways, and I am pleased that certain bits are missing. I was deeply unhappy with the manifesto proposal to reduce the number of hon. Members to 600. That would be very difficult for the Government to pass. I hope that we will soon ask the Boundary Commission to look again at equalising the size of constituencies without reducing the number of colleagues here because as our MEPs go, the burden of work will fall to us.

I also had grave reservations about the manifesto proposals regarding section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, which is all about the media being properly regulated. The media who do not like it complain that there is only one approved regulator, but there is nothing to stop them having more than one approved regulator. That would allow for low-cost arbitration for newspapers and complainants. Small local papers ought to have that bargain basement way of solving these problems.

Those are the two things in the manifesto about which I was deeply unhappy. This is a great opportunity for us to think again and continue to press forward for an outstanding and positive Brexit conclusion. Of course, we will never read about that in our newspapers, but the Government are going to do a grand job on it. The Opposition can knock the Queen's Speech if they will, but let us see them support all the things they say they believe in. I am happy to conclude and allow my hon. Friend to get her words in too.

4.29 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) for so graciously giving me a lesson in parliamentary brevity. I will endeavour to be quick so that the Front Benchers have adequate time for the wind-ups.

I echo other hon. Members in expressing my sentiments and condolences in view of the tragic events at Grenfell Tower recently.

Today it has been a pleasure to listen to the maiden speeches of, I think, seven hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. I recall giving my own maiden speech two years ago during the debates on the Queen's Gracious Speech; I think I chose the enterprise debate on that occasion.

I welcome the Gracious Speech and the Government's legislative priorities for the next two years, particularly the focus on recognising and grasping the opportunities ahead, as well as tackling the challenges we face as a country. Leaving the EU means that we are respecting the result of last year's referendum. That is what my constituents in Aldridge-Brownhills expect. We need to get Brexit right. In doing so, we need to take the public with us and have their support.

We also need to continue to build and strengthen the strong economy that creates jobs, opportunities and aspiration. Since 2010, more than 2.9 million people are back in work—something to be commended. I particularly welcome the increase in the national living wage, the space industry Bill, the automated and electric vehicles Bill, and reforms to technical education. This is all part of building a world-class education system and, importantly, the skills that we need for today and for the future—developing the traditional skills and trades that we often talk about in this place, as well as the new ones that arise in conjunction with the new, emerging technologies. I hope that businesses in the west midlands and in my constituency have opportunities to play their part in developing those too.

Today's debate focuses particularly on housing. There is welcome news from the Government that the affordable homes programme will become more flexible. We have the homelessness reduction taskforce, building on the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which was taken through this place in the previous Parliament. It was spearheaded by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) as a private Member's Bill one Friday, but he garnered so much support from Members on both sides of this Chamber that it could go all the way through the House of Lords and become an Act of Parliament.

Many of us will remember the first time we bought or rented our own home. For most of us, it is a huge step, and for many, a huge financial commitment, but a dream that has come true. I hope that through these measures we are able to make more people's dreams come true, so that with Help to Buy they too can have the chance to buy that first home. This is where affordability matters more than ever before. I remember that affordability mattered when we bought our first home 20-plus years ago, and it is still an issue today.

I welcome the recent focus on using public sector land for building on. I hope that we continue with this so that we can prioritise housing on public sector land and brownfield sites—something that my hon. Friend the new Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) recognised in his speech. In the west midlands, as you may be aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, our new metro Mayor, Andy Street, has a very sensible approach to this—brownfield first. My constituents feel that that is an excellent way of tackling the housing crisis by putting those brownfield sites first and unlocking the potential to develop on them, thus protecting our precious green belt and green open spaces. There are also welcome measures in the Queen's Speech to promote fairness and transparency in housing with the draft tenant fees Bill, which is also to be welcomed.

I am conscious of the time, but I ask for your generosity, Mr Deputy Speaker, in indulging me in making one request; I hope the Minister will also be generous. During the last Parliament, my name was drawn in the private Members' Bills ballot, and I introduced the

Crown Tenancies Bill. I believe it had some support from the Government, so in considering housing in the round, might that be looked at again? Its purpose was to provide, for Crown tenancies, assured tenancies for the purposes of the Housing Act 1988.

4.35 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): It is lovely to see you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I welcome the new Secretary of State to his place.

This has been an extensive debate. There were 24 speakers, and I want to thank them all. I congratulate all the new Members who made their maiden speeches, including the hon. Members for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke), for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) and for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), and my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous), but I particularly pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad), who spoke so movingly about the devastating effect of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. I know that she will go from strength to strength, and will continue to represent her constituents in the fantastic way she has during the past week.

I, too, extend my condolences to everyone affected by the fire, and to all those affected by the terror attacks in Manchester and at London bridge and Finsbury Park. It seems to be a sign of our times that, in the space of just a few weeks, we should have faced these horrific events.

On behalf of the more than 50% of people who voted against austerity in the general election just two weeks ago, I want to express my profound disappointment at the content of the Gracious Speech. After delivering Brexit and building a stronger economy, it refers to making our country fairer, echoing the Prime Minister's warm words on the steps of Downing Street about building a country for everyone. Frankly, this just does not stack up. As a result of seven years of austerity under this Government, we have escalating levels of poverty, including 7.4 million people who are in working households, 4 million children and 4.2 million disabled people, while one in seven of our pensioners are living in poverty, which is an increase of 300,000 since 2010. At the same time, there have been excesses in boardroom pay, with Britain's top bosses being paid, on average, 312 times more than a care worker, 165 times more than a nurse, 140 times more than a teacher and 132 times more than a police officer. It is all right to praise the work of the emergency services, but let us give them a decent pay rise.

The richest 1,000 people own more wealth than the poorest 40%, and this Government's tax and spending policies have reinforced, rather than addressed, such inequalities. The Conservative manifesto promised more of the same—carrying on regardless of the pain and suffering that so many people have endured and are still enduring. The Conservatives have broken promise after promise: there was no mention in the manifesto of raising living standards, in spite of real wages being at 2007 levels in real terms, and there was no reference to raising the national living wage, in spite of one in five workers being in low-paid jobs. Instead, it boasted that corporation tax will continue to be cut in spite of the fact that it is already the lowest in the G7. Shockingly, it

pledged to erode further the social security safety net for older people by removing the winter fuel allowance for 10 million pensioners and the state pension triple lock, while promising a dementia tax that people, if they could not afford it and were unfortunate enough to need home care, would have to pay by selling their home. The Queen's Speech mentioned none of those Tory manifesto promises, so I would be grateful to the Secretary of State if he confirmed that, given the position of their coalition partners on these issues, they will not now be delivered.

Given that the Government are currently in breach of their own Pensions Act 2014, will the Secretary of State confirm when they will respond to the Cridland report and guarantee that there will be no further increase in the state pension age? Further to that, there was no mention in the Queen's Speech of the plight of the 2.6 million WASPI women, including the 4,000 in my constituency, who have been affected by the accelerated increase in their state pension age, many of whom had no notice of the increase and many of whom have been left destitute. I have heard cases of women in their 60s who have had to sell up everything and who are sofa-surfing. What will the Government do to address their plight? We are the fifth richest country in the world. Those women have contributed to society and it is scandalous that they are being treated in this way. The Government must act urgently to address the WASPI issue, reflect on the desperate circumstances that many WASPI women are in and put in place mitigation.

The Government seem oblivious to the escalation in child poverty over the past seven years, with 1 million more children expected to fall into poverty by 2020. They seem unconcerned by the direct and immediate effect that that is having on those children's health and wellbeing, let alone their long-term life chances. The Tory manifesto pledged to cut free school meals. While I am pleased that that has been dropped, will the Secretary of State confirm what specific measures are in place to address the rise in child poverty and to ameliorate its effects? Will the Government agree to exempt lone parents with children under two from the benefit cap, given today's High Court judgment? Where is the legislation or other measures to deal immediately with low-paid work and to ensure that work always pays, given that low pay is a key driver of worker and child poverty?

Universal credit, as we have heard in this debate, is failing, from its shambolic roll-out to the escalating costs and ludicrous design flaws, including the so-called "digital by default" and the six-week "long hello" before people get their first payment. During the election, I spoke to a constituent who was told she would have to wait six weeks and then had another four weeks added on top. That is not good enough. Of course, there is also the mess around having four-weekly as opposed to monthly payments. Some people have two payments in one month and then have to reapply because they reach the amount they are allowed.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Universal credit is being rolled out to all new claimants in my constituency from next month. Does the shadow Secretary of State share my worry about the interminable delays that are causing such problems in the claiming of universal credit?

Debbie Abrahams: As I say, it is an absolute mess and we have pledged to address it when we are in a position to do so.

[Debbie Abrahams]

The cuts to universal credit work allowances mean that 2.5 million families will be more than £2,000 a year worse off. Delays in UC and other social security support were a major cause of more than 1 million people relying on food banks last year. That problem is worse in UC areas. People are falling into debt, with eight out of 10 tenants being in rent arrears and homelessness rising. Again, why was this issue not in the manifesto or the Queen's Speech and what will the Government do about it?

The treatment of disabled people by this Government over the past seven years has been nothing short of scandalous. The scale and range of cuts in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 alone is huge, with £28 billion of support cut for 3.7 million disabled people. Of course, it did not stop there. Disabled people are now feeling the impact of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, with cuts of £1,500 a year for half a million sick and disabled people in the employment and support allowance work-related activity group. The new work capability assessment, the introduction of the personal independence payment and its associated flawed assessment, and the new sanctions regime have all had profound detrimental impacts on disabled people. Even a United Nations inquiry found the Tories guilty of "grave" and "systematic violations" of the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, yet there was still nothing in the manifesto and there is nothing in the Queen's Speech. Why do disabled people not count in this Government's so-called quest for a fairer society?

Why, when the Government affirmed their commitment to parity of esteem for people with mental health conditions, did the Prime Minister not extend that to PIP support? Her Government overturned the independent tribunal rulings and introduced PIP regulations in March without a vote or even a debate, which deprived people with mental health conditions of the higher rate of PIP. Why does parity of esteem not extend to ESA? According to the Government's own figures this week, 200,000 people with mental health conditions will lose £345 million in ESA WRAG support.

The Government's warm words about making our country fairer ring hollow. The Labour party made different choices in our manifesto, and we would most certainly have made different choices in an alternative Queen's Speech. We would introduce a new social security Bill that would repeal the personal independence payment regulations, reverse the cuts for those in ESA WRAG and transform universal credit to make sure that work always pays. Fundamentally, we would transform our social security system. Like the NHS, it is there for every single one of us in our time of need, providing security, dignity and the basics in life should we become sick or disabled or fall on hard times.

We would not stop there, but I will move on, because I know the Secretary of State wants to respond. Specifically on pensions, in addition to committing to the triple lock and maintaining the winter fuel allowance, we would extend pension credit to WASPI women and affected men and define new additional transitional protections. We would also commission a review to report on options for a flexible retirement age policy and much more. The Government are in chaos—saying one thing and doing another. We have the policies, we have the commitment and we are ready to deliver for the many, not the few.

4.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr David Gauke): It is a great pleasure to conclude this day's debate on the Gracious Speech. I thank all hon. Members from all parties who have contributed. Members from all parts of the United Kingdom have covered a wide range of subjects and it has been a very good and insightful debate.

I will not respond to every Member who has spoken, but I will respond particularly to those who made their maiden speeches, beginning with the hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad). It is difficult to imagine that there has ever been a Member of Parliament who has faced such a daunting challenge in their constituency in their first few days in office, and she has conducted herself with great sensitivity and energy. She made a very moving speech earlier today in which she spoke of her constituency generally, but she particularly and rightly focused on Grenfell Tower, the families she has met and the tales of the desperate situations that her constituents have faced. I congratulate her on the way she spoke and the way she has conducted herself as a Member of Parliament.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) on an excellent maiden speech. He spoke powerfully about his constituency and his particular constituency focuses, and showed his depth of knowledge of the borderlands. I also noted that he managed to deliver a perfectly timed speech, which is an attribute that I am sure will attract the attention of the Whips. I suspect he will be much in demand in future months.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), who spoke of his town and told us much about its history. As a former soldier, he has an appropriate background for an Aldershot Member of Parliament. He paid tribute to his predecessor, Gerald Howarth, who was a good friend to many of us here. On that note, I also congratulate the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous), who spoke about the tolerance and diversity in London and within his constituency, and about his own family's story. He also paid generous tribute to David Burrowes, with whom I shared an office for five years and who is a good friend. I welcome the opportunity to wish him well, as the hon. Gentleman did.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) on an excellent speech. He spoke warmly of all of his many predecessors and demonstrated a great love of Teesside and a desire to represent it as the first Conservative MP for his constituency for some time.

They did not give maiden speeches, but I welcome back to the House the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), with whom I suspect I will debate on many occasions, and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith). I also thank the shadow Work and Pensions Secretary for her welcome to me in my new position. I congratulate her on her reappointment. Today may mark one of our friendlier debates, but I hope that we can have a constructive working relationship in the period ahead.

I referred to the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Kensington. Clearly, Grenfell Tower has cast a large shadow over our debate. There have been several excellent

contributions, particularly that of the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), who previously represented that part of London. It is a terrible tragedy and all our thoughts are with those affected and the families who are grieving.

Our priority is to ensure that the people affected by the fire get the financial help they need. We have staff on the ground who are handling people's benefits claims sensitively and flexibly. For example, they are ensuring that payments continue if appointments are missed and that jobseeking requirements are suspended for as long as needed. The Department for Work and Pensions has also made sure that people's benefits will not be affected by payments from the discretionary fund. The local authority has assigned key workers to affected households to ensure that they have continuity of support—wraparound support—and we are working closely with them to provide benefit advice and support.

Money is available from the £5 billion discretionary fund to meet funeral costs. The Department for Work and Pensions administers funeral expenses payments and the local authority also has funds to support people who cannot afford funeral costs. It is important that all parts of government work together to provide the necessary support for the people of Grenfell Tower and the surrounding areas.

The debate on Grenfell Tower has also shone a light on the wider issue of housing. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government set out the Government's position. It is worth reminding the House that we have a proud record since 2010. We have overseen the building of nearly 1 million new homes and helped around 400,000 households to get on the property ladder through Help to Buy. However, with housing becoming increasingly unaffordable, there is much more to do. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden) made that point. We have set out our strategy in the housing White Paper and we are introducing a Bill to ban unfair tenant fees.

We will drive that forward by investing £7.1 billion through the affordable homes programme, implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and continuing to support the regeneration of housing estates. We have not built enough homes in this country for generations. We need to build more of the right homes in the right places and ensure that the housing market works for all parts of our community.

Let me deal with some of the welfare issues that have been raised in the debate. Our welfare reforms are restoring fairness and supporting people into work. Having a welfare system that offers work for those who can, help for those who could and care for those who cannot is part of our plan to build a fair society for all. The Government have improved the chances of finding employment and we will continue to build on that achievement.

The employment rate stands at a joint record high of 74.8% while the employment rate for women is at a joint record high of 70.2%.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): It is all zero-hours contracts.

Mr Gauke: There is a sedentary comment that it is all zero-hours contracts. The employment numbers that came out last week are striking because the increase was overwhelmingly a consequence of full-time employment.

We must bear in mind that those on zero-hours contracts constitute, what, 3%? [*Interruption.*] Less than 3%: 2.8% of the overall workforce. The majority of those people, when surveyed, say that that is what suits them. Moreover, the average number of hours worked by people on zero-hours contracts is 25. Let us not mischaracterise the nature of our labour market.

Let me now deal with universal credit, a landmark reform of the welfare system that will maximise people's chances of getting work, staying in work, and progressing into better-paid work. Universal credit is working. People move into work faster, and there are encouraging signs in that connection. The roll-out of universal credit continues to deliver to plan. It is being rolled out in a gradual, safe and secure way to ensure a successful delivery and the best service for claimants. The programme has recently passed an important milestone, with well over a million claims made and the number of claimants higher than the number of people claiming jobseeker's allowance.

Stephen Lloyd: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, because I am aware that time is short. Does he agree that the current taper is simply inadequate in comparison with what we planned a few years ago? Given that taper, what is the advantage of going into low-paid work?

Mr Gauke: We reduced the taper rate recently, so we have taken steps in that direction. One of the attributes of universal credit, however, is that it does not have the cliff edges of the legacy system that we have run up to now, which features all the disincentives to work for more hours and take on more work. We believe that one of the great benefits of universal credit is that it will always be sensible to do more work. I do not know whether I am being over-ambitious, but one of my objectives as Secretary of State is to convince Opposition Members at some point that this is an important and beneficial reform, and that they should get behind it rather than opposing it. That, however, remains to be seen.

Let me now say something about disability and health. There are more than half a million more disabled people in employment than there were three years ago, and the unemployment rate is at a record low. However, we know that we have further to go. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) spoke about the disability employment gap, and referred to our excellent record on the issue. I want to put on record that the Government are committed, and remain dedicated, to continuing our work in improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities and health conditions. We have made a commitment to get 1 million more disabled people into work over the next 10 years. That will enable them to enjoy the benefits that we know good work brings.

Let me now deal briefly with the issue of pensions. We are committed to ensuring economic security for people at every stage of their lives, including retirement. We are also clear about the fact that fairness must be maintained between the generations. The new simplified state pension provides a firm foundation on which to plan for retirement. Alongside the state pension, automatic enrolment has been introduced to ensure that the UK builds pension systems that enable individuals, with the help of their employers, to save towards achieving the

[Mr Gauke]

lifestyle to which they aspire in retirement, and which is sustainable in the future. About 10 million people will be saving more for a private pension to top up their state pension by 2018.

The Government have worked hard to improve people's lives. We are focusing on delivering more housing, and we have introduced successful welfare reforms on which we will continue to build. I am proud of this Conservative Government, of what we have achieved to date, and of what we have committed ourselves to achieving in this Parliament.

This is an important Gracious Speech. Part of what we will continue to do as a Government is ensure that we get people to work, reform welfare and deliver for the British people. Consequently, I commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Mike Freer.)

Debate to be resumed on Monday 26 June.

Business without Debate

ADJOURNMENT (SUMMER AND CONFERENCE)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25),

That this House—

(1) at its rising on Thursday 20 July 2017, do adjourn till Tuesday 5 September 2017; and

(2) at its rising on Thursday 14 September 2017, do adjourn till Monday 9 October 2017.—(Michael Ellis.)

Question agreed to.

NOTICES OF QUESTIONS (28 JUNE)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 22(5)(a), the questions for oral answer to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland circulated on Wednesday 21 June shall be put down for answer at the question time on Wednesday 28 June.—(Mike Freer.)

Kent & Canterbury Hospital

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

5 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I would like to start by welcoming Ken Rogers and campaigners from Concern for Health in East Kent, who have come here today to hear this debate. Ken was born in 1948, the same year as the NHS. He was diagnosed with chronic lymphatic leukaemia when his daughter was 15 months old and told that he would not live to see her fifth birthday. That was in 1981. Thanks to Kent & Canterbury hospital, he is here today, listening to this debate. There are thousands of people with similar stories—people who would not be here today if it were not for Kent & Canterbury hospital, a treasured hospital with a history going back over two centuries, and for many years a top destination for junior doctors and aspiring consultants.

The hospital has an outstanding reputation in specialties such as urology, providing dialysis for patients across east and west Kent, neurology, neuro-rehabilitation and surgery, with surgeons using a state-of-the-art robot to carry out manoeuvres impossible with human hands. Last week, the Taylor ward was providing fantastic specialist care for cardiac patients and the hospital serves around 200,000 people in Canterbury, Faversham and surrounding villages, but people across that area are worried—very worried—because there is a big question mark over the future of the hospital.

The building is out of date—frankly, it is crumbling—and the hospital is struggling to recruit staff. I said that last week the Taylor ward was providing specialist cardiac care because, this week, that is no longer the case. On Monday, junior doctors were withdrawn from Canterbury and relocated to neighbouring hospitals, after Health Education England said that there were not enough consultants to oversee their training and there was too much reliance on locums. The shift of junior doctors means the shift of emergency care. Heart attack patients in my constituency, who previously faced a journey of under 20 minutes to get to the hospital in Canterbury from Faversham, will now have to travel to Ashford—a longer drive on winding roads, one of which will be closed all summer—or Margate, 40 minutes away. In rush hour or by public transport, these journeys are far, far longer. People are scared that they or a loved one will not make it in time, and that visiting will be harder, or impossible for some. Added to that is the confusion about the transfer of services, and the risk that the pressure to free up acute beds will mean patients being transferred between hospitals before they are ready or ending up in corridors. Nurses, some of whom are here today, are desperately worried about the risk for patients.

Then there is the impact on the staff. Some are now making longer journeys to work. Others are staying at Kent & Canterbury but are at risk of losing their specialist skills. No commitment has been made on when acute services will return to Canterbury. There is great scepticism about the efforts being made to recruit consultants. Public trust has been lost. The point is that these temporary changes must not become permanent. We must not allow the hospital to crumble further and drift towards a downgrade, when there is a real opportunity to seize this moment of change to form an ambitious long-term vision for healthcare in Kent.

What patients really need is a new acute hospital providing world-class care and a medical school attracting the brightest and best doctors and nurses, making east Kent a centre of excellence in healthcare. As a university city and a major population centre with good transport links, Canterbury is the right place for a major hospital and a medical school. The Kent and Medway sustainability and transformation plan is proposing to reconfigure acute services across east Kent's three major hospitals into one emergency hub with specialist care and a trauma unit, a second emergency hospital also carrying out planned care and, at the third site, a rehabilitation hospital and a primary care-led urgent care centre. The STP is not specific about what will happen where, but all the signs are that Canterbury is the most likely to lose acute services, despite it being the obvious place to centralise specialist services.

We are at a crunch point, but this should not, and must not, be treated as a foregone conclusion. This is not the time for another short-term compromise. It is time to reverse the direction of travel and make the case for a long-term, visionary answer to the challenges of healthcare in Kent. A new hospital is not a panacea; it is not the answer to all Kent's healthcare problems. We still need to invest in primary care and bring more services out of hospitals and into places such as the Encompass Vanguard in Whitstable and Faversham cottage hospital.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): On behalf of all the MPs in east Kent, I absolutely support my hon. Friend in making a powerful case for a new, state-of-the-art acute hospital in east Kent. Does she agree that cottage hospitals such as Buckland hospital in Dover make a great deal of difference and that we ought to have more services locally, wherever possible?

Helen Whately: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. In addition to the fantastic acute hospitals, community and cottage hospitals are really important. Patients who do not need acute care can be looked after closer to home and be given a different sort of care in the environment of a local community hospital such as the one in his constituency or Faversham cottage hospital in my own, which is deeply loved and enormously valued by the community.

The new hospital that I am asking for will take time, so it will not fix the immediate challenges that the NHS is facing in Kent, but now is the time to look to the future. It has been suggested that the STP consultation is looking merely at the next five years. That is totally inadequate; it is far too short a timeframe. We need to put politics aside and think further ahead than the next parliamentary term, just as we are putting party allegiance aside for this campaign. I am pleased to be working with my colleague, the new hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield). She is taking up this campaign from her predecessor, Sir Julian Brazier, who fought hard for many years for Kent & Canterbury hospital.

In conclusion, I shall turn to the specific requests that I want to make of my hon. Friend the Minister. I ask him to note that Kent & Canterbury hospital has strong support in the community, represented here today by members of CHEK, and across the political parties. I ask him to look closely at the temporary changes to services, to challenge the hospital on its contingency plans and to make absolutely sure that, in the short

term, these services are safe for patients. I ask him to ensure that these changes do not become permanent. I also ask him to look favourably on the case for a medical school in Kent, and to ensure that the STP consultation takes into account the connection between the medical school proposal and the decision about acute sites.

I have been told many times that one barrier to the idea of a new Canterbury hospital is a lack of capital. I ask my hon. Friend to help us here. More capital has been promised for the NHS, so will he make it clear to the local NHS leaders driving the process that if they, and we in Kent, can make the case, capital will be available. There is a risk that the consultation on Kent's STP will be presented to the public with no option for an acute hospital at Canterbury. If none of the options propose keeping acute services at Canterbury, it cannot be called a true consultation.

Finally, will my hon. Friend please require STP leaders to look to the long-term, to be ambitious in their plans, and to aim for excellence? There is an opportunity here for Kent—specifically east Kent—to bring an end to the drift of services away from the area, to downgrading, and to the struggle to recruit and retrain staff. Instead, Kent could become a centre of excellence, making the most of the combined assets of the NHS, local universities and the strong life sciences research sector in east Kent to offer people in Kent brilliant patient care, to develop innovative treatments and pathways, and to set an example for the whole country of how we can provide excellent, sustainable healthcare.

5.10 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship as Deputy Speaker, Sir David. I hope that that will not necessarily be as temporary as suggested by Mr Speaker when he sought the leave of the House to appoint you. It is also a pleasure to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), who has been on her toes in securing Mr Speaker's consent to have this debate so early in the parliamentary Session. I am pleased that she has secured the support of many of her constituents, some of whom have come to witness her championing their interests in relation to Kent & Canterbury hospital. She has done that not just this evening, but consistently over the past few months with our mutual friend Sir Julian Brazier, who is sadly no longer with us in the House. However, I congratulate his replacement, the new hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield).

I worked closely with Sir Julian when we were Ministers in the Ministry of Defence, and both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent have been doughty champions of the population of mid-Kent, particularly those in the areas surrounding Canterbury, in fighting for healthcare services given the challenges that she quite properly describes at Canterbury hospital. I pay tribute to them for that, and they are doing the right thing in ensuring that such issues are brought to Ministers' attention. I know that she wrote to the Secretary of State only last week, and I am pleased to hear her arguments, which were so eloquently put today. I will say what I can in response to the questions and challenges that she posed, but I must say at the outset that I do not stand here tonight with all the

[Mr Philip Dunne]

answers to all the questions because, as she will appreciate, many of the things that she is calling for are decisions that will be taken and led by clinicians in Kent. It is not for Ministers to prescribe the provision of services in Kent. Many such decisions will take place over a period of time; it will not be instant decision making.

I will start my response by providing a little context for what has happened over the past few years, and this week in particular. As my hon. Friend pointed out, the board of East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust agreed to relocate some services from its Canterbury site, Kent & Canterbury Hospital, this Monday. The change happened overnight from Sunday into Monday and came in response to legitimate concerns raised by both the General Medical Council and Health Education England over a period stretching back to as early as 2014, when they raised concerns about the standard of training available at the Canterbury site, in particular the quality and safety of junior doctor training.

The situation was brought to a head following a visit in March this year. The recruitment and retention of key medical staff has been an ongoing challenge for the trust, and there is a shortage of consultants to provide the required training and supervision of junior doctors posted to Kent & Canterbury hospital. On Sunday 18 June, 38 junior doctors were reallocated from Kent & Canterbury to other sites operated by the trust. The removal of these junior doctors has required the trust to relocate some of the services it provides, to ensure safe and sustainably staffed services for patients.

My hon. Friend's constituents will still receive good service provision. The clinical commissioning group has facilitated this development by acquiring some 40 additional care packages to support effective discharge from the Ashford and Margate sites, to free up some 75 beds to allow for this temporary service change to take place, along with an additional 20 ambulances, supplied through SECAMB—the South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust—to cover the additional journey times from the Canterbury area. Replacement services at nearby hospitals in Ashford and Margate are being monitored to ensure that they are safe and effective, given the additional pressure on those hospitals from the move.

Unfortunately, I cannot say today how long this temporary closure will last. The GMC has made it clear that

“if there is evidence that appropriate and sustainable action has been taken to make the Urgent Care Centre a safe environment for doctors in training once more, HEE will review reallocating trainees to the site”.

No decision has been made about the long-term future of the service and no decision will be made without full public consultation. I can give my hon. Friend that reassurance.

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend mentions that there is monitoring of the provision of care for the services that have been moved to William Harvey and Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother hospitals. May I ask him to take a personal interest in that monitoring? I have heard reports from staff who are really worried about how care is being provided following the transfer of the services. They are very concerned that patients might be at risk.

Mr Dunne: One of my ministerial responsibilities is to support the Secretary of State in having an oversight of trusts that are in special measures. The East Kent trust has been in special measures and is currently in financial special measures, so I take a close interest in what is happening in that trust. In view of my hon. Friend's request and the events that have happened this week, I assure her that I will take a particular interest to ensure that the existing facilities at Ashford and Margate are up to scratch to cope with the increased demand they will undoubtedly have to manage.

I want to make it clear to the House and to the representatives on both sides who look after constituents in Kent that this issue is about maintaining the supervision of junior medical staff and ensuring that we have safe staffing levels for patients from central Kent; it is not about clinical practice or the competence of the hard-working staff in the hospital. I have been assured that before taking this decision every effort was made to identify appropriate senior staff cover from neighbouring trusts. The challenge has been to ensure that an adequate number of consultants were on duty at Kent & Canterbury hospital to allow junior doctors to have senior colleagues to refer to in the event of issues they felt uncomfortable dealing with. The problem that the trust has had is that it has been over-reliant on locum consultant cover in the hospital and there has been an inability to recruit to substantive posts in the hospital over a prolonged period, which has given rise to this concern on the part of HEE and the GMC that the training conditions for junior doctors were not adequate. That is what has led to this decision, rather than any criticism of the individual doctors or other staff members in the hospital.

I am also assured that the concerns of both HEE and the GMC are being addressed as quickly as possible. That will form part of any public consultation that follows from the development of the STP that is being worked up for the area.

I will not go into any great detail about the specifics of what has happened over the last few days as my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent has already done so, but our expectation is that this temporary relocation is likely to affect approximately 50 of the 900 patients who visit Kent & Canterbury hospital each and every day. It is important to recognise that there has not been a full A&E unit at Kent & Canterbury hospital since 2005, when services at the trust were reconfigured, and it was established as an emergency care centre. Trauma and general surgical emergency cases had already been sent to sites in Margate and Ashford for some time prior to the recent temporary changes, and I believe it was in 2016 that the emergency care centre itself was turned into an urgent care centre, which again had an impact on services at that time.

I am advised that local NHS leaders have fully explored the risks of temporarily relocating services and have put in place mitigating action and contingency plans when required. The decision has been an exercise in the balance of risk: it is clearly not desirable, and nor is it either common or unique, for the regulators to take action such as this when they have concerns about both patient and staff safety, and it is not a decision taken lightly or comfortably, but the trust has come to the view that the risk to patient safety outweighed maintaining the status quo and seeking to continue with, frankly, unsustainable levels of senior support.

My hon. Friend rightly raised concerns that this might presage a future closure of the site, and I want to try to reassure her: the trust board has been left in no doubt whatsoever that it should not regard this as a step on the road to a permanent solution and that it needs to consider the requirements of the population of mid-Kent in the round when looking at the provision for the future to be undertaken through the STP. The hon. Lady raised a perfectly reasonable concern that the STP horizon of five years is not long enough. If the STP were to consider a more wide-ranging reconfiguration, that absolutely would have to look at the long-term horizon for healthcare provision in the area and not just at meeting the immediate objectives of the next five years.

Charlie Elphicke: I thank the Minister for making this important speech, but may I gently press him on the issue of a new hospital? Is there not a cost-benefit analysis between the efficiency savings to be had from a new, state-of-the-art hospital, which can operate much more efficiently and do much more with much better use of resources, versus the cost in capital? How would the Minister and his Department strike that balance, and can they carry forward a feasibility study to look at the very interesting case being put by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately)?

Mr Dunne: I was going to come on to the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent about both allocation of capital and the possibility of a new hospital. I was starting to develop the point that this matter needs to be assessed in the light of the overall requirements of the healthcare economy of mid-Kent and the East Kent trust through the STP process. Capital is currently constrained throughout the NHS. As hon. Members will know, in the March Budget we announced a capital allocation of some £325 million over the next three years to support the first phase of STPs. Fairly shortly, we should have made sufficient progress in deciding which of the STP proposals should be supported to secure that capital. Other capital pots are available to the NHS for what we refer to as business as usual, and there are always opportunities for trusts to make capital proposals to the NHS.

Right now, it is not appropriate for me to explain the basis on which future capital allocation decisions will be made. One can look to the recent past to identify some significant new hospital builds that are now in progress. There is currently a significant capital investment not far around the coast from Kent, in Brighton, and there is another closer to my constituency, in Sandwell in Birmingham. Such builds are few and far between, and bearing in mind the kind of major capital investment we are talking about, I think both my hon. Friends from different parts of Kent are arguing for space to undertake a study to consider whether a major build is appropriate to meet the needs of the mid-Kent population.

Generally, as can be identified from the two significant builds that are currently under way, which have been allocated hundreds of millions of pounds of capital

each, a certain density of population is required to be served. Such builds are therefore most likely to occur in major cities rather than in less densely populated areas. That said, it is not for me to make suggestions as to what would or would not be appropriate. I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent to discuss the matter, as I know she has already, with her STP leaders. If there is a desire among Kent MPs and the Kent community to consider whether in future a more holistic approach to satisfying healthcare needs should be taken in the county as a whole, perhaps my hon. Friend should work in conjunction with other hon. Members.

The right forums are the STPs, which are bringing together NHS providers and commissioners from throughout their regions to try to arrange provision to meet the future healthcare needs of their populations. Whether or not my hon. Friend is successful in persuading the STP that a new hospital in Canterbury is the right solution, that is a matter for her to take forward with the STP. Such an effort would carry more weight were it supported by other colleagues from the area.

Helen Whately: It needs to come from the top that, when a bid is put forward that makes the case for significant investment, capital will be forthcoming. That message is currently not coming through and it is deterring people from making that case. It needs to shift.

Mr Dunne: I am conscious that I am close to running out of time, and I want to address the other point my hon. Friend raised, but I will say that capital is allocated by the Department of Health on the basis of the strength of the proposals, which need to meet the criteria on meeting the needs of local populations. That has to be balanced against the amount of capital that is available throughout the country, where there are competing needs.

My hon. Friend also raised the idea of a medical school, which she has discussed with me previously. She is aware of the consultation the Department ran on allocating new medical school places. That consultation has completed and we are considering our response. I am grateful to her for her submission. We wish to encourage some development of new medical schools, but again, that is subject to regulatory approval by the General Medical Council and other bodies. Any universities that wish to establish a new school need to meet the regulators' criteria. I encourage my hon. Friend to see what progress is being made in that direction.

In conclusion, I again congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and reassure her that I will be taking a close interest in how events unfold in the East Kent trust. I expect we will have an opportunity to discuss this matter again before too long.

Question put and agreed to.

5.30 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 22 June 2017

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Government's Legislative Programme 2017-19

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): Following yesterday's State Opening of Parliament, and for the convenience of the House, I am listing the Bills which were announced yesterday:

Agriculture Bill
 Armed Forces (Flexible Working) Bill
 Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill
 Civil Liability Bill
 Courts Bill
 Customs Bill
 Data Protection Bill
 Draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill
 Draft Patient Safety Bill
 Draft Tenants' Fees Bill
 European Union (Approvals) Bill
 Financial Guidance and Claims Bill
 Fisheries Bill
 High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill
 Immigration Bill
 International Sanctions Bill
 National Insurance Contributions Bill
 Nuclear Safeguards Bill
 Repeal Bill
 Smart Meter Bill
 Space Industry Bill
 Trade Bill
 Travel Protection Bill

The following Law Commission Bill will be introduced:

Goods Mortgages Bill

The programme will also include three Finance Bills to implement budget policy decisions.

Detailed information about each of these Bills can be accessed from the gov.uk website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/queens-Speech-2017>

[HCWS2]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Government's Legislative Programme (Northern Ireland) 2017-19

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (James Brokenshire): The Government's legislative programme for the first Session was outlined by Her Majesty on Wednesday 21 June. The legislative programme will

deliver legislation required in relation to exiting the European Union, in addition to delivering on important domestic policy.

The following Bills contained in the programme are likely to extend to Northern Ireland in whole or in part:

Agriculture Bill (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs)
 Armed Forces (Flexible Working) Bill (Ministry of Defence)
 Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill (Department for Transport)
 Courts Bill (Ministry of Justice)
 Customs Bill (HM Treasury)
 Data Protection Bill (Department for Culture Media and Sport)
 EU Approvals Bill (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
 Financial Guidance and Claims Bill (Department for Work and Pensions)
 Fisheries Bill (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs)
 Immigration Bill (Home Office)
 International Sanctions Bill (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)
 National Insurance Contributions Bill (HM Treasury)
 Nuclear Safeguards Bill (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
 Repeal Bill (Department for Exiting the European Union)
 Space Industry Bill (Department for Transport)
 Trade Bill (Department for International Trade)
 Travel Protection Bill (Department for Transport)

There are currently no plans for the provisions in the following Bills and draft Bills to extend to Northern Ireland:

Civil Liability Bill (Ministry of Justice)
 Draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill (Home Office)
 Draft Patient Safety Bill (Department of Health)
 Draft Tenants' Fees Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)
 Goods Mortgages Bill (Law Commission)
 Smart Meter Bill (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)

Although the High Speed Rail (West Midlands—Crewe) Bill sets out the route of the railway from the West Midlands to Crewe, its provision may have consequential effects relevant to Northern Ireland.

The programme will also include three Finance Bills to implement budget policy decisions, which will apply to Northern Ireland.

The Government will continue to work with all of the parties in Northern Ireland to support the return of devolved Government. We will also work constructively with Northern Ireland Departments Bills as part of the process of securing legislative consent motions where appropriate.

[HCWS5]

SCOTLAND

Government's Legislative Programme (Scotland) 2017-19

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): The legislative programme for the first Session was outlined by Her Majesty on Wednesday 21 June.

This statement provides a summary of the new Government legislation for 2017-19 and its application to Scotland. It does not include draft Bills, Law Commission Bills or Finance Bills. The programme will include three Finance Bills to implement budget policy decisions.

The Government's legislative programme will bring forward important legislation required in relation to exiting the European Union, whilst also continuing to deliver on important domestic policy.

Legislation will be brought forward to support advances in transport technologies, making the UK a leader in industries including electric cars and commercial satellites. The Government will also legislate to provide for greater work flexibility for members of the armed forces, improve the provision of financial advice and will support energy efficiency through the smart meter regime.

The Government's repeal Bill will help to deliver a smooth and orderly exit from the EU. In addition several further bills on EU exit will legislate in key areas such as trade, customs and immigration.

In addition to this new programme, we remain committed to implementation of the Scotland Act 2016. Moving forward, the UK Government are committed to working closely with the Scottish Government to implement these important powers, including the significant transfer of welfare responsibilities. The powers devolved in the Act will result in the Scottish Parliament becoming one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world.

In line with the Sewel convention, the Government will continue to work constructively with the Scottish Government to secure legislative consent motions where appropriate.

The Bills listed in section 1 will apply to Scotland, either in full or in part. Some of these bills may engage the Sewel process depending on final content. Section 2 details Bills that will not apply in Scotland.

Section 1: Legislation applying to the United Kingdom, including Scotland (either in full or in part).

- Repeal Bill
- Agriculture Bill
- Armed Forces (Flexible Working) Bill
- Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill
- Courts Bill
- Customs Bill
- Data Protection Bill
- European Union (Approvals) Bill
- Financial Guidance and Claims Bill
- Fisheries Bill
- High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill (technically applies to the whole UK but concerns the Fradley - Crew route)
- Immigration Bill
- International Sanctions Bill
- National Insurance Contributions Bill
- Nuclear Safeguards Bill
- Smart Meter Bill
- Space Industry Bill
- Trade Bill
- Travel Protection Bill

Section 2: Legislation that will not extend to Scotland.

- Civil Liability Bill

TRANSPORT

Rail Franchising

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard): I am pleased to inform the House that we have today published the shortlists of companies that will bid for the new West Coast Partnership franchise which will launch the first services on HS2, and the next South Eastern franchise.

The House will be aware that passenger numbers have more than doubled since privatisation of the railways 20 years ago and our country's railways need to adapt and change to be able to cope with this and future demands. This Government are committed to revolutionising our railways through innovation and investment to transform passengers' experiences and ensure our railways work for everyone.

This is an exciting time for both franchises, which are changing to ensure passengers are at the heart of their services. The winner of the WCP franchise will be expected to work with HS2 Ltd to launch the first services on HS2, taking advantage of the extra space it will provide for commuters on the west coast main line. The winner of the South Eastern franchise will need to work as one team with Network Rail to ensure passengers experience better journeys and provide longer trains with more space.

West Coast Partnership Franchise

The West Coast Partnership will be responsible for services on the west coast main line from April 2019 and will design and run the initial HS2 high-speed services between London and Birmingham from 2026.

The shortlist contains bidding consortia which sees UK rail network experts working in partnership with companies that operate high-speed railways around the globe, supported by businesses which have an excellent track record in customer services.

They are:

First Trenitalia West Coast Ltd, a joint venture between First Rail Holdings Ltd and Trenitalia SpA;

MTR West Coast Partnership Ltd, a joint venture between MTR Corporation (UK) Ltd and Guangshen Railway Company), with the following key sub-contractors: Deloitte MCS Ltd, Panasonic Systems Europe, Snowfall AB, Trainline.com Ltd and WSP Parsons Brinkerhoff; and

West Coast Partnership Ltd, a joint venture between Stagecoach Group plc, Virgin Holdings Ltd and SNCF C3).

The West Coast Partnership will support growth and better services on the west coast main line while helping to ensure HS2 becomes the backbone of Britain's future railways. This will create more seats for passengers, improve connections between our great cities, free up space on existing rail lines and generate jobs and economic growth throughout the country.

The winning bidder will collaborate with HS2 Ltd to design, launch and operate the initial HS2 services and deliver the transition of the timetable on the west coast main line as it is revised to take advantage of the extra capacity provided by HS2. There are significant benefits in bringing the two projects closer together to ensure the best outcomes for passengers both before and after the start of the HS2 services.

The new operator will also be expected to work closely with local transport authorities, Transport Scotland and the Welsh Government to ensure passengers receive the excellent experience they demand from the west coast main line.

South Eastern Franchise

The South Eastern franchise is one of the busiest franchises in the UK, running almost two thousand services every weekday. We want passengers to be at the heart of everything that the new operator does, enjoying modern, spacious trains on a more punctual and reliable service. We will listen to what passengers say in the current public consultation, and we will seek to make changes and improvements only with their support. We will create more space for passengers in the peak commuting times including by running longer, more modern trains in and around London.

Other ambitions for this franchise include:

- increasing the reliability of trains by using the latest technology while reducing delays by encouraging the operator to work closely with Network Rail;
- improving passenger compensation arrangements and supporting smart ticketing; and
- improving customer service, with staff able to respond quickly and effectively, including during disruption.

The new franchise will also complement the completion of two major enhancement schemes—Thameslink and Crossrail—providing passengers with more trains, more destinations, and significant improvements in reliability and performance. The winner of the next South Eastern franchise will be required to optimise the value of these investments for passengers.

The shortlisted bidders for the South Eastern rail franchise competition are:

The franchise applicant, South Eastern Railways Ltd, is currently a wholly owned subsidiary of Abellio Transport Group Ltd. If awarded the franchise it would become a subsidiary of South Eastern Holdings Ltd, a joint venture between Abellio and the consortium of East Japan Railway Company and Mitsui & Co., Ltd;

London and South East Passenger Rail Services Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Govia Ltd;

Stagecoach South Eastern Trains Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Stagecoach Group plc; and

Trenitalia UK Ltd, wholly owned by Trenitalia SpA.

The public consultation seeking views and priorities for the new South Eastern franchise runs until June 30. The new franchise is planned to start in December 2018.

New companies enter the market

I am also pleased to inform the House that two companies have applied for a pre-qualification questionnaire passport to allow them to enter the bidding process. These firms are now eligible to express an interest in all upcoming rail franchise competitions until September 2019.

Amey Rail Ltd
SNCF-C3

[HCWS1]

WALES

Government's Legislative Programme (Wales) 2017-19

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):The Government's first legislative programme announced in the Queen's Speech on 21 June contains a wide range of measures that will apply to Wales either in full or in part.

The following Bills and draft Bills will extend to Wales in whole or in part:

- Agriculture Bill (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs)
- Armed Forces (Flexible Working) Bill (Ministry of Defence)
- Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill (Department for Transport)
- Civil Liability Bill (Ministry of Justice)
- Courts Bill (Ministry of Justice)
- Customs Bill (HM Treasury)
- Data Protection Bill (Department for Culture Media and Sport)
- Draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill (Home Office)
- EU Approvals Bill (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
- Financial Guidance and Claims Bill (Department for Work and Pensions)
- Fisheries Bill (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs)
- Goods Mortgages Bill (Law Commission)
- Immigration Bill (Home Office)
- International Sanctions Bill (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)
- National Insurance Contributions Bill (HM Treasury)
- Nuclear Safeguards Bill (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
- Repeal Bill (Department for Exiting the European Union)
- Smart Meter Bill (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
- Space Industry Bill (Department for Transport)
- Trade Bill (Department for International Trade)
- Travel Protection Bill (Department for Transport)

There are currently no plans for the provisions in the following draft Bills to apply to Wales:

- Draft Patient Safety Bill (Department of Health)
- Draft Tenants' Fees Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)

Although the High Speed Rail (West Midlands—Crewe) Bill will extend to Wales, this Bill will set out the route of the railway from the West Midlands to Crewe.

The programme will also include three Finance Bills to implement budget policy decisions, which will apply to Wales.

In line with the convention on legislative consent, the Government will continue to work constructively with the Welsh Government to secure legislative consent motions where appropriate.

[HCWS3]

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 22 June 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
LEADER OF THE HOUSE	1WS	TRANSPORT	4WS
Government's Legislative Programme 2017-19	1WS	Rail Franchising.....	4WS
NORTHERN IRELAND	1WS		
Government's Legislative Programme (Northern Ireland) 2017-19.....	1WS	WALES	6WS
SCOTLAND	2WS	Government's Legislative Programme (Wales) 2017-19	6WS
Government's Legislative Programme (Scotland) 2017-19	2WS		

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 29 June 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 22 June 2017

Members Sworn [Col. 165]

Grenfell Tower [Col. 166]

Statement—(Prime Minister)

Terror Attacks [Col. 195]

Statement—(Amber Rudd)

Deputy Speakers [Col. 213]

Business of the House [Col. 214]

Statement—(Andrea Leadsom)

Air Travel Organisers' Licensing Bill [Col. 227]

Bill presented

European Union (Approvals) Bill [Col. 227]

Bill presented

Debate on the Address [Col. 228]

Debate Adjourned

Kent & Canterbury Hospital [Col. 292]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 1WS]

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