

**Tuesday
5 September 2017**

**Volume 628
No. 22**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Tuesday 5 September 2017

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(FORMED BY THE RT HON. THERESA MAY, MP, JUNE 2017)

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt Hon. Theresa May, MP
FIRST SECRETARY OF STATE AND MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE—The Rt Hon. Damian Green MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Philip Hammond, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt Hon. Amber Rudd, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS—The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION—The Rt Hon. David Davis, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE—The Rt Hon. Sir Michael Fallon, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt, MP
LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE—The Rt Hon. David Lidington, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—The Rt Hon. Justine Greening, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Liam Fox, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY—The Rt Hon. Greg Clark, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—The Rt Hon. Michael Gove, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT—The Rt Hon. Chris Grayling, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT—The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt Hon. David Mundell, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt Hon. Alun Cairns, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt Hon. James Brokenshire, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—The Rt Hon. Priti Patel, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT—The Rt Hon. Karen Bradley, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS—The Rt Hon. David Gauke, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER—The Rt Hon. Sir Patrick McLoughlin, MP
LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt Hon. Baroness Evans of Bowes Park

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Greg Clark, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Joseph Johnson, MP (Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation) §

Claire Perry, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Margot James, MP

Richard Harrington, MP

Lord Prior of Brampton

Cabinet Office—

MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE AND FIRST SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Damian Green, MP

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL—The Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom §

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Chris Skidmore, MP

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Caroline Nokes, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER—The Rt Hon. Sir Patrick McLoughlin, MP

Communities and Local Government—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Alok Sharma, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Marcus Jones, MP

Jake Berry, MP

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth §

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Karen Bradley, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Matt Hancock, MP (Minister for Digital)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Tracey Crouch, MP

John Glen, MP

Lord Ashton of Hyde

Defence—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Sir Michael Fallon, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Mark Lancaster, MP

The Rt Hon. Earl Howe §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Harriett Baldwin, MP

The Rt Hon. Tobias Ellwood, MP

Education—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—The Rt Hon. Justine Greening, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Nick Gibb, MP (Minister for School Standards)

Joseph Johnson, MP (Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation) §

The Rt Hon. Anne Milton, MP

Robert Goodwill, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—

Lord Nash

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Michael Gove, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—George Eustice, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Thérèse Coffey, MP

Lord Gardiner of Kimble

Exiting the European Union—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. David Davis, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Baroness Anelay of St Johns

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Steve Baker, MP

Robin Walker, MP

Foreign and Commonwealth Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Sir Alan Duncan, MP (Minister for Europe and the Americas)

The Rt Hon. Alistair Burt, MP (Minister for the Middle East) §

The Rt Hon. Mark Field, MP (Minister for Asia and the Pacific)

Rory Stewart, MP (Minister for Africa) §

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Minister for the Commonwealth and the UN)

Health—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Philip Dunne, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Steve Brine, MP

Jackie Doyle-Price, MP

Lord O'Shaughnessy

Home Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Amber Rudd, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Brandon Lewis, MP (Minister for Immigration)

The Rt Hon. Ben Wallace, MP (Minister for Security)

Nick Hurd, MP (Minister for Policing and the Fire Service)

Baroness Williams of Trafford

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—

Sarah Newton, MP

International Development—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Priti Patel, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Alistair Burt §

Rory Stewart, MP §

The Rt Hon. Lord Bates

International Trade—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Liam Fox, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Greg Hands, MP (Minister for Trade Policy)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—MARK GARNIER, MP

Justice—

LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. David Lidington, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Dominic Raab, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Sam Gyimah, MP

Phillip Lee, MP

ADVOCATE GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Lord Keen of Elie, QC

Law Officers—

ATTORNEY GENERAL—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Wright, QC, MP

SOLICITOR GENERAL—Robert Buckland, QC, MP

Leader of the House of Commons—

LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom, MP §

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—Michael Ellis, MP

Northern Ireland—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. James Brokenshire, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Chloe Smith, MP §

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth §

Scotland Office —

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. David Mundell, MP

Transport—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Chris Grayling, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—The Rt Hon. John Hayes, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Paul Maynard, MP

Jesse Norman, MP

Lord Callanan

Treasury—

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt Hon. Theresa May, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Philip Hammond, MP

CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP

FINANCIAL SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Mel Stride, MP

EXCHEQUER SECRETARY—Andrew Jones, MP

ECONOMIC SECRETARY—Stephen Barclay, MP

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson, MP

LORDS COMMISSIONERS—

The Rt. Hon. David Evennett, MP

Guto Bebb, MP §

David Rutley, MP

Heather Wheeler, MP

Mark Spencer, MP

Andrew Griffiths, MP

ASSISTANT WHIPS—

Mike Freer, MP

Graham Stuart, MP

Rebecca Harris, MP

Nigel Adams, MP

Andrew Stephenson, MP

Chloe Smith, MP §

Stuart Andrew, MP

Craig Whittaker, MP

UK Export Finance—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Liam Fox, MP

MINISTER FOR TRADE AND INVESTMENT—The Rt Hon. Greg Hands, MP

Wales Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Alun Cairns, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—
Guto Bebb, MP §**Work and Pensions—**

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. David Gauke, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Damian Hinds, MP (Minister for Employment)

Penny Mordaunt, MP (Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Guy Opperman, MP

Caroline Dinage, MP

Baroness Buscombe

Office of the Leader of the House of Lords—

LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND LORD PRIVY SEAL—The Rt. Hon. Baroness Evans of Bowes Park

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt Hon. Earl Howe §

Her Majesty's Household—

LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt Hon. Earl Peel GCVO, DL

LORD STEWARD—The Earl of Dalhousie

MASTER OF THE HORSE—Lord Vestey KCVO

TREASURER—Julian Smith, MP

COMPTROLLER—Christopher Pincher, MP

VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Chris Heaton-Harris, MP

CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Rt Hon. Lord Taylor of Holbeach CBE

CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD—Earl of Courtown

BARONESSSES IN WAITING—Baroness Goldie DL, Baroness Sugg, Baroness Buscombe §, Baroness Vere of Norbiton, Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen

LORDS IN WAITING—Viscount Younger of Leckie, The Rt Hon. Lord Young of Cookham CH

§ *Members of the Government listed under more than one Department*

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—The Rt Hon. Dame Caroline Spelman, MP

REPRESENTING THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION—Bridget Phillipson, MP

REPRESENTING THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY—Charles Walker, MP

REPRESENTING THE HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—The Rt Hon. Tom Brake, MP

CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION—Sir Edward Leigh, MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

THE SPEAKER—The Rt Hon. John Bercow, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Lindsay Hoyle, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Mrs Eleanor Laing, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Dame Rosie Winterton, MP

PANEL OF CHAIRS

Sir David Amess, Mr Adrian Bailey, Mr Clive Betts, Mr Peter Bone, Mr Graham Brady, Ms Karen Buck, Mr Christopher Chope, Sir David Crausby, Geraint Davies, Philip Davies, Ms Nadine Dorries, Mr Nigel Evans, Sir Roger Gale, Mike Gapes, The Rt Hon. Mrs Cheryl Gillan, James Gray, The Rt Hon. Mr David Hanson, Mr Philip Hollobone, The Rt Hon. Mr George Howarth, Sir Edward Leigh, Mrs Anne Main, Steve McCabe, Mrs Madeleine Moon, Albert Owen, Ian Paisley, Mark Pritchard, Andrew Rosindell, The Rt Hon. Joan Ryan, Mr Gary Streeter, Graham Stringer, Mr Charles Walker, Phil Wilson

SECRETARY—Colin Lee

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The Rt Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), Sir Paul Beresford, MP, The Rt Hon. Tom Brake, MP, The Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom, MP (Leader of the House), Stewart Hosie, MP, Valerie Vaz, MP, The Rt Hon. Dame Rosie Winterton, MP, David Natzler (Clerk of the House), Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Dame Janet Gaymer, DBE (External Member), Jane McCall (External Member)

SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION—Marianne Cwynarski

ASSISTANT SECRETARY—Helen Wood

ADMINISTRATION ESTIMATE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE AND MEMBERS ESTIMATE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Dame Janet Gaymer, DBE (Chair), Sir Paul Beresford, MP, The Rt Hon. Tom Brake, MP, The Rt Hon. Dame Rosie Winterton, MP, Jane McCall, Bob Scruton

SECRETARY—John-Paul Flaherty

THE BOARD

Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Myfanwy Barrett (Managing Director, Corporate Services and Finance Director), John Benger (Clerk Assistant and Managing Director, Chamber and Committees), Carlos Bamford (Managing Director, In-House Services), Lee Bridges (Head of Communications), Brian Finnimore (Managing Director, Strategic Estates), Marianne Cwynarski (Head of the Governance Office), Rob Greig (Director of the Parliamentary Digital Service), Eric Hepburn (Director of Security for Parliament), Penny Young (Librarian and Managing Director, Research and Information, and Managing Director, Participation), Annette Toft (Ways of Working Director), Patsy Richards (Customer Service Lead), Edge Watchorn (People Stripe Director), David Natzler (Clerk of the House and Head of the House of Commons Service) [ex officio]

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD—Sarah Petit

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

David Natzler (Clerk of the House and Head of the House of Commons Service), Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Myfanwy Barrett (Managing Director, Corporate Services and Finance Director)

SECRETARY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE—Sarah Petit

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—Peter Barratt

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—Saira Salimi

SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Kathryn Hudson

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2017]

SIXTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 628

THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 2017-2019

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 September 2017

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRAYERS

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

MIDDLE LEVEL BILL

Motion made,

That the promoters of the Middle Level Bill, which originated in this House in the previous Session on 24 January 2017, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of bills).—(*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Tuesday 12 September.

Oral Answers to Questions

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Legal Aid: Access

1. **Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that people in each region of England and Wales have adequate access to legal aid providers. [900664]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Lidington): The Legal Aid Agency regularly reviews the capacity of the legal aid market to cope with demand for legal aid and takes urgent action where any regional shortfall develops. I intend to look more widely at the impact of recent policy changes on access to legal aid as part of a forthcoming post-implementation review, about which I hope to be able to say more shortly.

Thelma Walker: The latest report from the Children's Society, "Cut off from Justice", found that in Yorkshire we saw a 56% drop in the availability of free immigration advice between 2012 and 2016. Given the acute vulnerabilities of unaccompanied children who need to access legal advice, will the Secretary of State commit to consider those children in the upcoming review of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012?

Mr Lidington: There will certainly be an opportunity, as the hon. Lady wishes, for representations to be made and consideration to be given to that sort of change. While the most recent legislation did indeed exclude non-asylum immigration matters, much family law, including cases involving vulnerable children who might be taken into local authority care, is still eligible for legal aid.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): While it is undoubtedly true that fewer people have access to legal aid than was the case before the reforms, it is also true that lots of people who are entitled to legal aid are not getting it. What can the Justice Secretary do to make sure that those people receive the finance that they need to get the access to justice that they require?

Mr Lidington: If people believe that they are entitled to legal aid, I would strongly encourage them to apply to the relevant authorities and to one of the legal aid providers that are contracted to provide that kind of advice. Even after the exclusion of certain categories in the most recent legislative reform, last year's legal aid expenditure still amounted to £1.6 billion, which is nearly a quarter of my Department's entire expenditure.

Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab): Does the Minister believe that a greater number of people who have to represent themselves in court—so-called litigants in person—helps justice to be done in this country?

Mr Lidington: What is important is that we manage legal aid in a way that directs finite taxpayer resources to those cases where there is greatest need, and that we look actively for ways to simplify access to justice, including through the use of digital technology, so that people do not feel the need always to have that kind of professional representation.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Barely a third of immigration detainees even know that they are entitled to 30 minutes of free legal advice in England and Wales, and only half have ever been able to access it. Given the horror show in Brook House that we saw on last night's "Panorama", will the Government act urgently to ensure that all detainees get access to the free legal aid that they urgently require?

Mr Lidington: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the centre that was the subject of last night's programme is accountable to the Home Office. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is concerned about the allegations and appropriate action is being taken.

On the hon. Gentleman's broader point, legal aid is still available for asylum cases. I would certainly hope that appropriate measures are taken in every relevant establishment to bring those rights to the attention of anyone who is detained and might qualify for legal aid.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): May I press the Secretary of State on a publication date for the legal aid review? Will he tell me how many people who have been denied legal aid since the Government changed the criteria the Government have heard from?

Mr Lidington: I would hope to be able to give Parliament details in the relatively near future. I am conscious that this work has been promised. We have not yet been able to make an announcement, but the hon. Lady will appreciate that matters such as a general election and a change of Ministers have intervened. I want to press ahead with this as soon as possible.

Employment Tribunals: Rebates

2. **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): When the Government plan to announce how rebate arrangements will work for people who have paid employment tribunal fees. [900665]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Dominic Raab): Following the Supreme Court judgment on employment tribunal fees of the end of July, we immediately stopped charging them. We are putting in place arrangements to refund those who have paid the fees in the past, and we will announce the practical, detailed arrangements shortly.

Ronnie Cowan: I have been contacted by a constituent who highlighted the stress and financial burden that was placed on them while going through an employment tribunal case that they ultimately won. Will the Minister

ensure that those who are entitled to claim back employment tribunal fees are made aware of the process and reunited with their money in a timely fashion?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that it can be quite an ordeal to go to an employment tribunal—or any tribunal—which is why I pay tribute to the conciliation work of ACAS. We will set out practical arrangements for the reimbursement of those fees. We want to ensure that all the points—particularly about people's awareness—are properly thought through before we do that.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah! The Chair of the Justice Committee, no less.

Robert Neill: It is no pleasure to say that a number of the criticisms of the development of this policy were foreshadowed in a Justice Committee report in the previous Session. As well as rightly and promptly acting to reimburse fees paid, will the Minister undertake to look at some of the specific recommendations in that report and at the factual findings on the evidence in the Court's judgment? That would highlight a better way of developing policy in this area so that we do not end up in this situation again.

Dominic Raab: I thank the Chair of the Select Committee. We will certainly further consider his Committee's report into this—[*Interruption.*] The former Chair of the Select Committee—

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): There is no Committee. He's the Chair, but there is no Committee.

Dominic Raab: In due course.

The cost of employment tribunals last year was £68 million. Only £8 million came from fees; the rest was from taxpayers. It is inherently difficult to balance the contribution required by those who use the justice system against the amount that needs to be borne by the taxpayer, and we recognise that we got that balance wrong. We have ended those fees and are looking at practical arrangements to ensure that those affected are reimbursed.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): In the light of the Court ruling and the Select Committee's report, was the decision to introduce the fees in the first place a mistake?

Dominic Raab: We certainly accept the Supreme Court ruling. We think that we got the balance wrong and we have ended the fees. We are looking to ensure not only that we reimburse those affected, but that we learn lessons for the future.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): The Women and Equalities Committee also called for changes in tribunal fees, particularly because they affect pregnant women and new mums, who have experienced significant increases in discrimination at work in the past 10 years. Will the Minister undertake to look at the other part of our recommendation, which is to increase the time limit from three months to six months for pregnant women and new mums to bring cases to court?

Dominic Raab: We will certainly look into all aspects of the various Select Committee reports when charting the way forward.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): May I start by welcoming the Minister to his place?

The Supreme Court ruled that the secondary legislation that brought in the employment tribunal fees interfered with access to justice and employment rights, and that it discriminated unlawfully. Does the Minister accept that the Supreme Court's judgment illustrates that fundamental rights such as equality and access to justice should not be changed or undermined by secondary legislation that receives little or no parliamentary scrutiny?

Dominic Raab: The hon. and learned Lady makes her point in a typically powerful way. The Supreme Court also recognised that fees can have a role to play. Of course, they do help to secure justice and access to justice by making the necessary resources available. Equally, we recognise that we got the balance wrong. That is why we have taken immediate action to end the fees. We will be coming up with proposals on the practical arrangements for reimbursement shortly.

Joanna Cherry: In 2015, the Scottish Government said that as soon as the power to do so was devolved—and that is pending—they would abolish employment tribunal fees. Does the Minister agree that the fact that the Scottish Government chose to do that voluntarily—the UK Government were forced to do so by the Supreme Court—shows that the case for the devolution of employment law to Scotland is strong so that the Scottish Government may protect the interests of Scottish workers and access to justice?

Dominic Raab: We are fully in favour of the principle of devolution. A whole range of justice matters have been devolved, and we will look very carefully at how we get the balance right.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): In the Supreme Court, Baroness Hale was very concerned about meritorious claims being put off by the fees. She also acknowledged that there are some unmeritorious claims, and those are the ones that damage relations in the workplace. Will the Minister consider fairer ways of sifting out unmeritorious claims, such as having a sift before the application is made into a full case?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend makes a strong point and that is certainly something we can look at. Equally, it is fair to say we got the balance wrong on the specific issue of fees. One of the strong elements we are looking to reinforce is the role of ACAS. We have seen that conciliation and the number of cases referred to conciliation have had a strong impact on reducing the number of cases that need to go to court or a tribunal.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I wrote to the Secretary of State back in July to call on him to issue a full and unequivocal apology to working people for deliberately and unlawfully blocking their access to justice through employment tribunal fees. Last week, I received a wholly inadequate reply, which I have here.

Will the Minister apologise today for the suffering that this policy has caused hundreds of thousands of working people?

Dominic Raab: We have conceded that we got the balance wrong. I am happy to say that I am very sorry for any frustration or deleterious impact that this has caused anyone who has been affected. That is why we are acting so quickly to end the charges and to make sure there are practical arrangements for the reimbursement of anyone affected by these fees.

Cyber-crime

3. **Ms Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): How Government investment in (a) cyber-security and (b) the National Cyber Security Centre will support victims of cyber-crime; and if he will make a statement. [900666]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): The Government are investing £1.9 billion to transform our ability to respond to the cyber-threats we face. This includes continuing to develop our support to victims of cyber-crime. I am committed to making sure that victims get the support they need to cope with and, as far as possible, recover from the effects of crime. The National Cyber Security Centre is part of GCHQ, which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has ministerial responsibility for.

Ms Rimmer: Given that it is Government policy that victim support is commissioned locally by individual police and crime commissioners, is the Minister content that there is sufficient resource for victim support? Given the year-on-year increase in cyber-crime, and considering the national and international nature and background of cyber-criminals, does he not agree that a single, national approach to victim support would act as a better deterrent and a better support structure for victims, rather than allowing criminals to cherry-pick among the 43 police forces?

Dr Lee: As I made clear in my initial response, cyber-security policy does not sit with this Department—in fact, it sits with the Cabinet Office. Victim support funding has gone up from £51 million in 2010-11, and I was pleased to announce that it is going up to £96 million in 2017-18. Most of that is spent via PCCs. Importantly, I have put in place an audit of the performance of PCCs with regard to funding for victims' services.

20. [900684] **Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): As crime changes and the focus on cyber-crime grows, what assurances can the Minister give us that police budgets will match that changed focus and that we will not see a loss of bobbies on the beat as resources are inevitably shifted?

Dr Lee: Unfortunately, I am not a Minister at the Home Office, so I cannot really respond in detail to that question. I would encourage the hon. Gentleman to write to the relevant Minister.

Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): When will we see the draft of the victims' Bill, which was committed to by the Government and Her Majesty's Opposition?

Dr Lee: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. We committed to the victims' Bill in the last manifesto. We are up against it in terms of parliamentary time, as I am sure he understands, but work continues on the legislation most likely to underpin the victims' code.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): The Minister will recognise how vital international co-operation is in tackling cyber-crime. I hope he is aware of the excellent work done by Europol, with, for example, the UK sending over 400,000 malware files to its malware analysis service since its inception just two years ago. Have the Government decided whether the UK will stay part of that EU mechanism to fight cyber-crime?

Dr Lee: I hate to repeat myself, but the two policy areas to which the right hon. Gentleman refers do not sit within the Ministry of Justice. Cyber-security sits with the Cabinet Office and our membership of Europol sits with the Home Office.

Child Sex Abuse: Compensation

4. **Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of compensation paid by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority in child sex abuse cases. [900667]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Lidington): Child sexual abuse is abhorrent. The taxpayer-funded criminal injuries compensation scheme provides an important avenue of redress for victims and is accessible to victims of violent crimes, including physical and sexual assaults. The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority administers the scheme and decides all claims individually, independently of Ministers and Parliament.

Sarah Champion: Will the Secretary of State commit to updating the guidance in three specific areas? First, children cannot be complicit in their own abuse. Secondly, as part of a grooming process, children are coerced into carrying out criminal activities. Thirdly, will he look at compensation for victims of family abuse under the same roof before 1979? At the moment, CICA is denying compensation on those grounds.

Mr Lidington: I am happy to look further at all those three issues. Following some of the concerns expressed earlier this year, CICA decided to mount an urgent re-examination of its own internal guidelines—in particular, to make sure that there is no risk that a child could be disqualified from compensation because they had given consent when that consent had, in effect, been forced from them by a subtle process of grooming. The Department is also aware of concerns that have been raised about how the rules of the scheme work more generally in relation to cases of child sexual abuse. We are talking to organisations such as Barnardo's and Victim Support in detail about those concerns and the reforms that they propose to deal with them.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): If it is a criminal offence to have sex with a child, how is such an offence anything but a crime of violence? To say that child victims cannot receive compensation for

their abuse is simply victim blaming. The definition of a crime of violence was last reviewed five years ago. When will this be reassessed to ensure that sexually abused children are not denied compensation?

Mr Lidington: As I have said, we are discussing with the various charities the concerns that they have expressed. If the hon. Lady's point was about the distinction that CICA makes between consent in law and consent in fact, this has been written into the law since it was first introduced by the previous Labour Government, I believe, and administered during their time in office. Its purpose was to ensure that we did not end up in a situation where, for example, two 15-year-olds engaging in sexual intercourse automatically led to a claim for compensation—it would be left to the authority to look at the facts of the case. I am very willing to look at, and CICA is already looking at, the guidance that applies to individual cases, but we should not lose sight of the fact that there was a reasonable motive behind the law as it was originally drafted.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): No one will deny the absolute right and need of victims to receive proper compensation from CICA under these conditions, but does not the Secretary of State agree that there may be occasions—as in, for example, the very grave allegations made against the late Sir Edward Heath—when the informant is incentivised in one way or another to make the allegation by the likelihood of getting some kind of compensation? Should not the compensation wait so that the outcome of the investigation is known before the person making the allegations is paid?

Mr Lidington: The scheme operates to provide compensation for people who are victims of crime. Probably all of us, as constituency Members, can think of cases when somebody has been the victim of an assault, but it has been impossible to successfully prosecute the person or people responsible. A direct link to a trial and conviction is therefore not in the scheme. However, I do agree with my hon. Friend that if there is evidence that compensation has been sought fraudulently, the authority ought to seek the necessary legal action to recover those funds.

Offenders: Education and Employment

5. **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve offenders' access to education and employment. [900668]

16. **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve offenders' access to education and employment. [900680]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): Education and employment opportunities are crucial to help offenders to turn around their lives. In line with our reforms, every prisoner will have a personal learning plan linked to their sentence plan. To make this reform effective, we are giving governors control over their education budgets to organise courses that fit prisoners' needs.

Rebecca Pow: Gardening and horticultural schemes for growing edible crops are increasingly being incorporated into prison programmes and programmes for those on remand up and down the country, giving offenders transferrable skills and offering them future employment

opportunities, as well as encouraging self-confidence and, quite often, transforming unattractive concrete yards into much more pleasant green spaces. Has a formal assessment been made of some of those programmes, with a view to rolling out the best of the models even more widely?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend is right. I remember visiting Rye Hill prison near Daventry and seeing the pride with which prisoners tended their gardens; they spent hours doing so. She may be aware of the Royal Horticultural Society Windlesham trophy award, which is judged by an independent panel that looks at the best gardening schemes across the prison estate. If she does not mind, I should be delighted to put her name forward to be a judge.

Matt Warman: Category D prisons often have the very best examples of rehabilitation as they prepare to let their prisoners back into the community. North Sea Camp in my constituency has worked with the council not only on that rehabilitative work to prepare prisoners for work but, for example, on fly-tipping, saving the taxpayer £300,000. Does the Minister agree that the other prisons in the sector can learn from category D's rehabilitative practices, and will he come to North Sea Camp and have a look at how well they can work?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend has lighted on an important principle. Work in prison is vital to preparing prisoners for life after release—North Sea Camp has an excellent example—which is why I am supporting the New Futures Network to develop relationships between employers, governors and the world of work. I would be delighted to visit North Sea Camp in due course.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I have never heard such complacency from the Government. The Prison Service is a shambles, and at the heart of that shambles is the lack of education, the lack of literacy, the lack of numeracy and the lack of apprenticeships—services that, as they are for our Scandinavian brethren, should be in every prison. When is the Minister going to wake up?

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Gentleman has come back from his summer holiday with his customary passion. I agree that if prisons are to work properly we need to give people the opportunity to turn their lives around. Prison reform is important to this Government. That is why we are giving governors more control of their budgets and more freedom to implement the plans that are necessary for offenders to turn their lives around. I share his concern and his passion, and such work is a priority for this Government.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): How will the personal learning plans of which the Minister has just spoken operate when a prisoner is transferred from one prison to another? What guarantees can he give that the education path on which that prisoner has commenced can be continued in his or her new setting, and that there will be consistency of offer right across the prison estate?

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Lady points out a very serious problem that currently exists on the estate. Prisoners are transferred and cannot continue courses that they have started—for example, some were on GCSE programmes

and cannot finish them. We are looking at courses and technology systems that allow them to carry on what they have been doing when they are transferred from one prison to another, so that there is progression on all the courses. I completely agree with her, but we are looking at it.

21. [900685] **David Warburton** (Somerton and Frome) (Con): If prison is to achieve anything, it must change lives. It has the best chance of doing that if we offer people both education and assisted places in work on release. Given that three fifths of offenders still leave prison without identified education or any employment opportunities, will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or my hon. Friend assure us that these programmes will be at the centre of the prison system and describe how these policies are being adjusted for greater success?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend is right. About 50% of prisoners have the reading age and numeracy skills of an 11-year-old. If we are to give them a chance in life, we need to sort out education, but we also need to give them employment skills that are valued in the workplace. That is why prison reform, which is at the heart of the White Paper that the Government published last November, is carrying on at pace.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): The chief inspectors of prisons and of probation recently issued a devastating report on the Government's flagship community rehabilitation companies, which stated:

"None of the prisoners had been helped into employment by through-the-gate services".

Will the Minister commit to an urgent review of the role of CRCs, including their delivery of education and employment services, and will he guarantee that no extra money will be passed on to those private companies until they can be proven to be fit for purpose?

Mr Gyimah: The probation reforms that the previous Conservative Government rolled out mean that 45,000 offenders who previously would not have been supervised, because they had been in prison for less than 12 months, are now being supervised. The hon. Gentleman is right that there are challenges with what is a first-generation outsourcing programme. We have an ongoing probation review and extra funds have been invested in the CRCs, but we are still within the funding envelope that was decided at the start of the programme. We are carrying out the review to make sure that through-the-gate and other services operate as was envisaged in the original vision.

Prisons: Extremism and Radicalisation

6. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to counter extremism and radicalisation in prisons. [900669]

13. **James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to counter extremism and radicalisation in prisons. [900676]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Lidington): We have established a new extremism unit, between Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and the Home Office, to strengthen our approach to

tackling the threat of extremism in prisons and probation. Prison governors and frontline staff in prisons and the probation service are being given the training, skills and authority needed to challenge extremist views and take action against them. The first separation centre at HMP Frankland in County Durham was opened in June 2017, and the first prisoners are now being held there. Those facilities will hold the most subversive extremist prisoners, protecting the more vulnerable from their poisonous ideology.

Michael Tomlinson: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer, and it is right to say that extremists target and manipulate the prisoners who they think will be most susceptible. Given his answer, what impact does he anticipate the removal of such individuals will have on the prison population as a whole?

Mr Lidington: The decision to proceed with the separation centre was taken only after very careful thought. We judged that it would be beneficial for the general prison population, and in particular for vulnerable and impressionable prisoners, if we could take out of association with them those who pose the greatest risk. Those who are going to be in separation centres will be assessed by experts regularly, and they will be returned to the mainstream prison population only if it is judged that the risk they present has reduced to a level that can be effectively managed there.

James Cleverly: Many young men start their journey towards radicalisation by seeking out in prison the strong male role models they so often lack in their lives outside. What is the Department doing to ensure that there are more better role models within the prison estate to guide them on to a better path?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which I think has relevance not just to matters of penal policy but to social policy more generally. Many charitable and voluntary organisations are helping—for example, by bringing sport into prisons—to provide the adult male role models of whom he wants more. In the context of extremism, it is also important to pay tribute to the work of the imams in the prison chaplaincy service who are arguing, from a basis of scholarship and expertise, to rebut the extremist ideology that some have espoused.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Figures from the right hon. Gentleman's own Department show that there are approximately 1,000 prisoners who have either been radicalised or are vulnerable to being radicalised. When they leave prison, those such as Khalid Masood, the Westminster terrorist, need to be effectively monitored. Is the Lord Chancellor satisfied that there is a sufficiently robust relationship between the police and the prison authorities to make sure that when such people come out of prison we know where they are and what they are doing?

Mr Lidington: The information we have is that only one of those involved in the recent attacks in London and Manchester had spent time in prison. That dated back to 2003 and there was no evidence to suggest that that man had been radicalised in prison. We clearly want the strongest possible joint work between the

police, the Prison Service and the probation service. I believe that what we have at the moment is strong, but there are always lessons that can be learned and improvements that can be sought. We are committed not to be complacent but to continue with vigilance and determination.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): The Secretary of State spoke in his initial answer of a new initiative. Does that come with new money and, if so, is it adequate?

Mr Lidington: It is part of the duty of the Prison Service appropriately to look after all those whom the courts have sent into custody. We have found the money for the separation centres from within Ministry of Justice budgets—a sensible prioritisation of expenditure that will bring benefits to the management of the prison population more generally by separating those who pose a particular risk through extremist ideology.

Child Sexual Exploitation: Sentencing

7. Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): What assessment the Department has made of the adequacy of sentencing for crimes involving child sexual exploitation. [900670]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Dominic Raab): We have a robust sentencing framework for all crimes involving child sexual exploitation. The changes made in the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 reinforced those punishments, giving the Parole Board a greater role to make sure that serious offenders are released only when it is safe.

Lucy Allan: Mubarek Ali will be released from prison on 1 November, five years after receiving a sentence of 22 years for child sexual exploitation in Telford. As the Minister just said, legislation was passed in 2015 to ensure that most serious offenders cannot be released until they have served two thirds of their sentence and satisfied the Parole Board that they are not a risk. What can he do to ensure that that legislation applies in this case?

Dominic Raab: I am aware of the case my hon. Friend raises, and of the heinous crimes that were committed and the appalling impact they had on the victims. She will know that the overhaul of the sentencing framework between 2012 and 2015 means that that type of sentence would not now be passed in that type of case. She will also appreciate that I cannot intervene in individual cases and that changes to legislation to strengthen sentences cannot be passed retrospectively. That is the problem and challenge in this case.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Bearing in mind that 56% of all victims of sexual offences in Northern Ireland in 2011 were under the age of 18, will the Minister outline the multi-regional approach that will be taken to deal with the aftermath of the sexual exploitation of children in the transition to adulthood?

Dominic Raab: That is a detailed and complex area, and I would be happy to write to the hon. Gentleman on its impact in Northern Ireland.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): One barrier to successful prosecutions in child sexual exploitation cases is the fact that, too often, victims are wrongly thought to be complicit in their own exploitation. That highlights the importance of the issue my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) just raised. There must be absolutely no suggestion in any Government guidance that children can be complicit in their own exploitation. That is why the guidance from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority needs to be changed—and needs to be changed now.

Dominic Raab: The hon. Lady makes a powerful point. No one wants to lay the blame at the door of any victim, let alone the most vulnerable—in this case children. She heard what the Secretary of State said about CICA: it will be looked at in the context of the issues that have arisen recently. It operates in a different context from the criminal justice system, in that it can apply when there has not been a criminal conviction.

Drones

8. **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to prevent the use of drones over prisons. [900671]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): Drones are a serious threat to order and stability in our prisons, given the contraband that they are used to smuggle. Our intelligence work tells us that a lot of this activity is backed up by organised crime gangs. That is why we have invested in our intelligence teams. There is also a specialist unit between the Prison Service and the police service to track down and prosecute such offenders. In the last year alone, there have been 40 arrests and 11 convictions of criminals involved in drone activity, resulting in those convicted serving a total of 40 years in jail.

Wendy Morton: With offenders being more than twice as likely to be reconvicted within 12 months of release from custody if they are known drug users, what work is being done to tackle the supply—potentially using drones—of drugs into our prisons?

Mr Gyimah: Drones are one way in which drugs are smuggled into our prisons, but we are looking at all possible ways. For example, paper is sometimes impregnated with new psychoactive substances, which makes them very difficult to detect. The way to tackle the supply is to get intelligence not just from each establishment but from different parts of the Prison Service so that we can respond appropriately. We are investing heavily in doing so to combat the drugs problem in our prisons.

Mr Speaker: We are now substantially better informed.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The escape in February of a convicted murderer serving a 30-year sentence was linked to the dropping of a mobile phone into a prison in Liverpool using a drone so that he could liaise with villains outside to effect his escape. What steps is the Minister taking to enhance and expand the scheme that he has put in place to disrupt drones over prisons? In passing, has he found the prisoner yet?

Mr Gyimah: The right hon. Gentleman, as a former prisons Minister, is well aware that the job of tracking down and arresting criminals is one for the police service, not the prisons Minister. In response to his other question, we are looking at various types of technology to disrupt drones flying into our prisons to deliver contraband.

Employment Tribunals

9. **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the reasons for recent trends in the number of employment tribunal cases. [900672]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Dominic Raab): In 2014, the Government introduced a requirement for potential claimants to consider conciliation before starting proceedings at the employment tribunal. The number of cases going to conciliation quadrupled, rising to 92,000 in 2015-16.

Ellie Reeves: In the year after employment tribunal fees were introduced, sex discrimination claims fell by 67% and pregnancy discrimination claims by 37%. The Supreme Court made it clear in its recent judgment that fees disproportionately affected women. The Minister has outlined plans to reimburse those who have submitted claims, but what steps will be taken to compensate people who were denied access to justice because they could not afford to pursue a claim in the first place?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Lady is right to refer to the ending of the fees and the proposals for reimbursement that we will bring forward shortly. If there were potential claims that should have been made but were not, anyone who was unable to bring a claim can submit to the employment tribunal to have their case heard outside the usual time limits. The judiciary will consider those applications case by case.

European Court of Justice

10. **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): What his Department's policy is on the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the UK after the UK leaves the EU. [900673]

17. **Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): What his Department's policy is on the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the UK after the UK leave the EU. [900681]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Lidington): The Government have been clear that in leaving the EU we will bring about an end to the direct jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the United Kingdom.

Carol Monaghan: As you know, Mr Speaker, Scotland has its own distinct legal system. Brexit will have a direct impact on that system, on justice agencies in Scotland and on a range of devolved issues. Will the Secretary of State confirm that that distinction will be given serious consideration as the Brexit negotiations progress?

Mr Lidington: Yes. Indeed, when I spoke to the Scottish Justice Minister Michael Matheson last month I emphasised to him that one of our key objectives in the official and ministerial-level meetings between my Department and his would be to ensure that the interests and features of the Scottish justice system are properly reflected in the UK's work, particularly on future civil judicial co-operation with the European Union.

Brendan O'Hara: In January, the Prime Minister boldly and unambiguously asserted that Brexit would allow the UK to take back control of its laws and bring to an end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in Britain. Last month, however, the official Government document on the ECJ said something entirely different: Britain would be willing to work with the EU on arrangements for judicial supervision. Given that remarkable change, how did the Prime Minister get it so wrong in January?

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman is misreading the Government's position. The Prime Minister was very clear in her Lancaster House speech, as the Government have been, that this country's exit from the European Union means that the EU's treaties will cease to apply to the United Kingdom and that therefore the direct effect that decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Union have in the United Kingdom will cease from that point. What is also the case, as spelled out in the Government paper on dispute resolution, is that there are many international examples of arbitration mechanisms that involve different jurisdictions coming together to agree how to take account of their different courts' views in coming to a settlement when a dispute arises. We are approaching these negotiations in a constructive fashion.

Courts: Victims and Witnesses

11. **Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve the court experience for victims and witnesses. [900674]

18. **Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve the court experience for victims and witnesses. [900682]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): We are testing pre-trial cross-examination for child and vulnerable victims and witnesses in the Crown court, and testing this provision for certain eligible intimidated victims in three Crown court centres this autumn. We have installed remote links in each region and recently completed work on model waiting rooms. We recognise that there are concerns about the operation of the victims' code, and we are considering how compliance might be monitored and improved.

Edward Argar: I welcome that answer. Despite the progress that has been made, attending court as a witness, and particularly as a victim, can still be very stressful. Will my hon. Friend enlarge on what steps the Government are taking to ensure that victims and witnesses know what to expect when they attend court, and that they are treated with respect in court and know when they are required?

Dr Lee: We want to use technology to assist all witnesses, not just those who are vulnerable and intimidated. That is why we are exploring ways of making best use of technology, such as video links, to allow witnesses to avoid the stress and/or inconvenience of having to be physically present in the courtroom. We also plan to develop an online tool, which will allow witnesses to access information about a case, such as a trial date, quickly and easily.

Justin Tomlinson: Research from Victim Support found that more than half of victims have unwanted contact with the defendant at court. How will the Government's court reforms ensure that separate entrances, waiting rooms and facilities are standard across all criminal courts?

Dr Lee: As I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, the Government are investing more than £1 billion to transform and modernise our court systems to make sure they put the needs of victims first. Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service recently established model victim and witness waiting rooms at Nottingham justice centre, Manchester magistrates court, Newcastle Crown court, Liverpool Crown court and Aldershot justice centre, drawing on feedback from the Victims' Commissioner, the Witness Service and court users.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that decisions on the support received by police and crime commissioners to work with victims are often made very late in the financial year. Will he consider three-year-long provision, so that services can be provided more efficiently and with greater stability?

Dr Lee: There are areas where PCCs are doing very good work and there are areas where the work is perhaps not as successful. I have announced annual awards only because I want to get to grips with the evidence of what works, so that the money can follow that and we can deliver better services for victims.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): Prior to the introduction of the Prisons and Courts Bill in the previous Parliament, no research had been carried out into the effects of virtual justice reforms on witnesses—victims or defendants—or the extent of expected savings. Will the Minister guarantee that research into these key areas will be done and published in advance of the Bill being brought back to the House?

Dr Lee: We are consulting a variety of different agencies and the Victims' Commissioner on the work to which the hon. Lady alludes. We are in the process of testing pre-recorded cross-examination at a number of centres across the country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I would not want the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) to feel that he was out of the water in some way. I call Mr Marcus Fysh.

22. [900686] **Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): Justice delayed can be justice denied. It can also be very distressing for victims and witnesses, such as constituents of mine, to suffer repeated delays in the scheduling and notification

of hearing dates and the notification of verdicts, which in some cases have even been learnt from the opposing parties. What can be done to improve court processes and timeframes, and their communication?

Dr Lee: All criminal justice agencies are committed to keeping victims and witnesses informed about their cases. The outcomes of cases involving vulnerable victims and witnesses are available in court systems within 24 hours. Professionals who are involved in a case and are present on the day will know the outcome immediately. If my hon. Friend is aware of details of any other cases in which that may not be happening, will he please write to me? I will then respond.

Prison Officers: Recruitment

12. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): How many additional prison officers have been newly recruited since January 2017. [900675]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): Between the start of January and the end of June 2017, there has been a net increase of 868 new prison officers. That puts us well on track to recruit 2,500 new officers by December 2018.

Alex Cunningham: The Minister will be aware of the major drugs finds and related problems at Holme House prison in my constituency, where experienced officers have left and have been replaced by 18-year-old recruits. Does he really think that recruiting youngsters is the answer when it comes to meeting the needs of our increasing prison population, tackling drugs, and solving the crisis in the Prison Service?

Mr Gyimah: I take issue with the implication behind the hon. Gentleman's question. We are recruiting new prison officers. We were all inexperienced once, but that did not mean that we were not capable of doing our jobs. I have been to the Newbold Revel training centre; I know that many of our recruits are of the highest calibre, and that the recruitment methods are those that have been used over a number of years. The Opposition did not believe that we could deliver these numbers, but we are delivering them, and I think that the Opposition should be supporting the Government.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): As a result of the Government's excellent policy, a new, modern prison has been built in Wellingborough. Can the Minister tell me how many of the new prison officers will be working there, and when the prison might open? If he cannot do so now, will he write to me, please?

Mr Gyimah: I will certainly write to my hon. Friend. The staffing arrangements at Wellingborough have not been decided yet, but we are very proud, and very keen to be progressive in opening the prison.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): The Minister is boasting about the number of prison officers who have been recruited this year, but the Ministry's own figures show that 35 prisons—a third of the total—have suffered a fall in frontline officer numbers since January this year. Is this another example of what the former director-general of the Prison Service now describes as Ministers "doing nothing except issue cheery press releases...which suggest all is going precisely to plan"?

Mr Gyimah: It has nothing to do with "cheery press releases". There are 868 people on the payroll, who have started work in our prisons and are doing a heroic and brave job. We promised to invest £100 million to recruit 2,500 new officers by the end of 2013, and we are on track to deliver that target. Of course there are wider issues in our prison system, such as the retention of officers, but we are working on those. We are also going beyond that, recruiting smart graduates to work on the frontline, and we have exceeded our targets for the Unlocked programme.

Those are not boasts. It was the Opposition who talked prison officers down and said that no one would want to work in our prisons. It is good to see people stepping up to do what is a brave and challenging job.

Topical Questions

T1. [900704] **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Lidington): My priorities as Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State are to uphold and defend the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, and to ensure that our prisons are safe and secure places that also work effectively, and with the probation service, to rehabilitate offenders. That means strengthening the frontline in the way described by the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), but it also means that we need to respond better to reports from prison inspectors. I am therefore setting up a new unit, ultimately accountable to Ministers, to ensure that we respond to, and follow up, inspectors' reports swiftly and effectively.

Mr Hollobone: How many foreign-national offenders are there in our prisons, and why is not more being done to send them to secure detention in their own countries?

Mr Lidington: As of 30 June this year, there were 6,792 convicted foreign-national offenders serving sentences in our prisons. In 2016-17, we removed 6,177 such offenders from the United Kingdom—that is including prisoner transfers—and that is the highest number since records began.

Mr Speaker: I hope the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) will shortly reissue his textbook for colleagues on succinct questions.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): This summer I was proud to sign up to the campaign launched by Gina Martin to change the law so that the disgraceful practice of so-called upskirting is made a specific sexual offence. So will the Minister finally join with us today in backing this call for a change in the law?

Mr Lidington: I have taken very seriously the representations made not only by Gina Martin, but by some of the police and crime commissioners around the country. I have asked for detailed advice on this, but I hope the hon. Gentleman will understand that, before proceeding to a commitment to legislation, I want to be absolutely certain that this would be the right course to take.

T3. [900706] **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): Legal services in the UK are rightly held in the highest regard around the world and are a major asset to our economy. What is the Minister doing to ensure that we champion and defend the interests of the legal sector in this country?

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Dominic Raab): My hon. Friend is absolutely right: legal services exports contribute a trade surplus of £3.4 billion to the UK economy. The UK is a global leader in dispute settlement. We are working with the sector to promote this key comparative advantage. It is a priority for the Brexit negotiations, and, as a global leader, this is the message my ministerial colleague Lord Keen will be taking to the International Bar Association conference in Australia just next month.

T2. [900705] **Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Last week a report from the committee of the United Nations made 60 recommendations to the Government on how they could better comply with the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. How will the Government respond, and what changes in Government policy can disabled people expect to see as a result?

Mr Lidington: It is obviously for the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work and the Department for Work and Pensions to decide overall on the Government response to that report. However, I think that the Government were right to express disappointment that the report failed to acknowledge the significant advances this Government have made in improving the lot of disabled people in this country, not least in seeing a record number of people with disabilities now in employment.

T5. [900708] **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): What upgrades have been achieved in prisons since we came into office, and how are we going to rehabilitate prisoners even further?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): I assume my hon. Friend is referring to the upgrades in the prison estate, where we are investing £1.3 billion to modernise the estate. As part of that, we will be building 10,000 modern prison places. That should help with offender rehabilitation. In terms of where we are now, we have started with the proposed developments at Glen Parva and HMP Wellingborough, and we have also announced plans to build four new prisons: in Yorkshire, adjacent to Full Sutton; at Port Talbot in Wales; and the redevelopment of the young offender institutions at Rochester and Hindley.

T4. [900707] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Given the problems the Department has had when it has privatised many of its services, it seems extraordinary that there are now plans to privatise the collection of court fines and outsource the work of civil enforcement officers. When will the Government appreciate that the public expect these sensitive public services to be delivered by the public, not a bunch of cowboys?

Dominic Raab: What the public expect is for those fines to be collected in the most efficient and effective way possible.

T9. [900712] **Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): Can the Minister update me on when the revised version of practice direction 12J will be adopted and how the Government will ensure that judges and magistrates are aware of the change in order to improve guidance for judges overseeing child contact cases with allegations of domestic abuse?

Dominic Raab: We are absolutely committed to doing everything we can to improve the treatment of victims in the justice system. In relation to the practice direction to which my hon. Friend refers, we expect to receive the revised version from the president of the family division for ministerial agreement by the end of this month.

T6. [900709] **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Since the election, hundreds of constituents have contacted me about our current animal cruelty laws, which are not fit for purpose. A maximum prison sentence of six months for some of the most appalling crimes, including torturing a dog to death, is completely unacceptable. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that the sentencing guidelines are rigorously reviewed and strengthened?

Dominic Raab: I share the hon. Lady's desire to see the most robust sentences for animal cruelty. The Government keep the sentencing framework under regular review, and I am not sure whether she is aware that in January the Sentencing Council published new guidelines on relevant aggravating factors in animal cruelty cases.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): In the past 18 months, three of my constituents have died in HMP Bristol, which has one of the highest numbers of self-inflicted deaths in custody. What reassurance can be provided that that prison is being given the scrutiny and support that it needs to get those figures down?

Mr Gyimah: Every death in custody is a tragedy, and I offer my condolences to the families of my hon. Friend's constituents. We have increased the staffing level at HMP Bristol by 31 prison officers in the past year. I chair a weekly safer custody meeting with officials to drive forward improvements, and I review the details of every self-inflicted death to see how we might prevent others. We have also launched an internal review of our approach to safer custody, specifically in relation to mental health patients, and I would be willing to visit my hon. Friend's prison in order to deal with this further.

T7. [900710] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Last week, a Tory peer said that Brexit was a good thing because our young people would be able to work longer hours. Can the Minister confirm that his Government will continue to guarantee protections for workers in accordance with the European working time directive?

Mr Lidington: The Prime Minister could not have been clearer: we are committed to the best possible employment conditions for all British workers. We have

a fine record of achievement on that, and we will ensure that when we leave the European Union, there is no diminution in workers' rights.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): In January last year, an Afghan national who had previously served time for murder in the Netherlands attacked two Crawley police officers with a clawhammer. Recently, the Court of Appeal has reduced his sentence. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the Sussex Police Federation's requests to the Home Office will ensure that he is deported at the earliest opportunity?

Mr Lidington: I can give my hon. Friend an assurance that the views of the Police Federation and others in his constituency will be conveyed fully to the Home Office. It remains the Government's collective will to ensure that those foreign national offenders who merit deportation are deported as soon as possible after serving their sentence.

T8. [900711] **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Is the Minister aware that the Equality and Human Rights Commission has recommended that the protections afforded by the EU charter of fundamental rights be retained in the UK? What is he going to do about that?

Dominic Raab: I am always bewildered by the approach of the Opposition to the charter. When Labour was in power, it claimed, rather fraudulently, that it was seeking an opt-out, but now that it is out of office and we are leaving the EU, it wants to opt back in. We have the strongest protections for human rights in this country, and they have been reinforced. We are going to see no diminution in those protections, but the charter adds uncertainty and is frankly surplus to requirements.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the pilot scheme that allowed the filming of judges' sentencing remarks in criminal courts has been a success? Will he now consider going further in allowing the broadcasting of court proceedings, so that justice is not just done but seen to be done?

Dominic Raab: We have made considerable progress in the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal, and my right hon. Friend is right to say that one of the areas under review is the broadcasting of judges' sentencing remarks in the Crown court. Last year, we conducted not-for-broadcast tests in eight Crown court centres, and we are looking at the experience from those trials with the judiciary in order to see how best to proceed.

T10. [900713] **Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): Last year, 316 people died in our prisons. Emails from prison doctors printed in the media a few days ago say that there are not enough medical staff in our prisons and that urgent hospital referrals are being cancelled because of prison escort shortages. What are the Justice Secretary and the Health Secretary planning to do to tackle this growing healthcare crisis in custody?

Mr Gyimah: We are very conscious that the Government have a duty of care to everyone we hold in custody. We are working with the Department of Health on a number of protocols, including some relating to mental health, as well as working to ensure that prisoners get access to the healthcare that they need, when they need it.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Will Ministers give the House their response to Lord Farmer's recent report on the importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties to reduce reoffending?

Mr Gyimah: Lord Farmer's report is excellent. Family ties are important not only to help people to turn their lives around, but to improve stability in prisons. We will publish our response in due course and will make the House aware of that.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): While I welcome the Minister's news about increased prison officer numbers in HMP Bristol in my constituency, I am concerned by the Department's figures, which show that 1,770 experienced prison officers left the service last year. What is the Minister doing urgently to retain valuable experienced prison officers for the longer term?

Mr Gyimah: It is always the case that people will leave an organisation voluntarily or due to retirement or—[*Interruption.*] May I finish my point? In some cases, people may leave because they have not been too happy with what has been happening in our Prison Service. A retention plan is available, but the numbers that I gave earlier—868 net new prison officers so far this year—take account of people leaving the service, so we are actually up on last year's figures.

Ms Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): Having recently met the governor of Styal prison in my constituency, I know that drones are an increasing problem in prisons, as is the illegal use of mobile phones. The two are linked because mobile phones allow for greater frequency and accuracy of drone activity. Does the Minister agree that the way to curb drone activity and stop illegal mobile phone use is to block phone signals in prison? Will he support my private Member's Bill to do that? The Second Reading is on 1 December.

Mr Gyimah: I fully support my right hon. Friend's Bill. It is what we need to deal with the illegal use of mobile phones, which are used to carry on criminal activity from behind bars.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Minister's plans to build a prison on the Baglan industrial park in my constituency are causing a huge amount of concern and disquiet within the community. May I urge the Minister to come to the public meeting that I have organised on 20 September in Baglan to explain the position to the community?

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Gentleman is aware that Ministers do not attend public consultation events about obtaining planning permission for new prisons. He is also aware that the Port Talbot site was proposed alongside several other sites by the Welsh Government, who continue to support us in redeveloping the site for the purpose of the new prison. I have received his representations on behalf of his constituents—he is diligent and persistent—and we also had a meeting on 12 July. Subject to the two-day consultation, which is more than would ordinarily happen, I am willing to engage further with him on what could be done to ameliorate his constituents' concerns.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We often have time for the questions but rather less time for the answers, which tend to take up rather more time.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State look at how families are treated by the insurance industry when a householder gets a criminal conviction? The Salvation Army recently highlighted several cases in which insurance had either been denied or made prohibitively expensive in a way that seems to me, as a former chartered insurer, to be neither reasonable nor necessary.

Mr Lidington: I am happy to look at that and would welcome a conversation with my hon. Friend to examine the matter further.

Mr Speaker: With exemplary brevity, Ann Clwyd.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Given the historical child abuse in north Wales, will Ministers now place in the Library the unredacted copy of Lady Macur's report on the Waterhouse inquiry, which relates to many of the children involved?

Mr Lidington: The honest answer is that I am not familiar with the detail as to why an unredacted copy has not been published, but I will undertake to ask for urgent advice on that and will write to the right hon. Lady.

Mr Speaker: I will call the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) if he confines himself to a short sentence.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the work of Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd, the Lord Chief Justice, who will have retired by the next Justice questions, both for his integrity as a judge and for his modernising work as head of the judiciary in England and Wales?

Mr Lidington: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in his salute to Lord Thomas, who has been a formidable and exemplary leader of the professional judiciary. What has struck me in the short time that I have held my office is the enormous respect and affection in which Lord Thomas is held by his colleagues on the judicial bench. I am sure the entire House will want to wish him all the best.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): In the last Parliament, a joint report of the Petitions Committee and the Women and Equalities Committee found widespread exploitation of women at work, and especially of young women in vulnerable employment. Now that

the barrier of fees has been removed, will the Minister look seriously at the report's recommendations and work with other Departments to ensure that women are aware of their access to justice?

Dominic Raab: As I explained earlier, we will take into account all the recommendations and findings of the Select Committee report as we chart the way forward.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Did the Secretary of State read the letter in the press by the widow of our late colleague, Ian Gow, contrasting the fact that the two IRA murderers suspected of killing him have no fear of arrest with the recent revelation that hundreds, if not thousands, of letters are being sent out to veterans of the troubles with a view to further prosecutions? Will he support the policy of a statute of limitations to put an end to this grotesque inequality of treatment?

Mr Lidington: The answer to my right hon. Friend's question is that, yes, I did read the letter to which he refers. Those matters, as he knows, are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is very concerned to ensure that a proper examination of the past, and a search for the truth about the past, does not lead to the unfair and disproportionate arraignment of British soldiers who stood firmly for democracy and human rights in Northern Ireland.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am afraid that we are well out of time, but we will hear Shabana Mahmood.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): The Minister will be aware of the serious disorder at HMP Birmingham in my constituency on Sunday, which follows the very serious riot in December 2016 and serious incidents at other prisons across the country over the summer months. Clearly our prisons are in absolute crisis. Is it not time that we had an independent inquiry into the state of our prisons?

Mr Gyimah: We have already said that the level of violence in our prisons is too high. I spoke to the Gold Commander at HMP Birmingham on Sunday night, and we should first praise the professionalism of the Prison Service in dealing with what are very difficult and very challenging situations in our prisons. Of course, a key part of dealing with the stability and security problem in our prisons is increasing the staffing levels, on which there has been a number of questions today, and we are doing so. A wider part of the reforms is dealing with drones, mobile phones and illegal drugs, and it will take time to do that, but I praise our prison officers for their brave work in containing these disturbances.

Violence in Rakhine State

3.42 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent violence in the Rakhine state of Myanmar.

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) for raising this matter and giving the Government the opportunity to detail the significant action we have taken. Overnight on 24 August, members of the Rohingya militant group the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army—the ARSA—attacked numerous police posts in northern Rakhine. Even in the days prior to that escalation of hostilities, our embassy in Rangoon had been monitoring the situation very carefully, including travelling to the Rakhine state capital, Sittwe. We understand that tens of thousands of people have crossed the border into Bangladesh.

Kofi Annan's Rakhine advisory commission report was published immediately prior to the attacks. The Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), and I issued a joint statement at that time welcoming the report, but also condemning the attacks by Rohingya militants on Burmese security forces. At the same time, the UK strongly urged the security forces in Rakhine to show restraint and called for all parties to de-escalate the tensions.

On 30 August, at the UK's request, the UN Security Council discussed the situation in Rakhine. Our UK representative in New York led the condemnation of attacks by Rohingya militants, and urged a measured and proportionate response from the security forces. We also called for humanitarian aid to reach those in need as soon as possible and offered UK support for the Rakhine advisory commission, encouraging the international community to do likewise. The recent violence serves to underline how important it is to address the long-term issues in Rakhine and deliver for all communities; it should not deflect the Burmese Government from the key task of addressing the underlying issues that have caused people to flee. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has said, it is vital that the civilian Government of Burma receive the support of the Burmese military, and that Aung San Suu Kyi is not thwarted in her attempts to stabilise the situation.

Along with de-escalating the fighting, our immediate priority is how urgent food and medical assistance can be provided to displaced citizens from all communities. Our ambassador in Rangoon has rightly been lobbying the Burmese Government on that, and they have confirmed that they are trying to get humanitarian aid through to communities most in need. As many will know, that is being hampered by the security situation and by inter-communal tensions.

Our high commissioner in Dhaka, Bangladesh, has also discussed the increasingly acute humanitarian situation with the Government there, and I discussed the situation with the Bangladeshi high commissioner last week. I look forward to discussing these issues further tomorrow at a meeting arranged some weeks ago with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), the co-chair of the all-party group on Burma, as well as to paying a ministerial visit to Burma in the near future.

Yasmin Qureshi: Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. I am a little disappointed by the Minister's response, as he started by suggesting that somehow the Rohingya Muslims and these people had caused this to occur. He must be aware that for a number of years there has been the systematic rape, murder, burning and beheading of people from the Rohingya community. If it is suggested that there may have been some attacks on the police stations, that is not a sufficient reason to attempt almost to explain away what the Burmese Government are now doing to these people. Everyone knows that for years now that the Government, the security forces and the Buddhist monks have been ransacking and killing people—murdering and raping women and children. This is only a climax to the brutality that the Burmese have been carrying out against these people.

Is the Minister aware that because of what has happened recently, many young children have been beheaded and civilians have been burned alive by the military forces? Is he aware that 120,000 Rohingya have fled for their lives to Bangladesh? Will he actually condemn this campaign of ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims? Is he aware that Human Rights Watch has satellite imagery showing the destruction of entire Rohingya villages, and that there are reports of people there being rounded up into huts and burned alive? Recent reports also show a massive cover-up by the soldiers who have carried out massacres of Rohingya, by gathering their bodies up and burning them.

This is one of the worst outbreaks of violence in decades, yet the international community is, in effect, remaining silent as we watch another Srebrenica and Rwanda unfold before our eyes. Does the Minister agree that the situation requires urgent intervention? What concrete action have the Government and the Prime Minister taken to date to deal with it? Is he aware that UN aid and monitors have not been allowed in? Will the Government make further representations to the UN Security Council about the ethnic cleansing now taking place? Can consideration be given to an immediate intervention by the UN Security Council to deal with this situation? As journalist Peter Osborne said in this morning's *Daily Mail*:

"The Rohingya people were loyal allies of Britain in World War II. Now they face their darkest hour."

We must take immediate action to help them, and I am very sorry about, and disappointed in, the Minister's starting response.

Mark Field: I am sorry that the hon. Lady is so disappointed; had she heard what I had to say, it would have been clear that we have been monitoring this situation for some time. Indeed, through diplomatic sources, we have made sure that our heartfelt concerns have been heard. It was thanks to a British lead that the issue was discussed at the UN over the past week. One has to remember that obviously a huge amount of attention has been given to issues relating to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which the House will discuss later.

The hon. Lady asked precisely what we are now doing. It is worth pointing out some aspects of the humanitarian aid we are going to put in place. As she is well aware, the UK has rightly and proudly been one of the largest development and humanitarian donors to Burma, and particularly to the Rakhine state, over many years.

[Mark Field]

Since 2012, the Department for International Development has provided more than £30 million in humanitarian assistance, including for food and sanitation, for more than 126,000 people. More important, given the unfolding situation, the UK is the largest single bilateral donor supporting displaced Rohingya refugees and the vulnerable communities that host them in Bangladesh. DFID has allocated some £20.9 million for humanitarian aid responses between 2017 and 2022.

Because of the acute nature of the problems, to which the hon. Lady referred, we will keep an eye on exactly what happens. Please rest assured that the Government will do all they can to condemn when condemnation is the right way forward, but she is well aware that the politics of Burma are incredibly tense and difficult. We have hopefully moved away from a 55-year period of military rule. As far as we can, the international community should support civilian rule under Aung San Suu Kyi.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. There is substantial interest in this question, which I am keen—up to a point—to accommodate, but colleagues will be aware that there are three ministerial statements to follow, in which there can be expected to be substantial interest. Colleagues from Back and Front Benches alike need to help me to help them. There will be a premium upon brevity, now to be brilliantly exemplified by Mr Tom Tugendhat.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): How is my right hon. Friend's relationship with China going? As we all remember, the Chinese influence in the seeking of a peace agreement in some of the northern areas of Burma was instrumental in delivering humanitarian effects like those we wish to achieve in the Rakhine state. Will he say a little more about the Bangladeshi Government, and perhaps praise them for their extraordinary work in welcoming so many Muslim Rohingya people? I welcome the Foreign Office's efforts in supporting that work.

Mark Field: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. I was in Beijing only 10 days ago; he will appreciate that attention was focused largely on the DPRK and, to an extent, issues relating to Afghanistan and Pakistan. I suspect we will have a chance before too long to discuss the issues relating to Burma with counterparts in China. I echo my hon. Friend's words about the Bangladeshi authorities, with whom I had a strong relationship as a member and officer of the all-party group on Bangladesh for some seven years before I took up ministerial office. He is absolutely right that a terrific amount of work has taken place, and it will continue to take place in what is a fraught situation.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The vast majority of Rohingyas want nothing but peace, but it is they who have suffered most as a result of the violence committed, supposedly in their name, by a small number of armed militants. Because of so-called collective punishment for such attacks, more than 100,000 innocent Rohingya men, women and children have been forced to flee their homes in a campaign that UN officials say may amount to ethnic cleansing. Many displaced Rohingyas have ended up in squalid camps,

and, according to UN figures published today, some 35,000 have fled across the border to Bangladesh in the past 24 hours alone. There, and in Myanmar itself, these families are in desperate need of our aid.

I am sure the Minister will share the deep disappointment of many Members of this House at the failure of Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of Myanmar's civilian Government, to speak out more forcefully against human rights abuses in Rakhine. It is, though, General Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of Myanmar's armed forces, who of course bears ultimate responsibility for the army's atrocities. It is he who ultimately must be held to account.

The Minister must do more than express disappointment, important though that is. The Government must do everything they can to help to bring an end to this senseless violence. Ministers must set clear and unambiguous red lines for Myanmar's authorities—civilian and military—when it comes to respecting human rights. If those red lines are crossed, there should be consequences. For instance, in the light of recent events, it seems wholly inappropriate that in the past three years this Government have sold weapons worth more than half a million pounds to the Government of Myanmar.

Will the Minister now accept that his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence demonstrated shockingly poor judgment in spending a quarter of a million pounds—from the aid budget no less—on training members of Myanmar's army? Will he also accept that it was a serious error of judgment for the Minister of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster), to say by way of explanation that such programmes ensure that other countries learn about British values and human rights?

Does the Minister agree that it simply cannot be right for Britain to continue to provide military aid to a country where human rights abuses are so rampant? If he accepts that, will he demonstrate his Government's commitment to the Rohingya people by immediately suspending military aid until Myanmar's army can demonstrate that it is both able and willing to protect the rights of all the country's citizens?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Lady for her heartfelt comments. Those issues, which are clearly for the Ministry of Defence, will be under review, and I will ensure that her comments are passed on and that she is kept up to date. Contrary to some of the press reports, I think it is important to clarify precisely what the UK does provide. We do not provide any form of combat training to the Burmese military. The UK provides vocational courses, focused on language training, governance, accountability, ethics, human rights and international law. The UK rightly believes in using elements of our DFID money on programmes of real and lasting change. Such change will only come about from engaging with the Burmese military. Exposing them to how modern militaries operate in a democracy is more effective than isolating them. The content of the educational courses that we provide—the hon. Lady referred to a quarter of a million pounds—complies entirely with the UK's commitments under the EU arms embargo.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): There is more that the Government can do as a convening force, bringing together the countries that are involved with

the Rohingya. There are problems not just in Rakhine or in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, but with the hideous trafficking of the Rohingya people down through Thailand and into Malaysia. Given the goodwill that we have in Bangladesh and Burma and, to a lesser extent, in Thailand and Malaysia, will the Foreign Office consider convening a meeting to look at this issue and at how we can improve the lives of these people?

Mark Field: I thank my right hon. Friend for his words. I know that he, having held the post that I now hold, has a lot of knowledge of the area. As I pointed out in my initial comments, after the violence broke out on 25 August, the UK, as a matter of urgency, spoke out and took a lead not just in issuing statements but in ensuring that we had a UN Security Council discussion on 30 August—at a time when the UN was looking at other matters. He is absolutely right to suggest that this situation must be looked at in the context of Malaysia and of other neighbouring states in the region, and not just in the context of Bangladesh. Our ambassador has lobbied the Burmese Government, and our high commission in Dhaka has also discussed the situation with the Government of Bangladesh. We will continue to keep a close eye on developments. I hope that we can do that partly through the UN and other international bodies. My right hon. Friend's suggestion that the UK brings things together is something that, uniquely, we have some authority to do. I hope that we shall do so if there is any escalation of the situation in the weeks ahead.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): The recent violence in Rakhine state and the long-standing persecution of the Rohingya are appalling and must end immediately. In the past two weeks alone, some 120,000 refugees have fled the violence in Rakhine state, and the two main UN camps in Bangladesh are now overflowing. We ask the Government and the military of Myanmar to remove all restrictions on entry to Rakhine state for the media, aid agencies and non-governmental organisations, as the world must be allowed to see what is happening and to help people in need.

While attacks by Rohingya militants are not to be condoned, the Government and military of Myanmar have a responsibility to protect civilians in all communities from violence and displacement, and they must begin to do so immediately. Will the Minister therefore make a commitment to work immediately with the UN and the Bangladeshi Government to provide urgent aid, food and water to refugees both inside and outside the camps?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his words. He will appreciate that I have already touched on some of the issues in relation to Bangladesh.

I, too, am concerned on behalf of the UK Government that Burma has dissociated itself from elements of the fact-finding mission to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Following the last set of attacks in October 2016, the UK co-sponsored a resolution at the Human Rights Council setting up a fact-finding mission to look into the human rights situation in Burma. We will continue forcefully to urge Burma to co-operate with the mission and its mandate, and as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the more the world sees what is going on, particularly on the border of Bangladesh and Burma, the more urgent attention we can give to the Burmese authorities to ensure that this terrible humanitarian crisis comes to a close at the earliest opportunity.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): We must acknowledge the wrongdoings of the minority armed group, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, but the disproportionate response has escalated violence and enflamed a long-running human rights problem. It has also left other states such as Bangladesh, as we have heard, to carry a significant burden. Does the Minister agree that we should recognise the pivotal role that Aung San Suu Kyi plays in bringing democracy to what remains a fragile country, but if we are ever to get back to talking about democratic structures, trade, healthcare and education in that country we need a long-standing solution that will work to bring the human rights crisis to an end, so that the Rohingya Muslims can live peacefully? Will the Minister outline what we are doing, so that we can cope without UK aid for the increasing numbers of people who are fleeing to Bangladesh?

Mark Field: I thank my hon. Friend for all the work that he does, both as an officer of the all-party group on Burma and for Bangladesh. He will be aware that the 2008 constitution in Burma grants the military 25% of seats in Parliament as well as control of defence, border affairs and home affairs Ministries. That situation has entrenched the role of the security forces since the coup in 1962 and makes it difficult for life to have any normality as we understand it. In that context, we have to recognise the amazingly courageous behaviour of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. I can understand the disappointment of the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), but we have to look at this in the context of Aung San Suu Kyi trying to play a role that has made life better for many Burmese citizens—not, I accept, for the Rohingya population down in the south-west.

Imagine the situation if there were another coup d'état and Aung San Suu Kyi was removed from the scene, and we went back to fully fledged military rule. That would be a calamitous outcome for the Burmese people. We need to do all that we can to support the moves, slow as they are, towards some sort of democracy as we would understand it in Burma. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) rightly said, the role of Aung San Suu Kyi and her international standing is critical in ensuring that some sort of normality comes to pass in the years to come.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I welcome the Minister's remarks, because it is incongruous and incomprehensible that Aung San Suu Kyi, for so long a beacon for human rights, has not stepped in to intervene in the face of an horrendous military crackdown that has burned down 17 villages and left 250,000 people without access to food. What is his assessment of the power struggles between the Burmese Government and the military, and how can we best help those who wish to uphold human rights to gain the upper hand?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Lady for her words. As she says, the one person many British folk with relatively little knowledge or experience of Burma remember is Aung San Suu Kyi, so they are dismayed. It is worth pointing out the sectarian complexities of Burmese society, along with the lack of democracy as we would understand it for over five decades, as that plays an important role in the concerns that the hon. Lady has expressed.

[Mark Field]

After the most recent escalation in Rakhine state, a number of statements were released by the Burmese information office. I have to say that these were not released with the consent of, or directly by, Aung San Suu Kyi. The information office is run by a former military officer. We understand that the State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi, has now removed her name from that office. That gives some indication of the level of tensions and the complexity of what is going on in Burma.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): May I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) on the tone and manner of her question, associate myself with the direction of her interrogation of the Minister and gently say how disappointed I was with the Minister's tone, which sounded pretty close to dumping the blame for this ethnic cleansing on the victim community? Will he say a little more about our expectations of Aung San Suu Kyi, who is leading a Government and military forces who are associated with behaviour that is utterly unacceptable by any standard at all?

Mark Field: I am sorry that my hon. Friend chooses to use the opportunity to grandstand in the way that he does—[*Interruption.*] The House has voted on that matter already, as we know. As far as this matter is concerned, we have made it very clear that we feel that Aung San Suu Kyi and her Government need to step up to the plate. We are not in any way forgiving or understanding of the terrible violence and its impact. It is worth pointing out that the entrenched security forces, including the army, police and border guard force, are responsible for the security operations that are currently under way in Rakhine state. We have made that absolutely clear. We will support Burma's ongoing transition from military dictatorship to a civilian-led democracy. This is very much an ongoing process, led by the democratically elected Aung San Suu Kyi.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The appalling persecution of the Rohingya is long standing and well documented. I concur with the remarks of the former Chair of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt); I was very disappointed with the statement made in response to the urgent question.

I have two questions for the Minister. On aid, reports today suggest that 30,000 Rohingyas are stranded in the mountains between Bangladesh and Burma. What is being done to address that in practical terms? There has to be a political solution in the long term. Does the Minister agree with the Nobel laureate, Malala, who yesterday appealed to Aung San Suu Kyi, saying that the citizenship of Myanmar has to be given to the Rohingya, so that they cease to be stateless people?

Mark Field: The hon. Gentleman will recognise just how complicated the situation with the Rohingya is. I suspect that the matter has been in his in-tray throughout his time as Chair of the Select Committee on International Development. In fairness, we are trying our best to get reliable information on the ground, which is difficult, as he will appreciate. We understand that 123,000 people have fled from Burma into Bangladesh. He may well be right that there are tens of thousands more in some halfway house, not able to make their way but desperate to do so.

I have tried to point out that we are not standing by innocently. We are doing all we can. In many ways, Britain has taken a lead at the UN, which will ultimately be the body that will have to deal, to a large extent, with elements of this humanitarian crisis. It is also worth pointing out that we have to be realistic about the manner in which the UN operates. The Security Council will require a unanimous vote or at least no veto. It is very difficult to see how, even within the P5, we would be able to get that for the reasons alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat).

These are difficult issues. We have done all we can and will continue to do so on the ground in Rangoon and—probably even more importantly in the months and years ahead—in Dhaka. We will do our bit and more to ensure that the humanitarian aspects of this crisis are kept to an absolute minimum.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Over 120,000 Rohingyas have been displaced and 17 villages have been torched, with thousands of deaths. Does my right hon. Friend share my disappointment that Aung San Suu Kyi is yet to live up to her Nobel peace prize, call out what is fast becoming a genocide and assist Rohingyas fleeing persecution?

Mark Field: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. I have tried to explain the situation as it applies to statements that were put out in Aung San Suu Kyi's name that did not reflect her views on these matters. As I have said, there is disappointment for many people; there was a sense that the moment Aung San Suu Kyi came into office—only a year ago—somehow everything would be transformed. The issues in Burma are, I am afraid, considerably more complex than that. It is vital that we do as much as we can to support Aung San Suu Kyi and the transition—slow as it may be—towards a fully fledged democracy. There remains a huge amount of good will for her work, which will be critical if we are to get any sort of resolution to these terrible events in the months ahead.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): In the Minister's last conversation with the trade envoy to Burma, did he raise the humanitarian crisis?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Lady. Yes, I did. Obviously, this is a fluid situation. The trade envoy will be heading out to Burma again before too long, as well as to other parts of the world. Let us be honest about it: as far as Burma is concerned, the issues around trade are entirely secondary to the humanitarian issues to which she referred. It is perfectly legitimate for those on the Opposition Front Bench to make the statements they did about past trade in weaponry and the like, but, equally, we are now in a very different, much more critical humanitarian situation. The hon. Lady can rest assured that, as far as our diplomats on both sides of the Bangladesh-Burma border are concerned, the focus will be exclusively on humanitarian rather than trade issues.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I raise this as a genuine point to the Minister. Having looked at civilian transitions from military Governments in other parts of the world, will he say today whether, according to his moral conscience, Aung San Suu Kyi has done enough to challenge the mass murder of Rohingyas in Burma?

Mark Field: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. The truth of the matter is that we do not know precisely what is going on. That is one of the difficulties about Burmese society and the complexities around the Burmese political and military situation. Just what is happening out there is difficult to gauge. I have obviously spoken to our ambassador in Rangoon. He has reassured me that representations are being made on a regular basis. My understanding from what he has said is that the concerns my hon. Friend pointed out are being felt in the very highest ranks of the Burmese Government. So there is no suggestion, to my mind at least, that Aung San Suu Kyi has been guilty of anything other than keeping a very close eye on what is a desperate situation. However, the notion that she has full control over what happens in the military, particularly down in Rakhine, is, I am afraid, a long way from the reality of the situation in Burma and Burmese politics.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I participated in the induction programme for the new Parliament last year, and I appreciate the challenges facing Burma as it transitions towards democracy. I also appreciate the efforts made by the UK Government and Parliament—let us not overlook its role—in supporting that democratic development. Surely, though, it is vital that the UK Government and this Parliament continually restate their belief that citizenship for the Rohingya is an essential part of that transition.

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Lady for her words. Prior to taking on this role, I was vice-chairman for international affairs in the Conservative party and worked with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and although I did not specifically do work myself in Burma, I am well aware that a lot of work goes on in a cross-party, integrated programme. Yes, I accept that the citizenship issue is live. As the hon. Lady will be well aware, the sectarian divisions are very pronounced in that part of the world. As many will know, there was a suggestion that when Burma was formed in the aftermath of the second world war or when Bangladesh was formed in 1971, the Rohingya, as ethnic Bengalis, should have been in that part of the world. I fear that all those are very live issues in Burmese politics. They are very complicated issues for us to entirely make a judgment on, but that is not to say that there will not be an open debate on them from our diplomats on the ground.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Minister is right to say that it must be difficult to get reliable and accurate information on the ground, in which case his offer of a ministerial visit should come sooner rather than later. When he goes, will he make sure that he visits both sides of the border, with a particular emphasis on following the DFID aid stream to satisfy himself that our aid is getting to where it is needed?

Mark Field: Yes, I am obviously keen to see on the ground what is happening throughout Burma and also Bangladesh, which is a country I know well. I should perhaps point out that the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), is the Minister with DFID responsibilities in this regard. He visited only a matter of a few weeks ago and saw

what was happening before the latest outbreak of inter-communal ethnic violence. He has been confident that there has been a positive flow of DFID money for a whole range of different projects, both in Bangladesh and in Burma. A lot of the DFID money that is spent, and will continue to be spent, in that regard is on much broader infrastructure and other projects that are going to make life better for all Burmese. That is not for one minute to say that we should not be focusing attention now on some humanitarian aid, but there is a huge amount of aid that this country can rightly be proud of in that part of the world that is making life better, and will do so for all citizens, for the decades to come.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Despite the extensive support—economic, cultural and political—that we have given to the Myanmar Government, we are now seeing that the Rohingya community is in danger of genocide. Does the Minister agree that we need to ask that Government for three things? First, the Government security forces need to be brought under control. Secondly, the aid organisations need to have free access there. Thirdly, the key thing is that the Rohingya need to be recognised as full citizens of Burma.

Mark Field: The hon. Gentleman's comments will be passed on; they will be heard not just here but in Rangoon. We are making representations at a diplomatic level. It is difficult, given the political situation there, to make demands, in the way that he perhaps suggests, about the role or otherwise of the military, or indeed any demands about Rohingya citizenship. However, he can rest assured that the concerns addressed to this House today will be made very clear.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): You will be aware, Mr Speaker, of the Burmese army's six-year campaign against the Rohingya Muslims in Kachin and Rakhine provinces, during which 100,000 civilians have already been forced to flee their homes under very repressive laws and are unable to work freely. The UN has said that war crimes have been committed, yet nobody has been held accountable. This looks like the ethnic cleansing that is the precursor to genocide, with stateless citizens who cannot be counted, meaning that their bodies cannot be counted either. We need our Foreign Secretary and the Minister to say unequivocally that we want full humanitarian access, that we want the violence to end and that we want to end the culture of impunity that allows these people to be murdered and nobody brought to justice.

Mark Field: I concur with the hon. Lady. As well as the condemnation to which she refers, we will do our best to get that message across through the international community. One hopes that not just British Ministers but Ministers from across the globe will make that clear, on a bilateral basis but also at the UN. Any judgment on whether crimes under international law have occurred is evidently a matter for judicial determination rather than for Governments or non-judicial bodies. We will continue, however, to call for an end to the violence and to prevent escalation, irrespective of whether incidents fit the definition of specific international crimes to which she referred.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I note the significant humanitarian aid that the Minister has set out, but will the Government continue to urge foreign Governments to follow suit?

Mark Field: We work in partnership through the UN and through other international bodies. It is worth pointing out that we should be proud of our own expenditure, particularly in that part of the world. Bangladesh is a member of the Commonwealth and Burma was at one time part of India, so there are long-standing connections between our countries. Although one hopes that the international community will also take on some of the burden, we recognise through our DFID commitments that we have particular responsibilities and connections in that part of the world. Although I hope that we will do a lot on an international basis, I do not think we should be frightened by the fact that Britain may well, initially, very much take the lead in humanitarian aid.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): We need to appreciate that the sustained discrimination against, and killing of, Rohingya Muslims has been ongoing for years. To their credit, Bangladesh and other nations have attempted to accommodate and assist Rohingya refugees. Surely, the de facto leader of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi, of all people, should respect the rights of all, especially minorities. Extraordinary respect and honour were accorded to her by our Parliament for her own long struggle for democracy. Has the Minister reminded her of this, and of the urgent need to stop the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya in her country? Will the Minister also confirm whether the Myanmar Government will be taking any positive steps openly to encourage the Rohingya back to their own country?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his heartfelt comments. He will appreciate that the diplomatic process means that a lot of attention is being paid in Burma to the nature of the debate; that is probably unique among other Parliaments in which there is a passion for issues concerning Burma. To be fair, it is too early to talk in terms of commitments about the Rohingya being brought back to Burma at any point. One issue will be whether many of them wish to return to Burma, even once the situation begins to stabilise. He will forgive me if I say that this is something to which we will return at a future stage.

Mr Speaker: I am keen to accommodate colleagues, but there is a premium on single questions. I look for a rapier inquiry to that intellectual colossus from Newham, Mr Stephen Timms.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Minister urge the Government of Myanmar to review—or, preferably, repeal—the 1982 citizenship law so that Rohingya Muslims can be granted citizenship of the country where they have always lived?

Mark Field: This is a live debate, and we will continue to make representations such as that which the right hon. Gentleman has made. He is well aware of the difficulties that face us in our relationship with Burma, which will regard this as largely an internal matter. It is not for us to dictate that on an international agenda,

but his voice has been heard loud and clear, and this is not the only time that such an issue has been raised. We will do our level best to make sure that, apart from anything else, Bangladeshi citizens who live on the border are properly represented.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Some 90,000 Rohingya are estimated to have fled to Bangladesh. What help can the Minister give to the displaced who now live in the open and in forests, without tents or food? Bangladesh cannot afford to keep them and wishes them to leave.

Mark Field: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that DFID is already the biggest single donor of bilateral aid to Bangladesh. We will continue to do as much work as we can, without in any way prejudicing important existing projects, particularly infrastructure projects, which have been under way for some time. He can rest assured that we have significant equities and significant expertise on the ground, particularly around the Cox's Bazar area, which is the district adjacent to the Burmese border. I very much hope that those will come into play, and I suspect that that work is already going on as we speak.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): May I press the Minister further on his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg)? The Minister says it is very difficult to find out what is going on in Burma, but is it so difficult or is it that we do not believe the reports? I have a report from the Burma Human Rights Network, which specifies that 30,000 Rohingya are trapped on the hillsides in Tha Win Chaung and Inn Din near Maungdaw township. These people are trapped without food, water and medicine. What is the Minister doing to find out what is going on? Frankly, if 30,000 people are trapped in such a situation, they cannot await a ministerial visit.

Mark Field: No one was suggesting that knowing about such a situation would be dependent on a ministerial visit. We are working on the ground, but we do need to verify the facts. I accept what the hon. Lady says and there is no sense of disbelief in what an NGO says—NGOs on the ground are working hard, including with DFID and other parts of the UK Government apparatus—but we need to verify the facts before making such statements. However, she should rest assured that a significant amount of work is going on, on both sides of the Burmese-Bangladeshi border, as we speak.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): When the Minister has finally clarified the facts, will he condemn as genocide what everybody else believes to be genocide? What is the value of having a democratic dialogue if the result is the persecution and massacre of a whole group of people?

Mark Field: As the hon. Gentleman rightly points out, our immediate priority has been to establish the facts, but it has also been to ensure that we provide urgent food and medical assistance to as many displaced citizens as we can. As I say, we are at the forefront of that.

On making any judgment about whether crimes have occurred under international law—this goes back to the issue discussed earlier—that is really a matter for judicial determination, not something that we should condemn

here as politicians. Whether that is done through the UN—through a UN Security Council referral to the International Criminal Court, for example—lies some steps ahead. None the less, this must ultimately be a legal, rather than a political, intervention. As a P5 Member of the United Nations, we have obviously taken that particular aspect very seriously. As I pointed out in my initial comments, over a week ago we began the process of asking the UN to take seriously the issues that I fear have only deteriorated further in the past few days.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Minister keeps repeating that the situation in Burma is very complex; I think we know that. What is really disturbing for those of us who went to listen to Aung San Suu Kyi and were so moved by her speech is that it seems that not only is she not doing anything, but she is not actually saying anything. In view of our relationship with the country and with her, does the Minister not think that someone should pick up the phone and speak to her? Has he done so? Has the Foreign Secretary spoken to her? Has anyone telephoned her and had a conversation in which they have repeated what some of us are saying in the Chamber today?

Mark Field: I believe that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has spoken to Aung San Suu Kyi in recent weeks, when the situation was obviously already beginning to deteriorate. I know that he has regular conversations with her, and I am sure he will be on the phone to her again in that regard.

I am sorry if my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey)—the Thames lies between our constituencies—feels that I am repeating myself. It has to be said that there are only so many ways in which I can answer the same questions from Opposition Members. I do understand the heartfelt concerns expressed by Members on both sides of the House. As I say, I think the message will go out loud and clear to Rangoon and, indeed, to other parts of Burma.

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): I heard the Minister's statement, and to be honest, I am quite disappointed. It is a really big issue, and he has mentioned a number of times that the Government are working on the ground. What exactly does he mean by "working on the ground"? What exactly has he been doing and what exactly has he done during the past few weeks? Will he please explain?

Mark Field: To be fair, the nature of diplomacy is to try to keep open lines of communication as far as possible. We obviously have connections at a ministerial level and also, and probably more importantly, through our embassy on the ground in Burma.

Above all, as I have said, there is the humanitarian aid that we are putting in place—a huge amount of work is going on—for the displaced communities that have been leaving. It is a massive humanitarian problem. At one level, it is clearly a problem for the international community, but vast amounts of DFID money—not least because of our expertise on the ground in that part of Bangladesh—are being put to good use to meet this humanitarian crisis.

I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman feels that not enough is being done. The reality, however, is that if 25,000 or 30,000 more people are pouring across the border daily, that is amazingly difficult to deal with. I do believe—I am confident and satisfied—that Britain is doing all we can in the current circumstances, and as the situation unfolds in the weeks ahead, I hope that we can redouble our work. It is unrealistic to think anything else.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): Over the past six years, the British public have witnessed the murderous persecution of the Rohingya in Rakhine province. At the same time, they have turned on their television screens and heard some of the Burmese Buddhists using language that suggests that the Rohingya are almost subhuman. We have seen that persecution going on. Given that we have given some £80 million a year in DFID aid over this period, the British public will want to know why the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has no influence over the situation at all.

Mark Field: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman seems to think that we have no influence. The reality is that even in the past six years, when I accept some terrible things have gone on for the Rohingya population in Burma, there has been a move towards some sense of democracy. There was an election of some sort and Aung San Suu Kyi came into office, albeit with the constitutional constraints she is under and the difficulties brought by the civil war that is going on.

Nothing could be further from the truth than the idea that we have done nothing. There has been a huge amount of energy, particularly from the UK Government. Sometimes that has happened quietly behind the scenes. We shall continue to do that on behalf of the many tens of thousands who find themselves displaced.

Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister started his statement by talking about a Rohingya attack on the Burmese military. That flies in the face of what is an emerging genocide. When will the Government take a much stronger line with the Burmese Government, which in spite of the election of Aung San Suu Kyi are allowing the military to continue as it did before?

Mark Field: As I said to the hon. Gentleman earlier, the constitution unfortunately constrains that to a certain extent. The military have essentially been in control for most of the time since the successful coup in 1962. The moves towards democracy have, by British standards, been relatively small. The constraint we are under is that the hand of the military still plays a very important role from day to day.

I started my statement with that issue simply to say that the escalation we have seen in the past 10 days came about as the result of a terror attack and the reaction of the security services to it. That is the moment at which things reached the crisis point that we have seen over the past 10 days. However, I accept what has been said by many Members of the House: this is not something that has come out of the blue sky; the persecution of the Rohingya population has been a profound issue for decades.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): The Rohingya were the loyal allies of Britain in world war two and now they face their darkest hour. Will the Minister give

[*Mohammad Yasin*]

us a clear answer? Will the Government make representations to the UN Security Council, calling for its immediate intervention to protect the Rohingya?

Mark Field: As I pointed out, we are in touch with the UN Security Council. We led the discussions that took place last week in this regard. Clearly, as the situation unfolds, we will be happy to make further representations.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Newcastle in solidarity with the people of Rohingya group meets on Monday. Does the Minister recognise that many people there—and there will be many people there—will take his word as evidence that he sees the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people as collateral damage in the establishment of democracy in Myanmar and, therefore, that the Rohingya people have no friend in this Government?

Mark Field: I really think that that is a very partisan view of the situation. I have tried to explain the constraints that the Government in Burma find themselves under. That is not to say that the Rohingya are collateral damage. We want to see democracy and, as has been pointed out by many Members, the persecution of the Rohingya minority is not something that has come out of the blue in the last year or two; it has been going on for some considerable time. I refute the analysis that the hon. Lady has put into play. We are doing our level best to ensure that this issue is dealt with and she should feel proud, as a UK parliamentarian, that it is the UK Government and our permanent representative in the UK who are taking a lead in raising the profile of this issue in international quarters.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Over the weekend, I met members of the Rohingya community in my constituency. They told me horrific stories of some of the most grave crimes against humanity. They did not even know whether their friends and family were dead or alive. They told me horrific stories of women and children being burned and tortured. They also told me that during her time in custody, they had led some of the biggest campaigns in this country for the immediate release of Ms Suu Kyi. Now, in their hour of need, they hear a deafening silence. Why will the Minister not condemn this grave crime against humanity; why will he not condemn the persecution and ethnic cleansing; and why will he not condemn the deafening silence of Ms Suu Kyi?

Mark Field: I will not condemn an elected politician who, in my view, is doing her level best in the most incredibly difficult circumstances. I have pointed out that we condemn violence, and we have done our level best to ensure that tensions are defused as far as possible. That is the position that we will put across to all sides in Burma. We want to see the tension reduced, not raised to a higher level as the hon. Gentleman perhaps suggests, in his passionate plea, would be the right way forward. I do not think that it would be.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): The Minister may struggle with identifying the situation as genocide, but systematic rape, massacres and the burning of buildings

of a minority community amount to ethnic cleansing to try to force it out of the country, if not out of existence. That is genocide. When can we expect an appropriate response to that effect from the Minister or the Government?

Mark Field: As I have said, that is a legal issue that has to go through the United Nations. It is not for the Government to make such a condemnation or to grandstand, either in the Chamber or elsewhere. The issue will need to be dealt with through the United Nations if it is to go to an International Criminal Court action, and at the moment we judge that it would be unlikely to get through the UN because at least one of the permanent five members of the Security Council would look to impose a veto. We will do our best to make the statements that we need to make in the international community, but this is ultimately a legal rather than a political matter. It would be easy for me to say words from the Dispatch Box to satisfy the hon. Lady now, but it makes much more sense to do things in a systematic manner.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The Department for International Development can and will do excellent work, but there are reports that authorities are restricting access to international aid. What will be done to ensure that the most vulnerable get the aid that they so desperately need? What political steps will be taken, and will the Government condemn those who will not allow access to aid in this humanitarian crisis?

Mark Field: The hon. Lady makes a fair point. Particularly on the Burmese side of the border, it is desperately difficult to get our DFID representatives the access that we would like them to have. By contrast, once people have crossed that border and are in refugee camps just inside the Bangladeshi border—I accept that that is by no means an ideal situation—we are able to do terrific work on the ground, and will continue to do so, to try to ensure that a looming humanitarian crisis is kept at bay.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): One issue inhibiting the UN's work is the almost complete absence of in-country staff of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Will the Minister urgently raise that with his counterparts to ensure that the commissioner's staff are granted regular visas?

Mark Field: We will raise that. The hon. Lady will know that Mark Lowcock has just taken up his role, and we will want to discuss that issue with him at the first opportunity.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): The message that seems to be coming over loud and clear today, as it has in the Foreign Secretary's comments in recent days, is that the British Government are most concerned about defending the de facto leader and the worthy pursuit of democracy, at the expense of the suffering of the Rohingya Muslims. We have heard talk of getting the UN to take the situation seriously, but when are we going to escalate that? Given that children are being beheaded, villages burned and people raped in huge numbers, how serious does it have to get before we escalate our action?

Mark Field: I understand the upset that the hon. Lady feels. Anyone watching the desperate scenes unfold out in Burma and Bangladesh can only be moved by them. The truth is that if Aung San Suu Kyi were removed from office and Burma's road towards democracy were closed off, it would be a calamity not just for the Rohingya but for every Burmese citizen, so we should not support that. We must work towards getting Burma on the road to democracy as much as possible rather than trading one off against the other.

I think the hon. Lady makes an unfair interpretation of the British Government's position. We want to do our level best with what we have in place, but we recognise that things would be even worse if there were not some semblance of democracy in the Burmese Government.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Over the past five years, the UK Government have allocated over half a million pounds towards the provision of educational training to the Burmese security forces, which, among other things, aims to promote awareness of international humanitarian law, ethics and leadership. What assessment has the Minister made of the efficacy of such training, and, if it has been found wanting, will the Government divert such military aid towards humanitarian efforts?

Mark Field: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman heard my words earlier on this issue. We are providing the money for educational courses, not military training. Their content complies with the UK's commitments under the EU arms embargo. The UK is, and will remain, a very strong supporter of continuing the EU arms embargo. We will continue to comply with it as it applies to Burma.

EU Exit Negotiations

4.41 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): I will now update the House on the two rounds of negotiations with the European Union which took place in July and August. While at times the negotiations have been tough, it is clear that we have made concrete progress on many important issues. *[Laughter.]* I rather wondered whether Opposition Members would fall for that. I wonder how they are going to explain to their constituents that they do not care about the pensions and healthcare of 4 million people. I would like to thank all the officials who are working hard, both at home and in Brussels, to make this happen.

Colleagues will have received my letter following the July negotiation round, dated 9 August, which set out the dynamics of that round in some detail. These rounds are not at this stage about establishing jointly agreed legal text; they are about reaching a detailed understanding of each other's position, understanding where there might be room for compromise and beginning to drill down into technical detail on a number of issues. During both rounds, discussions took place on all four areas, including specific issues relating to: the rights of citizens on both sides; Northern Ireland; the question of a financial settlement; and a number of technical separation issues. I will speak briefly about each in turn.

Making progress on citizens' rights has been an area of focus for both negotiation rounds and we took significant steps forward in both July and August. We have published the joint technical paper, which sets out our respective positions in more detail, and this has been updated following the August round. It underlines both a significant alignment between our positions and provides clarity on areas where we have not, as yet, reached agreement. In July, we reached a high degree of convergence on: the scope of our proposals on residents and social security; the eligibility criteria for those who will benefit from residents rights under the scope of the withdrawal agreement; and a shared commitment to make the citizens' application process as streamlined and efficient as possible. In August, we agreed: to protect the rights of frontier workers; to cover future social security contributions for those citizens covered by the withdrawal agreement; to maintain the rights of British citizens in the EU27 to set up and manage a business within their member state of residence, and vice versa; and that we should protect existing healthcare rights and arrangements for EU27 citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU. These are the European health insurance or "EHIC" arrangements.

These areas of agreement are good news. They may sound technical, but they matter enormously to individuals—something Opposition Members might remember when thinking about their own constituents. The agreement on healthcare rights, for example, will mean British pensioners living in the EU will continue to have their healthcare arrangements protected both where they live and when they travel to another member state, where they will still be able to use an EHIC card. On mutual recognition of qualifications, we have made progress in protecting the recognition of qualifications for British citizens resident in the EU27, and EU27 citizens resident

[Mr David Davis]

in the UK. In fact, each one of those areas of agreement is reciprocal, and they will work for Brits in the EU and EU27 citizens in the UK. They help to provide certainty and clarity for EU27 citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the EU27. They will make a tangible difference to those people's lives. I hope everyone recognises the importance of that.

The outcomes of the discussions demonstrate that we have delivered on our commitment to put citizens first, and to give them as much certainty as possible as early as possible in the process. Of course there are still areas of difference, on which we continue to work. For example, we will need to have further discussions on the specified cut-off date, on future family reunion, and on the broader issue of compliance on enforcement. Progress in those areas will require flexibility and pragmatism from both sides.

During the summer negotiating rounds, a number of issues emerged in the EU offer that will need further consideration. For example, the European Union does not plan to maintain the existing voting rights for UK nationals living in the EU. We have made it clear that we will protect the rights of EU nationals living in the UK to stand and vote in municipal elections. Similarly, the EU proposals would not allow UK citizens currently resident in the EU to retain their rights if they moved within the EU.

Even in areas in which there has been progress, more is needed. While the EU has agreed to recognise the qualifications of UK citizens resident in the EU, and vice versa, we believe that that should go much further. The recognition must extend to students who are currently studying for a qualification, it must apply to onward movement by UK citizens in the EU, and it should extend more broadly to protect the livelihoods of thousands of people which depend on qualifications that will be gained before we exit the EU. In those areas, the EU's proposals fall short of ensuring that UK citizens in the EU and EU citizens in the UK can continue to lead their lives broadly as they do now.

On separation issues—a very technical area—we established a number of sub-groups. They made progress in a number of specific areas, and drew on papers that the UK published ahead of both rounds. I am pleased to say that we are close to agreement on our approach to post-exit privileges and immunities—on which we have published a position paper—which it will benefit both the UK and the EU to maintain after we leave. We have agreed on our mutual approach to confidentiality requirements on shared information post-exit. With respect to nuclear materials, we held discussions on the need to resolve issues relating to the ownership of special fissile material, and the responsibility for radioactive waste and spent fuel held both here and there. We reiterated—this is important—a strong mutual interest in ensuring that the UK and the European Atomic Energy Community, or Euratom, continue to work closely together in the future as part of a comprehensive new partnership.

With respect to legal cases pending before the European Court of Justice, the parties discussed and made progress on the cut-off points for cases being defined as “pending”. There was also progress in discussions concerning the UK's role before the Court while those pending cases

are being heard. With respect to judicial co-operation in civil and commercial matters, and ongoing judicial co-operation in criminal matters, we made good progress on the principles of approach and the joint aim of providing legal certainty and avoiding unnecessary disruption to courts, businesses and families. With respect to goods on the market, both parties reiterated the importance of providing legal certainty for businesses and consumers across the EU and the UK at the point of departure. In that area, in particular, we emphasised that the broader principles outlined in the UK's position paper seek to minimise the type of uncertainty and disruption for business that we are all working to avoid.

We remain committed to making as much progress as possible on the issues that are solely related to our withdrawal, but our discussions this week have demonstrated and exposed yet again that the UK's approach is substantially more flexible and pragmatic than that of the EU, as it avoids unnecessary disruption for British businesses and consumers. I have urged the EU to be more imaginative and flexible in its approach to withdrawal on that point.

I am pleased to report that there has been significant, concrete progress in the vital area of Northern Ireland and Ireland. The negotiation co-ordinators explored a number of issues, including both the Belfast or Good Friday agreement and the common travel area. In August, the group also held detailed discussions on the basis of the UK position paper. As both Michel Barnier and I said at last week's press conference, there is a high degree of convergence on those key issues, and we agreed to work up shared principles on the common travel area. That is a major change.

We also agreed to carry out further technical work on cross-border co-operation under the Belfast agreement. Of course, as I said all along, the key issues in relation to cross-border economic co-operation and energy will need to form an integral part of discussions on the UK's future relationship with the EU.

Finally, on the financial settlement, we have been clear that the UK and the EU will have financial obligations to each other that will survive our exit from the European Union. In July, the Commission set out the European Union position. We have a duty to our taxpayers to interrogate that position rigorously, and that is what we did, line by line—it might have been a little bit of a shock to the Commission, but that is what we did. At the August round, we set out our analysis of the EU's position. We also had in-depth discussions on the European Investment Bank and other off-budget issues.

It is clear that the two sides have very different legal stances. But, as we said in the article 50 letter, the settlement should be in accordance with law and in the spirit of the UK's continuing partnership with the EU. Michel Barnier and I agreed that we do not anticipate making incremental progress on the final shape of a financial deal in every round. Generally, we should not underestimate the usefulness of the process so far, but it is also clear that there are significant differences to be bridged in this sector.

Initial discussions were also held on governance and dispute resolution. These provided an opportunity to build a better, shared understanding of the need for a reliable means of enforcing the withdrawal agreement and resolving any disputes that might arise under it.

Alongside the negotiations, we have also published a number of papers which set out our thinking regarding our future special partnership with the EU. These future partnership papers are different from our papers that set out the position for the negotiations under our withdrawal agreement. Our future partnership papers are part of a concerted effort to pragmatically drive the progress we all want to see. All along, we have argued that talks around our withdrawal cannot be treated in isolation from the future partnership that we want. We can only resolve some of these issues with an eye on how the new partnership will work in the future. For example, on Northern Ireland it would be helpful to our shared objectives on avoiding a hard border to be able to begin discussions on how future customs arrangements will work. Furthermore, if we agree the comprehensive free trade agreement we are seeking as part of our future partnership, solutions in Northern Ireland are, of course, easier to deliver.

A second example is on financial matters. As I have said, the days of making vast yearly contributions to the EU budget will end when we leave. But there may be programmes that the UK wants to consider participating in as part of the new partnership that we seek. Naturally, we need to work out which of those we want to pursue; we need to discuss them as part of our talks on withdrawal from the EU and our future as its long-standing friend and closest neighbour.

A third example is on wider separation issues. While we are happy to negotiate and make progress on the separation issues, it is our long-term aim that ultimately many of these arrangements will not be necessary. With the clock ticking—to quote Mr Barnier—it would not be in either of our interests to run aspects of the negotiations twice. Last week, we turned our consideration to the next round of talks, and my message to the Commission was: let us continue to work together constructively, but put people above process.

To that end, my team will publish further papers in the coming weeks, continuing to set out our ambition for these negotiations, and the new deep and special partnership the UK wants to build with the EU. Ultimately, businesses and citizens on both sides want us to move swiftly on to discussing our future partnership, and we want that to happen after the European Council in October if possible.

As colleagues know, at the start of these negotiations both sides agreed that the aim was to make progress on four key areas: citizens' rights, the financial settlement, Northern Ireland and Ireland, and broader separation issues. We have been doing just that, and I have always said—*[Interruption.]* Nobody has ever pretended that this will be easy; I have always said that this negotiation will be tough, complex and, at times, confrontational. So it has proved, but we must not lose sight of our overarching aim: to build a deep and special new partnership with our closest neighbours and allies, while also building a truly global Britain that can forge new relationships with the fastest growing economies around the world.

4.54 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me notice of his statement. I also thank him for what I hope will be his agreement to update the House in this fashion after every round of the talks. I think that he has agreed to do that, and I am grateful.

We accept that the negotiations are complex and difficult, and I understand the Secretary of State's frustration at points with the process and sympathise with the view that some phase 1 issues cannot fully be resolved until we get to phase 2. Northern Ireland is a classic example of that. Although he will not say it, I am sure he is equally frustrated by the deeply unhelpful "go whistle" and "blackmail" comments from some of his own colleagues. I am sure that colleagues and officials in his Department are working hard in these difficult negotiations and I pay tribute to what they are doing behind the scenes. However, the current state of affairs and the slow progress are a real cause for concern. The parties appear to be getting further apart, rather than closer together. Round 3 of the five in phase 1 is gone, and we would now expect agreement to be emerging on the key issues. The last round is in October, and that should involve formal agreement. There is now huge pressure on the negotiating round in September. If phase 2 is pushed back, there will be very serious consequences for Britain, and the concept of no deal, which I hoped had died a death since the election, could yet rise from the ashes—*[Interruption.]* Great? The second cause for concern is that it is becoming increasingly clear that the Prime Minister's flawed red lines on issues such as the role of the European Court of Justice or any similar body are at the heart of the problem, as is the matter of progress on EU citizens here and abroad. The Secretary of State, the Prime Minister and the Government need to be much more flexible on that issue. I fear that these examples will crop up not only in phase 1, and that these flawed red lines will bedevil the rest of the negotiations. It is a fantasy to think that we can have a deep and comprehensive trade deal without shared institutions, and the sooner we face up to that, the better.

That brings me to my third concern. We are obviously reaching the stage of the negotiations where fantasy meets brutal reality. The truth is that too many promises have been made about Brexit that cannot be kept. The Secretary of State has just said that no one pretended this would be easy, but the Government were pretending it would be easy. The International Trade Secretary promised that a deal with the EU would be

"one of the easiest in human history"

to negotiate. A year ago, in the heady early days of his job, the Secretary of State himself wrote that

"within two years, before the negotiation with the EU is likely to be complete...we can negotiate a free trade area massively larger than the EU."

He went on to say that

"the new trade agreements will come into force at the point of exit from the EU, but they will be fully negotiated and therefore understood in detail well before then."

Even this summer, the Government published position papers riddled with further fantasies. The "track and trace" customs idea was put forward on 15 August as an apparently serious proposition, only to be effectively removed on 1 September by the Secretary of State himself, with the admission that it was merely "blue sky thinking".

The time for floating fantastical ideas is over. There must be no more promises that cannot be met. This is the brutal reality. We need to know how the Secretary of State intends to ensure that real progress is made in the September round. Is he intending to intensify the talks? Does he accept that it is now time to drop some of the

[*Keir Starmer*]

Prime Minister's deeply flawed red lines, in order to create the flexibility that he says is necessary? When will we see position papers that actually set out the Government's considered position on the key issues?

Mr Davis: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his comments at the beginning and for recognising that not only on Northern Ireland in particular, but on many other issues, the future relationship is indistinguishable from the ongoing negotiations. That is one of the problems in this negotiating exercise and it arises directly because the Commission is seeking to use keeping the first part of the negotiations going as a pressure point against Britain in the future, and I will return to that in a moment because I have a point to make.

On citizens' rights, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman holds up as being—I have forgotten what his phrase was, but it involved something about red lines. Anyway, citizens' rights is not the issue that is vexing the Commission. In fact, internal progress has been remarkably effective. He is quite right about the European Court of Justice, but everything else has been going pretty well. I expect that we will conclude most of those issues—in outline, not in text—quite soon. However, what does the right hon. and learned Gentleman actually want the Government to do? The Commission is saying, “Unless we give approval that sufficient progress has been made, we will not go on to the main substance of negotiation: the ongoing rights.” What is it seeking to get from that? It is seeking to obtain money. That is what this is about. Do members of the Labour party want to pay €100 billion in order to get progress in the next month? Is that what they are about? That is what they were saying. I hope that the answer is no, but what we heard from the shadow Brexit Secretary was a beautiful piece of lawyerly argument that ignored the simple fact that this is a pressure tactic to make us pay. We are going to do this the proper way. We are going to represent the interests of the British taxpayer and that means rigorously interrogating every line of the argument on funding line by line. That is the way that we are going to go.

As for the other elements that the right hon. and learned Gentleman talked about, I do not resile at all from the intention to negotiate a first-rate free trade agreement with the European Union in the course of the next two years. That is why we published all the position papers. He tried to rubbish one or two of them, but let me cite one to him: the customs paper. By the way, saying that something is blue-sky thinking is not to rubbish it; it is to say that it is imaginative and forward-thinking. The position papers were designed to make points to our European partners so that they could see what the future might look like under our vision. Let me give him the response of Xavier Bertrand, the president of Hauts-de-France, which includes Calais and Dunkirk—our nearest ports in France. He said:

“We welcome with great interest the initiatives announced by the British government...as they are likely to preserve trade between the UK and France”.

France is supposedly the country most resistant to our arguments and to free trade, but the man responsible for Calais and Dunkirk said that that is the way that we should go and that is the way that we will go.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): The Secretary of State will recall that during the referendum campaign the prominent leaders of the leave campaign who dominated the media refuted any suggestion that our future trading relationships with Europe would be affected in any way. The present Foreign Secretary put great weight on the fact that the Germans need to sell us their Mercedes and that the Italians need to sell us their prosecco. Now that we are modifying our trade agreement, does the Secretary of State accept that in the modern world any trade agreement with the EU, the US, Japan or anybody else involves some pooling of sovereignty, some mutual recognition or harmonisation of regulations, some defining and easing of customs barriers and some easing of tariffs, and that they always take years to negotiate or to modify?

Will the Secretary of State therefore demonstrate the imagination and flexibility that he has been demonstrating so far and actually accept that we should remain members of the existing single market and the customs union during the interim transitional period, which will be necessary before we have our new relationship? That will greatly ease his progress in opening up the hundreds of other issues that he will have to start negotiating in a moment and will certainly ease the great uncertainty in British business that is threatening to cause so much damage to our economy at the moment.

Mr Davis: As ever, my right hon. and learned Friend—

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): We're over here.

Mr Davis: The microphone is there, and the speaker is there.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) has touched on some important points. No. 1, on the ability to do this deal, we start from a position of exact identity on product regulations and other social regulation—such regulation is what worries the European Union—so we are in the same place. The issue is not one of bringing together massively different economies but of maintaining a reasonable relationship between the regulatory structures of our country and of that organisation.

My right hon. and learned Friend is quite right in one respect, which is that whenever a trade agreement is forged, it will have within it agreements on standards—the Canadian one did, for example—and not just on product standards but on, say, labour law standards. The Canadian deal has labour law commitments to stay above International Labour Organisation standards. In that respect, we are in the same place.

In terms of the implementation or transitional period—call it what you will—there is now widespread agreement across Europe that it will be beneficial to have an implementation period. How long it will be and how it will work will be decided straightforwardly on practicalities. Three things will drive an implementation period: No. 1 is this Government's ability to put in place regulations, new customs arrangements, and so on; No. 2 is the ability of companies, corporations and sometimes people to accommodate it, which is principally the issue with financial services, for example; and No. 3 is the ability of other countries to accommodate it. That is why the quote from Xavier Bertrand is important, because it shows

a clear intent on the part of major French politicians to bring about the sort of frictionless trade that we want. I find myself largely agreeing with my right hon. and learned Friend, but this is why it is entirely possible to deliver a first-class Brexit for Britain.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his statement, and for giving us an advance copy.

The Secretary of State is looking for imagination and flexibility from the European Union, but I do not think there is anyone in the European Union with the fevered imagination needed to think that the NHS would be £357 million a week better off if we left the European Union. Will he clarify exactly what flexibility the UK Government have shown? They were inflexible to the point of obstinacy in trying to avoid any parliamentary oversight on the article 50 process. They set their own inflexible deadline for triggering article 50, and they set their own inflexible red lines before the negotiations had even started, including an inflexible determination to leave the single market without any idea at all as to where we would go instead.

All this has been done over the heads of the devolved national Governments and, to a large extent, over the heads of Members of this Parliament. I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has updated the House today, but he has not updated the Joint Ministerial Committee since six weeks before article 50 was triggered, despite a joint request from both the Welsh and Scottish Governments for such a meeting.

Can the Secretary of State confirm whether the Government will now be flexible in having proper, meaningful and constructive dialogue with the devolved nations? Will he now accept that this Government's continued obsession with immigration is forcing him into a dangerously inflexible position on the single market, threatening 80,000 jobs in Scotland and hundreds of thousands of jobs throughout the UK? Or will the Government continue on their present course, charging blindfold towards a cliff edge and relying on the *Daily Mail* to make us believe that it was all the foreigners' fault when it all goes wrong?

Mr Davis: First, on flexibility, I have just mentioned areas that matter to individuals, such as guaranteeing their pensions, guaranteeing their healthcare and so on, and those areas did involve some flexibility on the part of the British negotiating team, which did a very good job.

On notification, I chaired a number of JMC meetings—I do not do it anymore, as the JMC is now chaired by the First Secretary of State—to keep the devolved Administrations up to speed. Indeed, yesterday I briefed in detail Mike Russell of the Scottish Government and Mark Drakeford of the Welsh Administration. Obviously, at the moment I have a bit of difficulty briefing the Northern Ireland Executive, because they do not exist yet. But the hon. Gentleman can take it as read that the concerns of the devolved Administrations have been taken on board very squarely and will continue to be so in the course of the ongoing negotiation.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I urge my right hon. Friend not to accept the advice of the Opposition party, which only six weeks

ago was in favour of leaving the customs union and the single market, only to reverse that position today; he should stay steady on the course of the Government. On transition and implementation deals, over which the Opposition have got very excited, may I remind him of one simple fact: you cannot have any discussion about transition or implementation until you know what you are transitioning to? Thus the agreement over what we get with the European Union comes before any discussion about transition deals.

Mr Davis: I take my right hon. Friend's point about the Labour party. I was being quite kindly to my opposite number, the shadow Brexit Secretary—after all, I only have to negotiate with Brussels, whereas he has to negotiate with his entire Front Bench! My right hon. Friend is right to say that we have to know where the endgame will be—where the end position will be—in order to get an accurate description of the implementation and transition period. I will differ from him on one point: that does not mean that we should not make it clear up front that we intend to have some sort of implementation period, where it is necessary—only where it is necessary.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Leaving without a deal would be disastrous, and the Government must now realise that it will not be possible to negotiate the bespoke deal that they have spoken about at great length by the time set out under the article 50 process, because there will not be sufficient time, given the rate of progress. In order for the Secretary of State to talk about an implementation period, he has to have something to implement. Why does he not recognise, therefore, that the only way now to give business the stability and certainty it requires is to say that we will remain within the current trade and market access arrangements for a transitional period in order to allow a final deal to be negotiated and agreed?

Mr Davis: Let us start with the right hon. Gentleman's original presumption that we cannot achieve a negotiated deal in the period. As he should know, given his role as past and current Chairman of the Brexit Committee, the previous Trade Commissioner, Karel De Gucht, who is no friend of Brexit and does not approve of what we are doing, has said in terms that it is not technically difficult to achieve a trade outcome—all it requires is political will. What it requires is the political will on the European side to do it. What will give that political will is the fact that it sells roughly €300 billion of product to us every year and will want to continue doing so.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that not only have the official Opposition been totally contradictory on the single market, customs union and the European Court, but they are now even defying their own manifesto and their vote on the article 50 Act, let alone the democratic outcome of the referendum itself? In other words, they have now moved from being remainers to reversers.

Mr Davis: On the day the shadow Brexit Secretary was on "The Andrew Marr Show" saying, if I remember his words correctly, that he was glad to have a unified party behind his current policy—policy No. 10, by the way—on that very same programme the right hon.

[Mr David Davis]

Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) was saying exactly that: that the right hon. Gentleman was betraying Labour's own voters. That is what the Labour party has to come to terms with. Its voters, more than anybody else, want us to leave. They voted for it and they want us to leave, and Labour had better deliver on it.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Last year, UK agencies initiated 3,000 Europol investigations, yet with just 18 months until we are due to lose our Europol membership, our European arrest warrant and our security co-operation underpinnings we still have no idea what the Government want—is it to replace this, to extend it or to include it in a transition? There have been no announcements and there was not even any mention of it in the Secretary of State's statement today. When are we going to get some substance on this serious issue about public safety and national security? When is he going to realise that this waffle is letting the country down?

Mr Davis: In my statement I discussed civil judicial co-operation and criminal judicial co-operation, which relate to the right hon. Lady's question—or criminal judicial co-operation does, at least. The European Union will only negotiate on the ongoing relationship once it has decided there has been sufficient progress. At that point—I have said this in terms, and it was in the article 50 letter, the Lancaster House speech and the White Paper—we intend to negotiate a parallel arrangement, similar to what we have now, based on the structures we currently have, and we intend to maintain exactly what she says: the high level of co-operation on intelligence, counter-terrorism and anti-criminal work that we have had in the past.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on explaining that we have no legal liability to pay money above our contributions up to the date of departure. We want to get on and spend that on our priorities. Does he agree that the EU has a simple choice to make, which I hope it will make sooner but which it will probably make later: it can either trade with us with no new tariffs or barriers, because we have made a very generous offer, or it can trade with us under World Trade Organisation rules, which we know works fine for us because that is what we do with the rest of the world?

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend is exactly right, and one of the things I have picked up going around the European Union countries is that most of those nations also understand that fact very plainly. That is particularly true of those on the North sea littoral—Holland, Belgium and France, which I have mentioned, and Denmark—which all know that the impact of no deal on their economies would be dramatic, and more dramatic than for us.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Petulant references to the EU blackmailing the UK do not help our negotiating stance; in fact, they increase the risk of our crashing out of the EU. In those circumstances, does the Secretary of State still agree with himself on the need for a decision referendum, which would allow people to vote on the terms of the deal or to stay in the EU?

Mr Davis: The right hon. Gentleman has had great difficulty understanding the distinction between mandate referendums and decision referendums down the years. I suggest he goes back and reads the speech properly, because he is just wrong and he does not understand it—

Tom Brake: I have read it.

Mr Davis: If he has read it, I fear he has some other problem.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. I do not know whether he heard me, but I was cheering the contribution by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), because I agree that we should have a transition period that includes our remaining a member of the single market and the customs union. [Hon. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] Ah, yet again we hear cheers in support of that notion from right hon. and hon. Members on the Opposition Benches, but does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree that that is not the policy of the Labour party? In a radio interview yesterday, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) explained that Labour's policy would be to negotiate a customs union with the EU by way of a transitional period. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that is exactly the Government's policy?

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend makes a good point, and she is right that the Labour party is incredibly confused about what its policy is. The approach we are taking is simple: we want a customs agreement that goes with a free trade agreement. Those two things together are designed to deliver frictionless free trade. We want not only to protect jobs and the economy, about which she is quite right to be concerned, but to be able to trade with the rest of the world, which is where the maximum growth is.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I hope there is a deal, and that it is good both for Europe and for us. However, to implement such a deal, with clause 9 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill the Government are seeking to allow Ministers to introduce regulations that "may make any provision that could be made by an Act of Parliament"—any provision—“(including modifying this Act).”

In the whole history of this Parliament, no Government have ever come to Parliament to ask for that. That is not a Henry VIII clause; it is an Alice in Wonderland clause! Surely the Secretary of State, as the parliamentarian who has stood up so many times at the Dispatch Box to call for Parliament to have powers, should amend that provision before it comes to Committee stage.

Mr Davis: I will deal with that in more detail on Thursday, but I am not the one in fantasy land. This is a Bill that will work and will deliver the best deal for Britain.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend raised the thought with Monsieur Barnier that if a member state that is a net beneficiary were leaving, would he expect to pay it a large dowry? When he realises that the answer to that

question is obvious, does it follow that the European Commission's demand for money with menaces is ridiculous?

Mr Davis: I did raise that point in a rather jocular way about three or four months ago and all I got was laughter. The important point is this: the European Union has based its argument on legal necessity—we have to pay because that is what the law says. Our approach to that was not to make some sort of counter bid as it wanted us to do, but to go back and say, “Okay, let’s test that law.” Last week, it was given a two-and-a-half hour briefing on why we think the legal basis is flawed. To some extent, that is why the end of that negotiating round was tetchier than the one before.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): On the financial settlement, can the Secretary of State confirm that the Government will bring forward a separate and distinct vote in Parliament to authorise any billions of pounds of divorce bill from the European Union? I ask him because next Monday he is expecting the House—hon. Members will see this on the Order Paper—to vote for a money resolution, which authorises, in advance, any expenditure, and, worse, for a Ways and Means resolution, which authorises any tax. I do not think that he would accept that Parliament should be giving such a blank cheque in advance without knowing what the settlement is.

Mr Davis: I think the hon. Gentleman has got that wrong. The Bill does not cover separation payments. I ask him to bear in mind one other thing that we have said, which is that there will be a vote of this House on the final settlement. My expectation is that the money argument will go on for the full duration of the negotiation. The famous European line that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed will apply here as it will everywhere else, but there will be a vote in which the House can reflect its view on the whole deal, including on money.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State not only for this update, but for all his work over the summer. I spent a bit of the summer in Ireland and Northern Ireland with businesses trading across the border, looking at the papers and suggestions on customs and on Ireland and Northern Ireland. May I congratulate him on trying to find creative solutions to make that border crossing, and indeed crossing the channel, easier? There is interest from both sides of the border on working on those. Given the complexity, can he update us on whether we can move to continuous rather than monthly negotiations to progress discussions?

Mr Davis: First, on customs borders and frictionless trade, there was a lot of attention on my visit to Washington last week, but I went straight from there to Detroit to look at the American-Canadian border. That has always been a very open border. I have traded across it myself, so I know it well. The average clearance time for a vehicle going through that border—there is a choke point—is 53 seconds. When we clear containers from outside the European Union area, we can clear 98% of them in four to five seconds. Technology can accelerate these things enormously well, and that is what we are aiming to do.

With respect to the negotiating round, we stand ready to do anything to accelerate the process. This process was asked for by the Commission. We must bear in mind that it has a very stiff, rigid, structured mandate process: it draws up its lines, negotiates, goes back to report to the other 27, and starts the cycle again. I do not know whether it is possible to get continuous negotiation that way. If it is, we would be happy to go along with it.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): On the financial settlement, does the Secretary of State believe that the European Union is blackmailing the UK?

Mr Davis: With the best will in the world, I choose my own words. In a negotiation there are pressure points, but that is to be expected. Anyone who imagines that 28 nations effectively negotiating together will not come to a point of pressure is living in another world—a fantasy world, someone said.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I ask my right hon. Friend to confirm that it was Michel Barnier who described the idea of a transition period without a clear agreement at the end as a bridge to nowhere, so will he dismiss some of the advice that he has received on transition periods? May I also invite him to dismiss the idea that September will be the great progress point against which the Government should be tested? Should we not wait until after the German elections when the German Chancellor will be much more fully involved in the discussions before we become really impatient for progress?

Mr Davis: I would not be harsh on Michel Barnier or others. The view of what a transition period is has gone through an enormous metamorphosis in the past six months. When we began talking about this—us and the European 27—the Europeans had in mind using the entire two years to negotiate a withdrawal agreement, then a sort of infinite transition period in which we negotiated our departure. That is clearly something that was massively against our interest in negotiating terms.

What was my hon. Friend's second question? *[Interruption.]* Germany—yes. There are other issues that play against the timetable; there is no doubt about that. The German election takes place in three weeks or so, and the formation of the German Government will take at least another couple of months—probably three months. That will have an impact, because Germany—it is no secret—is the most powerful and important nation in Europe, as well as the paymaster, and it will have a big say in the outcome. So yes, there are other things to consider. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we should not pin ourselves to September, October or whatever, because in doing so we would be doing the job of the people negotiating against us, and we are precisely not going to do that.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): A record number of EU citizens resident in the United Kingdom applied for British citizenship this summer. We have 3 million EU citizens living here. Given that there is still no certainty about their status, is the right hon. Gentleman's advice to them immediately to apply for leave to remain in this country? If so, what additional resources does he propose to give to the Home Office?

Mr Davis: My advice is almost the opposite. The simple truth is that if 3 million people applied for leave to remain the Home Office might have the odd glitch along the way. That is part of the point of saying that there will be a two-year grace period after departure in 2019 in which people can make that application. Between now and then a great deal of resource will be put in to ensure that that process is streamlined. The right hon. Gentleman will remember because of his previous eminent role that the original application document was something like 85 pages long. We got it down to 16 and now six. It will be streamlined to a very, very simple process by the time that we get to that two-year grace period.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Article 50 provides in terms that the negotiations in which my right hon. Friend is engaged should take into account the framework for the future relationship between the departing member state and the European Union, but, as we have heard, the EU refuses to address that question. When he next sits down with Michel Barnier, would my right hon. Friend draw to his attention the fact that he is in dereliction of his duties under the treaty and that his stubborn refusal to discuss that future relationship is as contrary to the interests of the European Union as it is to those of the United Kingdom?

Mr Davis: My right hon. and dear Friend, who used to be in my Department not very long ago, knows full well that I have made those points more than once to Michel and other members of the Union negotiating team. This is not within the normal perspective as laid out by article 50, but we have gone along with it simply to get citizens' rights under way. That is what we have done, but now we are getting to the point at which we will think very hard about what the next stage is.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's paper on Northern Ireland, particularly the assurances to Unionists that the border will not be drawn along the Irish sea, and equally to nationalists that there will be no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. I especially welcome the fact that those goals are achievable because of the practical measures suggested in the paper. Is he therefore disappointed by the Irish Government's negative response to his paper, especially since they have so much to lose from an EU punishment beating of the UK? Has he had any assurances from the Irish Government that they will not act on the spiteful advice of Gerry Adams that they should block any agreement between the EU and the UK?

Mr Davis: The hon. Gentleman knows that I fight very shy of getting entangled in Irish politics, but I am confident that we can get a non-visible border operational between Northern Ireland and Ireland using the most up-to-date technology. That was one reason why I went to Detroit. It was not so we could replicate what is in Detroit and Buffalo, but so we could use some of the same techniques, such as authorised economic operators, pre-notification and electronic tagging of containers. All those things will make it possible for the border to be as light-touch as it is today.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a failure to pass the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, transferring European law

into British law, would plunge this country into chaos when we leave the European Union? Does he find it extraordinary that any party claiming to respect the decision of the British people should contemplate voting against it?

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend is exactly right. It is one of the reasons that there is tension within the Labour party now—[*Interruption.*] There is very visible tension on the television screen, let alone anywhere else. My right hon. Friend is dead right that the point of the repeal Bill—now the withdrawal Bill—is to ensure that the laws we have the day before we leave the European Union are the same laws as the ones we have the day after we leave, except where there has been another piece of primary legislation to replace it, whether on immigration or whatever else. That is simply a practical matter. It should not actually be a matter of politics; it is a simple matter of national interest.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): As the Secretary of State just said, the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill is a crucial piece of legislation for us to leave the EU. Would he therefore agree that, although people might have difficulties with parts of it that can be discussed in Committee, anyone who votes against the principle on Second Reading is betraying the will of the British people?

Mr Davis: The hon. Lady is exactly right. Such people will have to face their own constituents because those constituents voted to leave. This is a practical Bill designed to protect the interests of British business and British citizens. That is what it is there for—nothing else.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): In the Secretary of State's closing remarks at the most recent round of negotiation, he said that the UK has shown "a willingness to discuss creative solutions"

on the governance of citizens' rights. Will he outline in more detail the governance proposals?

Mr Davis: This is the area where the European Union's start position was to have European Court of Justice direct effect in the United Kingdom. We have said that we are a country that obeys the rule of law and its international treaties, that the treaty would be passed through into the law—we would repeat it there—and that we may set up some ombudsman arrangement with a reference to it. Those are the sort of ideas that we have in play.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State cautioned us to think about our constituents in response to his statement, so I am thinking about the nearly 30 million British people—I believe that is the figure—who went to Europe this summer, mainly on holiday. Will he confirm for them today that they will be able to book their European holiday when they come to do so next year, or is he thinking about blue skies, but delivering empty ones at this point?

Mr Davis: One duty we do owe our constituents is not to start scare stories.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): During the last three or four years, there have been very high levels of migration into the EU, particularly from north Africa and the middle east. If there is to be an implementation period, existing EU citizens will no doubt have freedom of movement into our country during that period. For that reason, will my right hon. Friend ensure, first, that the implementation period is over well before the date of the scheduled next election and, secondly, that if existing EU citizens do have a right of entry during the implementation period, that right refers to people who are already citizens of the EU at the end of March 2019?

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is introducing a whole load of hypotheticals. As I said earlier, the transition or implementation period might be an homogenous extension of what we have now, or it might be a piece-by-piece extension. We do not know at the moment; we have not yet even got into that negotiation. But the simple fact is that there are a number of things limiting how long that period can go on for. One of them is, frankly, that the Government have to deliver on departure from the European Union promptly—that is really what the British people expect. But there are also other issues, such as negotiability; if this period ran for too long, some of the Parliaments in Europe might think, “Actually, that’s a new treaty, and therefore we need to have a mixed-agreement procedure.” So there is a variety of things that will limit the extent it will go on for, and I am pretty clear it will be over before the next election.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Now that the Brexit negotiations are going so well that the Secretary of State has taken to calling his counterpart silly, will he publish the impact assessments his Department has overseen in relation to 50 sectors of the economy, or is he afraid that if he were to publish them, that might just make him look a bit silly, particularly if the leak is true from the Department of Health, which foresees a potential shortfall of 40,000 nurses by 2026?

Mr Davis: Let us start with a correction. I am sure the hon. Lady is not intending to mislead the House, but on television yesterday I corrected Mr Andrew Marr twice when he tried to say I had called Michel Barnier silly. I hope she will understand that that is not true. It does not help the negotiation to throw those bits of fiction into play.

The second thing I would say is that we are being as open as it is possible to be in terms of the information on this negotiation, subject to one thing, which is that we do not undermine the negotiation or give ammunition to the other side that is useful to them in the negotiation. That is the principle we will continue with.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the progress of the negotiations is entirely unsurprising, given the framework within which Michel Barnier is having to operate, as laid down by the European Council? It is only when we get to October, and it takes a decision to consider what the Opposition spokesman called phase 1 and phase 2 together, that we can begin to make real and serious progress.

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is right that the mandate structure is rigid; it does make it difficult for Mr Barnier and his team to be as flexible as they might want to be.

It will be the point at which the Council starts to take a steering role in this that indicates a change in speed. That may well be October, but it may well be dictated by other events—as my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) said earlier, the German election will have an impact, and other political issues in Europe will have an impact. And the process will go at varying speeds. As I have said from the beginning, this is going to be a turbulent process: there will be times when there are ripples, there will be times when it is smooth and there will be times when it is very stormy. We must be ready for that, because this is going to be a negotiation about big issues between major states, and these things are never serene.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Secretary of State will have noted that the United Kingdom registered the lowest rate of economic growth in the entire European Union in the first quarter of this year. Does he think that the chaotic and shambolic way these negotiations are going may have contributed to that level of growth?

Mr Davis: I am lost for words as to where to start on the logical impossibilities. First, I do not recognise the hon. Gentleman’s economic numbers. We have a country that has had sharp increases in exports and sharp increases in manufacturing. Vast numbers of good things are happening on the economic front, including the highest employment ever and the lowest unemployment for 42 years, so I simply do not recognise his rather interesting barb.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Have not the exchanges this afternoon shown once again that the Opposition’s position is that any agreement at all, no matter how bad for Britain and no matter how extortionate, is better than a clean break in 2019 if a good deal for Britain is not then on offer? Does it remain Government policy that a clean break in 2019 is better than a bad deal, as it may lead to more fruitful negotiations further down the line after we have actually left the European Union?

Mr Davis: The answer is yes, because the Prime Minister reiterated that just the other day.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State confirm that if we leave the European Union without a deal the car plant up the road from my constituency in Ellesmere Port, which currently provides 2,000 full-time jobs and a much wider supply chain, will struggle, because if we leave the customs union and the single market, that adds £125 million a year, and its supply chains are very mixed up all over Europe? Having no deal puts those jobs at risk, and it will be a disaster for my constituents in the automotive industry.

Mr Davis: I referred earlier to my visit to Detroit. One of the things I looked at in Detroit was the Ford factory. It is the original Ford factory—very historic and very big—at Dearborn. It makes the most sold car—the most popular car—in the world. The engine for that car is made in Canada, 10 miles across the border. If that border were such a problem, that factory would not be in Canada; it would be in America. That is a single demonstration—there are thousands of such demonstrations—of how borders can be made frictionless, and that is what we would do.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I was grateful to the Secretary of State for referring specifically to the progress made on civil and commercial law co-operation. Does he agree, however, that it is imperative that there is early clarity on one specific area—whatever the final outcome of negotiations, there should be early clarity on reciprocal recognition and enforcement of judgments and court orders? Unless that happens, firms will not be willing to enter into contracts for any period that runs over either the date of leaving or any of the likely transition periods that have been posited so far. It would be in both sides' interests to have that.

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is right—that is very high on the priority list.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I should declare that my husband is a dual Irish-British national, which gives me a particular interest in the relationship we have after Brexit with our largest trading partner in the EU. The Secretary of State talked about “significant, concrete progress” in this vital area. Yet when I was in Ireland this summer, commentators universally were saying what Fintan O'Toole from *The Irish Times* said:

“behind all of these delightful reassurances, there is sweet”—

here I paraphrase—“nothing”. Will the Secretary of State please detail what that “significant, concrete progress” is, or are his descriptions of this magic border just a whim?

Mr Davis: The biggest single issue that came up at the previous negotiating round in July was concern by the European Union that our intention to continue with the common travel area would impinge on the rights of European citizens. We managed to achieve an understanding on its part that that was not the case and that the CTA was therefore well worth preserving. We currently have technical work ongoing on north-south arrangements. We will, of course, have to wait on the outcome elsewhere for things like the Irish energy market and so on, but they are all very much front and centre in our negotiation. The Northern Ireland-Ireland border is very important, but the other very important thing in respect of Ireland is, as the hon. Lady says, its sales and trade with us—a billion a week. But there are also its sales to the continent which tend to come through Britain and require a common transport area too. We are working on all those things.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): People in Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland will be appalled to hear the shadow Front-Bench team opening the prospect of Britain's continuing in the single market and under the jurisdiction of the ECJ in perpetuity, which is, in my eyes, the very worst outcome that we could get. Does the Secretary of State agree that that would represent a comprehensive betrayal of my voters, and of very many Opposition voters?

Mr Davis: Yes. The Labour party gleaned a lot of votes in the last election because of a belief that it was willing to support the will of the people in Brexit. It plainly no longer is.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Businesses that are thinking about whether to invest here in the UK or overseas in the EU will be horrified to hear the Secretary

of State glibly agreeing with the Prime Minister by saying that leaving on WTO terms would be fine. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to state that if we were to leave on WTO terms, the consequences for the car factory that my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) just referred to would be catastrophic; and doing so would be bad for us and for the EU?

Mr Davis: Let us be clear. The aim of the Government is to get a free trade agreement and associated customs agreement. That is the aim, and that is the expectation. If that does not happen, it is not a catastrophe, but I would much, much prefer a free trade area and a customs agreement. That is what all the efforts of the Government in negotiation are going into.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that given that the majority of the public voted for two parties that held Brexit as part of their manifesto commitment, it would be helpful if the Labour party came to a settled view and made constructive input into the talks that he is having?

Mr Davis: Yes. One can reasonably expect some Labour Members to have different views, but for the deputy leader of the party to have a different view is really rather dramatic. The Labour party should do as my hon. Friend suggests.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): When will the Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Negotiations next meet?

Mr Davis: That is strictly a matter for the First Secretary. It has partly been delayed by the non-formation of a Northern Ireland Executive, and we will have to find other methods. My intention before the election had been to go, in the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive, to a series of bilateral arrangements in the meantime. That is why yesterday I called up the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government to brief them on the detail of the negotiation.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): As a taxpayer, I welcome the Secretary of State's practical and cautious approach to the matter of money. May I therefore urge him to continue to press the EU for detailed and, preferably, independently audited numbers before he comes to any financial settlement?

Mr Davis: We have been pressing the EU, but it has been more of the nature of going through the legal basis for each of the claims. They are all set on various claims about what voting in certain budgets and certain financial proposals binds us to—how much of that is binding. I think, frankly, the outcome will be that we will not agree on the legal basis. As for audited numbers, I used to be the Public Accounts Committee Chairman, and my hon. Friend will remember the number of times we actually got a clear set of accounts from the European Union; I think it was nought.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is entirely possible to love Europe—a subcontinent of wonderful peoples of great culture—but at the same time to oppose totally the European Union on democratic and economic grounds?

Mr Davis: The hon. Gentleman makes, if I may say so, a very civilised point, and he is exactly right.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Following on from that, it seems to me that it is the European elite's desire to protect the institution of the European Union and not to worry about the peoples of Europe, and therefore they will delay and delay, hoping that this country will somehow change its view. Will the Secretary of State give this House an absolute undertaking that on 31 March 2019 we will leave the EU, whether a deal has been reached or not, and that there will be no case whatsoever of considering an extension to the negotiations?

Mr Davis: One point that I think is sometimes confused is the idea that a transitional or implementation period means an extension of the negotiations. We need, essentially, to have arrived at a decision by the end of March 2019, but the simple truth is that the article 50 process stops it there. That is it; that is where it goes to. So even if I did not give the promise, it would happen.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State did not answer the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) regarding the money resolution and the Ways and Means motion that he is expecting the House to vote on next Monday. Will he confirm categorically that the motions will give him and other Ministers the power to cut whatever deal they like on the divorce bill without any further reference to this House in a separate, distinguishable vote?

Mr Davis: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman, first, that that is not in the Bill—I have taken advice, and I am correct on that—and secondly, that there is, because the Government have agreed it, a decision to allow a vote in both Houses on the whole deal.

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): When the European Union says Britain is not taking the talks seriously, it in effect means that it is not happy that Britain is not accepting everything it is putting on the negotiating table. May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on not conceding, and on standing up for the British people? May I also remind him that Britain's position is not as weak as some people would believe? It is not simply one country versus 27 countries; Britain's population alone is significantly more than those of 15 EU countries combined, and we are also the fifth strongest economy in the world. This has to be a two-way negotiation, and the EU needs to understand that.

Mr Davis: Yes, my hon. Friend is exactly right. Sometimes, those involved have to remember that they are negotiators, not arbiters. The simple truth—[HON. MEMBERS: “Turn around.”] There is clearly an outbreak of deafness on the other side of the House. The simple truth is that the interests of the other countries is as much engaged in having a deal as our interests are, and that is what will drive it in the end.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Liverpool's success owes a great deal to the European Union through its investment in business and support for high-level university research. Will the Government show some urgency in addressing these issues, in contrast

to the complacency exhibited in his answer to the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle)?

Mr Davis: First, any funding that Liverpool gets from the European Union comes, at the end of the day, from the British taxpayer, because we pay in more than we get out. That is the first thing to remember. The second point, on universities, is that we have done a great deal in encouraging universities to continue with their research applications and with bringing in students from abroad, and we have put in place various guarantees to ensure that, so I do not really see what she is driving at.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I just gently point out to the House that colleagues who beetled into the Chamber after the statement started should not now be standing and expecting to be called? To put it mildly, that is bad form, and I would have thought that the person guilty of it would know it and desist.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, and for the opportunity he gave Members of this House to spend many pleasurable hours during the recess reading position papers? The position paper on customs largely fails to mention financial services in any way. Given that the sector is our biggest tax raiser and represents 45% of our exports, will my right hon. Friend confirm to the House the Government's ambitions for customs arrangements in financial services? Have they yet been raised in the negotiations, and does he intend to publish a position paper on those arrangements?

Mr Davis: The answer to the last part of the question is: not immediately. The financial services sector is clearly an important part of the free trade agreement we want to achieve. Customs primarily apply, of course, to physical goods. We are very clear in our minds that financial services are a massively important part of the negotiation. My hon. Friend should be in absolutely no doubt about that.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State informed his EU counterpart that he has told this House and promised the people of Britain that he will deliver the “exact same benefits” outside the EU as we currently enjoy inside it, and what was the reaction?

Mr Davis: Every time this hoary old argument is brought up by Opposition Members I say the same thing to them: I make no apologies for being ambitious on behalf of our country.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Are the negotiations any more convivial than the press conferences that follow them, which serve only as a powerful corrective to any illusion that we ought possibly to have remained part of that institution?

Mr Davis: All my meetings with everybody are always convivial.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The European Investment Bank is the EU's not-for-profit, long-term lending institution, and it is symbolic of our commitment to each other's progress. EIB funding in the UK for infrastructure spending, entrepreneurship and development has been worth €35 billion in the past six years. What specific discussions has the Secretary of State had on the EIB? Is he committed to doing all he can in seeking for the UK to remain a member of the EIB after we leave the EU, or are the Government planning for us to leave the EIB? Can he guarantee that withdrawing from it will not have a negative impact on investment in the UK and on our economy?

Mr Davis: What the hon. Lady fails to say is that the British economy has actually been more successful than most others in obtaining investment from that source. So far, the negotiations have only been about the departure arrangements—what would happen in the event of a rift—but when we get to the point of talking about the ongoing relationship, I think we will be looking to maintain that ongoing relationship.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the British people are right to expect any divorce settlement to be determined only within the context of our ongoing relationship with the EU, and that any expectation that we will agree to a figure before knowing what our future relationship will be is completely unrealistic?

Mr Davis: Politically, my hon. Friend is quite right: that is the case. It is a point of view that is resisted heavily by the Commission, but he is right.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows perfectly well that to keep the lights on in this country, we need the electricity interconnectors with the continent to operate—

Mr Davis *indicated assent.*

Helen Goodman: He is nodding, so he does know. The Secretary of State also knows that the legal base for the energy market is separate from that for the single market, so when he says in his statement that “the key issues in relation to cross-border economic co-operation and energy will need to form an integral part of discussions on the UK's future relationship”, is he softening up his colleagues sitting behind him for the reality that we will have to stay in the European energy market?

Mr Davis: No, but a country does not have to be a member of that to sell and buy from it, just as many other countries do.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Has it not become depressingly clear this afternoon that, with some honourable exceptions, most Opposition MPs have swallowed the EU negotiating line hook, line and sinker? They want us to transition to staying in the single market and the customs union, and if possible to staying in the whole EU, thus preventing us from regaining control of our borders, and they are displaying a catastrophic loss of nerve at the first whiff of grapeshot from the European Commission. May I commend my

right hon. Friend for his cool head and his steady nerve, and may I urge him to hold the line and not to listen to the remoaners who have become reversers who would sell our country short?

Mr Davis: I thank my hon. Friend for the compliment, but all I will say is that I do not think the grapeshot has started yet.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Yesterday, with Members from both sides of the House, I was in Calais visiting some of the refugees who have been sleeping rough around the port since the demolition of the Jungle camp. About 200 of them are minors, some of whom have the right to come to the UK under the Dublin III regulations. If we leave the EU—if the Dublin III regulations will fall away. Will the Secretary of State guarantee to replicate them in immigration rules, and will they then apply just to EU countries or more widely?

Mr Davis: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not make an instantaneous promise on what will be in the immigration Bill, but this is precisely the sort of thing that that Bill should address. A more general point I made to the European Commission negotiators last week is that a legal requirement is not the only reason for doing things. We are a country with a strong tradition of tolerance and generosity, and if anything, I expect that to grow after we leave, not diminish.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): If it is deemed desirable to have a transition or implementation period for a fixed length of time after we leave, what reassurances can my right hon. Friend give me that during that period this country will be able to start formally conducting trade negotiations with other countries outside the EU?

Mr Davis: The basis of the limitation at the moment is the duty of sincere co-operation. That arises from membership of the European Union, and we will not be a member. I would, however, give my hon. Friend one word of caution. In the event that we have an open customs border for the duration—if there is some sort of short-term customs agreement—there will be limitations on what can be done, so the entry into force of such an agreement is unlikely unless it is parallel to the ones between, let us say, Japan and the European Union or South Korea and the European Union. There will be limitations, but he has made the point: we should be able to negotiate during that time.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): The Foreign Secretary has publicly proclaimed that the EU can “whistle” for a divorce payment and the Secretary of State for International Trade has accused the EU of blackmailing the UK. How helpful has the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union found those comments in underlining the UK's commitment to a “flexible and imaginative” approach, which he claims to be the basis of our approach?

Mr Davis: That just goes to show how lucky it is that I am such an amiable person.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): Michel Barnier has said that his

“state of mind...is to reach an agreement”

with the United Kingdom. In the Secretary of State’s experience, is the good will that is required to reach a negotiated settlement present?

Mr Davis: Of course it is. The simple fact is that all the negotiators on the other side want to reach a deal, not just out of generosity and altruism to us, but because it is in their own interest to do so. The second thing to say is that, as other people have pointed out, these are simply the negotiators. At the end of the day, they are not the final decision makers. That falls to the Council and it very much has every reason to do a deal.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): The Secretary of State mentioned that one reason the Joint Ministerial Committee has not met is the political situation in Northern Ireland. I appreciate that he does not want to go into hypotheticals, but if that situation is not resolved in the next few months, when will the JMC next meet?

Mr Davis: That is a question the hon. Gentleman should put to the First Secretary, who is the decision maker on that. If the situation is not resolved very soon, we will have to find another mechanism. He is exactly right.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The vice-president of the German Mechanical Engineering Industry Association recently said that German manufacturers were concerned for the future of their businesses and that the economic price of failing to strike a trade deal with the UK

“will be bad for all of us”.

Given that the implication is that businesses on both sides of the channel would benefit from a quick agreement on both the long-term future arrangements and the transition, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be helpful if the EU started discussing what future EU programmes we might want to participate in and what might be the nature of a free trade agreement, in order to speed up everything for the benefit of all businesses across the continent?

Mr Davis: Yes, my hon. Friend is exactly right. The reason that is not happening, as I have intimated before, is that the EU sees it as a tactical advantage at the moment. The simple truth is that it is not just German mechanical engineers, but the head of the Bavarian state, the head of Flanders, the head of Hauts-de-France, as I described earlier—it is many, many people—who see their own interest at risk. That is what will help us out in the end.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the delayed process of the negotiations means that universities and other educational institutions are left on tenterhooks in respect of long-term research programmes and exchange programmes? They do not know whether we will still be part of Horizon 2020 or the Erasmus Plus programme and bids have to be in for the next round at the end of this month. Will the Secretary of State give a commitment

that the universities sector will be one of our top priorities and that it will get full access to Horizon 2020 and Erasmus Plus?

Mr Davis: I will say two things to the hon. Gentleman. First, the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) spends a great deal of time on this issue with research institutes and universities. Within a few days, we will publish another position paper on science and the future that we see in that area. I think that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased with its contents.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the figures from the International Monetary Fund that show that the EU’s share of global GDP will fall to just 13% after Brexit and of the significant opportunity that that provides for this country in terms of forging international deals not just with, but beyond, Europe?

Mr Davis: We do not even have to look as far as the IMF. The European Commission itself has said that 90% of the growth in world trade will come from outside Europe. That is where the growth markets and the big markets are. We have the fabulous advantages of the English language, English law and all our historic contacts. The simple truth is that we can make a great future outside the European Union.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): May I press the Secretary of State on the Irish question? In particular, what detailed talks are happening between his Department and the Welsh Government on trade from Welsh ports to Irish ports? My constituents are concerned and they care about what leaving the customs union will mean in terms of barriers, customs and jobs. It seems that the Irish Government and the Welsh Government are concerned—they seem to get it—but that the UK Government do not. Will he assure me that talks are taking place? Will he or one of his Ministers meet me to assure me that that problem is being looked at, as is that of the north-south border in Ireland?

Mr Davis: If the hon. Gentleman was listening earlier when I answered—

Albert Owen: I was, but I didn’t get an answer.

Mr Davis: If I can finish the sentence, perhaps he will get an answer. When I answered the question on the north-south border, I said that we were also concerned that Ireland’s access to its major market—ourselves—and to the European market through the Welsh ports would be at risk in a bad outcome, so we are absolutely dealing with that issue.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) has rather stolen my thunder, because I was going to ask a very similar question about business. What feedback is the Secretary of State getting from businesses across Europe that they want to continue trading with us? It seems to me that the bureaucrats do not and want to punish us, but the business community I speak to wants to do business and does not want tariffs. Is that the feedback he is receiving?

Mr Davis: Yes, that is it exactly. Most businesses understand the real virtues of free trade and large markets, and they understand that a frictionless arrangement is best not just for us but for them.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Was the Secretary of State as horrified as I was by the comment from a senior Labour party grandee that there will be open “trench warfare” to block Brexit? I do not know whether that grandee was speaking about the conflict between colleagues on the Labour Front Bench, given the disputes over leaving or not leaving the single market, leaving or not leaving the customs union, leaving or not leaving the European Court of Justice and supporting or not supporting freedom of movement, but will the Secretary of State give a strong assurance to my constituents, who voted overwhelmingly to leave the European Union, that the United Kingdom is leaving with or without the help of Her Majesty’s Opposition?

Mr Davis: I think the answer is that we will be leaving without the help of Her Majesty’s Opposition, and there is nothing new in that.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): The Secretary of State continues to talk about the Canadian border when referring to the Irish border, reducing the situation to a technical issue, which it is not. The situations are not analogous. He said earlier that he would do anything to progress some of the talks. Will the Prime Minister do what her predecessors have done by taking charge of the situation in Ireland and visiting Northern Ireland, perhaps with the Taoiseach, to demonstrate to the EU that this is a highly critical issue that goes beyond the technical issue of the border?

Mr Davis: The Prime Minister has done that. She spoke to the previous Taoiseach a number of times and, indeed, went to see him. It was her first visit abroad immediately after she became Prime Minister. She has had numerous conversations since. There are some telephone conversations that I am aware of. Last week, I think on Thursday, the Chancellor was in Dublin with the same mission. We take this issue very seriously. There is no doubt about that. I do not think that the Irish Government are in any doubt about the fact that

we take it seriously. Indeed, I met the Irish Foreign Secretary within days of his appointment. We are on this problem and we will get it right.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): The Secretary of State said in his statement that he respects the need for safeguards on nuclear materials, but he went on to comment that he looks forward to a “comprehensive new partnership”. Does he envisage Euratom continuing and us being a part of it, or will we have a new Euratom-type agreement?

Mr Davis: One problem with not being able to get on to the ongoing arrangements is that we do not have a definitive answer to that, but we do know that we are capable of creating a parallel arrangement if need be. That is not technically difficult, but we would prefer to have a closer association than that, and that is what we will play for.

Mr Speaker: I call Matt Western.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have just experienced what it is like to be the last Member called and to realise that nearly all the questions have already been asked. I will try to make this one slightly fresh.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that exchange rates are seen across the world as the measure of confidence in a country and reinforce the decisions of businesses and others to invest there? Since the negotiations started, our currency has fallen against the euro and the dollar. What does that say about how well the negotiations are going?

Mr Davis: I will start by helping the hon. Gentleman with his view of the House of Commons: the motto of this place is, “Everything has been said, but it has not yet been said by everyone”, so he is in a good position.

I thought the hon. Gentleman’s view of currencies had gone out with Harold Wilson—“the pound in your pocket” and all that. The simple truth that is a currency lands at the level that works best for the country, and that is what is happening here. We are seeing a significant increase in manufacturing and in exports and an increase in our competitiveness, so I would not worry about that. We do have to worry about inflationary effects, but so far they have been relatively minimal.

Grenfell Tower and Building Safety

6.11 pm

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the latest progress following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower 12 weeks ago. Over the summer the Prime Minister, the Housing Minister, the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service and myself have been meeting the people of north Kensington to make sure that their concerns are being listened to and, more importantly, acted upon. As a result, the Grenfell recovery taskforce has been appointed and started work. The process of removing control of properties from the tenant management organisation has begun; the remit of the public inquiry has been set; a temporary school has been built; and work is under way on the scaffolding that will surround the tower.

I would like to pay particular tribute to the incredible team recovering and identifying the remains of those who died. They are doing an exceptionally difficult job in the most trying of circumstances. So far, they have identified 57 victims, hopefully bringing some measure of comfort to their loved ones. Obviously we would all like to see the process completed as quickly as possible, but I am sure all hon. Members appreciate the need for both accuracy and dignity as well as speed.

My statement will focus on two areas in which the House has previously shown particular interest: the rehousing of residents and our building safety programme. However, I will be happy to answer as many questions as I can on any area that hon. Members wish to cover, and my door is always open to anyone who wants to discuss issues in greater detail.

First, on rehousing, 151 homes were lost to the fire. A number of the households have said that they would like to be rehoused separately, leading to 196 households from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk needing a new home. Everyone who was ready to engage with the process was offered a temporary home within three weeks of the disaster. Sixty-one households have accepted an offer, and 29 have moved in. Some 153 households, including all but two of those that suffered a bereavement, have had face-to-face meetings with the team responsible for offering a choice of permanent homes, and 164 households have used the online allocation system to look at what permanent accommodation is available, with 127 having expressed an interest in one or more properties. Viewings are continuing this week. So far, 10 households have accepted offers and two have moved in. Twenty-one households that accepted offers of temporary accommodation with housing associations have asked for their tenancies to be made permanent. That is entirely fair, and the council is working to make it happen.

The number of people who have moved into temporary or permanent homes continues to rise, but I know that the overall total is still low. One reason for the low take-up of temporary home offers is that some residents simply do not want to move twice and have said that their preference is to stay where they are until a permanent home becomes available. Meanwhile, residents who have accepted an offer of a permanent home have been given the opportunity to make choices about furniture and so on before they move in. That obviously takes a little time too.

We are talking here about people's homes and lives, and what matters to us is not ticking boxes but working at a pace that suits the needs and circumstances of individual residents. We do not want to rush anyone. That is why, at the request of residents, the council extended the expressions of interest period for permanent homes. I do not want to see anyone living in emergency accommodation for any longer than is necessary, but nor do I want to see families being forced to move or make snap decisions simply so that I have better numbers to report at the Dispatch Box.

I turn to testing and building safety. Of course, the issues raised by the Grenfell disaster extend well beyond Kensington. Across England there are 173 social housing buildings that are over 18 metres tall and clad with some form of aluminium composite material. In July, the Building Research Establishment began a series of large-scale fire safety tests on ACM cladding systems—both the visible cladding and the internal insulation. The aim was to establish whether each system, when properly fitted, complied with the relevant building regulations guidance, BR 135. Three of the seven cladding systems that were tested were found to meet the criteria set out in BR 135. The other four fell short of what is required. The cladding systems that passed the test are in use on eight social housing towers. Systems that failed are in use on 165.

The owners of affected buildings have been given detailed advice drawn up by our independent expert advisory panel, covering steps to ensure the safety of residents, including, where necessary, the removal of cladding. We have also held weekly update calls with local authorities, housing associations and other building owner groups. We have today published further advice that brings together all the results and the views of the expert panel on the implications for building owners, and we will shortly meet local authorities and housing associations to discuss further steps. That will include the process by which we will ensure that remedial work is carried out.

We have made the BRE test facilities available to all private residential building owners. Although 89 buildings in England have had their cladding tested through those facilities, I continue to urge all private sector owners of similar blocks to submit samples for testing. I have also asked housing authorities to ensure that the same steps are taken for all private sector residential tower blocks in their areas, and to collect the data so that we understand the scale of the issue and can track remedial action.

Inspections carried out since the fire have also highlighted other safety issues related to building design. For example, structural engineers studying Southwark's Ledbury estate said that strengthening work may be needed on blocks constructed using the concrete panel system that failed with devastating effect at Ronan Point in 1968. They also raised concerns about cracks that appeared cosmetic but could compromise fire safety and compartmentalisation. We have been in contact with Southwark Council and the engineers to discuss those issues and have engaged the Standing Committee on Structural Safety to advise on their implications. Meanwhile, all local authorities that own similar buildings have been advised to review their designs and check whether any strengthening work was carried out properly.

[Sajid Javid]

Separately, the British Board of Agrément has told us that, based on its investigations following incidents in Glasgow, some cladding systems may have been designed and installed in such a way that they could fail in strong winds. We are not aware of any injuries caused by this kind of failure. However, we are taking advice from the independent expert panel and we have written to building control bodies to draw their attention to the issues that have been raised. The wider issues of competence and certification will also feed into Dame Judith Hackitt's review of building safety, the terms of reference of which were announced last week. Finally, I have established an industry response group, which will help the sectors required to improve building safety and to co-ordinate their efforts.

For all the work being done, nothing can match the strength and determination shown by the people of north Kensington. We saw it in their initial response, we have seen it in the dignity and the courage that has been shown by survivors, and we saw it in the deeply moving scenes at this year's Notting Hill carnival. For me, the biggest sign that the people of Kensington will not be beaten was the amazing results achieved by local children in their GCSEs and A-levels. I am thinking particularly of a remarkable young woman named Ines Alves, just 16 years old. Her family lost their home in the fire, but she still received a string of top grades, including an A in chemistry, despite Ines' sitting the exam just hours after the burning tower. Ines is due to start her A-levels this month and I wish her all the very best. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Her achievement should be an inspiration to us all. If a teenage schoolgirl who has suffered unimaginable trauma can do something so incredible, we in this House have no excuse for failing to do everything possible to support the victims of Grenfell and to ensure that such a tragedy never happens again. I hope all hon. Members will join me in doing just that.

6.21 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his letters over the summer and for the advance copy of his statement this afternoon.

Twelve weeks on from the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower, our horror has not lessened. Our determination to support the survivors and see all those culpable called to account is undiminished. Grenfell Tower must mark a change in our country on housing, so that such a tragedy can never happen again. The Secretary of State has three overriding responsibilities, on which we have pressed him ever since the fire: first, to ensure that everyone affected from Grenfell has the help and the rehousing they need; secondly, to reassure everyone living in other tower blocks across the country that their homes are safe, or that work is done to make them safe; and thirdly, to learn the lessons from Grenfell Tower in full.

On help and rehousing, we have been reminded today how vital this is by reports that 20 Grenfell survivors have tried to commit suicide since the fire. Twelve weeks on, how on earth can it be that only 29 households of the 196 from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk have been rehoused? What is the Secretary of State doing to speed this up and when will all the survivors be offered permanent rehousing? A hotel room is no home and temporary housing is no place to rebuild shattered lives.

On the Government's fire testing programme, 12 weeks on the Secretary of State still cannot answer the question: how many of the country's 4,000 tower blocks are safe or not fire safe? He tells us today that 173 high-rise blocks with aluminium-based cladding have now been tested. When will the many more with non-aluminium cladding be tested, so residents will know whether their homes are safe? His testing programme is still too slow, too narrow and too confused to do the job that is needed.

Then there is the question of funding. In the Secretary of State's last statement to the House, on 20 July, he said of councils' funding for remedial work:

"If they cannot afford it, they should approach us"—[*Official Report*, 20 July 2017; Vol. 627, c. 1025.]—

but that so far he was not aware of a single local authority that had done so. However, at least six councils had already done exactly that. How could the Secretary of State have been so misinformed about his Department that he so misinformed the House? Let me give him another chance. Twelve weeks on, how many councils and housing associations have asked for funding help? How many requests has he agreed? How much has he set aside for financial support?

On lessons, as the Secretary of State has said, over the summer the terms of reference have been published for the Grenfell Tower public inquiry and the independent review of building regulations. I welcome both as Sir Martin Moore-Bick and Dame Judith Hackitt begin their important work, but there are omissions in both. The regulations review fails to recognise the recommendations accepted by the Government at the time from two coroners in 2013 after the deaths in high-rise fires at Lakanal House and Shirley Towers. Four years late, will the Secretary of State act on those recommendations, start the necessary overhaul of building regulations now and incorporate later any further conclusions from the Hackitt review?

On the remit of the public inquiry, we are dismayed that the Government have closed off wider questions on social housing policy. These are exactly the "fundamental issues" the Prime Minister rightly said were raised by the Grenfell Tower fire, and exactly the failings that Grenfell residents and survivors want examined. A hard look at social housing policy is essential to a full understanding of this terrible tragedy, and to making sure it can and does never happen again.

Sajid Javid: First, may I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his questions and his remarks? He shares, I think with the whole House, a determination to do everything we can to ensure that nothing like this can ever happen again. He asked questions on three broad areas. Let me take them in turn.

On rehousing, I have to say in all seriousness that I am a bit disappointed by the right hon. Gentleman's response. Through the letters I sent him throughout the summer, my statement and the work done for the council through Gold Command, we have tried to make it very clear that when it comes to rehousing we will be led by the needs of the residents and the victims of this tragedy. The right hon. Gentleman knows that this is about the needs of the families and not about having statistics that might sound good but may not actually lead to what those people want. I am not going to go through the statistics I shared in the statement. The most important

thing for the families affected is that we first listen to them. They said they want to separate their homes and create more households—especially as many of the homes in Grenfell Tower were overcrowded—and that they want us to deal with that now. It is also right that there is, at the request of residents, a priority system that, for example, puts bereaved families first, and disabled people and families with children second, and that each family is given the time they have asked for to select properties. The right hon. Gentleman will know that we have already identified and acquired over 100 properties. These properties are new, and are in Kensington and Chelsea. On top of that, the conversion of temporary properties into permanent homes has been requested. All that is being done at the pace demanded by the residents. We will be led by what the residents actually require.

On the safety of other tower blocks, I will not repeat the numbers I have just shared with the House on the number of tower blocks in the social housing sector owned by either local housing authorities or housing associations. The right hon. Gentleman asked about other types of cladding. There is nothing to stop any housing provider, whether in the public or private sector, sending samples to test any type of cladding. Some have done that, but for all the right and obvious reasons the priority had to be ACM-type cladding. It is right that that was prioritised. It was also correct that we carried out the BR135 systems tests, as well as the limited combustibilities test, to make sure we had a joined-up approach.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the public inquiry and the review. Let me start with the review, which is fully independent and is being led by Dame Judith Hackitt. Last week we set out the terms of reference of what will be a very broad review. The intention is that Dame Judith will produce an interim report by the end of this year, followed by a final report in the spring of next year. The work should not be rushed. Dame Judith will set up an advisory panel and carry out the work thoroughly so that we can properly learn the lessons, including lessons from the past and the contents of reports that have been published. We want those matters to be taken into account together, in an independent way.

In the meantime, as the right hon. Gentleman will know, soon after the tragedy we established an independent expert panel to advise on any more urgent immediate action that is required for the purposes of building safety. In the light of developments over the summer, I have decided to extend the term of the panel by at least four months. I want to add further professionals with more experience of building structural safety in the light of what has happened in Southwark, and in particular Ledbury Towers, while retaining the fire safety specialists. I have asked specific questions about structural safety—again, in the light of what we discovered in Southwark—to ensure that we are given any immediate advice that can be used.

It would, of course, be wrong for me to talk about the public inquiry in detail, given that it is rightly being led by a judge, completely independently. However, the right hon. Gentleman raised wider issues involving social housing, and he was absolutely right to do so. Such wider issues need to be addressed, as we know from the Grenfell tragedy and subsequent events, and from what

the House has learnt and discussed in the past. We know about what has happened in Camden, for example, and we now know things about Southwark as well. In due course, I will set out for the House how we intend to deal with those issues.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): The horrific and tragic events of Grenfell Tower have brought the issue of faulty white goods into even sharper focus. A recent freedom of information request revealed that more than 600 house fires in the midlands had been started by tumble dryers in the last decade. What conversations are my right hon. Friend and his ministerial team having about that issue with their counterparts in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to raise the question of white goods. We have heard, and have seen from the police report on the Grenfell tragedy, how that tragic fire started. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is very much part of the ministerial group that meets weekly to make key decisions about, in particular, building safety. One of the issues involved is that of white goods, and we are working well with the industry and in co-ordination with BEIS.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Let me again extend my deepest condolences, and those of my party, to the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire and their families. Responding to such a tragic incident is undoubtedly challenging for any Government, but it is also a test of how a Government can react to ensure that we never find ourselves in the same situation again, and I welcome the Secretary of State's response to questions about rehousing, testing and building safety.

In Scotland, we have already moved quickly to establish a ministerial working group on building and fire safety to co-ordinate responses to the ongoing investigations. Building standards are devolved, and the cladding that is suspected of contributing to the spread of the fire at Grenfell is not permitted for use on high-rise tower blocks in Scotland. While we are confident that we have stringent building and fire safety regulations, public safety is of paramount importance, and this afternoon the Scottish Government agreed a programme of work that they will now carry out. They intend to organise a review of the current building standards and the fire safety regulatory framework and a consultation on fire and smoke alarms in Scottish homes, and to introduce a targeted fire safety campaign for residents of high-rise buildings.

The Grenfell Tower fire raised profound concerns about the way in which social housing is managed in England, and lessons must be learned. I welcome the inquiry, but I worry that, without a wider focus, it will fail to get to grips with the causes of the fire and the lack of integrity and confidence that so many of the residents want and deserve. It should have one clear objective: justice for the survivors, victims and families. Will the Secretary of State therefore look again at the terms of reference and include the wider implications of social housing policy, which would mean examining social and political conditions including the provision and state of social housing in England? Will he also note that fire safety tests have concluded that more than 200 buildings are at risk of fire? The Government must

[Angela Crawley]

act to ensure that people living in those buildings are adequately supported. What support does the Secretary of State plan to provide for the people in those at-risk buildings?

Reports that survivors and witnesses are suffering from mental ill health as a result of the tragedy is hugely distressing. Post-traumatic stress disorder will undoubtedly play a part in the aftermath, and I urge the Government to look again at the support mechanisms that are currently in place for those affected. The Secretary of State has said that he is open to suggestions about expert input. How will the Government help the local authority to provide counselling services for survivors and witnesses, and what additional funds have been provided for mental health support services?

We have heard that families are still living in hotels, and there are reports of consequential mental ill health, a lack of emotional support and a lack of confidence in the Government's terms of reference. Surely the Government must deliver actions and answers to give people confidence in the system again.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady has raised a number of issues. Let me start with her points about Scotland and the safety of buildings. As she rightly said, building regulations are a devolved matter, but that does not prevent England and Scotland, and other devolved areas, from working together on common issues. In my statement, I mentioned some of the problems identified by the British Board of Agrément in relation to the structural safety of cladding following incidents in Glasgow. We are working together through the Ministerial Working Group on Building and Fire Safety, which meets regularly. Its meetings obviously include discussion of Scotland and other devolved areas, and will continue to do so.

The hon. Lady asked about social housing and the remit of the public inquiry. As she will know, the inquiry's terms of reference are set independently by the judge. They were accepted in full, without amendment, by the Prime Minister, and rightly so. That said, the hon. Lady—and the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey)—raised the issue of longer-term social housing; we will report to the House on that in due course.

The hon. Lady understandably raised the issue of counselling and mental health support. In the wake of the Grenfell tragedy, that support is being led by the local NHS trust. The work is being co-ordinated through GPs, pop-up clinics and a 24-hour hotline. However, there has also been a desire to get out there and make sure that the authorities are not waiting for people to come to them, and that people know what services are available. Thousands of doors have been knocked on, including hotel doors, and facilities have been set up in hotels. That process will continue so that everyone who needs help knows that it is available, and will receive it.

Lastly, the hon. Lady mentioned at-risk buildings and the need to ensure that any remedial work is done. We are monitoring that in the case of public sector buildings, and the same process will be applied to those in the private sector when problems are identified. The work will, of course, require funds. That allows me to return to a question asked by the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne about the funding of local authorities and others to ensure that they can continue

to do the work that is necessary: I apologise for not addressing it earlier. As has been made clear from this Dispatch Box before, all local authorities and housing associations are expected to carry out immediately, without delay, any essential works that are required. We have said from the start that when there are funding issues they should approach us, and we will look at ways of trying to support them.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me a question earlier about the number of local authorities that have approached us. We have been approached directly or indirectly by 27 local authorities—either by the authority itself, or in some cases by their local Members of Parliament—and so far we are in more detailed discussions with six of those local authorities.

As for housing associations, we have made it clear that they should approach the social housing regulator. The regulator has written to every housing association and said that that should be the starting point of any financial discussions. As of today, the social housing regulator has told us that no housing association has approached it with financial viability concerns over fire safety.

Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, not least because it gives me my first opportunity to put on record that my thoughts and prayers are with the community, those who have lost their loved ones and those who have been injured in the Grenfell disaster. I also want to put on record my admiration for the emergency services. I am a former member of the fire service; we were never trained to do this sort of tower block fire, and some of the things these people saw will be with them for the rest of their lives. I therefore ask the Secretary of State to assure me that all emergency services personnel will have the suitable support they will need, because post-traumatic stress will be with many of them for the rest of their lives.

Sajid Javid: I can assure my hon. Friend—

Mike Penning: Right hon. Friend.

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend, of course: I can assure him that such support is being provided to all emergency workers, and I join him in commending once again the work of the fire service workers in particular. We will continue to make sure they get all the support required, including, of course, counselling. This point allows me to highlight the work being done by voluntary sectors, including in Cornwall recently. The Cornwall Hugs Grenfell response led by Esme Page shows what communities can do, because through that response, as well as helping the victims of Grenfell, they reached out to fire service workers in London.

Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) (Lab): I acknowledge the work of the Government to date over the summer, when I was also working on this, of course. However, I have two issues of outstanding concern. It is clear that the rehousing of Grenfell survivors and evacuees has fallen disgracefully behind schedule, and we know that some of the homes offered to them within three weeks were completely unsuitable. The school year began today and students will shortly be beginning university from inadequate accommodation in hotels, with no space to study. Their grades will suffer, as will those of the young

man who was taking his GCSEs on the morning of the fire, who arrived at school in his underwear and was given clothes to wear. He did not have the fabulous good fortune of the efforts of the young woman the Secretary of State spoke about; he has had no consideration, and has lost his place at school, which I find disgraceful.

As well as hearing the Secretary of State's response on that, I would like him to address the issue of the provision of mental health services. The so far unsubstantiated press story we have heard today about the potential number of attempted suicides is very unsettling for a community still under huge stress. While the NHS foundation trust rebuttal today stated that nearly 4,000 people have been contacted, there are still many survivors and their families who feel forgotten and neglected, and who are not getting help. What will the Secretary of State do to ensure that trust is restored among these very vulnerable people and they get the help they need?

Sajid Javid: First, may I take this opportunity from this Dispatch Box to thank the hon. Lady for the work she has been doing ever since this tragedy happened to bring comfort to her constituents? We will continue to work with her closely. She mentioned an education case and a young man who has been excluded from school; if she can bring forward any details of that to my team, we will certainly take a careful look, as that kind of thing should absolutely not be happening.

The hon. Lady asked specifically about mental health support. I talked about that just a moment ago, but she is right to highlight it, because it is one of the key things we must all work together on, through the councils, the NHS trusts and the Government, to make sure it is being provided to all who need it. I can after this statement send the hon. Lady even more details about what exactly is being done. If she wants to discuss the matter further, we are happy to do that with her, but the work the NHS trust in particular has done is important, especially by reaching out to residents through the process of knocking on doors, going to hotels and also engaging the Samaritans to provide a different avenue of support that might be more welcome by certain residents. But it is also important to continue to look for other ways to provide that support.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): The Building Research Establishment is in my constituency, and I know what an excellent job it does on this and many other issues to do with building safety. The Secretary of State talked in his statement about each system when properly fitted. What further advice is he giving to councils to ensure that contractors are correctly fitting and retrofitting buildings and ensuring inspections are carried out not just on the materials used, but on the implementation or any compromises made over time?

Sajid Javid: I join my hon. Friend in commending the work of BRE. I went to see some of its facilities myself and was impressed by how it has approached these systems tests and how quickly it was able to conduct them. She is right to ask about contractors and implementing some of the early lessons we have learned. The advice we have received from the independent expert panel has been sent out to building groups and industry groups, and shared with all local authorities.

One further thing we have done today is to publish a consolidated note of all the building safety advice that has come out in recent weeks, to make sure it is in one place and is easily accessible.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): Many people in the House who have dealt with bereavement will know that it is about three months later, after the initial shock, when things really kick in, and that is what I heard from the father of my friend who died in Grenfell Tower this week.

We hear reports of suicide attempts, and I know that in the community people are talking about self-medication. The Secretary of State's statement did not include anything about health assessments, bereavement counselling and those services to support those people; will he make all that information available to the House by placing it in the Library in the coming days?

Sajid Javid: I always listen very carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman has to say, particularly on this issue. He has made a number of good points on this in the past, as has just done so again today. A huge amount of support has been put in place in terms of bereavement, such as through the family bereavement centre that has been set up. If he has any other ideas or suggestions that he thinks we could follow, we will happily look at them. In response to his request to put before the House more detail, I will happily do that.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): On building safety and testing, what work has been carried out for those buildings across the country that have been converted under permitted development rights?

Sajid Javid: We have not differentiated between whether or not the buildings were converted under permitted development rights; our focus is on all buildings regardless of how they came to be residential housing. As I said in my statement, it has been more straightforward to find out what residential towers there are and the types of cladding in the public sector, but less straightforward in the private sector. That was why on 11 August I wrote to all chief executives of local authorities in England asking them to immediately start working on compiling information on the private sector residential towers in their area and the type of cladding they have, and to share that information with us, and also to remind them of the enforcement powers they already have to make sure all these buildings, including in the private sector, are safe.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): There remains a real concern about the clarity regarding the testing process, including what is being tested and the relationship between the materials and the whole building in a real-world context, such as whether the impact of fire safety in respect of cladded buildings takes into account the design of windows. It does not give me a great deal of confidence that the Fire Protection Association has now started to consider doing its own tests because of its concerns about the Government's testing. This is a real worry for residents—thousands of residents—in my tower blocks and in others.

May I ask a very specific question about the role of the fire authorities in this? Are the Secretary of State and his Department liaising with fire authorities across the country and receiving regular briefings from them,

[Ms Karen Buck]

and have there been any cases where fire authorities have recommended a change to the “stay put” policy during the process of testing, and the removal of cladding?

Sajid Javid: We have been very open in sharing information on what the testing process is and why it is important, as well as sharing the results that are coming out of the process. For example, as each of the systems tests took place over the summer, we provided an update as soon as the results were made available to us through the Building Research Establishment. We contacted each of the relevant local authorities and housing associations to ensure that we could answer any further questions they might have. As I said earlier, I have also decided to publish today a consolidated note giving details of the testing processes and the subsequent results and advice. I am also asking the expert panel to think about this further, especially in the light of some of the structural—as opposed to fire safety—issues that have emerged in recent weeks. The hon. Lady asked about fire authorities. We are working closely with them, and the head of the National Fire Chiefs Council is a member of the expert panel and of the building safety ministerial group, which I chair. We continue to get advice from those sources, and as and when any of the advice that they share with us changes, that will be published.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): It is impossible for us to imagine the suffering of the bereaved who lost loved ones on the night of the Grenfell Tower fire but who still do not know their fate with any certainty. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that everything is being done to identify the victims as quickly as possible?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this point. This is one of the most challenging aspects of the tragedy, and as I said in my statement, we commend the people who are doing this work and the dignity and speed with which they are doing it.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State admit that he has only scratched the surface of the scandal surrounding building regulations for cladding and insulation? We have allowed tall buildings to be clad with combustible materials that would not be allowed in almost any other European country. He has failed to test all classes of cladding and insulation that are more flammable than those used at Grenfell, and I think that that includes any internal wall insulation. Will he publish a full, comprehensive schedule of cladding and insulation types, detailing their combustibility and where they are being used, so that we can judge independently what still needs to be done to make tower blocks safe?

Sajid Javid: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a lot still to be learned about building safety and building regulations. There are a lot of lessons to learn, and that is exactly why we have the independent review, which is being led by Dame Judith Hackitt. We have also asked the Building Research Establishment to start publishing historical data on other cladding systems, as well as testing them, to ensure that we can learn the lessons about them as well.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I am sure that all Members will have been shocked by the revelation that 1,000 fire doors were found to be missing from towers in Camden. Does not this raise wider questions about the maintenance of premises in Camden and other areas by landlords who should know better?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House of this wider issue of building safety that goes beyond any one local authority. He mentions the issue that has been unearthed in Camden, and I mentioned earlier the issues in Ledbury Towers in Southwark. There are a number of building safety issues across a number of local authorities, and that is why there are so many lessons to be learned.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The Secretary of State has said that 165 tower blocks in the public sector have failed the systems test. What is the figure in the private sector across England and Wales?

Sajid Javid: That figure of 165 does indeed relate to the public sector, so those buildings are owned by either a local authority or a housing association. In the private sector, 89 buildings have been tested so far, of which 85 have failed and four have passed. That is only 89, however; there are obviously thousands of private sector buildings, and that is why we have asked all local authorities to conduct an audit of properties in their area and to work with us on a process to enable us to monitor this situation.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The horror of the Grenfell Tower fire has, sadly, provided us with a tragic snapshot of the state of high-rise social housing in Britain today. In his statement, the Secretary of State said that 151 homes were lost to the fire, but that 196 households had asked to be rehoused. That presumably means that one third of the homes in the tower were overcrowded. My question to him is: how can that level of overcrowding be permitted to exist in one of the richest boroughs in the land? Is there no means of control over the local authority, either internally or externally? What is now being done in the aftermath of the fire to address similar overcrowding in other high-rise blocks?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. He is right to say that 151 homes were lost and that we are now looking for 196 homes. That is not entirely due to overcrowding, however. It is partly due to the fact that a number of families have requested to split their households. In many situations, for example, they have asked for separate accommodation for the young adults in the household. In every case, we have accepted those requests. He is right to raise the issue of overcrowding, however, and we are determined to take a much wider look at social housing.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for his update. He is absolutely right to praise the outstanding results achieved by Ines Alves, but it would be wrong of us to expect such resilience from everyone. I agree with the concerns raised about the emotional wellbeing of the people suffering from post-traumatic stress who have not received proper support. I have a separate question, however. Does the Minister have

plans to address the question of the many empty homes in Kensington and Chelsea and elsewhere? This is unacceptable when there are so many families in need of a permanent home.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady will know that there are already measures in place to deal with empty homes and to provide incentives for them not to be left empty. In terms of finding the necessary homes following the Grenfell tragedy, considerable progress has been made over the summer in acquiring mostly new homes in Kensington Row, Hortensia Road and elsewhere. A considerable amount of work has also been done to convert some of the temporary homes into permanent ones, at the residents' request.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The statement reports that the weaknesses discovered following the Ronan Point collapse have not been fully addressed or remedied. That collapse took place nearly 50 years ago. We also read that 165 existing tower blocks have the same combustibility and dangers that existed at Grenfell. Does not this show a continuing catastrophic failure of building regulations? Do we not need an examination not only of combustibility but of all the other structural problems that are likely to affect those who have the misfortune to live in multi-storey blocks?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise this matter. This is precisely why I have asked for an independent review of building regulations. Also, in the light of the discovery at Ledbury Towers in Southwark, I have written to Dame Judith Hackitt and asked her to ensure that she considers those types of structural considerations. As well as building regulations, there are also wider questions. The issue at Ledbury Towers was discovered because of Grenfell Tower, but it is a structural issue. The work should have been done after the Ronan Point disaster, and there are some really big questions for the local authority to answer. The cracks that were discovered were large enough to put a human hand through or to put books in. Those cracks did not appear overnight. They had been there for some time—months, or even years. How can it be that the local authority was seemingly able to act only after the Grenfell tragedy?

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): The Secretary of State has furnished us with information about the number of residential housing blocks that have failed under the safety regime, but will he tell us how many other public buildings, including hospitals, libraries, shopping centres and even schools, have failed the test and what he is doing about it?

Sajid Javid: I can tell the hon. Lady that I am aware of 16 public buildings that have failed the test so far, and other public buildings may come in for further testing. This talks to a wider problems, however, because we are seeing a huge rate of failure, as I have said, across the board in both the public and private sectors and in residential and commercial buildings.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Twelve weeks ago, when I heard the Prime Minister try to encourage local authorities to get in touch and to put

forward samples for testing, I put it to her that encouragement was not the right route to take and that we should be mandating, but it still seems that we are inviting local authorities or housing associations to submit material. The public inquiry will inform us of its findings, but I am concerned by the significant under-investment in our council properties and social housing stock, which I can speak about from experience in my constituency. I therefore suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that the right course of action would be to undertake a full independent audit of all aspects of safety in the 4,000 blocks, hospitals, student residences and other buildings, because just one item is being considered. Surely that is the least that we owe to the families.

Sajid Javid: The process of testing the buildings that have been similarly clad is not voluntary. It has not been voluntary for the public sector; it has been a requirement of all local authorities and housing associations. Clearly, not one has refused, so there is nothing voluntary about it. It is important that we keep looking at how to continue the process, in particular to capture much more of the private sector, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): As a psychologist, I am particularly concerned by the number of residents—those who witnessed things or lost loved ones—who have tried to harm themselves. Survivor guilt will become a real issue. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on psychology, I wonder whether the Secretary of State has spoken to the British Psychological Society. There is so much expertise around the country, and I am sure that it would be only too willing to help and lend that expertise where it is required.

Sajid Javid: I agree with the hon. Lady's point about the importance of that type of support. Some of the reports that we have heard, including today, are worrying, so we must ensure that we are providing counselling and mental health support to all who need it. As for the experts we have spoken to, the work is being led by my colleagues in the Department of Health and they are part of the overall response group, but I will be sure to pass on her thoughts to the Secretary of State for Health.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I commend the Secretary of State on the great compassion and sensitivity that he has shown in the aftermath of this terrible tragedy. I want to seek clarification on one particular matter from his statement: the permanent accommodation that is on offer to residents. Is the rent for the permanent accommodation so high that it is acting as a deterrent to families in accepting the offers? Bearing in mind the last sentence in his statement, which said that the House should put no obstacle in the way of helping the residents of the tower, the Government should pay those rents.

Sajid Javid: I first thank the hon. Lady for her kind comments. As for rents, we have made it clear that all properties, whether permanent or temporary, will be rent-free for the first year. Following the first year, no former tenant of Grenfell Tower or Grenfell Walk will pay a penny more than they previously paid in rent.

Korean Peninsula

7.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the situation on the Korean peninsula.

At noon on Sunday, local time, North Korea tested the most powerful nuclear device ever detonated in the history of the regime's quest for an illegal arsenal. The underground explosion at a testing site only 60 miles from the Chinese border triggered an earthquake measuring up to 6.3 on the Richter scale—10 times more powerful than the tremor created by the last detonation. The regime claimed to have exploded a hydrogen bomb capable of being delivered on an intercontinental ballistic missile. We should treat that claim with scepticism, but the House must be under no illusion that this latest test marks another perilous advance in North Korea's nuclear ambitions. In a country blighted by decades of communist economic failure, where in the 1990s hundreds of thousands of people died of starvation or were reduced to eating grass and leaves to survive, the regime has squandered its resources on building an illegal armoury of nuclear bombs. The House will want to join me in condemning a nuclear test that poses a grave threat to the security of every country in east Asia and the wider world.

Earlier today, the North Korean ambassador was summoned to the Foreign Office to receive a formal protest. Members will recall the steady drumbeat of provocative and dangerous actions by Kim Jong-un's regime. Last year, North Korea tested two nuclear weapons and launched 24 missiles. So far this year, the regime has fired 18 missiles, including two of intercontinental range. Indeed, three tests have taken place since the House rose in July. On Monday last week, a missile flew over Japan, causing sirens to sound on Hokkaido and forcing thousands of people to take cover. The regime has threatened to launch more missiles towards the US Pacific territory of Guam, which is home to 180,000 people and two military bases. I commend the dignity and restraint shown by South Korea and Japan, the countries which find themselves in the firing line of Pyongyang's reckless ambitions.

North Korea's brazen defiance has brought universal condemnation. When the UN Security Council met in emergency session yesterday, every member, including China and Russia, denounced the latest nuclear test. Britain has been at the heart of mobilising world opinion with the aim of achieving a diplomatic solution. Last week, I spoke to my Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, and the Japanese Foreign Minister, Taro Kono. A few hours after the nuclear test on Sunday, I spoke to the South Korean Foreign Minister, Kang Kyung-wha, and I have of course been in regular contact with Secretary Tillerson of the United States.

During the Prime Minister's highly successful visit to Tokyo last week, my right hon. Friend made clear our solidarity with Japan as it faces this grave threat. Just as North Korea has pursued nuclear weapons with single-minded determination, so the international community must show the same resolve in our pursuit of a diplomatic solution. We should not be diverted by arguments that equate the illegal and aggressive actions of Pyongyang with the legitimate and defensive military exercises of South Korea and the United States. North Korea has

caused this crisis and the onus rests squarely on Kim Jong-un's regime to obey international law and meet their obligations to disarm.

All hopes for progress rest on international co-operation, and there are some encouraging signs. On 5 August, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2371, including the toughest sanctions ever imposed on North Korea, banning exports of coal, seafood, iron ore and lead. If fully enforced, those new measures would cost Pyongyang about \$1 billion—one third of that country's total export earnings—reducing the resources available for nuclear weapons. We are now pressing the Security Council to pass a new resolution, as swiftly as possible, imposing further sanctions and showing the unity and determination of the international community.

China, which accounts for 90% of North Korea's overseas trade, has a unique ability to influence the North Korean regime, and the House can take heart from the fact that Beijing voted in favour of the latest sanctions resolution and condemned Pyongyang's actions in the most unsparing terms. North Korea's nuclear device was not only tested near China's border but was detonated on the day President Xi Jinping opened a summit in Xiamen with the leaders of Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa. I call on China to use all its leverage to ensure a peaceful settlement of this grave crisis.

Kim Jong-un claims to want security and prosperity for North Korea's people. The only way to achieve that goal would be for North Korea to obey the UN and halt its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programmes, disarming in a complete and verifiable manner. Britain stands alongside our allies in striving to achieve that goal, and I commend this statement to the House.

7.11 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Before I respond to the Foreign Secretary, I am sure the whole House will join me in sending our thoughts to the families of all those killed over the summer in the terrorist attacks in Barcelona and across the world, including seven-year-old Julian Cadman. Given the subject we are discussing, it does us all well to remember that some 8 million children like Julian, under the age of 10, live on the Korean peninsula today.

I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement, and I join him in unreservedly condemning North Korea for the flagrant breaches of international law that have brought us to this sorry pass. I have three questions prompted by his statement. First, although he mentioned the new sanctions regime agreed on 5 August, he will know that we are still in the early stages of enforcing the last set of sanctions agreed last November. Indeed, only 80 countries have so far submitted implementation reports on the new sanctions regime, so how does he propose to ensure that these new sanctions are implemented quickly and effectively and given time to work?

Secondly, on the strategy outlined by the Foreign Secretary, he will have seen the article today by his predecessor, William Hague, considering whether the strategic goal will eventually shift from preventing North Korea achieving nuclear capability to accepting that that capability exists and seeking, in some form, to contain it. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with his predecessor? Has the Foreign Office planned for that scenario?

Thirdly, given the threat to Japan and South Korea, the Foreign Secretary will be aware of the suggestion that they should now be allowed to develop their own nuclear weapons as a response to Pyongyang. Does he agree with me that that would be utter madness? Surely it cannot be a serious suggestion that the world's response to North Korea breaching the non-proliferation treaty should be to encourage other countries to do the same. Surely our goal must be the denuclearisation of the entire region.

Beyond the substance of the Foreign Secretary's statement, I welcome its careful and judicious tone. After a summer of utterly reckless rhetoric from Washington and Pyongyang, we urgently need some cool heads and calm words, especially now that we have drifted from that dangerous escalation of rhetoric into the even more dangerous escalation of actions. With every ratcheting up of words and deeds, the risk grows. That escalation will lead to miscalculation and a war will begin, not by design but by default.

Faced with that situation, we are told that all options remain under consideration and that no options have been ruled out, but if any of those options risks 10 million people in Seoul being, in the Foreign Secretary's words, "vaporised", or similar devastation in North Korea and Japan, we have to say that those options should be in the bin. The reality is that the only sane option is, as William Hague wrote today, dialogue and diplomacy. That means a deliberate de-escalation of rhetoric and actions, it means properly enforcing the new sanctions regime, and it means restarting the six-party talks to seek a new and lasting settlement.

Yet we have a US ambassador to the UN who says, "the time for talk is over."

We have a President who says, "talking is not the answer".

Although in his case I would usually be inclined to agree, for the US to turn its back on diplomacy at this stage is simply irresponsible and, as its closest ally, we must be prepared to say so.

Although we welcome the Foreign Secretary's statement, the real test is what comes next. Will Britain be a voice of calm and reason on the world stage? Will we ally ourselves with Angela Merkel? She told the German Parliament today:

"there can only be a peaceful and diplomatic solution".

If the answer is yes, and if that is the route the Government take, they will have our full support; but if they pretend that military options involving decapitation, annihilation, fire and fury belong anywhere but in the bin, and if they swear blind loyalty to Donald Trump no matter what abyss he drags us towards, they will be risking a hell of a lot more than just losing our support. I urge the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues to remain calm and judicious in their approach, to discount all so-called military solutions and to steer a course towards the only options that work: dialogue, diplomacy and peace.

Boris Johnson: I join the right hon. Lady in the sentiments she expresses about the victims of terror across our continent over the summer months. There is a lot in her reply with which I agree, and she is certainly right to commend a measured tone in these things. In her focus on Washington and the pronouncements of Donald Trump, it is important that we do not allow

anything to distract this House from the fundamental responsibility of Pyongyang for causing this crisis. It is a great shame that there should be any suggestion of any kind of equivalence in the confrontation—I am sure she did not mean to imply that—and it is important that we do not allow that to creep into our considerations.

The current situation is so grave because it is the first time in the history of nuclear weaponry that a non-P5 country seems to be on the brink of acquiring the ability to use an ICBM equipped with a nuclear warhead. This is a very grave situation, which explains why we are told, and we must agree, that theoretically no options are off the table, but it is also essential—the right hon. Lady is right about this—that we pursue the peaceful diplomatic resolution that we all want.

In the history of North Korea's attempts to acquire a nuclear weapon over the past 30 years there have been flare-ups and crises, and then they have been managed down again. We hope that in the UN, with the help of our Chinese friends and the rest of the international community, we can once again freeze this North Korean nuclear programme and manage the crisis down again. I share the emphasis on peaceful resolution that the right hon. Lady espouses.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I welcome the Foreign Secretary's statement. I associate myself very much with his hopes, but I should lay out some of my concerns.

I find myself, for the first time, talking in this House about nuclear weapons that may be used, because we are talking not about a state but about a family cult with a kingdom. This is a very different type of relationship between the leaders and the led. It is a country that is prepared to see its people starve and is perfectly happy to see them literally eat grass. We are not dealing with a rational actor. That imposes an enormous amount on Her Majesty's Government, of course, and on partners in the region.

I particularly welcome the Foreign Secretary's conversation with the Chinese. What indications are there that they are prepared actually to apply the sanctions to which they have agreed? At the moment, the indications are poor. As we are one of the few nations with an embassy in Pyongyang, what assistance is our ambassador there giving to other members of the Security Council? This is a time for as much openness as possible among allies, in order to manage a very dangerous situation. Perhaps I may ask a more specific question, given the proximity of our relationship with the United States: will the Foreign Secretary mention the presence, or otherwise, of British troops serving alongside American troops in South Korea and Japan? Will he discuss whether those embeds are in any way operationally involved in the American chain, and whether or not they would be? This is a moment for the Helsinki example of the 1980s. I very much hope he can find a way for the supports to Kennedy and Khrushchev to be seen today.

Boris Johnson: I thank my hon. Friend for his compendious question. He rightly says that we are one of the few countries to have an embassy in Pyongyang—we are the only P3 country with an embassy there. As such, we are determined to keep that embassy going, and I hope the House will share our determination to keep it going, along with support for other P5 countries, and for

[*Boris Johnson*]

other western interests in that city and in North Korea. Let me pick out his most important question; I do not wish to comment on British forces' operational activities. I think he is really driving at the question of whether the Chinese have yet played all the cards they have in their hand. China controls 93% of North Korea's external trade. It is a simple fact that North Korea is wholly dependent on imported oil. In the end, the Chinese do have much further to go on this. There are ways in which they can tighten the economic ligature; they can make more of a difference. The question in their minds is whether they can do that without incurring serious political convulsions within North Korea. We think there is room for further Chinese effort. We are working with our Chinese friends to persuade them to do this. To be fair to the Chinese, I must say that they have shown a much greater willingness than they have hitherto to understand the threat that North Korea poses and to take action. To that extent, the Chinese should be commended.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): It is very apparent that the international community needs to act immediately to ensure that all sides exercise restraint and return to diplomatic dialogue. The most effective means of reducing tensions would be for the North Korean regime to immediately suspend its nuclear development and testing, and we join the majority of the international community in urging it to do just that. We also take note of the numerous calls for even tougher UN sanctions to be imposed on North Korea. However, to be most effective, increased sanctions should be accompanied by reinforced six-party talks and renewed efforts to reach a peaceful diplomatic solution. Moreover, the UK Government must use their much-vaunted "special relationship" with the United States and influence their friend Donald Trump to drastically calm his rhetoric. If that relationship is worth anything—if the UK has any sort of genuine influence in the White House—the UK Government must use it now to walk President Trump back from the unacceptable threats he has made and to bring some modicum of rationality to his dialogue. If the UK Government are unable or unwilling to make a constructive intervention, that would make a mockery of the so-called "special relationship" and of the much-vaunted "global Britain".

Finally, this crisis is a stark reminder of the danger posed by nuclear weapons and must be harnessed to intensify efforts towards multilateral disarmament and achieving global zero. The recent UN treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons was a major achievement. Will the UK Government therefore take this opportunity to demonstrate real leadership on the international stage, and show that to all of us, by choosing to become the first nuclear-armed state to sign the UN treaty and to commit to legally binding nuclear disarmament? It is worth reiterating that the people of Scotland live side by side with nuclear weapons every day. On their behalf, my colleagues and I in the Scottish National party urge the UK Government to sign up to the UN treaty without delay.

Boris Johnson: On the American point, let me just say that it is vital that we keep the focus of our attention on Pyongyang's primacy of responsibility for causing this crisis; anything else is a distraction. As for nuclear

disarmament, let me make a comment I might direct to those on the Opposition Benches: surely to goodness this crisis shows the folly of unilateral nuclear disarmament. That is one of their policies and it would open up this country and others to nuclear blackmail from North Korea.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): It is more than 10 years since the Democratic People's Republic of Korea tested its first nuclear weapon, and I am afraid that we have been paying the price for being caught like rabbits in the headlights; every time the DPRK has advanced its technology, we have somehow wished it was not happening and turned the other way. So we are where we are now, and I fully understand the US reluctance to reassemble the six-party talks, because previous such talks have been so thwarted by the DPRK. In all fairness, I must say that there have been some successes during those talks. If we look at the other options—containment; living with the DPRK as a de facto nuclear-armed state; or military action—we see that we owe it to the whole world to try to reassemble the six-party talks. We can empty-chair the DPRK if it does not turn up, but we must show that we are making one last huge push before other options are pursued.

Boris Johnson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we are paying the price for previous complacency on this question. He is also absolutely right to say that we have had success in the past; we have shown that diplomacy and engagement can make a difference. We intend to pursue that path.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I urge the Foreign Secretary to carry on that quiet diplomacy. This must be one of the most frightening times in world history, as we really could be in a situation where a country such as North Korea would launch a missile. I want quiet diplomacy, but may I get the message across to the Foreign Secretary that that means working assiduously with all our allies? Yes, we must have serious conversations with the United States—that is unavoidable—but we must also work with all our friends and allies in Europe, particularly the Germans, the French and others, and particularly with NATO. We have heard very little about NATO in the recent days and weeks.

Boris Johnson: I hope the hon. Gentleman will be reassured to learn that I had long conversations last night with our Swedish friends—as he knows, they also have an embassy in Pyongyang—in addition to various other European colleagues.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I urge the Foreign Secretary to cheer up a bit and to cast his mind back 53 years to 1964, when red China, led by Mao Tse Tung, who was every bit as much of a murderous maniac as the current leader of North Korea, was about to acquire nuclear weapons? May I ask my right hon. Friend to face up to a couple of hard facts? First, he is clearly right to say that North Korea is determined on this path. Secondly, he is clearly right to say that China could stop it, but probably will not do so. Thirdly, if North Korea is determined to get nuclear weapons, it will get them and, what is more, we will deter it from using them. That is what happened with China, which we are now looking at as our friends, although it used to be led by exactly the same sort of regime.

Boris Johnson: I, of course, hugely admire the sangfroid of my right hon. Friend and his natural optimism. I hope he will forgive me if I, none the less, continue with what I think is the settled view of this House: we should pursue all diplomatic and peaceful means available to us to try to prevent North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I have been talking to my many Korean constituents. May I tell the Foreign Secretary how alarmed they are and how worried they are for their families back in Korea and for their country? In rightly emphasising the case for a diplomatic solution, does he feel that the actions of President Trump are encouraging Beijing to go further, or are there other recommendations and approaches he would make to the White House to encourage China to do what only China can do?

Boris Johnson: As it happens, I think it is important that the United States says, as it does at the moment, that all options are on the table, but it is clearly the overwhelming desire of the US Administration to get a peaceful resolution to this crisis. I hope the right hon. Gentleman will reassure his constituents in south London—I remember them well from when I used to represent them myself—that we are doing everything we can to protect South Korea.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I commend the tone of the Foreign Secretary's statement, and I commend to him a strategy of trying to ensure that Pyongyang pays an ongoing price for this gross breach of the non-proliferation treaty. If there is a war option, it should be pretty clear that it must be North Korea that starts it.

Boris Johnson: I absolutely accept that point; the alternative is deeply undesirable, and not one that I think would commend itself to anybody in this House.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is clear not only that North Korea has developed much of its missile and nuclear capacity domestically, but that the country has received both physical and intellectual external assistance for its missile and nuclear programmes. Is the Foreign Secretary convinced that we have done all we can to intercept such help and to prevent North Korea from receiving further assistance?

Boris Johnson: We need to enforce the existing sanctions, as well as put new pressure on North Korea. There is currently an investigation into exactly how the country has managed to make this leap in technological ability. We are looking at the possible role that may have been played, inadvertently or otherwise, by some current and former nuclear states.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): It is clear that the House hopes overwhelmingly for a diplomatic solution to the crisis, but as the Foreign Secretary said that we stand by our allies, have we received any requests for potential military support from South Korea, Japan or, indeed, the United States? If so, what has been our response?

Boris Johnson: We have received no such requests so far, and our intention is to try to avoid the circumstances in which they could be made.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): It is a great pity that some Opposition Members have chosen this occasion to attack the President of the United States, rather than those who caused the current crisis: the North Koreans.

The effect of sanctions is likely to be limited because we are dealing with a deranged, selfish leader who cares little about the suffering in his own country. Will the Secretary of State tell us what assessment has been made of who is helping the North Koreans to develop their bombs and missiles? What steps will we take against those countries if it is shown that they are helping this tyrant in his aspiration to have the means to strike other countries?

Boris Johnson: The hon. Gentleman asks an extremely good question. As I indicated in my answer a moment ago, we are looking into that very question. We have our suspicions, but as yet we have no hard information.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): The financial burden of implementing UN resolution 2371 will largely fall on China. What proposals are there, from our friends elsewhere and from within our country, to help China to meet those costs? It is easy for us to say, "They won't do it," but surely we can do something to say, "If you take that step, we will do something to help you."

Boris Johnson: I understand my hon. Friend's good and interesting point. At the moment we think that the cost to China is pretty minimal in comparison with the impact on North Korea, but if that is raised by our Chinese friends, we will certainly consider it.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary may be aware that I am due to visit South Korea in the near future, with NATO allies. Who does he see as having the major responsibility for dealing with the crisis—is it America, the United Nations, or alliances from around the world? Who will spearhead the diplomatic effort, and will he give us a clear idea of where we sit in that?

Boris Johnson: I wish the hon. Lady every success in her trip to South Korea. When she goes there, I am sure she will have a clear feeling of the imminence of the threat posed by North Korea, not only with nuclear weapons but with conventional weapons. The answer to her question is simple: the two most important actors outside the Korean peninsula are of course China and the US. But the UK can play an important role in trying to bridge the gap between them and unite the international community around a common position.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The current Chinese ambassador to the Court of St James's, Liu Xiaoming, has often made it clear that in his previous role as ambassador to Pyongyang the North Koreans were incredibly difficult to work with on almost everything. Given the timing of North Korea's latest missile test, which could scarcely have been less convenient for Xi Jinping, does my right hon. Friend really believe that the Chinese have been able to exercise any restraint on Kim Jong-un so far and will be able to do so in future?

Boris Johnson: My hon. Friend speaks with great experience of the region and is entirely right in his analysis of the timing of the test and the effect it was meant to have on Xi Jinping and the Chinese leadership. That does not mean, though, that we should discount the Chinese ability to affect events in North Korea and China's potential to do more.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): In the current situation, China has enormous power in the form of the 500,000 tonnes of crude oil that it exports to North Korea every year. What further steps can the Foreign Secretary take to encourage China to exercise that enormous power?

Boris Johnson: The best thing we can do is to continue our work with the UN Security Council, at which the Chinese have so far been absolutely in step with us. The hon. Gentleman is right to focus on oil, which we think is the next opportunity.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Do we believe that Kim Jong-un is a rational actor? Perhaps more importantly, does China believe he is?

Boris Johnson: I do not think we can simply assume Kim Jong-un is totally irrational. We have to hope that he is willing to take the interests of his people—the suffering people of North Korea—into account and that in the end he is willing to protect their interests. We have to ascribe some kind of rationality and humanity to him in the end.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What lessons can be learned from the difficult negotiations with Iran, a country that was also described as being part of the axis of evil by President Bush some years ago?

Boris Johnson: That is a wonderful illustration of the vital importance of maintaining the joint comprehensive plan of action—the deal to restrict the development of Iran's nuclear weapons that, as everybody knows, has been the subject of some controversy in Washington and that has been deprecated by some members of Congress. The value of coming to such arrangements with potential nuclear powers is evident.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Following on from that point, North Korea and Iran signed an agreement on science and technology co-operation in 2012. The Foreign Secretary said that certain countries are suspected of supporting North Korea's weapons programmes; will he clarify whether Iran is one of those countries? When will the investigations into those suspicions be concluded so that everyone knows who those countries are and what action will be taken against them?

Boris Johnson: Tempted though I am, I do not think I can comment on that otherwise excellent question.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): The regime in Pyongyang is most certainly unpalatable, but it is important to remember that it may not be totally irrational. The Foreign Secretary's alignment of Beijing's policy with our own approach to the matter is commendable; is it worth considering what kind of security guarantees can

be offered to North Korea? Trying to get a diplomatic solution means we have to allow for the possibility that there are some people in North Korea who take a rational view of their own future.

Boris Johnson: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is driving at, but we cannot get into the business of offering security guarantees to the North Korean regime when it is currently threatening to destroy New York and other cities and countries around the world.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this dramatic rise in the threat should send a powerful message to our NATO allies to meet their spending commitments?

Boris Johnson: Absolutely. Spot on.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): The nuclear escalation by North Korea is appalling and terrifying, especially to a generation that is too young to have lived through the fear of the cold war. When China is a voice of calm and even Russia is more measured than the US, it speaks volumes about the state of global diplomacy. I disagree with the Government's cosying up to Donald Trump, but if there is to be any value in those actions, surely the Foreign Secretary should use his influence to make President Donald Trump use his phone for talking instead of sending inflammatory tweets into what is a fragile and precarious situation.

Boris Johnson: I really must disagree powerfully with the hon. Lady's assertion that somehow this crisis has been whipped up by the Americans, the President or the White House when, if we look at the history not just over the past year, but over the past 10 or 30 years, we will see that this has been a movement towards the acquisition of thermonuclear weapons by a rogue state. We have now come to a point where we have to use all the diplomatic and peaceful means at our disposal to freeze that nuclear programme and to ensure a peaceful solution.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that Britain, with its close and established ties with the United States and its strengthened ties with Japan, is in a unique position to bring together regional players to achieve the sort of regional solution that we need in order to avoid the instability that none of us in this House wants to see?

Boris Johnson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That was why the Prime Minister's trip to Japan was so timely and why her interventions there were so warmly welcomed not just by our Japanese friends, but by the South Koreans and many others. As my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary will confirm, the United Kingdom is committed to the security and stability of east Asia as much as it is to Europe.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The most likely start of a nuclear war will come by accident, by technical failure or by human error. The danger of that is greatly increased as world tension multiplies. Is it not true that, while there is no equivalence in this and we should pay credit to China for keeping the lid on paranoid regimes in North Korea for 60 years, the new element has been

an American President who has managed to inflame every frozen conflict that he has addressed? Should it not be right that we take a British diplomatic, experienced view of this, with cooler heads, rather than follow the example of the apprentice President?

Boris Johnson: The new element is the increasing desire of the North Korean regime illegally to test nuclear weapons and threaten its neighbours and those further afield, and the acquisition of what looks like an intercontinental ballistic missile with what could be a hydrogen bomb capability. That is the new element, which requires international co-ordination to defeat.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): North Korea's regime is partly financed by money laundered through Chinese regional banks and companies. In the US, the Treasury Department has taken decisive action to cut off those organisations—even those that are Chinese—from the financial system, and prosecutions have been launched in the past few days. Will the UK Government do exactly the same to those organisations operating out of the City of London?

Boris Johnson: We are certainly in favour of ensuring that all the sanctions that are currently in place are fully applied. If it is necessary to take action in respect of the City of London, we certainly shall do so.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): As the Foreign Secretary is on the record as saying that all options are on the table, may I press him a little bit more tonight to confirm that he has taken off the table any kind of UK support for military action? Will he give Government support to efforts that are already beginning to happen—I am talking about a longer-term process towards a phased and comprehensive approach to a north-east Asian nuclear weapons-free zone, which has cross-party support in Japan and South Korea?

Boris Johnson: I am grateful for the opportunity to point out that that is an entirely hypothetical question. I am very impressed by the mood of moderation in the House today. Everybody really wants a peaceful diplomatic solution, and that is what we are working towards.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Is it not a reality that further sanctions are unlikely to persuade this depraved regime to give up its illegal nuclear programme, even though it is beggaring its people in the process? Has the time not come to press again for six-party talks to include the North Korean regime if necessary?

Boris Johnson: My hon. Friend is very thoughtful on these matters. What we want is to freeze the North Korean nuclear programme, and diplomatic means are the best way forward.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Sanctions imposed by the UN on North Korea, especially those of the past year, are the strongest yet. Can the Secretary of State tell us what steps the Government are taking to ensure that all those sanctions are fully implemented and, crucially, enforced by all UN member states?

Boris Johnson: We have raised that at the UN repeatedly over the past few weeks, as the hon. Lady would expect us to do.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the Foreign Secretary's statement and the focus on seeking a peaceful diplomatic solution. Will he reassure me that we have also made it clear to our allies in the region that if they were the subject of an unprovoked military attack by North Korea, they would not face it alone?

Boris Johnson: As my hon. Friend knows, we are doing everything we can to make sure that that appalling possibility does not take place. That is our aim. As he will also know, much of the region—Japan and South Korea—is protected by an American guarantee. The new element in this equation is that North America could now itself be the victim of an ICBM from North Korea. That is why the situation is now so grave, and why we must make sure that we terminate this programme where it is.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I was glad to see the emphasis on diplomacy in the Secretary of State's statement today and to hear him say in media comments yesterday that there is no easy military solution. Considering that the North Korean regime above all craves security guarantees and normalised economic and diplomatic relations, does he agree that those are the key bargaining chips that might bring the regime back to the negotiating table with other partners to de-escalate this crisis?

Boris Johnson: I do. The hon. Gentleman has caught my sentiments exactly.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I do agree that this crisis has been created by the missile tests and thermonuclear test last week by the North Korean regime, which clearly is not acting like a rational nation state. I thank the Foreign Secretary for his approach and for using the UN Security Council to put pressure on China and to restart the six-nations talks. However, on Sunday, the President of the United States made a public statement on Twitter, as is his wont, saying:

"South Korea is finding, as I have told them, that their talk of appeasement with North Korea will not work, they only understand one thing!"

Is that our approach? Are we saying that the approach of regional nations such as South Korea amounts to appeasement? The "one thing" he mentions is clearly military action. Are we pressing all the other options on the United States?

Boris Johnson: It is not so much that we are pressing all the options on the United States—though of course we are—but that those are the options that the United States itself massively prefers and wants to bring about.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Korea—I speak of it as a nation and not as two divided political states—is at a crossroads in its political, social and economic future. It is a future that may well impact on the very fabric of the People's Republic of China, and China knows that only too well. I was glad to hear the Foreign Secretary mention China in such friendly tones; it was extremely welcome. In playing its part in defending peace, I hope that the Government do so by asking some practicalities of the Government of the United States as well as of the People's Republic of China. Do they recognise, for instance, that the Korean

[Martin Docherty-Hughes]

nation and the world require the United States and China to work in partnership and use their leverage? Is it not the case that we require mutually assured restraint, as espoused by the sociologist Amitai Etzioni, to bring about a full and comprehensive peace in Korea?

Boris Johnson: I am delighted to hear Amitai Etzioni quoted on the subject of Korea. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to focus on the partnership and potential of the relationship between the US and China. They hold the key to the question between them, but, as I say, where there are differences it can be our task to try to help to bridge the gap, then unite the rest of the international community on a common position.

Exiting the EU: Devolved Administrations

Application for emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

7.50 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I seek to propose that the House should debate a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely the UK exiting the EU and the role of devolved Administrations.

With Parliament on the cusp of debating the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, the House should take note that the UK Government have not held a Joint Ministerial Committee with the Governments of the devolved nations since 8 February this year. On 15 June, the Scottish and Welsh Governments wrote jointly to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union requesting a meeting of the JMC. This request has not been granted by the UK Government, which is in direct violation of the rules set out in the JMC concordat, memorandum of understanding and supplementary agreements. Any request for a meeting should be actioned within a month. It is completely unacceptable that the UK Government are ignoring the request from both the Welsh and Scottish Governments for a JMC meeting.

We know that the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill touches on areas of devolved responsibility. We know that the UK Government are going to have to ask for legislative consent motions from the devolved Parliaments. In doing so, they are seemingly not prepared to respect the established procedures that should allow both dialogue and mutual respect between Westminster and the devolved Administrations.

Often in this place, we hear the phrase “taking back control”. It should not mean taking powers from the devolved Administrations, as is happening, and certainly not without appropriate mechanisms for resolution. There has to be co-operation with all the devolved Governments, and the JMC is the forum for that to take place. The House needs to debate why it is not happening before the Bill is debated.

Emasculation of the devolved Administrations by itself undermines our democracy and questions the constitutional rights of our devolved Administrations. The UK Government seem to be provoking the devolved Administrations when we should be seeking co-operation. A minority UK Government have to seek to build consensus—I would venture that that is what the public want—and not seek division with democratically elected devolved Governments.

It is important that the House has the opportunity to debate those matters before the Bill is introduced. This is a Government who function as a minority Government. We have a society where there are divisions over Europe, and the legislative measures we will be discussing have an impact on devolved competency. The House has to hold the UK Government to account for their actions in the devolved areas.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): The hon. Gentleman has asked for leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely the UK exiting the EU and the role of devolved Administrations. I have listened carefully to his application, but I am not persuaded

that this is a matter properly to be discussed under Standing Order No. 24. The Standing Order states that I should not give the reasons for my decision to the House, but perhaps I may give a hint that the Standing Order requires me to have regard to the probability of the matter being brought before the House in time by other means. I will leave it at that.

Point of Order

7.55 pm

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your assistance regarding regulation 23(9) of the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013. The regulation provides for local authorities with concerns about decisions by clinical commissioning groups to refer those decisions to the Secretary of State for Health for consideration.

On 26 January and 11 January this year, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council made a referral of decision by Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire CCGs to close community care beds across community hospitals in our area. On 11 April 2017, a letter from my hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) and for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), the former Member for Stoke-on-Trent South, Baroness Golding and me was sent to the Secretary of State asking for an update on the matter, with a subsequent letter from me sent to him on 28 July. To date no one has received a response. The local authorities that made the referral almost eight and a half months ago have yet to receive any acknowledgement from the Secretary of State that the matter is under consideration. While the matter is not being dealt with by the Secretary of State, the decisions by the CCGs stand and community care beds are closing.

I seek your assistance, Madam Deputy Speaker, on how I can compel the Secretary of State for Health to consider the referral that he has received from those two authorities and how future referrals from local authorities can be dealt with in a timely fashion under the regulations provided by the House that give power to the Secretary of State.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice that he wished to raise this matter. I appreciate that it is an important matter of great concern to him and his constituents, but it is not a point of order. It is not for me to interpret the legal responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Health. However, the hon. Gentleman has succeeded in getting his concerns on the record. No doubt they have been heard by Ministers in the Chamber and will, I am sure, be relayed to the Department. If the hon. Gentleman does not receive a satisfactory response, I encourage him to seek the advice of the Table Office on the various avenues that he might use to pursue the matter.

BILLS PRESENTED

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): As the House can see, a good many Bills will be presented today. [*Interruption.*] Now, now. To save time and to get on with the main business, I will accept private notice of the dates of Second Reading for Bills on the Order Paper where multiple Bills have been tabled by the same Member. Those dates will be minuted accordingly in *Hansard* and in *Votes and Proceedings*.

VOTER REGISTRATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Sir Paul Beresford, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Sir Greg Knight, Mr William Wragg, Eddie Hughes, Esther McVey,

Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to prohibit persons from being registered to vote in Parliamentary elections in more than one constituency; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November 2018, and to be printed (Bill 27).

PUBLIC SECTOR EXIT PAYMENTS (LIMITATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Eddie Hughes, Esther McVey, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies, Justin Tomlinson and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to limit exit payments made by public sector organisations to employees; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 28).

STUDENT LOANS (DEBT INTEREST) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Nigel Evans, Mr William Wragg, Esther McVey, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to limit the rate of interest chargeable on outstanding student loan debt; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November 2018, and to be printed (Bill 29).

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (REMOVAL OF COUNCIL TAX RESTRICTIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Eddie Hughes, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for the removal of restrictions on principal local authorities in England to set levels of council tax; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 1 December, and to be printed (Bill 30).

HEALTHCARE (LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Sir Greg Knight, Eddie Hughes, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision about the accountability of clinical commissioning groups; to make provision about local referendums on NHS sustainability and transformation plans; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 2 February 2018, and to be printed (Bill 31).

HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, Eddie Hughes, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to require persons bringing claims or proceedings under the Human Rights Act 1998 to satisfy a test of reasonableness and equity; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 December 2018, and to be printed (Bill 32).

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTERS (PRIVATISATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for the privatisation of the British Broadcasting Corporation and Channel 4; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 January 2019, and to be printed (Bill 33).

BBC LICENCE FEE (CIVIL PENALTY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Nigel Evans, Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, Eddie Hughes, Esther McVey, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision to decriminalise the non-payment of the BBC licence fee.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 March 2018, and to be printed (Bill 34).

TAX RATES AND DUTIES (REVIEW) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Esther McVey, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to require the Government to publish an annual review of the net yield to HM Treasury of tax rates and duties levied, including estimates of the impact on yield of changes to rates of those taxes and duties; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 1 December, and to be printed (Bill 35).

HIGH SPEED 2 PHASE 1 (REVIEWS OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Esther McVey, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to require the carrying out and publication of reviews of the level of public expenditure in connection with the High Speed 2 rail line (Phase 1); to establish procedures in connection with changes in these levels; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 January 2019, and to be printed (Bill 36).

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (CO-FUNDING AND CO-PAYMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for co-funding and for the extension of co-payment for NHS services in England; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 May 2018, and to be printed (Bill 37).

VALUE ADDED TAX BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to enable the maximum turnover threshold for exemption from the requirement to register for VAT to be raised; to make provision for the exemption of certain goods and services from liability to VAT; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 8 February 2019, and to be printed (Bill 38).

PRINCIPAL LOCAL AUTHORITIES (GROUNDS FOR
ABOLITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr William Wragg, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to prohibit principal local authorities being abolished in the absence of the authority of its elected councillors and a local referendum; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 39).

DEREGULATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Philip Davies, Sir Henry Bellingham and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for the reduction of burdens resulting from legislation for businesses or other organisations or for individuals; to make provision for the repeal or amendment of regulations; to make provision about the exercise of regulatory powers and functions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 8 March 2019, and to be printed (Bill 40).

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION (OFFENCES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Eddie Hughes, Philip Davies, Sir Henry Bellingham and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to create offences in respect of persons that have entered the UK illegally or who have remained in the UK without legal authority; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 July 2018, and to be printed (Bill 41).

BORDER CONTROL BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Eddie Hughes, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision about the requirements for non-UK citizens seeking leave to enter the United Kingdom; to make provision about a process for the removal from the United Kingdom of non-UK citizens, in certain circumstances and on the basis of established criteria; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November 2018, and to be printed (Bill 42).

FOREIGN NATIONALS (CRIMINAL OFFENDER AND
PRISONER REMOVAL) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Mr William Wragg, Eddie Hughes, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for the removal from the United Kingdom of foreign national criminal offenders and of prisoners who are citizens of European Union Member States; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 February 2019, and to be printed (Bill 43).

FREE TRADE (EDUCATION AND REPORTING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to impose duties relating to the provision of public education

on free trade; to require regular reports from government on trade arrangements with other countries; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 March 2019, and to be printed (Bill 44).

IMPORT TARIFF (REDUCTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for the reduction of tariffs on goods imported into the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 May 2018, and to be printed (Bill 45).

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to introduce more freedom, flexibility and opportunity for those seeking employment in the public and private sector; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 July 2018, and to be printed (Bill 46).

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE
(DEFINITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision about the definition of international development assistance; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 March 2018, and to be printed (Bill 47).

SCHOOLS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to enable schools to select pupils on the basis of published criteria; to allow schools to determine maximum class sizes; to remove restrictions on the expansion of the number of pupils schools and on the creation of new schools; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 May 2018, and to be printed (Bill 48).

BAT HABITATS REGULATION (No. 2) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision to enhance the protection available for bat habitats in the non-built environment and to limit the protection for bat habitats in the built environment where the presence of bats has a significant adverse impact upon the users of buildings; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 July 2018, and to be printed (Bill 49).

GREEN BELT (PROTECTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr William Wragg, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to establish a national register of green

belt land in England; to restrict the ability of local authorities to de-designate green belt land; to make provision about future development of de-designated green belt land; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 50).

INTERNATIONAL PAYMENTS (AUDIT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Eddie Hughes, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision to require cost-benefit analysis and independent audit before payments are made by the Government to a foreign country or international organisation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 March 2018, and to be printed (Bill 51).

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (BORROWING AND INVESTMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision about the acquisition of land and property by local authorities in England outside their own local authority boundaries; to limit the power of local authorities to invest in commercial risk-taking enterprises; to limit public borrowing by local authorities for non-core activities; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 1 December, and to be printed (Bill 52).

BENEFITS AND PUBLIC SERVICES (RESTRICTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision to restrict the entitlement of non-UK citizens to publicly-funded benefits and services; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 March 2018, and to be printed (Bill 53).

PUBLIC SERVICES (AVAILABILITY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Esther McVey, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision about the availability of public services during weekday evenings, at weekends and on bank holidays; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 May 2018, and to be printed (Bill 54).

WORKING TIME (REGULATIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for the expiration of the Working Time Regulations 1998; to provide for regulations governing working time; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 8 March 2019, and to be printed (Bill 55).

LOCAL ROADS (INVESTMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Eddie Hughes, Esther McVey, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision about the maintenance and repair of roads by local authorities in England; to make provision for prescribing the use of funds for this purpose; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 2 February 2018, and to be printed (Bill 56).

HOLIDAY PAY BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision about holiday pay for employees; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 December 2018, and to be printed (Bill 57).

LOCAL AUDIT (PUBLIC ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to amend the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to extend public access to certain documents that are commercially confidential and documents relating to NHS bodies in England; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 58).

ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES (REGULATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for the regulation of the sale and use of electronic cigarettes; to exempt electronic cigarettes from UK law derived from the Tobacco Products Directive; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 59).

ELECTORAL COMMISSION (DUTIES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Sir Greg Knight, Eddie Hughes, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to impose duties on the Electoral Commission to investigate allegations of electoral fraud and other breaches of electoral law and to act as the prosecuting authority for such offences; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 60).

MOBILE HOMES AND PARK HOMES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Martin Vickers and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to require the use of published criteria to determine whether mobile homes and park homes are liable for council tax or non-domestic rates; to make provision in relation to the residential status of such homes; to amend the Mobile Home Acts; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 61).

SUBLET PROPERTY (OFFENCES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make the breach of certain rules relating to sub-letting rented accommodation a criminal offence; to make provision for criminal sanctions in respect of unauthorised subletting; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 62).

FRUIT AND VEGETABLES (CLASSIFICATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for fruit and vegetables to be classified by flavour, condition and size for the purposes of sale in the UK; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 63).

STUDENT LOANS (DEBT DISCHARGE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Nigel Evans, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision about the forgiveness or discharge of student loan debt in certain circumstances; to make provision about the treatment of student loan debt in bankruptcy proceedings; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 64).

STAMP DUTY BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for the reduction of stamp duty rates on residential property.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 65).

ARMED FORCES (VOLUNTEER RESERVE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for the recruitment and retention of Volunteer Reserves for the Armed Forces; to make provision for the eligibility for deployment of such reserves; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 66).

FISHING (ACCESS TO TERRITORIAL WATERS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Sir Greg Knight, Martin Vickers, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to restrict the rights of vessels not registered in the United Kingdom to fish in territorial waters; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 67).

SPEED LIMITS (ENGLAND) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Sir Greg Knight, presented a Bill to prohibit permanent derogations from a 30 mile per hour speed limit in built-up areas in England; to make provision for the circumstances in which speed limits below 30 miles per hour may be introduced; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 68).

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS AND RETIREMENTS (AGE LIMITS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to repeal provisions for the compulsory retirement of holders of judicial office on the grounds of age; to remove upper age limits for appointment to judicial office; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 69).

COASTAL PATH (DEFINITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for the definition of a coastal path in England in respect of the coastal access duty under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 70).

DOMESTIC ENERGY (VALUE ADDED TAX) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to reduce Value Added Tax on domestic energy bills; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 71).

MANUFACTURED GOODS (TRADE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Esther McVey, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to remove certain restrictions on the production and sale of goods manufactured in the United Kingdom for use in the United Kingdom, in connection with the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 72).

CRIMINAL FRAUD (PRIVATE PROSECUTIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Esther McVey, Philip Davies and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision about private prosecutions in cases of suspected criminal fraud in certain circumstances; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 73).

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (LIMIT)
BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Esther McVey, Gordon Henderson, Ben Bradley, Philip Davies, Mr Christopher Chope and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to impose a limit on the level of international development assistance at an amount equal to the European Union average of equivalent expenditure; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October 2018, and to be printed (Bill 74).

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS (ABOLITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Gordon Henderson, Philip Davies, Steve Double, Mr Christopher Chope and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for the abolition of the Department for International Development and the Government Equalities Office; to make provision for the abolition of the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, Scotland Office and Northern Ireland Office; to establish a Department for the Nations of the United Kingdom in their place; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 30 November 2018, and to be printed (Bill 75).

PRIME MINISTER (TEMPORARY REPLACEMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Dr Dan Poulter, Philip Davies, Henry Smith, Mr Christopher Chope and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for the carrying out of the functions of the Prime Minister in the event that a Prime Minister, or a person temporarily carrying out the functions of the Prime Minister, is incapacitated; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 January 2019, and to be printed (Bill 76).

JUNE BANK HOLIDAY (CREATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Mr William Wragg, Philip Davies, Sir David Amess, Steve Double and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision for a national public holiday on 23 June or the subsequent weekday when 23 June falls at a weekend; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 June 2018, and to be printed (Bill 77).

LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS (ELECTION)
BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Esther McVey, Philip Davies, Henry Smith, Steve Double, Mr Christopher Chope and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to amend the House of Commons Administration Act 1978 to provide that the Prime Minister may only nominate as Leader of the House of Commons a Member of that House chosen following an election held amongst all Members of the House of Commons; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 1 March 2019, and to be printed (Bill 78).

PRIME MINISTER (ACCOUNTABILITY TO HOUSE OF
COMMONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Philip Davies, Mr Christopher Chope and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to impose duties on the Prime Minister relating to accountability to the House of Commons; to require the Prime Minister to be available to answer questions in that House on at least two occasions during a sitting week except in specified circumstances; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 March 2019, and to be printed (Bill 79).

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION (OVERSIGHT)
BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Esther McVey, Dr Dan Poulter, Philip Davies, Sir David Amess, Steve Double, Mr Christopher Chope, Jim Shannon and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to create an independent body to monitor broadcasting impartiality at the British Broadcasting Corporation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 April 2018, and to be printed (Bill 80).

VOTER REGISTRATION (NO. 2) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Dr Dan Poulter, Mr William Wragg, Esther McVey, Gordon Henderson, Mike Penning, Philip Davies, Henry Smith, Sir David Amess, Steve Double, Mr Christopher Chope and Jim Shannon, presented a Bill to prohibit persons from being registered to vote in Parliamentary elections at more than one address; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 November, and to be printed (Bill 81).

HOSPITAL (PARKING CHARGES AND BUSINESS RATES)
BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Esther McVey, Gordon Henderson, Mike Penning, Philip Davies, Henry Smith, Sir David Amess, Steve Double and Jim Shannon, presented a Bill to prohibit charging for car parking at NHS Hospitals for patients and visitors; to make provision for NHS Hospitals to be exempt from business rates; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 April 2018, and to be printed (Bill 82).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Gordon Henderson, Mr Jonathan Lord, Henry Smith, Steve Double, Mr Christopher Chope and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to provide for 100 per cent retention of locally collected business rates; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 February 2018, and to be printed (Bill 83).

HOUSE OF COMMONS WHIPS (TRANSPARENCY) BILL
Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Mr Christopher Chope, presented a Bill to require the Government to publish details of meetings between the Government Whips

Office in the House of Commons and the corresponding offices of other political parties in the House of Commons; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 March 2019, and to be printed (Bill 84).

EUROPEAN UNION (RETURN OF CONTRIBUTIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Gordon Henderson, Philip Davies and Mr Christopher Chope, presented a Bill to require the Government to obtain, on withdrawal from the European Union, a payment from the European Union not less than 50 per cent of the United Kingdom's net contributions to that institution; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 14 December 2018, and to be printed (Bill 85).

GENERAL ELECTION (LEADERS' DEBATE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Esther McVey and Mr Christopher Chope, presented a Bill to set up a commission to make arrangements for debates between leaders of political parties during a General Election; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 March 2019, and to be printed (Bill 86).

HOMELESS PEOPLE (CURRENT ACCOUNTS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Mr William Wragg, Esther McVey, Dr Dan Poulter, Philip Davies, Steve Double, Mr Christopher Chope, Ben Bradley, Jo Churchill and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to require banks to provide current accounts for homeless people seeking work; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 1 February 2019, and to be printed (Bill 87).

ELECTORAL CANDIDATE (AGE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Esther McVey, Gordon Henderson, Mr Jonathan Lord, Steve Double and Mr Christopher Chope, presented a Bill to allow a person who is age 18 or older on the day of a parliamentary or local election to stand as a candidate; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 14 December 2018, and to be printed (Bill 88).

PARLIAMENTARY ALLOWANCES (RESTRICTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Esther McVey, Gordon Henderson, Philip Davies, Sir David Amess, Steve Double and Mr Christopher Chope, presented a Bill to prohibit members of the House of Commons who do not take the oath from receiving parliamentary allowances; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 1 February 2019, and to be printed (Bill 89).

CHILD SAFETY (CYCLE HELMETS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Gordon Henderson, Sir David Amess, Mr Christopher Chope, Jo Churchill and Jim Shannon, presented a Bill to require children under 16 to wear a safety helmet when riding a bicycle on a public highway; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 1 March 2019, and to be printed (Bill 90).

HUMAN TRAFFICKING (CHILD PROTECTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Esther McVey, Dr Dan Poulter, Mr Jonathan Lord, Philip Davies, Henry Smith, Mr Christopher Chope and Jo Churchill, presented a Bill to make provision for the creation of secure safe houses for children that have been subject to human trafficking; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 January 2019, and to be printed (Bill 91).

DRONE (REGULATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Esther McVey, Gordon Henderson, Mr Jonathan Lord, Philip Davies, Henry Smith, Steve Double, Mr Christopher Chope, Sir David Amess and Jim Shannon, presented a Bill to regulate the purchase and use of drones weighing 5 kilograms or more; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 February 2019, and to be printed (Bill 92).

OVARIAN CANCER (PUBLIC AWARENESS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Philip Davies, Sir David Amess, Mr Christopher Chope, Jim Shannon and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision about public awareness measures in respect of the symptoms of and screening for ovarian cancer; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 30 November 2018, and to be printed (Bill 93).

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE (NATIONAL DATA GUARDIAN) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Jo Churchill, Kit Malthouse, Jeremy Lefroy, Rebecca Pow, George Freeman, Maria Caulfield, Will Quince, Nick Thomas-Symonds, Dr Philippa Whitford, Jim Shannon and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to establish, and make provision about, the National Data Guardian for Health and Social Care; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 94).

PILOT (LICENSING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Mr Christopher Chope and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to create a pilot licensing system in line with International Civil Aviation Organization standards; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 March 2019, and to be printed (Bill 95).

PENSIONS (REVIEW OF WOMEN'S ARRANGEMENTS)
BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Philip Davies, Esther McVey, Gordon Henderson, Steve Double and Mr Christopher Chope, presented a Bill to establish a review of pension arrangements for women affected by changes made by the Pensions Act 1995 and the Pensions Act 2011; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 February 2019, and to be printed (Bill 96).

ISHAM BYPASS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to impose duties relating to the completion of the Isham Bypass by 31 December 2020; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 February 2018, and to be printed (Bill 97).

NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE (URGENT CARE
FACILITIES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Tom Pursglove, presented a Bill to make provision about the restructuring of urgent care facilities in North Northamptonshire; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 February 2018, and to be printed (Bill 98).

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CLINICAL COMMISSIONING
GROUPS (MERGER) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Tom Pursglove, presented a Bill to require the merging of the Nene Valley and Corby Clinical Commissioning Groups; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 February 2018, and to be printed (Bill 99).

GENOCIDE DETERMINATION (No. 2) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Fiona Bruce presented a Bill to provide for the High Court of England and Wales to make a preliminary finding on cases of alleged genocide; and for the subsequent referral of such findings to the International Criminal Court or a special tribunal.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 October, and to be printed (Bill 100).

SCHOOL HOLIDAYS (MEALS AND ACTIVITIES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Frank Field, supported by Mr Graham Brady, Dr Philippa Whitford, Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck, Heidi Allen, Nicky Morgan, Sir Oliver Letwin, Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg, Sir Nicholas Soames, Dr Dan Poulter, Ruth Smeeth and Sir Henry Bellingham, presented a Bill to require local authorities to facilitate the delivery of programmes that provide free meals and activities for children during school holidays; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 19 January 2018, and to be printed (Bill 101).

Telecommunications Infrastructure
(Relief from Non-Domestic Rates) Bill

Considered in Committee

[DAME ROSIE WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

RELIEF FROM LOCAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES: OCCUPIED
HEREDITAMENTS

8.3 pm

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Clauses 2 to 4 stand part.

That the schedule be the schedule to the Bill.

Clauses 5 and 6 stand part.

New clause 1—*Report on operation of the relief*—

“(1) The Secretary of State shall, by 30 September 2018, lay a report before Parliament containing an assessment of the operation of the relief in the 2017-18 financial year.

(2) The report shall include an account of—

- (a) the impact upon the level of local authority income raised through non-domestic rating,
- (b) the level of investment likely to have been stimulated by the proposed relief, and the scope for extending the relief to other forms of investment,
- (c) whether the duration of the relief is appropriate,
- (d) the views of those subject to charge of non-domestic rates on the relief, and
- (e) the efficacy of the existing mechanism for distribution of relief.”

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):

The Government are committed to supporting full-fibre telecommunication infrastructure and the roll-out of 5G. This will deliver a step change in the speed, service quality and reliability of broadband and mobile services. Independent research suggests that increased broadband speed alone could add £17 billion to UK output by 2024, so this is a vital measure for the whole economy. The Bill will provide the powers we need to implement an important part of that strategy.

At the 2016 autumn statement, the Government announced 100% rate relief for new full-fibre infrastructure in England. The clauses in the Bill will allow us to deliver that relief with retrospective effect to 1 April 2017. We have already published draft regulations that illustrate how we will use these powers to implement the relief. The draft regulations have been prepared in consultation with telecoms experts in the Government, Ofcom and telecoms providers. Business rates and telecoms are technical fields so there is considerable scope for complexity where they meet. However, I am glad to say that through our work with the sector, we believe that we have found a clear approach to allow the valuation officer to identify, capture and quantify new fibre.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): I refer the Committee to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Is my hon. Friend aware of some concerns in the telecoms sector that the tax relief could be gamed? People could switch off lit fibre and light dark fibre in order to take advantage of the tax relief.

Some have suggested that a better way of implementing may be simply to limit the quantum of business rates paid by telecoms companies. Will my hon. Friend comment on those concerns, which I have heard from a number of providers?

Mr Jones: I understand the concerns raised by my right hon. Friend, and I have great respect for his considerable knowledge of the matter. I reassure him and the various bodies that hold concerns that the relief is not a measure to support the relighting of fibre that has been turned off. Indeed, it is to support the laying of new fibre in the ground. This technical matter is laid out in the draft regulations and explained in the accompanying consultation document published by my Department last week. Consultation will ensure that the proposal reaches the right audience in the telecoms sector. With business rates experts, we will ensure that the relief will work as planned. The consultation will also allow us to move quickly to implement the relief once the Bill has passed and ensure that support is available for new fibre.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Even if this were a relief that applied to currently dark fibre that is lit, or to fibre that was lit, is unlit and is then lit again, if the premise of the scheme holds true, this is an investment. The idea is that this is meant to spur more economic activity. Therefore, more tax will be gained from corporation tax, pay-as-you-earn and other forms of business rates because people will have premises that become available for use and that are then much more commercial. Rents will rise, values will rise and all the rest of it. The Government do not need to be too chary about where the relief goes, because if the relief is seen as an investment, not just some kind of freebie for the industry, it will benefit everyone, including the Government.

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend is right that this is an investment in the infrastructure of the country. Indeed, it is a relief that is time-limited for five years. After that five-year period, that fibre will attract its own income into the business rates pool, whether on the local list or on the central list.

Mr Vaizey: I hope the Minister will forgive me for interrupting his eloquent speech, but I was spurred into action by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), who is a newly elected member of the Treasury Committee—I congratulate him—and who displays the forensic skill we will see in many hearings in months to come. It behoves me to clarify that it is possible under the current regulations for a telecoms provider simply to lay new fibre in existing ducts, turn it on and take advantage of the tax relief, even though there is already fibre in those ducts. That would be seen as gaming the system—taking advantage of the tax reliefs without building the new infrastructure my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire has campaigned for so vigorously. That is simply the warning light that I put up, and it may be that my hon. Friend will drive future Treasury Committee hearings towards that subject.

Mr Jones: By definition, full fibre is fibre that goes all the way from an exchange to the particular business or residential property that it individually serves. Therefore, by definition, even if an existing set of ducting was

used, the new fibre would be an expansion of the network, because it would serve a different property from the current fibre. I therefore hope that my right hon. Friend is reassured.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): As my hon. Friend will know, there are homes and businesses in the rural parts of North East Hertfordshire that are more than 1,000 metres from the nearest cabinet, so providing fibre straight to the door is the best solution. Will the proposed change mean that more work can be done on that more quickly?

Mr Jones: My right hon. and learned Friend hits the nail on the head. The whole design of this legislation and this tax relief is intended to encourage providers—not just the large ones, but the smaller ones, which these proposals are very good for—to bring that new, direct fibre cable to homes and businesses.

Kit Malthouse: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Jones: I will just make some progress first, if I may.

The Bill contains six clauses. Clauses 1 to 3 provide the powers for the relief, and clauses 4 to 6 cover consequential and financial matters. Business rates are payable on three classes of properties: first, occupied properties shown on the local rating lists held by local authorities; secondly, unoccupied properties shown on local rating lists; and, thirdly, properties on the central list, which is held by my Department.

The main business rates legislation in the Local Government Finance Act 1988 contains separate provisions for charging rates on those three classes. Clauses 1 to 3 provide powers to allow relief in those three classes. Clause 1 allows for relief for occupied hereditaments shown on local ratings lists. Clause 2 allows for relief for unoccupied hereditaments shown on local ratings lists. Clause 3 allows for relief for hereditaments on the central list.

Clauses 1 to 3 have similar structures and serve the same purpose. First, the powers in the clauses will allow the Secretary of State to set conditions as to when the relief will apply. This is not a wide-ranging power covering all properties. The power can be used only for telecommunication hereditaments. Through these powers we will target the relief on operators of telecoms networks who deploy new fibre on their networks. That will incentivise and reward those operators who invest in the fibre network.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): In that context, could the Minister clarify something for me? The Bill says the relief will apply to hereditaments used “wholly or mainly” for the purpose of telecommunications. Is a standardised definition of “mainly” extant in legislation, or could he enlarge on what it would be defined as?

Mr Jones: I think it would be best for me to reassure my hon. Friend that the sole purpose of this legislation is to cover telecommunication hereditaments. As he has heard, the aim is for the Government to provide a targeted, five-year rate relief to incentivise the laying of new fibre cable, which will hopefully serve and support his constituents in Leicestershire.

8.15 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I thank the Minister for giving way—he is being most generous in allowing interventions. In 2015 and last year, Solihull enjoyed a higher growth rate than China, but it is still one of the poorest areas for broadband provision, particularly business provision. The Minister can imagine what more could be achieved if we had better broadband, so the Bill is very welcome, as is the £60 million in targeted tax relief. Does he agree that the relief will not only boost Solihull's economy but key in to the midlands engine, which is absolutely at the heart of UK growth and productivity?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend is a keen advocate and supporter of the businesses of Solihull. My understanding is that, by the end of the current roll-out period, 91% of properties will have been reached by superfast broadband. However, the Bill will incentivise providers to roll out more direct fibre services to all parts of the country. Hopefully, businesses and individuals in Solihull will also benefit from the provisions in the Bill.

Through these powers, we will target the relief on operators of telecoms networks who deploy—I have reiterated this point a number of times for the sake of clarity—new fibre on their networks. The proposals will incentivise and reward operators who invest in the fibre network.

These concepts have not been defined before for business rates. The powers in the clauses will therefore allow us to develop definitions with experts in the telecoms and business rates sectors. By taking this approach, we can ensure that we accurately capture in the relief only those parts of the telecoms network that comprise new fibre, which has been a significant concern of right hon. and hon. Members.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The Minister knows that I am as keen as he is to make sure that all the blackspots in our urban constituencies are broadband-enabled as soon as possible. For some time, my concern has been that if new developments do not get fibre connections, there will be a continuing gap, and that every time Ministers stand up and say they will get 95% or 100% coverage, there will be new places without coverage. I am pleased that the Minister's colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen), wrote to me saying that Openreach will “provide FTTP”—fibre to the premises—

“to all new developments with more than 30 plots for free.”

That is great news, and it means that Ministers do not have to consider the option I was recommending of enabling local councils to make it mandatory for new developments to have fibre connections. However, will the Minister say something about developments with under 30 houses, because part of the regeneration of all cities is getting small plots redeveloped with housing, and that may involve developments of fewer than 30 homes?

Mr Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. He is absolutely right that it is extremely important that new housing developments serve well the people who purchase the properties in relation to superfast broadband. He is right that it is a requirement for developments of under 30 dwellings to have a broadband connection and for developments of over 30 properties to have a superfast

broadband connection. In bringing forward those requirements, which started this January, the Government had to make a very challenging decision in getting the balance right between making sure that people are properly served with the latest technology and that we build the homes required to deal with the housing shortage in our country.

Mr Vaizey: I am very grateful to hear my hon. Friend talk about these issues. In my constituency, the developer Linden Homes built a housing development with houses selling for hundreds of thousands of pounds, and for the mere price of £6,000 to deliver broadband, refused to stump up that money. It is this kind of behaviour by developers that brings them into disrepute. I congratulate the Government on making great progress, because no new home should be built without superfast broadband.

Mr Jones: My right hon. Friend is quite right. Developers who are not necessarily compelled to provide superfast broadband should think to themselves how the installation of superfast broadband could become a selling point for the property. The provision of superfast broadband is becoming more and more important, particularly as more and more people work from home.

Kit Malthouse: I acknowledge that the Government made huge progress in changing the building regulations so that this becomes mandatory for developments of over 30 houses. However, does it not strike the Minister as peculiar, in this century, that building regulations require the provision of electricity, water and drainage to every house, no matter the size of the development, but not, now, this vital piece of infrastructure that is becoming mandatory for modern living?

Mr Jones: Even in developments of under 30, developers are required to provide a broadband connection for the people who are going to be occupying those properties. It is the developments of over 30 that require fibre broadband to be connected. While my hon. Friend does not seem happy with the premise on which that is based, the rationale behind it is based on the viability of new developments. Quite often, the smaller developments are more difficult for developers to find viable. Therefore, rather than prevent those developments from taking place by overburdening developers with regulations, a balance was struck.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): Since speaking on Second Reading about connectivity to new homes, another case arrived in my inbox last week. I cannot go through it in an intervention, but needless to say it involves BT Openreach and the developer, with lots of emails to and from the constituent. I am sure that I will be writing to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Digital about it over the next few weeks.

Mr Jones: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be very happy to talk to my hon. Friend about this issue.

As I have said, through our work with the sector and the Valuation Office Agency, we believe that we have found a clear way to capture the concept of new fibre. We have set this out in our draft regulations and the consultation document that we published last week. However, this is a technical and fast-moving sector, so we will keep the operation of the relief under review to

ensure that it is working as planned and that the regulations keep pace with the continuing technical advances and changes in the industry. Accordingly, it will remain important that we have the powers available to amend the operation of the relief scheme over time. The powers in the clauses will also allow the Secretary of State to determine the level of relief to be awarded. As I have said, the Government intend to allow telecoms operators 100% relief, but only for new fibre. That new fibre will of course form part of existing telecom networks with existing ratings assessments.

Through the operation of this scheme, we intend to ensure that the relief is awarded only in respect of new fibre and not existing fibre. To achieve this, the powers in the clauses will allow us to set, by a formula contained in regulations, the correct level of relief for each property, reflecting the amount of their network that qualifies for the relief. This will be based on a certificate of the amount of rateable value that it appears to the valuation officer is attributable to the new fibre. The consultation document we published last week explains how, when taken together, the formula in the Bill and the formula in the draft regulations will deliver the correct relief for a property.

As I have said, these provisions are mirrored in the first three clauses of the Bill. Sometimes the letters in the formula differ, but that is merely to conform to existing lettering in the sections into which the formula will be introduced. Hon. Members will have noticed that clause 1 includes a table referring to different subsections. In theory, there will be instances where a property could be eligible for the new fibre relief but also for another such as charitable relief, although we believe this to be extremely unlikely. However, for completeness, the table in clause 1 makes it clear which relief should apply. No such conflict can arise for unoccupied properties or properties on the central list, so the table appears only in clause 1. The rules we have adopted here are consistent with the existing hierarchy of reliefs in the business rates system. Charity relief will apply above all others, and then reliefs such as small business rate relief. The relief for new fibre will apply only where no other relief applies.

Clause 4 gives effect to the schedule to the Bill. As I have described, the Bill makes a number of amendments to different sections of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. Most of the amendments in the schedule are to that Act, and are necessary merely to ensure that those provisions continue to make sense and operate as intended. We are also in the schedule making consequential changes to the Business Rate Supplements Act 2009. Ratepayers entitled to mandatory reliefs in the main business rates system are also entitled to the same relief against the business rate supplement currently applied to larger properties in London. The Bill ensures that that continues to apply for the new fibre relief through these consequential amendments.

Clause 4 also includes the normal power to make regulations for other consequential provisions. We intend to use these powers to make consequential changes to the regulations that govern the transitional relief scheme. This will ensure that the relief is also available for those ratepayers who are either receiving transitional relief or whose reductions from the revaluation are being capped to fund the transitional relief.

Clause 5 provides the normal authority from Parliament that is necessary when making provisions that create a charge on public funds.

Clause 6 provides that the Bill applies to England and Wales. Business rates policy is devolved, so it will be for the Welsh Government to consider whether to introduce a similar relief. The Welsh Assembly Government have asked for the powers in this Bill to apply to Wales, although it will of course be a matter for Welsh Ministers to exercise those powers in relation to Wales. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, business rates legislation is made in their own Parliaments, so again it will be a matter for them whether to proceed with this measure. However, under the Barnett formula, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will receive their share of the funding of the relief. As we have discussed, the relief for new fibre will apply from 1 April 2017, so clause 6 also provides that the amendments and powers in the Bill can take effect retrospectively for the financial year commencing 1 April 2017.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): We have just had a run-through of what the Bill contains, and by and large we welcome it. It is one of the remnants of the Local Government Finance Bill, which fell when the general election was called, and which contained things that industry and local government leaders wanted to see introduced. This could well be the first of several proposals, and I would welcome a conversation about that.

8.30 pm

If our country is to have the type of economy that we want, a concerted effort must be made to deliver high-speed broadband to each and every community. The Bill represents an important step towards securing better connectivity and access to high-speed broadband across the country. If we fail to install the infrastructure our country needs, we will fail to realise our full potential, and communities who already feel geographically isolated will feel digitally isolated as well.

Big data providers such as BT and Virgin will be the initial beneficiaries of the relief—through big programmes such as Virgin Media's Project Lightning and BT's Openreach subsidiary—but, in the longer term, it is expected and hoped that small providers will also benefit when they lay new fibre in the ground. We need more detail about how the scheme will go beyond the big players and get down to smaller providers, particularly those that are really making an effort to reach out in rural areas to get to places that are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to broadband connectivity. There is no detail on that, and it would be good to see some.

The ill-fated Local Government Finance Bill would have introduced a number of changes. Some of them caused concern; we were concerned about how the full retention of business rates would eventually be financed, and about how the loss of certain grant funding—the public health grant and the early intervention grant—would eventually settle when a scheme had to be developed for the whole country. But, equally, local government and industry have called for the Government to make sure that the legislation and the funding of public services catch up with changing demand and the changing way in which public services are delivered. We are keen to

see more detail, and perhaps even a schedule of legislation to implement measures contained in the Local Government Finance Bill that might still have a chance of being introduced.

We broadly welcome the Bill, and we sincerely hope that it will lead to a material change in the pace and the coverage of high-speed broadband. The Opposition have tabled a new clause, which is designed to be positive. It is about contributing to the debate and looking to see where we can improve the legislation. It is not intended to frustrate or delay the Bill, or to take away anything from its spirit; the new clause is intended to add to that, and I hope that the Government will see the benefit of it.

We have heard today a concern about how the big players might seek to manipulate the rules by, for example, turning from one type of cable to another. We have heard concerns about how some new housing developments might not see the full benefit. Under the current rules, in a new development of 29 properties it will not be mandatory to provide this cabling, but in a new development of 30 or 31 properties it will be. My question is: would it have been more appropriate to make the £60 million available to smaller developers to fund the connection at that end, rather than using it to provide a business rate discount at the other end?

The new clause is needed because it would allow the Government to assess, within a 12-month period, whether the £60 million is delivering the type of roll-out and coverage that they intended. If it is not, the 12-month review would allow those changes to be made, based on the information gathered over that period. I believe that a good Government should do that as a matter of course, and I am sure that the Government will say that that is exactly what they intend to do. If that is the case, why not receive our new clause in that spirit and incorporate it in the Bill?

It is important that the big players—Virgin Media and BT Openreach—understand that the Government have not just written a cheque for £60 million, which they are happy to write off if the scheme does not work. It is a deal, and the money is being made available because the Government are determined to see broadband rolled out. There is an expectation that it will be rolled out, and if it is not, the Government should have the facility—the mechanism—to change the scheme if it is being abused. By adopting this new clause the Government would send a message to the big providers that the Government are watching to make sure that they deliver what is required, and that there will be a review in 12 months so that if the relief is not working the Government can change the legislation. I would welcome the Minister's views on our new clause.

Mr Marcus Jones: Before I talk about the new clause, I would like to make a few observations about the hon. Gentleman's opening comments. He mentioned the Local Government Finance Bill, which eventually fell when the general election was called. I spent many happy hours with him in that Bill's Committee, where we debated the merits of allowing local areas to keep more of the taxes they raise locally. I reassure him that, as per our manifesto in the last general election, we are still absolutely committed to allowing local areas to keep more of the taxes that they raise locally. I expect that we will work over the coming months with the local government sector to discuss how we can take that aim forward.

On the point that the hon. Gentleman made about operators gaming the system by, for example, purporting to lay new fibre cable but simply relighting existing fibre cable that is already in the ground, I reiterate that the relief is all about the physical laying of new fibre in the ground. We believe that the definitions in the regulations provide a clear way of capturing what constitutes new fibre, so we consider that we will not be providing business rate relief when new fibre is not being installed and people are merely relighting existing fibre that is already in the ground.

I am grateful to the Opposition for tabling the new clause and giving us the opportunity to discuss at greater length the operation of the relief. Although, as I will explain, we cannot agree to the new clause, I hope that I can provide some detail and assurances on the operation of the relief. It is important to recognise that investment in fibre is a long-term commitment. To support and incentivise that commitment, the relief for new fibre will apply for a five-year period between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2022. That was the commitment given by the Chancellor in the autumn statement of 2016, and that commitment will be met through the Bill and the draft regulations that we published last week. This is part of a wider package of measures worth £1.1 billion that we announced at the autumn statement to support the market development of digital networks underpinned by full fibre, to ensure that we have the world-class digital infrastructure that we need. This includes £200 million to support local bodies in the roll-out of full fibre networks in their area, and in July 2017 we launched a £400 million investment fund providing finance for network providers to match their fibre investments. Alongside the legislative changes we brought forward in the Digital Economy Act 2017, such as changes to the system that governs access to land and the powers for universal broadband, we are therefore creating the right environment for investment. This measure is a crucial part of that: it is crucial that we provide the necessary support and the environment to allow this investment to happen, and that is what the Bill will do.

Although I am not unsympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's new clause, I do not think it would support the overall measure to require the Government, as the new clause would do, to review the operation of the relief only one year into the five-year period. This would create significant uncertainty in the sector about the future of the relief, especially as the new clause specifically questions whether a five-year scheme is appropriate. That could in itself damage the success of the scheme and jeopardise the returns we expect for both businesses and households.

As I have said, we cannot agree to the new clause. However, the Government do of course keep all taxes and reliefs under review, and that will include the tax relief for new fibre. We will continue to track the operation of the scheme, and where we believe it can be improved, we will take action. The Bill will allow us to do that. It will also allow the Chancellor in the lead-up to the conclusion of the scheme in 2022 to consider its success and whether it should be reviewed or repeated for future years.

The Bill allows for future relief schemes within the boundaries of telecommunication infrastructure, and for different levels of relief and different technologies

within those boundaries, but, as with all taxes, that is a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer as part of the Budget process. However, I can give some details of where we will meet some of the aspects of the new clause from existing legislation and practice.

Under the existing local government finance system, local authorities are required to submit to my Department non-domestic rating returns containing information about the business rates income and relief in their area. These are provided before the start of the year as estimates, and after the end of the year as final out-turns. This information is published in full on my Department's website. I can assure the House that these returns will be amended to include separate information about the level of new fibre relief, so this information will be available for each local authority in England. We expect the first returns to include this information to be the out-turn data for 2017-18, which are expected to be published in the autumn of 2018.

At earlier stages in the progress of the Bill, I gave the House the assurance that we will compensate local government for the cost of its share of the relief. We restated that commitment in the consultation document that we published last week, and I give the same assurance again today. The relief that will be awarded on the central rating list held by my Department is not included in the published return provided by local government, but I can confirm that we will also publish the value of the new fibre relief in respect of the central rating list.

I also assure the House that we take very seriously the challenge of developing a suitable mechanism to deliver relief to new fibre, and that we are listening to the views of the sector. We have been working with Ofcom, the valuation office and the sector to ensure we have the correct mechanism. Last week, we published a consultation document, as I have said, and draft regulations illustrating how this will work. We will have further dialogue with those stakeholders, collect views as part of the consultation and publish a summary of responses to that exercise. In view of the assurances I have given, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not press his new clause.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Clauses 5 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): As indicated on the Order Paper, Mr Speaker has certified that clauses 1, 2 and 5 relate exclusively to England and Wales, and are within devolved legislative competence. As the Bill has not been amended in Committee, there is no change to that certification.

Under Standing Order No. 83M, a consent motion is required for the Bill to proceed. I shall now suspend the House for about two minutes while the Government table the appropriate consent motion, copies of which will be available shortly in the Vote Office and will be distributed by Doorkeepers.

8.44 pm

Sitting suspended.

8.47 pm

On resuming—

Madam Deputy Speaker: The appropriate consent motion has been tabled. Does a Minister intend to move the consent motion?

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con) *indicated assent.*

The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England and Wales) (Standing Order No. 83M).

[Mrs Eleanor Laing in the Chair]

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I remind hon. Members that, if there is a Division, only Members representing constituencies in England and Wales may vote on the consent motion for England and Wales.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Committee consents to the following certified clauses of the Telecommunications Infrastructure (Relief from Non-Domestic Rates) Bill:

Clauses certified under Standing Order No. 83J as relating exclusively to England and Wales and being within devolved legislative competence

Clauses 1, 2 and 5 of the Bill (Bill 3).—(Mr Marcus Jones.)

The First Deputy Chairman: I am pausing, lest anyone wishes to intervene at this moment.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Come on!

The First Deputy Chairman: The hon. Gentleman must not tell the Chair to come on. I am anticipating some great speeches. I have stopped anticipating such great speeches.

Question put and agreed to.

The occupant of the Chair left the Chair to report the decision of the Committee (Standing Order No. 83M(6)).

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair; decision reported.

Third Reading

8.50 pm

The Minister for Digital (Matt Hancock): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill is part of a wide-ranging strategy to deliver world-class connectivity for our country. That, in turn, is part of our work and commitment to build a country that works for everyone and is fit for a modern age. Whether it is basic broadband over copper, world-class connectivity over fibre or continuous coverage through the air, it is part of what we could call a full-spectrum strategy.

The Bill provides vital support for the vision of full-fibre connectivity. Growing the fibre network beneath our streets and along our roads and railways is like growing a tree. The trunk links our great cities and connects Britain to the world, and we are growing the great boughs and branches to power ever wider mobile signal and reach every community. We are increasingly growing out fibre not just in the trunk or the boughs but in the multitude of small branches and twigs. It is increasingly going to people's houses and to each business, and to all the public services of the land. The fibre network needs nourishment—it is as yet a sapling,

[*Matt Hancock*]

and as increasing demands are put on it, it will be under greater strain, so we must ensure that it is strong enough to deliver.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to the Bill, including those who gave it full support on Second Reading and highlighted the contribution that it would make to furthering our ambitions to deliver world-class digital infrastructure. They were absolutely right to make that point. I am grateful to the Clerks of the House, the Bill team in the Department for Communities and Local Government and my brilliant team in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. I am also grateful to our partners in the telecoms industry, with whom we have worked on getting the Bill right. I look forward to their responses to the technical implementation consultation published last week. I would very much like to thank the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), for steering the Bill through the House. The debates in Committee were fruitful, with the degree of support for the Bill being evident and strong.

The Bill will provide 100% business rates relief for five years for new fibre installed after April 2017. To get the details right, we will of course listen carefully to the responses to the consultation on the regulations—it is not on the policy or who the relief should apply to but on making sure that the technical details operate effectively. Especially given the Bill's smooth passage through the House, we hope that it will be in force very soon to incentivise the deployment of more fibre and support our efforts to get world-class digital infrastructure.

To build on that, we want to create an attractive environment for the private sector to provide fibre. We are already seeing significant investment by operators across the country, including the new and growing altnets such as CityFibre, Gigaclear and Hyperoptic as well as Openreach and Virgin Media. That is supported by the Independent Networks Cooperative Association and others. I commend all of them for their work in the national interest. Business rates relief for new fibre will reduce the costs of deployment for those operators and incentivise the market to deliver where it otherwise may not have done. It is all part of ensuring that we can deliver the infrastructure that this country needs.

As I said, that is part of a broader plan. In July, we announced a £400 million investment fund to provide finance for network providers by matching their fibre investments. Over the summer we announced details of our universal service obligation so that every household will get decent broadband by 2020, and we recently announced further details of £200 million of support for getting full fibre to local bodies, schools, hospitals and other public services to help them to deliver their services more effectively and ensure that the branches of fibre are rolled out more broadly. We continue to extend superfast broadband coverage over the copper network. Over 93% of UK premises have been covered to date and we are on target to reach 95% by the end of the year. Mobile coverage is on track to reach 90% of the landmass by the end of the year and we want to see 95% coverage in future.

The Bill is proof of our commitment to connectivity and our determination to deliver digital infrastructure that the country deserves. It has wide support, it has been considered in detail and it will help us to build a modern Britain. I commend it to the House.

8.55 pm

Jim McMahon: I share the vote of thanks to the range of people who have assisted the Bill. A great deal of work went on in the background to ensure the support of Members and the passage of the Bill. I would like to thank the Public Bill Office for the support it gave to the Opposition during the Committee stage, which was a great help.

The Opposition welcome this infrastructure, which aims to improve our connectivity. We know that improved connectivity is important for economic growth, more jobs and improved links between business hubs and individuals alike. One slight regret, which is a major regret for the people affected, is that nothing in the Bill addresses the divide between urban areas and our rural communities. With 95% of people connected, it is a bitter pill for the 5% who live in areas that are not connected. People in those areas do not want warm words about the amounts of money being given away, but a plan in place to say when high-speed will reach them. Self-employment is on the rise, so access to decent IT in rural communities is essential. It is not in the Bill, but I urge the Government to give more detail on what they are going to do to encourage that roll-out, either in terms of allocation or through the soft relationship they are developing with providers.

The Labour party is committed to focusing on improvements to connectivity and infrastructure in rural communities, many of which feel they have been taken for granted by the Government. They have suffered chronic underinvestment for far too long. We know there are different demands, different drivers and different pressures on our communities, but the decisions we make today should not be just about catching up with infrastructure developed five or 10 years ago; it ought to be about preparing the country for the next 10, 20 or 30 years ahead and for the next century. Many communities do not feel that they are a part of such consideration.

The Prime Minister previously called for co-operation across political parties. Over the summer, I reflected on 18 months of being an MP, after previously being a councillor and council leader for 13 years. To make a council and a place work, people need a common vision of what an area can be and they need to know what part they can play in taking it forward. I do not see that taking place nationally. It seems as though party politics is far more important than the people we all, collectively, represent. Getting one up on the Opposition or the Member sat across the Benches seems to be worth more than delivering investment on the ground for the very diverse communities we represent.

I should say that that is not my personal style at all. I am always more than happy to work across political parties if it means, ultimately, that we have better government for all the communities we represent. That is an offer. I do not intend to do the Government's job for them—I am not a taxi for hire in that sense—but I am keen to ensure that the voice of industry, local government and our many diverse communities really feature in policy as it comes through.

There is one area that we need to address. This is not party political, although I do have a view about what the Local Government Finance Bill included and did not include in terms of some of the safety nets and safeguards required. Our local councils cannot continue with their current funding settlement. We know that demand for adult social care is outstripping the money that they have, we know that they are stripping away frontline services just to keep their heads above water, and we know that that is just not sustainable. People are being expected to pay more and more council tax for what they perceive to be fewer and fewer of the services on which they rely, and which they consider to be vital and the foundation of their communities. Surely, if we believe in a decent country in which people can get on and public service is the foundation stone, we must not stand by and watch those people fall over.

This is, in effect, a plea. We have seen the presentation of one element of the Local Government Finance Bill; let us now see the presentation of a scheduled series of Bills that will really address chronic underfunding and the short-term nature of local government finance.

9 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in a debate that is, as we all know, enormously important. I spoke in detail about the effect of poor broadband in my constituency on Second Reading, but I now want to make two brief points about events which occurred during the recess and which illustrate precisely what I have spoken about in the House on so many occasions.

Kernahan Service is a garage on one of the major industrial estates in Witney. It is an excellent local family-run company which has serviced vehicles throughout west Oxfordshire for many years. When I visited the garage, the people there wanted not just to explain to me how the business worked, but to demonstrate to me the difficulty caused by the poor broadband that was available to them. Nowadays, as we know, when vans

and other vehicles go into a garage, they are plugged into a computer which then connects to a server, and that provides the diagnostic information. I have seen for myself the waiting and the waiting and the waiting in that garage: I have seen those people waiting to find out from the Ford servers what the difficulties are with a particular vehicle. Moreover, I have witnessed with my own eyes the managing director waiting and waiting and waiting for the results of a simple Google search for information. That makes very clear the problems experienced by businesses throughout west Oxfordshire, although it is not a particularly rural problem; it is being experienced in Witney and on one of the most important industrial estates there.

Then there is the domestic side. Isabelle Jackson, a 15-year-old constituent who lives in Kiddington, a small village just outside Woodstock, wrote asking me to raise this issue, and I now gladly do so. I am grateful to her for writing, because she has drawn attention to problems that are experienced by many young people.

Isabelle will take her GCSEs in the current academic year, and is required to do her homework online. She is required to do research and to use sites such as BBC Bitesize and MyMaths, which, as I am sure those with children of the relevant age will know, are very important. The broadband in her village runs at 0.9 megabits per second, so it is simply impossible for her to do her homework. It cannot be right that, simply because Isabelle and many like her live in rural areas, they are being disadvantaged in the course of their education, but that is exactly what we are seeing.

It is for those reasons—the effect on business and the effect on the domestic instruction of young people in particular—that I wholeheartedly welcome the Bill and the incentives that it gives operators to provide the investment that will ensure that we have high-speed internet in rural and, indeed, urban areas throughout west Oxfordshire.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Incontinence

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

9.5 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Incontinence is not an issue that is often discussed in the Chamber. Society sees the condition as a taboo, which is hidden from public view while sufferers cope in private. However, an estimated 14 million people in all age groups will, at some point in their lives, experience a problem with bladder dysfunction. A further 6.5 million will have bowel dysfunction.

It is generally assumed that incontinence is a condition that affects older people, but that is only half the story. The National Childbirth Trust estimates that almost half of all women experience urinary incontinence after childbirth; there are around 700,000 births a year, so as many as 350,000 women could face this problem. NHS figures suggest as many as 900,000 children and young people experience some form of problem.

More than 300,000 people are diagnosed with ulcerative colitis and Crohn's, otherwise known as inflammatory bowel disease, and the most common age for diagnosis is between 18 and 30. Those conditions affect the digestive system to different degrees, but one in 10 people will experience regular incontinence. A 2012 survey by Crohn's and Colitis UK found that 61% of people had not sought medical advice for the incontinence. Like all other conditions that have associated problems with incontinence, that leads to social isolation. Crohn's and Colitis UK surveyed 1,000 young people on their experience, and 75% said that their condition made socialising impossible because of always needing to know of the proximity to a toilet. On a very simple level, given how many local authorities are closing access to public toilets, is it not time that we looked at alternatives? It is surely not beyond our wit in this House to look at issues such as rate relief, so that hotels, restaurants, pubs and cafes provide access to their toilets for those who urgently need to have it.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Does my hon. Friend agree that businesses with a high footfall could do an awful lot more to support their customers' needs in respect of incontinence issues, and consider additional aids such as the Crohn's and Colitis UK "Can't Wait" card—a facility to enable individuals who suffer from incontinence issues to access the toilet facilities of businesses that would not ordinarily allow people to use them, but which support their customers as and when they might need it, to avoid any emergency situations?

Mrs Moon: I thank my hon. Friend for her work in this area. That most certainly would help, and it is so simple; it is not a huge thing to do. Another example is simply having a shelf in toilets where someone with a colostomy or ileostomy can place the clean bag, so it is readily available while they remove the full bag. That would make things so much easier and healthier, by ensuring there is no cross-infection. Instead, people often have to scramble on dirty toilet floors, trying to access what they need.

All the figures I have to hand today are estimates—as one patient group pointed out to me, the collection of statistics in this field is patchy at best, and putting a true figure on the scale of the problem is very difficult—but we will not tackle taboos until we start talking about them: we must destigmatise the subject so that no one faces humiliation if they admit to a problem. We need to bring this issue out into the open once and for all, so that people no longer suffer in silence and we can reduce the long-term health implications and additional costs for the NHS.

An analysis of calls to the Bladder and Bowel Foundation's helpline in 2015 suggested that half the people with a continence problem had never spoken to a healthcare professional. Another study found that only one in three families seek help for children and young people with a continence problem. Imagine the long-term impact on a child's health of having to try to manage such a problem at school, with all the stigma of being the smelly kid and all the fear of having an accident during a lesson.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this subject forward; it needs to be aired and she is doing that very well today. I thank her for that. Does she agree that young people suffering from ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease and other inflammatory bowel diseases need more help and support to deal with the lifestyle changes that these illnesses can bring? The latest statistics show that 75% of those young people say that they cannot have an active social life because of their condition, and I believe that restaurants, shops and councils have a responsibility to do more to help them to lead as normal a life as possible.

Mrs Moon: I would ask every Member to consider the impact on their life of suddenly having a desperate, urgent need to access a toilet while at work or walking down the street, and there not being one available. Of course we must do more; no one can assume that incontinence is not coming their way or coming to a member of their family. As a society, we have to take responsibility for ensuring that people can access toilet facilities wherever they are and whenever they need them.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a compelling case. She will be aware of ERIC—Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence—which has campaigned for many years for better availability of continence pads. These are still charged for at very high rates. If every school were to provide continence pads, a lot of children would have a much better experience at school.

Mrs Moon: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. In particular, we should look at the need for teachers to understand the issue of incontinence. They need to understand that a child who constantly puts their hand up and says that they need to go to the toilet is not trying to get out of the lesson, and that it is perhaps an indication of a deep-seated problem that needs to be tackled. There is certainly a need to educate and to build awareness of continence problems in schools. This relates to the little ones coming into the reception class—some of whom, increasingly and shockingly, have not been potty-trained and have not learned to control

their bowels and bladder—and the problem continues throughout the school. Schools need to step in and ensure that parents and children have access to the help and advice that they need.

People should have the confidence to talk about the problem to GPs and to seek an early diagnosis and intervention. People should not have to assume that it is something they have to live with. It is estimated that people manage the problem themselves for an average of five years before seeking help. We also need to highlight the detrimental impact that incontinence can have on an individual, and the fact that existing policy responses exacerbate the situation. This is a quality-of-life issue. It affects sleep and mental wellbeing, and it can cause isolation. For a child, it can have a long-term impact on their self-esteem and on family relationships, and it often makes them vulnerable to bullying.

Access to toilets can become a determining factor in every journey and activity away from the home. The condition can also lead to more complex health problems, which are inevitably more expensive to treat, and some people even choose residential care so that they can have management of their problem. One specialist in the field summed the situation up by saying:

“The reality is that bladder and bowel continence needs can affect anyone at any age. It can reduce a person’s enjoyment of life, ability to live an independent life, reduce education and work opportunities and lead to further medical complications.”

Patient surveys have highlighted the limitations imposed on people’s lives by their conditions. For sufferers who responded to a survey, those restrictions and sleep deprivation were the worst aspects, with 93% saying that it had affected their mood, 63% saying that it had affected their ability to work, and 39% saying that it had forced them to take time off work. Frustratingly, there are solutions for many, but people all too frequently struggle to cope on their own, using incontinence products available in local chemists rather than seeking the help that could be available from the NHS.

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): It is really important to note that people who rely on getting pads and looking after themselves are not getting the best service, and doctors and nurses are sadly not receiving training in this most important area. Shockingly, the pre-registration nurse curriculum does not include training for bladder or bowel incontinence, so it is all too easy not to address the real problem. We need that experience to help people; we should not just pad them up. People can be helped with exercise, for example, and there are many interventions that could help instead of them being told simply, “Go and buy a pad.”

Mrs Moon: I commend my hon. Friend’s work for the all-party parliamentary group on continence care, which does invaluable work in this area.

I am going to jump to another section of my speech. It is shocking how many people go into hospital with no continence problems but may be incontinent or doubly incontinent and have major problems by the time they leave. It is far too easy for nurses and doctors to see the use of pads as the only solution. At some point, I hope the Minister will look at how we can gather figures from hospitals on how many patients enter with continence problems and how many leave with continence problems to get some idea of how great the problem is.

I chair the all-party parliamentary group on Parkinson’s, and the Minister will be aware that Parkinson’s UK has campaigned for many years due to the problems that people with Parkinson’s have when they go into hospital and their carefully timed medication regime is changed to fit in with drugs rounds on the ward. A perfectly mobile and continent person can become immobile and incontinent due to NHS failure. That cannot be allowed to carry on. It is shameful that we are facing such problems in 2017.

Diagnoses are not made in a huge number of cases. Healthcare professionals do not provide consistent assessments, diagnosis and follow-through according to standard practice. Even basic things, such as an assessments of where the toilet is in relation to where someone sleeps, are not carried out by social workers. I cannot begin to tell the House how many times people are admitted to hospital as the result of a fall at night caused by them trying to negotiate the stairs to go up or down to a toilet that is on a different level from where they sleep. It is shocking that people face having to wear an incontinence pad because they cannot use the stairs or because there is a risk of them falling at night when accessing the toilet. We simply must get this sorted out.

Incontinence can cause additional problems. Urinary tract infections, pressure sores, anxiety, depression and falls cost the NHS a great deal of money, and we could save money by making relatively simple changes. I have not been able to find any comprehensive analysis of the cost to the NHS and other services that would demonstrate potential savings from early interventions. As far as I am aware, such an assessment has not been carried out. A series of parliamentary questions tabled last year revealed that data are not held by the Department of Health on the number of people admitted to hospital for catheter-associated urinary tract infections, for non-catheter-associated urinary tract infections or with urinary incontinence generally. If it existed, such information would help to clarify the extent of the problem. An estimate was offered in 2014–15, with NHS trusts reporting an annual cost of £27.6 million, which is almost certainly an underestimate.

Too many individuals are bearing the brunt of managing their condition. Buying a regular supply of pads costs anywhere between 10p a pad, for a child, and 60p a pad, depending on the type of pad required.

Melanie Onn: My hon. Friend is being generous with her time. Does she think that now is the time for the Government to reconsider the VAT on these products?

Mrs Moon: We need to reconsider the issue of VAT on a whole range of sanitary and continence products. As a society, we need to take responsibility for the facts of our daily life. For a person on any sort of restricted income, such as those on benefits, the costs even of simple laundry are huge when dealing with incontinence.

Some families are spending up to £100 a week buying incontinence products. It is ludicrous if they are not able to access those products through the health service or joint stores with local authorities. It is a postcode lottery whether or not a person can access the help and support they need, which is shocking. Think of the savings in sickness pay, in hours of work lost and in mental health and wellbeing if we started to tackle this problem.

[Mrs Moon]

It is time to raise a number of issues, including what happens when things go wrong.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady has referred to people being caught short and, from my knowledge of people who have come to me with their problems, there is a lack of understanding from employers towards employees who have these problems, with people losing their jobs. Does she agree with me and other Members that there has to be a better understanding from employers of employees who have this problem?

Mrs Moon: I recently had a meeting with employers in Bridgend, and the chief executive of CGI was present. That company is proactive in asking its employees what problems they have so that it can support, rather than punish, when those problems affect people's working situation. People with incontinence should feel confident that they will not lose their job if they say, "Actually, I have this problem. I am going to have to go to the toilet." Shockingly, I found another employer in my constituency that was making deductions from employees' wages every time they left the floor to go to the toilet because it was time away from their telephone response service. Yes, we need to consider the whole issue of employment practice in relation to incontinence.

Between 2007 and 2015, 92,000 women in England are thought to have had vaginal mesh implants as a treatment for incontinence. As many as one in 15 women have gone on to have those removed because of complications. The individual testimonies of those affected are dreadful, and while dealing with the wider issue of incontinence we must not forget their plight. I commend the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith), who has brought this issue to the attention of the House, but it is also important that the Government carry out a full audit, establish a registry to determine how many women have been affected, suspend this treatment and look at how we can make sure that the damage and destruction of people's lives does not continue.

I know you have been generous with our time, Madam Deputy Speaker, as the House has concluded its other business so early, but I hope that the need for action on this has become obvious. First and foremost, we need to work collectively to raise the profile of incontinence as a public health issue, not as a personal failing—that is how it is seen. If I have an incontinence problem, it is seen not as my having a medical problem but as there being something wrong with me. That view needs to be turned around. People need to be able to talk to their GP. If we go into any pharmacy, we see a sign saying, "If you've got a cough and it persists, see your GP." There are signs saying, "If your mole is changing size, talk to your GP." We need to have something that says, "Suffering incontinence? Well don't suffer in silence, talk to your GP. You will be able to access help and support." We need to stop assuming that this is something that affects older people and to engage schools in understanding how it affects young people. We need to educate young people on bowel and bladder health. Why on earth do we not talk about this? Are we really so hung up that we cannot talk to young people about the fact that at some point in their life they may have a problem, tell them what they do about it and say what sort of help they can get?

Will the Minister give us an idea of what his Department plans to do to tackle the huge hidden problem of incontinence in this country? Will he agree to talk to the devolved Administrations so that we do not just set something up for England, but we all take responsibility for this? I am sure that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) would agree that we must get this sorted once and for all.

When people seek help they need to feel that health professionals will be equipped to help them. It is also important that doctors are trained in this; it needs to be part of the core training of all nurses and doctors. It should also be there for those who are training to be nursery nurses. We need to build that conversation and to do it soon. It is important that the General Medical Council takes responsibility for moving this forward. I am aware that in England the NHS published "Excellence in continence care" in November 2015, which sought to define what best practice should be and to make recommendations. The document was very welcome, but implementation has been slow. The executive summary even commented on that, saying:

"Over the years, some excellent research and guidelines have been produced for best practice continence care but this work has often stalled as it has not translated into a clear commissioning plan for a local continence pathway."

Will the Minister ensure that every local authority and every health authority has a clear continence pathway? That is not a big ask; they should be doing it already. Can we make sure that such pathways are now in place?

Continence services in the UK vary in quantity and availability, with a report in 2010 concluding that patients were faced with a "life sentence" of suffering due to non-existent or poor diagnosis, a lack of treatment plans and poorly co-ordinated care. Earlier this year, a Paediatric Continence Forum audit established that only 41% of clinical commissioning groups and health boards provide all four main continence services and product provision. That is absolutely shocking.

I hope I have convinced the Minister that he should take the opportunity to make a change in the quality of life for far too many people in this country. This is a problem area that we have neglected for too long.

9.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Steve Brine): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) on securing this debate. I completely agree that incontinence is a public health issue. I am the public health Minister, so it is appropriate that I am responding to the debate.

It is important that I reiterate some of the hon. Lady's points from the Government Dispatch Box. Incontinence is absolutely an issue with which too many suffer in silence, and we all need to learn to speak more openly and honestly about it. Think of the subjects that the House of Commons has discussed today, on its first day back after recess: it is incredible what the House can achieve and bring to public consciousness. The hon. Lady has certainly added to that today. By talking about incontinence, we draw back the veil and encourage others to come forward for assessment. I hope that somebody is watching or listening to this at home and decides that they are going to take the first step and ring their GP tomorrow morning, without shame or embarrassment.

As the hon. Lady said, there are 14 million adults in the UK with bladder-control problems and 6.5 million with bowel-control problems. She is absolutely right to point out that this is not just an older person's problem: it reaches across the sexes and across the generations. Incontinence has been touched on in previous debates—the hon. Lady has raised it in the House this year—but I am told that there has been no dedicated Commons debate on it since 2004, so it is now high time for one.

All continence problems can be debilitating and life-changing. They affect a wide range of care groups and can be a particular concern for the ageing population—although, as both the hon. Lady and I have said, not exclusively. As the hon. Lady said, incontinence is not just a physical problem; it can be, and very often is, psychologically distressing. When continence care and support is done well, it makes an enormous positive difference to patients' lives.

As the hon. Lady acknowledged, some of the issues she raised go much wider than the brief of a mere health Minister, but I shall touch on some of the other points she made, as well as those for which I am directly responsible. We absolutely do need to develop the workforce of health professionals so that they are more informed and educated about continence issues across the board and are able to support and care for individuals in a safe, effective and dignified manner. We need to measure people's health outcomes robustly—without measurement it is hard to take action—to make sure that services continue to improve and that we can provide the best care possible.

A good-quality, patient-focused service begins with getting the specification and commissioning right from the outset. For services in England, NHS England published its commissioning framework for continence services, "Excellence in Continence Care," in 2015 to help to achieve this. Working with clinicians, third sector organisations and people living with the condition, NHS England brought together the most up-to-date evidence-based resources and research to support commissioners, health providers and professionals to make real and lasting changes to raise the standards of continence care. As well as outlining an individual's pathway from assessment to treatment and recovery when possible, the guidance advocates integration across primary, secondary and tertiary services, as well as across health, education—as mentioned by several Opposition Members—and social care. It is designed to ensure that commissioners work in collaboration with providers and others so that safe, informed, dignified—a key word—efficient and effective continence care is consistently provided to patients.

Dr Drew: The Minister will have heard my earlier intervention. Will he and his colleagues in the Department for Education commit to write to each school to make sure that they have an incontinence strategy? In particular—it is just a simple thing—they should provide incontinence pads for children who suffer from this terrible condition.

Steve Brine: Clearly, it is not my place to promise work tasks for Education Ministers, let alone other Health Ministers, but they will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said. I have a feeling that he will be following this matter up, no doubt through the all-party group. The chair of that group, the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper), is sitting but two rows in front of him.

As well as outlining an individual's pathway from assessment to treatment and recovery when possible, the guidance advocates integration across the different areas. Strengthening the workforce's knowledge is absolutely key. In England, continence care and the importance of this issue to the comfort of patients is already an important part of the basic training offered to a wide range of clinicians and care workers and is part of the Nursing and Midwifery Council's training curriculum.

The commissioning guidance builds on that by setting out the minimum standards required along with the specific roles and responsibilities for every member of a patient's continence team including the individuals themselves, their family—very important—and carers. It is important to acknowledge that, following assessment and with the right advice, self-management of a condition can improve outcomes considerably.

There will always be people, including some in care homes, who have a need for aids. A group of specialist nurses for adults and another group for children are currently preparing some consensus guidelines on commissioning continence products, which in due course the Excellence in Continence Care board will consider for endorsement as a supplement to the framework. Of course we need to make sure that commissioners are following the framework, and NHS England is taking several approaches to tackle this. Let me touch on a few of them.

Rosie Cooper: The Minister's comments are very welcome, but what pressure can he really apply to get clinical commissioning groups to implement NHSE's guidance and to get the GMC, the Nursing and Midwifery Council and medical schools to include training in continence? If we can get that right, those facilities will be there when people say that they have the problem. Then we will get the clinical intervention, not just the costly pads in response.

Steve Brine: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I will take that away with me, and I will come on to the point about the CCGs.

I was just about to outline the approaches that NHS England wants to take to ensure that commissioners are following the framework. They include arranging for CCGs to have access to teams of expert clinicians, commissioners from areas that have adopted the guidelines and are following best practice, and people with lived experience to review their existing service against the best practice and make appropriate improvements. NHS England is also exploring the potential for a mandatory data set to provide transparency about the continence services being commissioned and encouraging CCGs to develop integrated commissioning arrangements to improve co-ordination, experience and use of resources. That is all very positive.

In addition, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence—or should I say NICE as I am now getting to grips with all the acronyms—has produced a range of guidance for clinicians to support them in the diagnosis, treatment, care and support of people with continence problems, including the 2015 quality standards for urinary tract infection in adults, which sets out how treatment must be holistic.

[*Steve Brine*]

I understand that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), recently replied to the hon. Member for Bridgend on the issue of paediatric continence data and the risk of losing the National Child and Maternal Health Intelligence Network, which provides a valuable data resource. Let me take the opportunity to reassure the hon. Lady that the ChiMat legacy website can still be accessed. Paediatric continence is a very important issue. I understand that Public Health England is grateful to the Paediatric Continence Forum for its productive collaboration over the years and that it wishes this relationship to continue. It has agreed that if PHE's infrastructure remains the best place within the health system to enable these reports and to make the data available at a local level, it will make every effort to recreate the paediatric continence needs assessments during its 2018-19 business planning process. I am the Minister responsible for Public Health England. I see its leaders regularly and I will raise it with them next time I see them.

Mrs Moon *rose*—

Steve Brine: I would also like to use this debate briefly to mention transvaginal mesh implants, which the hon. Lady rightly raised in her speech. She was about to intervene to ask whether I was going to mention them. I know that some women experience severe side effects and complications post operation. I know that there has been considerable interest in this across the House. The hon. Lady mentioned the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) who chaired a working group on it recently and is looking to set up an all-party group on the subject.

I have heard heart-breaking stories and I have talked to colleagues in the House who have been contacted by constituents about this. We have to make sure that we listen, not only to provide the best support but to inform health services so that they can reduce complications from the treatment. When complications do occur, we must ensure that they are treated promptly and effectively.

We must also remember that these procedures help thousands of women each year who are suffering the distressing effects of stress urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse. Surgical procedures using mesh devices have provided an effective form of treatment that can be far less invasive than alternative surgical procedures. Let us not throw the baby out with the bathwater. In 2014, NHS England set up its mesh oversight group which, in partnership with clinicians, regulatory experts and patient groups, published its final report in July this year which helps to address the three major issues highlighted by clinicians and patient interest groups alike: clinical quality, data and informed consent. That answers the point made by the hon. Member for Bridgend about the devolved Administrations. Yes, we liaise with them, and I welcome the news that both Wales and Northern Ireland will be setting up their own working groups. We would like to see more collaboration on this topic across all the devolved Administrations, and we will give them every support

so that they can learn from what we have found in the NHS England working group. I hope that that answers that point.

The hon. Lady raised a couple of other issues. She made a really good point about non-domestic rates and public toilets. That issue is raised in the House more often than it should be—it should not need to be raised. I will make sure that my colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government hear her call. There is a discretionary relief scheme on non-domestic rates that councils can access, and I am sure that she has made her council aware of it. I encourage other Members to do so, because that is how the discretionary scheme can be used. It is exactly what it says on the tin—it is discretionary.

The hon. Lady made an excellent point about installing a shelf in public toilets. That would be welcome. As a parent of young children in the not too distant past, a shelf would have come in handy on lots of occasions. She made an excellent point about the changing of continence products. The hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) made a point about ERIC. I was not aware of that, so I thank him for doing so and will look it up. He also spoke about the need for teachers to be informed about the subject. I urge him to pursue that with Education Ministers, but I am sure that they have heard tonight's debate, given that they have been mentioned.

The hon. Member for Bridgend made a really good point about hospital data on continence, access to tertiary care and exit from hospital care. My family and I have experienced the fight on Parkinson's on far too many occasions. I thank the hon. Lady for the work that she does on the all-party group and I look forward to meeting her in that capacity. I will ask officials to look at the very good point that she has made. She also raised VAT on sanitary and continence products. The Government have taken action on VAT on women's sanitary products within the realms of what is possible as a member of the European Union. We have invested that money in women's health charities, as she knows. On the wider point about VAT, we are restricted as a member state, but we will soon be free, and we will be able to make those decisions in the House—taking back control, as someone once said.

Finally, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made an excellent point about employers and their understanding of the issue. Employers should show every understanding in this area, and I expect them to do so—I do not think that I can be clearer than that.

To conclude, I thank the hon. Member for Bridgend once again for highlighting these issues. For all those who suffer from continence issues, it is important that we talk about the topic, treat it seriously, and work together to overcome the taboo and stigma by speaking candidly about it. I genuinely believe that only by doing so can we truly provide patient-centred services, where patients are at the centre of everything we do. We work with the healthcare professionals, commissioners, providers, pharmacists and trusts to improve the advice and services offered to best meet the needs of the people who rely on and—let us remember—pay for these services.

Question put and agreed to.

9.45 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 5 September 2017

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

Venezuela: Political Situation

9.30 am

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the political situation in Venezuela.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, and I am grateful for this timely debate. I do not often speak about Latin America, but it is registered in the “Dod’s” directory as one of my interests. I am a long-standing member of the all-party parliamentary British-Latin America group, as well as chairman of the newly formed APPG on Venezuela.

As I said, I am grateful for this opportunity to speak on the situation in Venezuela. Latin America is an area of the world where Britain has a myopic view—partly due to the continent’s Spanish and Portuguese colonial past, and partly due to its own sense of history in relation to those two European nations and, of course, the Vatican. It is in British interests that there is a change of outlook on South America, Latin America and Venezuela, particularly given our exit from the European Union and the need to build new international bridges. Latin America is an important part of the planet that we should be mindful of in protecting the wellbeing of this fragile place that we all inhabit. I appreciate that our South American relationships have been somewhat skewed—rightly so, in my opinion—in terms of protecting the UK sovereignty of the Falkland Islands.

Although the issue of Venezuela has been a concern for a while, it landed on my constituency doorstep when constituent Andrea Adamson came to see me in June. Her son, Adam Cowell, of Oswaldtwistle, died of cocaine poisoning due to its purity. That unnecessary death in Hyndburn recently led the local coroner, Michael Singleton, to say:

“I can tell you from the inquests that I have recently conducted, and those that are going to be conducted by me within the next few weeks, that this is reaching epidemic proportions.”

He said:

“I am becoming increasingly concerned with the number of young people who are dying from cocaine toxicity.”

In relation to Adam’s case, the pathologist said:

“At the time of post mortem there was 8.4 micrograms of cocaine per millilitre of blood.

That is very high, anything over one is potentially fatal.”

The coroner said:

“I have been doing this job for 25 years and this has reached phenomenal levels.”

Mr Singleton went on to make a searing criticism of the UK’s failure to tackle the cocaine epidemic. His comments are online.

This so-called party drug has been responsible for the deaths of at least 17 young people in the Lancashire district in the last nine months. I promised Andrea that I would raise the issue of cocaine dealing, trafficking and production locally, nationally and internationally, for they are all part of one deadly supply chain.

This was a *Daily Telegraph* headline as long ago as June 2008: “President Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela has become the key trafficking route for most of the cocaine sold on Britain’s streets”. The report stated:

“Anti-drugs officials estimate that more than 50 per cent of all the cocaine consumed in Britain has been trafficked through Venezuela—under the ‘revolutionary’ regime of Mr Chávez. The figure could be as high as two thirds.”

In 1998, the last year before Mr Chávez came to office, Venezuela’s security forces made 11,581 drug-related arrests. By 2005, that had plummeted to just over 1,000, and the figure remains low to this day. That journalistic piece highlighted the Venezuelan gateway for cocaine into Europe and the United Kingdom. It alleged that Mr Chávez’s Administration had

“a longstanding relationship with Marxist rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). These guerrillas fund their insurgency by smuggling drugs”.

Back in 2008, *The Guardian* reported from FARC sources in Colombia

“that powerful elements within the Venezuelan state apparatus have forged a strong working relationship with Farc”

and

“that Farc and Venezuelan state officials operated actively together on the ground, where military and drug-trafficking activities coincide.”

The allegations were that the Chávez regime, alongside the Venezuelan military, supported the FARC rebels with military equipment in exchange for cocaine.

In 2012, *The New York Times* used radar information—when we look at the radar maps of flights out of Venezuela, we see that it is remarkable where they go—to show that Venezuela was

“one of the world’s busiest transit hubs for the movement of cocaine”,

with FARC Colombian guerrilla rebels able to operate “with...impunity.” The drug is coming from Venezuelan airports, not from inside Colombia. The flights by and large go to Honduras; it is going to the Caribbean and on to the United Kingdom.

In 2014, Reuters reported that the “Venezuela drug trade rings alarm bells”. It reported on a major French seizure:

“Hidden in a large ochre-colored container, the 1.4 tonnes of cocaine got past two dozen army checkpoints during a 500-mile journey from the Colombian border to the Venezuelan capital.

The drugs were stored for several days at the Simon Bolivar International Airport outside Caracas, then placed in 31 suitcases with false name-tags and put on an Air France flight to Paris on Sept. 10, 2013.

Ten days later, French police announced the biggest cocaine haul in their history—the shipment was worth about \$270 million—after a meticulous operation involving French, British, Spanish and Dutch authorities.

The foreign agents kept Venezuelan authorities in the dark.”

The problem for the Minister and the Government is that the flow of drugs from Venezuela into this country continues unabated to this day. Only recently, during our general election, Spanish police seized more than 2 metric tonnes of cocaine—£1 billion-worth—from a ship with a Venezuelan flag in the Atlantic ocean.

There are ample stories of cocaine seizures, but the UK and EU Governments seem to have little success in stemming drug trafficking from South America and Venezuela in particular and to be unable to take firm

[Graham Jones]

action against a corrupt narco regime. The UK Government have had enough signals. Mr Chávez halted co-operation with the United States Drug Enforcement Administration way back in 2005.

Last year, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime—UNODC—stated that Venezuela has become more important in recent years as trafficking organisations move Colombian cocaine overland across a porous border and take advantage of the busy maritime traffic between the coast and the islands of the Caribbean and Europe.

In the UK, we have seen rising purity levels for cocaine, along with ease of supply and vibrant demand. My constituents and their families are bearing the brunt of that. Our own National Crime Agency identifies Venezuela as a producer country and a major transit country for cocaine coming to this country.

Early last month, *The Times* ran a warning headline: “Pure cocaine fuels rise in drug deaths”. Deaths linked to cocaine jumped by 16% between 2015 and 2016 to a record high of 6.4 deaths per million. That sharp rise was widely reported across all media. The Office for National Statistics report said:

“The National Crime Agency reports that there was a significant increase in both crack and powder cocaine purity at all levels in 2016, including user-level, which may partly explain the increase in deaths relating to cocaine.”

A decade on, little seems to have changed. The Chavistas continue, through the new President, Nicolás Maduro, to facilitate and funnel cocaine to the west. Last November, two of Nicolás Maduro’s nephews were convicted in a New York court of attempting to smuggle 815 kg—about £350 million-worth—of cocaine into the United States. Throughout that trial, details emerged suggesting that high-level Venezuelan officials had serious involvement in the drug trade. The court heard that the President’s nephews intended to use the presidential aeroplane hangar at Caracas’ international airport to move the drugs. It also heard that “government executives” and the Cartel of the Suns were the “only ones who worked” in drug trafficking in Venezuela, and that they were “in charge of fumigating [eliminating] anyone who tried”

to get involved in the drugs trade in Venezuela.

Venezuela is a narco-state and the UK cannot have a policy of “do nothing”. The US Administration have acted. They have imposed sanctions on Venezuelan Vice-President Tareck El Aissami for facilitating shipments of narcotics on board planes leaving a Venezuelan airbase, as well as controlling drug routes through Venezuelan ports. Since appointing Mr El Aissami to the post, Mr Maduro has granted him expanded powers, including over the economy and expropriating businesses. *The Guardian* reported:

“Venezuela’s top convicted drug trafficker, Walid Makled...said he paid bribes through El Aissami’s brother to officials so they could turn a blind eye to cocaine shipments that proliferated in Venezuela over the past two decades of”—

so-called “socialist rule.” In March, the US Administration also announced sanctions against eight corrupt Venezuelan Supreme Court justices for stripping the opposition-controlled legislature of its powers.

Mr El Aissami joins a long list of senior Venezuelan Government officials who have been sanctioned or indicted by US law enforcement for complicity in drug trafficking

to the United States. That includes Minister Néstor Reverol; the former head of military intelligence, Hugo Carvajal; sitting Governor, Henry Rangel Silva; former Interior and Justice Minister, Ramón Rodríguez Chacín; and several others. It also includes Diosdado Cabello, vice-president of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela—Maduro’s party—and an alleged member of the Cartel of the Suns.

Before briefly turning to the economic turmoil, which has been widely reported and I am sure colleagues want to speak about, I ask the Minister why it has been left to the US Administration to take action against this rogue regime, which has been operating with impunity for many years. When will the UK Government look into this issue in the interests of my constituents and UK citizens, and publish their findings? What measures can the UK Government take independently, as well as with the EU, on implementing individual sanctions? Finally, will the Foreign and Commonwealth Office facilitate a much-needed parliamentary visit to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime?

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for eloquently setting out the woeful conditions in Venezuela and the very human impact that that regime has on people’s lives not only in Venezuela but in this country as well. In my previous life I prosecuted serious organised crime gangs, including drug traffickers. Will he join me in wishing that all Members of Parliament, including his leader, would condemn the Venezuelan regime and spread the message that anyone buying cocaine in this country is supporting organised crime?

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Order. As it is the first day back, may I just remind Members that interventions should be brief? A large number of people wish to speak in this debate and there is limited time, so I ask people to observe that rule.

Graham Jones: I am grateful for the hon. Lady’s intervention. I say to her that it is the Government—her party—who are in power, and I am asking the current Government to tackle the situation on the streets of the United Kingdom. I can speak for myself and I condemn the regime, as I have done.

I want to turn briefly to the economic and political situation. I asked the House of Commons Library to update Members of the House and am grateful that it has done so. I am also pleased that it provided a debate pack for Members before the debate. It does a marvellous job and we should all thank it for that.

Venezuela is an economic basket case. Despite more than \$1 trillion of oil revenues and billions of dollars from narco-trafficking and remittances, it is possibly the most mismanaged economy in modern history.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): My hon. Friend describes Venezuela as a socialist state. It is in fact yet another failed communist state, and shows the inability of a command economy to run the economy properly or, indeed, to feed its people. We should note that as well as huge revenues, it has the world’s largest oil reserves; but oil production is going down because of failed management.

Graham Jones: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is a failed authoritarian communist state, but are not all communist states authoritarian in their outlook? It is certainly a basket case.

I do not need to elaborate on the stories from Venezuela that we have all witnessed over the summer and before. Recent political events have been condemned by all—the UN, the EU, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the South American trading bloc Mercosur and Venezuela's neighbouring countries. Importantly for Opposition Members, and coming to my right hon. Friend's point, Socialist International has also condemned the Chavista regime, and we stand alongside our sister socialist parties in opposition to the Venezuelan regime.

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): On that point, does my hon. Friend agree that in politics there is sometimes a clear right and wrong? When any President in effect abolishes a Parliament that opposes him and replaces it with a lapdog Assembly, there is only one side—whatever President Trump or anybody else does—for democrats and those in this House who believe in human rights to be on regarding that issue: condemning that action of abolishing the Parliament.

Graham Jones: I, and Members of this House, do condemn the actions of the Maduro Government. My hon. Friend alludes to the point that we must not conflate power and the powerless. These are the decisions of those in power, not of those who are powerless—the protestors—and it is the regime that we should condemn, not the people of Venezuela.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing such an important issue forward for debate today. He talks about condemning, and over the summer he suggested himself that the Leader of the Opposition would condemn the human rights abuses in Venezuela “in his own time”. Is the hon. Gentleman satisfied with his leader's response to date?

Graham Jones: The response from the Labour party Front-Bench Members has been a condemnation, and I am pleased with the words put forward by them in condemning this. I reiterate that this is the Government's responsibility. They won an election; it is now for them to resolve this issue and for us, as Opposition Members, to put pressure on them. Let us not conflate the two.

The humanitarian situation in Venezuela is calamitous. The scarcity and shortage of food and medicines are making Venezuelans' daily lives a nightmare. Record high inflation and the systematic destruction of the commercial and industrial sectors are only making things worse. Criminality and political violence are the norm.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Graham Jones: I will give way to my Lancashire neighbour.

Mark Menzies: As chairman of the British-Latin America APPG, I am absolutely delighted in the hon. Gentleman's debate. May I urge him to look at the misery of people trafficking and the record numbers of displaced persons who are now living in Bolivia, Brazil and Colombia? In fact, we now have more people displaced from Venezuela than from Syria. That is a shocking statistic.

Graham Jones: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. I cannot cover all aspects of the issue in this debate, but the misery of those who have had to

flee Venezuela to neighbouring countries is considerable. I think we underestimate the numbers involved and are not fully aware of the scale of the problem of those refugees who have had to flee for their own safety into neighbouring countries and the pressure that puts on those countries. The hon. Gentleman raises a very good point.

John Spellar: My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) rightly identify those who are poor, dispossessed and being forced to flee, but is not the additional tragedy of Venezuela that many with university educations and technical skills are also fleeing because of the breakdown of civil society inside Venezuela? That is a long-term tragedy for that country, which, because of its natural resources, should be a very prosperous state.

Graham Jones: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right; it is probably the most mismanaged country in the world. As a result, it is experiencing a brain drain: those who are educated are leaving Venezuela, because the regime is strangling intellectuals' careers and the economy, and because their human rights are being undermined and they are being persecuted for taking part in demonstrations. Many of them are taking the decision to leave, which is having an adverse effect on Venezuela.

Venezuelan cities are the most violent in the world. Gangland violence, political brutality and drugs have taken hold as the economy collapses. The motorbike militia are quite frightening, and seem to operate hand in hand with the Maduro Administration to oppress the people of Venezuela. Inflation is at 720%, according to the International Monetary Fund, and is expected to surpass 2,000%. Rather than cutting budgets and raising taxes, the Chavista Government have borrowed from their communist allies Russia and China at high prices, and have resorted to printing money. The value of the Venezuelan bolívar has plummeted 99% against the US dollar since Hugo Chávez came to power.

The crunch will come later this year when Venezuela's debt repayments come due. According to the World Bank, Venezuela has run a budget deficit in 15 of the last 17 years, and over the last four years, that deficit has averaged about 15% and climbing. Most of Venezuela's reserves—what little it has—are in the form of gold, so in order to make debt repayments this year, Venezuela shipped gold bars to Switzerland. China has bailed out Venezuela by loaning it an eye-watering \$60 billion, but now, according to analysts, even it is reluctant to give its Latin American ally more credit. Despite all this borrowing and huge receipts from legal and illegal exports, the country remains in dire straits. Food prices are soaring and hospitals are broken. If Members want further information, there are some good illustrative examples in the House of Commons paper provided for the debate.

Transparency International consistently ranks Venezuela as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. The House of Commons Library briefing paper states that former president Hugo Chávez

“inherited a weak economy which deteriorated further under the initial phase of his Presidency”,

with an average fall of 5.1% in economic performance, which was finally offset only by significant increases in world oil prices. Its modest rises in GDP between 2004

[Graham Jones]

and 2008 were financed solely by rising oil prices. Oil accounts for 98% of total exports and 59% of official fiscal revenues.

Economic problems were exacerbated from 2005 onwards, when so-called unproductive land was nationalised, along with strategic industries including electricity, steel, cement, tourism, telecommunications, agriculture, oil services, and food distribution. By 2013, the World Bank ranked Venezuela 160th out of 185 nations for electricity availability, and 185th out of 185 for paying taxes.

We must question how Chávez's daughter, Maria Chávez, has amassed a personal fortune of \$4.2 billion. The Bolivarian revolution has spawned many "boligarchs"; the presidential palace, according to elected opposition members, costs more than \$3.6 million a day to run. Such profligacy extends to the state oil company, whose US subsidiary, as reported in April by *The Guardian*, donated \$500,000 to Donald Trump's inauguration. All overseas trade is currency-controlled. Since 2003, the Chavista Government have controlled currency. The real currency rate is now thought to be 700 Venezuelan bolívars to the dollar, but those needing dollars require a Government permit.

As the economic situation deteriorates, the dollar is becoming the de facto currency, yet poor people cannot access it, which means they cannot access many basic goods that must be imported. The four Government rates, including what can only be described as 'mates' rates, are just another means by which the Chavista elite can gain material advantage. Corruption and incompetence have been endemic throughout the Chavista regime. According to Transparency International, when the state oil company, PDVSA, took over a programme to buy food in 2007-08, more than

"1 million tons of food were bought for US \$2.24 billion, but only a little more than 25% of the food was received. And of this figure, only 14% of the food was distributed to those in need. At one port alone, 3,257 containers with a total of 122,000 tons of rotten food were found."

The United Nations says that President Maduro, the country's leader, is responsible for "widespread and systemic" human rights abuses. The UN has said that blame for the oppression there lies

"at the highest level of the Venezuelan Government"

and slammed Maduro's use of excessive force. More than 5,051 protesters were detained and 1,000 are still in custody after months of clashes, according to Foro Penal. Some 600 cases of torture have been referred to the International Criminal Court; according to the Casla Institute, 70% of torture cases involve sexual assault. There are 620 political prisoners in Venezuela, according to the Organization of American States, and 73 people have been killed by security forces during protests, according to UN High Commission for Refugees. The UN states that violations include house raids, torture and ill-treatment.

Before I conclude, it is worth briefly mentioning democracy in Venezuela. Although elections take place, the Government spend most of their time manipulating the law—either breaking it or changing it—with the sole intention of undermining the opposition. That has gone on for a considerable time. The line dividing state and the ruling party spending has been erased. Citizens and organisations loyal to the Government get most state jobs, contracts and subsidies, while overt opponents

get nothing or are locked up. Proportional representation has been manipulated and mayors sacked to favour the PSUV.

I would like to ask the Minister about UK nationals caught up in Venezuela. My constituent Judith Tregartha-Clegg is worried that political turbulence could leave her daughter stuck in the country. She states:

"A few airlines have been cancelling flights out of Caracas because of the trouble and some just won't fly there anymore."

She expressed her worry and her daughter's about the journey to the airport. She has received no support from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office so far. What support have the UK Government given to UK nationals living in Venezuela? Do they have a plan to evacuate all UK nationals from Venezuela if the situation deteriorates?

Judith has described to me the dire situation. Her daughter now lives in the town, as their home was taken over by squatters following 2006 legislation allowing for requisitioning of property. It is not safe outside urban areas. Schools do not have teachers, because they have not been paid.

In summary, condemnation is not enough. The UK Government must show resolve through tangible actions that will put pressure on President Maduro and his allies to respect democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The UK Government should lead on targeted sanctions against individuals in the Venezuelan Government responsible for drug trafficking, human rights violations and breaches of democracy. Those sanctions should include: freezing any UK assets belonging to those individuals; preventing UK individuals and companies from doing business with them; enforcing a travel ban against them; enforcing a ban on exporting weapons or any equipment that might be used for internal repression in Venezuela. I note that we give Venezuela export licences for military equipment. Surely that must stop.

Those are not economic sanctions against Venezuela. It is important that the UK targets the regime and not its citizens. Can the Minister update the House on what progress he has made in introducing sanctions, and when we are likely to see some? Many thanks for your patience, Mr Stringer; I look forward to the rest of the debate and to the Minister's reply.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): There are four Members wishing to speak and I intend to call the Front-Bench spokespeople in 30 minutes, so the arithmetic is straightforward.

9.59 am

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) on securing today's debate, which is as timely as it is important.

We work in the shadow of George Canning, whose statue stands in Parliament Square and who gave moral and material aid to the nations of Latin America as they emerged from the wreckage of the Spanish empire. Since then, Great Britain has always taken an active interest in the continent's affairs. There has been so much progress in recent years: Latin America is more prosperous and more free than at any time in history, and nations such as Colombia and Chile stand as shining examples of what the continent can and should be.

In Venezuela, however, chaos reigns. The gross economic mismanagement that the hon. Gentleman referred to means that inflation is running at more than 1,000% this year and is forecast at more than 2,000% next year. That kind of inflation guts an economy and a society. It brings with it the incalculable miseries that we have already heard discussed today. Some 82% of Venezuelans live in poverty. Businesses have been ruined. Unemployment stands at more than 25%. Life savings, and with them any chance of a dignified retirement, have been destroyed. There is not enough food for 90% of the population, and there are shortages of basic medicines.

According to the Venezuelan Government's own data, infant mortality rose by 30% last year, maternal mortality rose by 65% and malaria jumped by 76%. The people, understandably, are desperate for change, but they face naked political oppression. The utterly illegitimate Constituent Assembly has sidelined the opposition-led National Assembly. The Supreme Court has been expanded and packed with Government supporters. Just since April, at least 73 people have died at the hands of the security forces and pro-Government groups, and a further 51 deaths are unaccounted for. Opposition leaders have been arrested and dragged off in the dead of night. Dissenting TV and radio stations have been censored and shut down. We should be in no doubt that this is a tyranny.

With that in mind, will the Minister inform us what pressure the Foreign Office is exercising on the Venezuelan Government to reinstate basic democratic norms? What dialogue has he held with neighbouring Governments in Latin America to promote and co-ordinate regional pressure on Maduro? What further steps will we take at the United Nations following the report issued by its Human Rights Office on 30 August that calls for the regime to release demonstrators who have been arbitrarily detained and to end the use of military courts to try civilians? Finally, can British influence be brought to play on President Putin and the Russian Government not to bail out Maduro as the calamitous consequences of his rule bring his regime to its knees?

Closer to home, I am clear that we in Westminster have our part to play. I hope that colleagues will join me in utter condemnation of the Venezuelan Government's actions and in deploring the likes of early-day motion 1278 of 17 April 2013, which

"congratulates...Maduro for his victory in Venezuela's...Presidential elections",

praises his continuation of

"Chavez's Socialist revolution"

and urges the then Prime Minister

"to extend an invitation for...President...Maduro, to visit this country at the earliest opportunity."

There were just 13 signatories to this nonsense—unlucky for some. Among them were the current Leader of the Opposition, the current shadow Chancellor and the current chair of the Labour party, the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery).

For some historical context, allow me to read the assessment of Venezuela made by Human Rights Watch just one month before that early-day motion:

"the concentration of power and erosion of human rights protections had given the government free rein to intimidate, censor, and prosecute Venezuelans who criticized the president or thwarted his political agenda."

Lenin used to gloat about useful idiots to his cause. I call it grotesque. Either the signatories are blind to the point of crippling naivety about the ruin that Chávez and Maduro have unleashed on their country or they are complicit in actively misrepresenting the regime to the world as some kind of socialist paradise. That matters because the right hon. Members for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), and for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) head the alternative Government of our country. The signals that they send out by their failure to condemn the terror, murder and totally avoidable economic ruin are powerful ones, and are wholly unacceptable.

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. He mentioned some statistics about deaths. I am informed by the Library that there have been 124 deaths during clashes between police and protesters. The crisis in Venezuela is not just economic but political, and it is entirely self-made. Democratic institutions are being torn apart and there are violent clashes on the street. Does he share my disappointment that the Leader of the Opposition holds up Venezuela as a different and better way of doing things?

Mr Clarke: I completely share my hon. Friend's condemnation of the regime. I would not have thought it so difficult for the advocate of a "kinder, gentler politics" to condemn state violence and murder.

John Spellar: I think my cold war credentials are fairly clear, but I recognise that the hon. Gentleman and some other Members who have made interventions are fairly new to the House. Do they recognise that one can make a greater advance by uniting across party lines on issues of common agreement than by trying to score cheap political points? The points speak for themselves, but what we need is a united attitude from the British Government and the British Parliament on this issue. He is not getting the balance right.

Mr Clarke: I am afraid I totally disagree. The Leader of the Opposition speaks for the right hon. Gentleman's party, and he is absolutely and totally mealy-mouthed in refusing to condemn violence by the regime. He talks about condemning violence by all sides. What does that mean to the victims of this monstrous tyranny?

Graham Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Clarke: No, I will not.

Victoria Atkins: Let me try to bridge the gap between the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) and Conservative Members. Is there not, indeed, a great deal of agreement in this Chamber about the woeful conditions in Venezuela? Is not my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) simply saying that it would be nice if the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition joined us in condemning Venezuela and the way in which it is treating its people?

Mr Clarke: That is absolutely right. We all share horror and repugnance at what is going on in Venezuela. The right hon. Gentleman who purports to be the

[Mr Simon Clarke]

alternative Prime Minister of our country bears a heavy responsibility, and Labour Members have to account for—

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case for the importance of standing up to these people. Will he therefore join Labour Members in calling for the Government to do what the American Government have done and introduce a travel ban? Perhaps they could come up with some practical suggestions for sending a strong message that this House universally condemns human rights abuses, and then actually act on those suggestions. The need to take the plank out of one's own eye before looking at the splinter in somebody else's is a wise thing to remember in this place.

Mr Clarke: On this issue, the splinter in the eye of the right hon. Member for Islington North is a large one. However, I am perfectly happy to look at practical steps that could be taken to bring the regime to some form of account. I see the Magnitsky Act in Russia as an encouraging precedent that we should seek to follow. We need to hold those at the very top of the regime to account for their actions, but it is also important that the moral lead set by the Opposition—

Graham Jones: I have a simple question. Perhaps I am repeating what my colleagues have asked, but will the hon. Gentleman tell me what actions the current Government have taken against the Venezuelan regime?

Mr Clarke: I am asking the Minister for an update on precisely those issues: the steps that the Government are taking to hold Venezuela to account. However, at least we on the Conservative Benches are absolutely crystal clear that what the regime is doing in the name of socialism is profoundly wrong.

I close my remarks with a message of heartfelt solidarity with those who are fighting to keep the flickering flame of democracy alive in Venezuela; with an utter condemnation of President Maduro and his associates; and with a call to the leadership of the Opposition to show some belated moral clarity about the true nature of the regime that they have supported for far too long.

10.8 am

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I never thought that I would speak in a debate on Venezuela, although I am interested in what is going on. The international issues that I become involved in are normally determined by the concerns of my constituents, whether the Tamils of Sri Lanka or the Ahmadiyya Muslims.

I became involved in the issues of human rights and the terrible economic conditions in Venezuela through football—not the wonderful Latin American game, but the league one game. Ivor Heller, the commercial director of my team, AFC Wimbledon, contacted me to ask what could be done to help his partner Lisa, her Venezuelan family and the great Venezuelan community in south London. I had the opportunity to meet members of that community a fortnight ago and many of its representatives are listening to this debate. So I gently say to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) that their anxieties and

distress about the starvation and murder of their families is much greater than our own inter-parliamentary and party disputes.

I would like to give a few pen portraits of the people I met, and of their families. I would like to tell you about my constituent and neighbour, Marifel. Her brother is a surgeon in a Venezuelan hospital and he faces complications beyond anything we can imagine in our healthcare system. Marifel showed me a photo of him holding a torch to carry out an operation due to the regular blackouts in the hospital. And that is just the beginning. In her own words:

“Patients need to bring everything with them, from bed sheets to surgical gloves and antibiotics. The x-ray machines are not working and nor is simple equipment to take blood pressure. You may think we are talking about a hospital in a war zone”.

Those deplorable facilities face the country's worst healthcare challenges in decades. Diphtheria has come back after previously being eradicated, malaria has multiplied tenfold since 1999 and maternal mortality has increased by 67% in the last year alone—I could go on.

Jennifer tells me that her grandmother had a severe stroke three months ago and that she feared the worst. Fortunately, she is still with us, but the doctors treating her told her that the medicines she needed were no longer available. Jennifer has resorted to reaching out to friends in Spain, Chile and Colombia to locate, purchase and transport the medicines that her grandmother needs to survive. Similarly, Erika, who has joined us here to watch the debate, spends every night praying that her mother will be able to obtain the blood pressure pills she needs to survive.

Those terribly sad stories are the real-life examples behind the 87% shortage of food and medicine in the country. Last year, three quarters of the Venezuelan population lost an average of 19 lb because there is so little food. The annual inflation rate is expected to rise to 1,100% by the end of 2017 and the family food basket currently costs almost five times the monthly salary of the majority, leaving 82% of the population in poverty.

Leana contacted me with her story behind the shocking statistics. Her mother sends a monthly care package and money to her family in Venezuela, as they cannot afford to live on their salaries. The prices of the items they can actually find in the supermarkets are too high, and those who cannot afford food are eating out of rubbish bins. Day-to-day survival is their primary focus. Militza's nephew and niece missed 60 days of school last year because of the street protests; they live in fear and desperation, yet many of their peers do not even reach school age. It is estimated that 54% of children suffer from malnutrition, and infant mortality has risen by 30% since 2012.

Compounding the extraordinary levels of poverty are world record levels of murder across the country, with a staggering 78 homicides per day. Thamara contacted me to tell me that her brother was kidnapped by a violent gang but luckily managed to escape. Unfortunately, the younger brother of María, who also wrote to me, was murdered. No investigation has been conducted and no justice served.

Without doubt, Venezuela is in a state of humanitarian and economic crisis that we simply cannot ignore. Democracy has been breached through the illegitimate

Constituent Assembly, and the regime should be condemned loud and clear. I have not all the answers, or perhaps any of the answers, but I know that there are 5,000 British-Venezuelan citizens in our country who look to us, our Parliament, our parties and our MPs to show leadership and concern for them and for their families. I hope we can show that today.

10.14 am

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Hon. Members have made absolutely evident the problem we face regarding Venezuela, so they will forgive me if I do not repeat the claims and statements that have been so clearly pronounced. Members on both sides of the House have rightly condemned the brutality of the regime and have called for the UK Government to do more, and I welcome the opportunity to hear the Minister's views on that. I also look forward to hearing how he is working with our European partners—as they still are—on getting joint action, particularly on the sanctions and prosecutions.

If I may be permitted one small reminder: the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) focused on her constituents and she is, of course, right that that is what we are here to do, but it is also right that we remember that these distant places are not so distant. The drugs that the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) spoke about kill people in our country. The drug money that goes back into the FARC pays to train the IRA—at least it certainly used to—and that brought death to the streets of Northern Ireland. The links between the UK and South America may appear distant, but they are not. Our history, as my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) described, links us to the revolutionary era and the end of the Spanish empire. Our present, through air, communications, friendship and marriage, links us to some of the most wonderful people in the world, in some amazing countries in one of the most beautiful continents but, sadly, also to the destruction, the failure of Governments, the abuse and the violence caused by people like Maduro.

So today, we should perhaps remember some of the names that deserve to be mentioned, not the ones that should be forgotten. We should remember names such as that of Leopoldo López, who has done so much for the cause of democracy in Venezuela, and that of his wife, Lilian Tintori, who has been refused permission to enter Europe to talk to the leaders of some of our European partners by an abusive and despotic regime.

10.16 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) on bringing the debate to the House, thereby giving us all the opportunity to be involved. We are not here to point the finger; we are here to look at the situation in Venezuela and, for me, the focus, as the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) mentioned, is on poverty and human rights.

I have an interest in the issue because the political situation in Venezuela is clearly precarious, and it is my belief that there is a sincere need for intervention from this House, to help where possible—the Minister will tell us about that shortly. Regarding human rights and

poverty, the statistics that were sent to many of us highlight the dire straits that innocent people living in the country face daily. There is 80% poverty—it was 40% when Chávez came to power and the oil price was only \$9 a barrel. As the parliamentary briefing states, hunger is rife, with 12.1% of the population eating fewer than three meals a day—I wonder how many of us could deal with that every day of our lives—and the Bengoa Foundation for Food and Nutrition estimates that 30% of school-aged children are malnourished. We need to look at what we can do to assist the children—either through the Government or by bypassing them—in whatever way we can.

In its May 2017 report, Caritas, a Catholic non-profit organisation working in Venezuela, found that, in the four states it surveyed, 11.4% of children under five were suffering from either moderate or severe acute malnutrition—a serious issue for families. Human Rights Watch's 2016 report stated that infant and maternal mortality rates were rising sharply. Some 85% of medicines are running low, and Venezuelans face shortages in everything, from vaccines to rice and bread. Diphtheria had been eradicated, or at least they thought it had gone, but it is back. The incidence of malaria is up by 79% and the number of cases of the Zika virus is rising. It cannot be denied that there are acute health issues.

The International Monetary Fund estimated Venezuela's budget deficit to be 15% of GDP in 2016, and the Government have monetised the deficit by printing money—my goodness me, how silly and completely out of control—which has led to soaring inflation. Official figures have not been released since 2015, but the IMF estimates that the annual inflation rate was 255% in 2016 and, as has been mentioned, that it will rise to 1,100% by the end of 2017. After more than \$1 trillion in oil revenue, the country has tripled its international debt and there are real concerns about its ability to meet its obligations on that international front. GDP has fallen by a third in the four years since 2013 and unemployment stands at 25%. To many people those are just statistics, but it is real, cold life for those in Venezuela.

Many jobs have been destroyed and most of the population works in the informal economy. People are going hungry every day; many are forced to rummage through rubbish bins to find food. The country was once one of the richest in middle America. It has fallen so far down the league of economic stability that it is in dire straits. The UN has just published a report stating human rights have been violated extensively in Venezuela—I want to speak about that in the short time I have. *The Independent* reports that Venezuelan security forces have wielded excessive force to suppress protests. They have killed dozens of people and have arbitrarily detained 5,000 since April, including 1,000 still in custody. Instead of easing off, they are getting stronger. If ever there was a time to have a debate on Venezuela, it is now. As the UN report further shows, more than 100 lives have been lost in the struggle for democracy, with 4,000 people wounded, 5,000 detained illegally and some brought to military tribunals, often in inhumane conditions, and in some cases tortured. That should not happen in this day and age.

The UN has investigated 124 deaths in connection with demonstrations against President Maduro's Government. It found 46 deaths attributable to security

[Jim Shannon]

forces and 27 to pro-Government armed groups. These are armed militias—terrorist groups—doing the Government's work under the table, behind closed doors or with balaclavas on, or however we want to describe it. It is clear that action must be taken.

Reports state that the Attorney General had to flee the country, leaving in flux one of the major stabilising effects of the rule of law and justice. He had to flee, which shows the level to which law and order has fallen.

Mark Menzies: The hon. Gentleman talks about the loss of life. Some is state-sponsored, but much of it is a result of the breakdown in law and order. I want to bring to the House's attention the numbers of people losing their lives as victims of people trafficking, which is off the scale. These are some of the most vicious people-trafficking gangs anywhere in the world. They have no intention of trafficking people: they take their money and kill them.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention; he has clearly illustrated the issue of people trafficking. It is one of the most wicked, depraved, violent and evil activities that takes place. Taking people's money with the sole aim of killing them, as he described, illustrates the extent to which law and order has broken down and how much the Government have lost control.

When we look further afield, we see that the US and Mexico have frozen the assets of 22 top Government officials, including President Maduro. It has been reported that while previous records indicate the absence of any major assets, several now show millions of dollars stored in foreign banks. We are all entitled to our wages, but that is nothing short of theft and literally taking food out of the mouths of children in that country. That money could and should be used to supply the food and medications that are needed for children and families and to try to restore law and order in that country. I ask the Minister the same question that I suspect others have, although perhaps in a slightly different way. What steps can we take to freeze the assets of those with bank accounts in this country and then use them for the welfare of others?

One case brought to my attention is that of a 23-year-old violinist, Wuilly Arteaga, who played the national anthem on the violin during street protests. Wuilly was arrested and put in jail. His crime was instigating violence and having an incendiary substance in his possession. Since when was a violin considered an incendiary substance? That clearly tells us that the Government there look upon any kind of protest as something they simply cannot take. He was tortured in prison. Amnesty International was alerted and secured his release after 19 days of wrongful imprisonment. Again, that illustrates the type of thing taking place.

It is abundantly clear that this situation is a time bomb. We have an obligation to act and not simply provide aid, which I believe we must do. We need to provide aid and get it to the people who need it, irrespective of Government, but also ensure that it reaches the proper destination and makes a difference to the children who are malnourished. We must also get medication to those who need it—for example, the blood pressure tablets that the hon. Member for Mitcham

and Morden mentioned. We must also seek to support the cause of democracy—we all believe in democracy, freedom and liberty—and exert any pressure that we can to see a real democracy in operation. The fact that the President of Venezuela has asked the UN for help to address the crisis must allow us a door to hopefully bring about change. Let us use it. Let us hear what the Minister, our Government and our allies—the United States of America or Mexico—are doing to bring about change. I ask the FCO what steps we are taking to help Venezuela at this time of great need.

10.25 am

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is nice to see you in the Chair, Mr Stringer. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) on securing this debate, which is of personal interest to me and some very close friends. The recent political history of Venezuela has not often been the subject of debate in this place. There has been too much subtlety when there should be clarity, and strong opinions when it is obvious that there are many complicated and intractable historical issues at play: issues not only in Venezuela, but across the South American continent, as it seeks—I paraphrase Linz and Stepan—to overcome the problems of democratic transition and consolidation in the post-colonial and cold war era.

The violence of the summer has been troubling. The deaths of many, thousands injured and the brutal Government crackdown, including the arrests of thousands of mainly peaceful opponents and demonstrators, as well as members of the Venezuelan National Assembly, can lead to no other conclusion than that the Venezuelan Government, their military and police forces have lost any democratic mandate they were seeking in July.

Let me be clear on behalf of the Scottish National party: we call urgently for an end to the violence. Venezuelans and the political parties that represent them have a right to protest, but the democratic process must be put back on track. I am sure we all hope that the United Kingdom Government and the Minister here today can work with the European Union and other allies to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing crisis. Those of us who have taken a keen interest in Venezuela over many years will have found something sadly inevitable about the recent events we have seen there, as a democratic deficit, economic mismanagement, and human rights abuses have combined to create a crisis that we have not seen in the Americas for more than a decade.

There is also something inevitable about the way that many in this place have used and continue to use Venezuela to prove narrow political points. I know from speaking to enough left-wing opponents of the late President Chávez and also Maduro that ideology is not the principal driver in this crisis. I will say something about the right in a moment, but the leadership of the Opposition can be criticised for the way in which they have ignored legitimate critiques of the Venezuelan regime and continued to lend it their support until long after it was credible for them to do so. Unlike many of the Chávez fanboys, from whom we would expect this sort of thing, they should have a good enough grasp of Spanish not to fall for the dismal, knee-jerk anti-Yankee propaganda that the regime of Maduro and the late Chávez put forward. But let us not fall either for the nonsense put forward by those on the right, which

somehow derives from the tragedy the belief that social radicalism is doomed always to fail. The example of one south American country that I personally know best, Brazil, shows that right-wing parties seeking to take the left to task on corruption often find themselves equally as culpable.

The examples of Chile and Bolivia, while not themselves perfect, show that progressive Government and the responsible stewardship of national resources mean that the problems we see in the Bolivarian Republic are not inevitable. Venezuela, as does the continent of south America, carries the scars—on its landscape, in its cities, and in the hearts of its people—of a legacy of nearly five centuries of colonial exploitation. The United States, at least in the 20th and 21st centuries, must carry much responsibility for that, but it is wishful thinking on a grand scale to think that they are the only villain in this piece. The elites, both political and economic, must face up to their repeated failures and impoverishment of the Venezuelan people. That President Evo Morales of Bolivia is the only indigenous leader of a South American state shows that there are much deeper issues at play in most of the continent. Although the Morales regime has its own problems, it has demonstrated how putting the people in charge of their own resources can have positive results for the economic and social whole of a country.

Graham Jones: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Venezuelan Government have run deficits in 15 of the last 17 years? Evo Morales and the Bolivian Government have run surpluses in virtually all those years. There are two distinct, different economic answers in those countries.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Morales shows a model of economic stability that I think many in south America would hope for in their own countries.

Venezuela deserves peace in its fractured and divided society. It will have none while the left and the right fight over the bones of the cold war. In summing up, the Minister may bring forward plans on the British Government working with our partners to be more stringent in banning travelling for Venezuelan officials—but we must, most of all, stand up for peace in Venezuela, for all Venezuelans. I hope the Government will play their part.

10.30 am

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): What a pleasure it is to see you in the Chair this morning, Mr Stringer. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) on showing the foresight he did in requesting this debate in July. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for agreeing to it.

My hon. Friend pointed out clearly the importance of looking at the Latin American countries and seeing the connections between what is happening in those countries and what goes on on our streets. He described the problems of drug-taking in his constituency. I join him in asking the Minister to say some more about what the Government are doing to limit and control the arrival of those drugs in this country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) spoke eloquently about the humanitarian crisis. She has constituents with relatives

who are suffering some horrendous experiences. We have all been reading about the issues over the summer in the newspapers. Her Majesty's Opposition entirely share the concerns that have been expressed by Members on both sides of the House about the deteriorating and serious humanitarian and political crisis in Venezuela. We mourn all those who have been killed and injured in recent months on either side of the sham election in August. We believe that the bloodshed must end without delay. While that means that all sides must put down their arms, there is a special responsibility on the so-called forces of law and order to live up to their name.

We condemn the closure of the Parliament, which was established in 1999 under a constitution supported in a referendum by 88% of the Venezuelan people. We are also deeply concerned about President Maduro's sacking of his independent-minded Attorney General. When we see police and security personnel assaulting civilians in the streets, using military tactics and weaponry against unarmed protestors and snatching political opponents from their homes at dead of night, it is obvious that they stand for neither the rule of law nor the restoration of order. Those actions must stop.

The Government of Venezuela must recognise their duty to protect human rights, free speech and truly democratic elections, rather than undermining them. They must stop the ever-escalating cycle of repression, division and violence for which they have been responsible.

Of course, in making that demand, we are not blind to the historical and economic context in which today's tragic situation occurs. The hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) pointed out that the recycling of drug moneys into Europe predates 1998, but everybody—particularly the Minister, who was an oil trader in a former life—must understand the significant impact that the collapse of the oil price was bound to have, and undoubtedly has had, on the Venezuelan economy.

In 2012, Venezuela was selling its oil at \$103 a barrel. By 2016, the price had collapsed to \$35 a barrel. That is bound to be a problem for a country when 90% of its export earnings are from oil exports, which raises another issue. Why has there not been greater diversification over time to build up other parts of the Venezuelan economy? That debate is not confined to Venezuela; Nigeria suffers similarly. When the oil price is high and the exchange rate is pushed up artificially, it can be difficult to get other sectors of the economy to become competitive and effective—indeed, such criticisms were made of this country in the 1980s. It is clear that the Venezuelans have not diversified in an intelligent and strategic way.

Notwithstanding the economic difficulties, the Maduro Government have no excuses for the political crisis that now faces the country, to which they have contributed. The Government must take responsibility for the crisis and respond to the legitimate concerns, expressed on both sides of this House and throughout the international community, about the increasingly dangerous direction the country has taken over the last five years, and particularly since the beginning of 2017. If they believe that those concerns are misplaced, it is not enough to ignore or dismiss them. They must take the necessary actions to prove them wrong.

One of the major long-term problems is that millions upon millions of ordinary Venezuelan people now regard themselves as “ni gobierno, ni oposición”. They are not

[Helen Goodman]

for the Government or for the Opposition. They regard Maduro's current Administration as a long way distant from the aims, methods and achievements of the original Chavista movement, but they have no faith in the official Opposition to do anything but return to the pre-Chávez norm of serving the elites and ignoring the masses.

As the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) said, there can be no political or economic solution in Venezuela until the needs of those disenfranchised citizens are met. If the rest of the world treats the dispute simply as a binary one between the PSUV and the MUD—the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática—that will not help. I hope that the Minister will reflect that in his remarks.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Does the hon. Lady agree that, in terms of elite transition, there is a requirement for civic society—every Venezuelan—to be included in the debate about how Venezuela moves forward?

Helen Goodman: The basic foundation for a flourishing civic society must be respect for human rights. We need that before we can build the democratic institutions. The destruction of the popular democratic institutions in that country is unhelpful, extremely concerning and straightforwardly wrong.

Hon. Members have asked the Minister a number of questions, and I will add a number on the Government's policy towards Venezuela. In addition to asking about the Government's policy on limiting the drugs trade, I want to ask about the funding programme. The Government previously committed to improving the operation of the National Assembly via the Magna Carta fund. I shall be grateful if the Minister brings us up to date on how that money will now be used. What are the Government proposing to do to build civic and democratic institutions in Venezuela, or will they abandon that plank of Government policy? The need to fund the promotion of human rights is obviously greater than ever, but there will be concerns about how to guarantee that any future funds are spent appropriately in the country when its institutions are so weak. We would like an update.

Secondly, I should like to ask the Minister about arms sales. Given the legal requirement for UK Ministers not to authorise arms sales to regimes that might use those arms for internal repression, will he explain why £80,000-worth of such sales to Venezuela were authorised in the past year alone? In light of the Maduro Government's refusal to co-operate with the ongoing UN-led investigation into human rights abuses, will the Government suspend any further arms sales until those concerns are resolved?

Thirdly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden mentioned, will the Minister tell us how the Government are supporting UK nationals affected by the crisis in Venezuela? How many requests for consular assistance has the Foreign Office received? What assistance has the embassy in Caracas been able to provide? What fees have been charged to individuals for that assistance?

Fourthly, as I am sure the Minister will spell out, what initiatives are the Government supporting to put pressure on the Maduro Government and bring about peace in Venezuela, including the mediation offered by

the Vatican? On the issue of sanctions, a good case has been made by some hon. Members for individual, targeted sanctions against those involved in serious and organised crime and drug trafficking, but what assessment have the Government made of the American Secretary of State's proposals to implement all sanctions? Is the Minister not slightly concerned about possible conflicts of interest in the American Administration, given that the Secretary of State, before he took up his post, received a payment of \$180 million on leaving Exxon? Will the Minister explain whether he believes that further reducing Venezuelans' export earnings would be helpful? Will he also make it clear that one plan the UK will definitely not support—and that we will actively oppose should it be put on the international table—is Donald Trump's threat of military action against Venezuela?

In closing, I have one more important point to make. When we face a situation such as that in Venezuela, with demands for an immediate end to bloodshed and hardship, and the full restoration of human rights, it does this House proud that we are united in such calls, as we have been today. It is also important that we are consistent, and that we avoid anything that could be construed as double standards. If we are prepared to speak out with one voice on the issue of Venezuela—rightly—then, by contrast, people will not understand any equivocation about other countries with serious human rights records, such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. We must not allow anyone to claim that this House discovers its conscience and its voice only when there is an argument to be had in domestic politics. We must be consistent. I hope that the Minister will give us the assurance that the Government are wholehearted in their condemnation and addressing of the human rights problems in Venezuela, as across the globe.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, I point out that we are not pressed for time, even though the debate was well attended, and I ask him to leave two or three minutes at the end for the proposer of the motion to respond to the debate.

10.44 am

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer.

I thank the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) for initiating the debate, and I congratulate him on becoming chair of the newly formed all-party parliamentary group for Venezuela. I was, however, rather disappointed by his recent letter to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, which accused the Government of silence on Venezuela. I will therefore take the opportunity to prove that that accusation is totally unfounded, as I will explain in a moment. It is indeed high time that this entire place spoke up on the situation in Venezuela, and it is vital that we do so with a single, united parliamentary voice, without making any excuses for the Government there.

Let me go straight in to answer some of the points made in the debate. The hon. Member for Hyndburn, despite his letter to the Foreign Office understandably focusing on all the political developments in Venezuela—that, too, is what I will primarily develop my thinking on in the debate—focused on cocaine. Most of the cocaine on the UK's streets, however, is produced in

Peru and Colombia, although that is aided and abetted by the nature of the Government in Venezuela. There is a lack of effective government control in porous border areas, in particular on the border with Colombia, where Venezuela both suffers from and colludes with illegal armed and criminal groups involved in drug production and trafficking, kidnap and extortion.

That is exactly why the Government have added Venezuela to our long-running serious and organised crime programme, which already covers Colombia and Peru. The NCA and its predecessor worked with Venezuela on counter-narcotics for 15 years and that work continues. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman appreciates, however, drug policy is primarily the responsibility of the Home Office, rather than the Foreign Office, so detailed questions should be addressed to that Department.

On consular matters, our travel advice is reviewed and updated regularly. Currently, we advise against all but essential travel to Venezuela. We have received no requests for consular assistance from British nationals in Venezuela, but were we to do so we would follow them up in the usual way, with the diligence and assiduous attention that I like to think we always offer to someone abroad who asks for our assistance. We did however take dependants out of our embassy when the Constituent Assembly vote was taking place, because we were concerned about reprisals against our diplomatic staff. The situation has been alleviated since then, but at the time we took that sensible precaution.

The UK does not have its own domestic sanctions regime. We will have once we have left the European Union and passed a sanctions Act, in preparation for which something will come before the House soon. In the meantime, we are working with the international community and international organisations to implement EU sanctions. We will continue to work with EU member states and, crucially, regional powers to consider a wide range of options, including sanctions and the freezing of assets in respect of Venezuela, should a consensus emerge.

On export controls, therefore, we assure the House that the Government take their export control responsibilities very seriously and operate one of the most robust defence export control regimes in the world. We rigorously examine every application case by case against consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

To be clear and to get to the fundamental point of the debate, the problem is that democracy is being dismantled piece by piece. Human rights and the rule of law are being systematically flouted. People are struggling to get hold of even the most basic essentials in what should be one of the most prosperous countries of the region. A local think-tank reports that a basket of basic food for a family of five costs more than the minimum wages for 14 people. That economic disaster would have implications for regional stability if it were to become a humanitarian crisis. Tens of thousands have already fled to neighbouring countries, and those flows are continuing.

It is clear what has caused that appalling situation. It is the result of a catalogue of deliberate attempts to undermine democracy, culminating in a highly dubious election in July to create a Constituent Assembly that is designed to usurp established democratic authority. That body has created something that it calls a truth commission,

supposedly, as it says itself, to “resolve violence”. It has already removed powers from the democratically elected National Assembly—it is like having a Parliament above this Parliament to neuter it—and stripped an MP of his parliamentary immunity, thus setting a very dangerous precedent.

As well as undermining democracy, the Venezuelan Government are failing to respect and defend human rights. Venezuela was identified in 2016 as one of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s 30 human rights priority countries. Opposition politicians have been arrested, protesters have been tried in military courts and demonstrators have been subjected to heavy-handed treatment by security forces, leading to more than 120 deaths since protests began in March. I am sure that everyone in this House considers that totally unacceptable. Baroness Anelay expressed our serious concern when she met members of the Venezuelan Government in Caracas in May. She urged all her interlocutors to respect the human rights of all Venezuelan citizens.

Since the start of the crisis, the UK has made its views very clear to both the Venezuelan Government and the opposition. We condemned the violence earlier this year and called on all sides to resolve their differences through dialogue. The Foreign Secretary issued a statement criticising the imposition of the Constituent Assembly, which does not represent the wishes of the Venezuelan people, and called on the Venezuelan Government to reduce tensions.

We have spoken in support of the integrity and autonomy of the National Assembly to both the Venezuelan Government and members of the Assembly itself, many of whom I met in March, and we condemned the dismissal of the independent prosecutor general. We made it clear that those steps constituted a direct attack on Venezuela’s democracy and its legitimate democratic institutions. I say to the hon. Member for Hyndburn that, far from doing nothing, I have been personally criticised by the Venezuelan Government for having been critical of them.

We believe strongly that the only solution to the crisis is for the Venezuelan Government to restart talks with the opposition. We encourage them to do that without causing further suffering to ordinary Venezuelans. We are working with our EU partners on a tangible response to encourage the two sides to find a solution that respects the will of all Venezuelans.

On Thursday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I will discuss the UK’s approach with Julio Borges, the President of the National Assembly, at a meeting in Downing Street. We had hoped also to meet Lilian Tintori, who is a human rights activist and the wife of opposition leader Leopoldo López, who is currently under house arrest. However, she has been prevented from leaving Venezuela, which is yet another example of how democracy and human rights are being so heinously undermined in that country.

One helpful development is the strong regional response. That is crucial, because any solution must come from the region. The Lima Group, a new gathering of a dozen or so countries from across the Americas that, as the name suggests, is led by Peru, strongly condemned “the rupture of the democratic order”

and

“the systematic violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, violence, repression and political persecution”.

[Sir Alan Duncan]

Importantly, it refused to recognise the Constituent Assembly. The condemnation of the Constituent Assembly by that regional gathering of neighbouring countries is a crucial development. I have worked closely with Peru's Foreign Minister, Ricardo Luna. Indeed, I last spoke to him on 18 August, at length, to acknowledge and support Peru's regional leadership and to offer UK backing.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response. I and others have asked how we can get food aid and medicines to children and families. Is it possible to do so through that organisation?

Sir Alan Duncan: I will write to the hon. Gentleman with more detail, but I believe that I am right in saying that the Venezuelan Government have declined to accept any assistance of that sort, which once again illustrates the total lack of concern that they have for their own people—a people whose need is growing. The poorest are always hurt hardest. The politicians in Latin America who talk most about the poor are often the ones who do them most harm.

The US has imposed sanctions on several Venezuelan Government officials, including high-ranking military officers and the managers of the state oil company, and it recently announced new sanctions targeting Venezuela's financial sector and the issuing of debt. The Constituent Assembly's determination to prosecute for treason people who support US sanctions is indicative of its total disregard for the rule of law.

As the Foreign Secretary said in his July statement, Venezuela stands on the brink of disaster. The Venezuelan Government must pull it back from the brink. They must engage in good faith with the opposition, restore democracy to the country and respect the human rights of all its citizens. Together with our international partners, we will continue to press the Government to do all those things and to restore the security and stability that all Venezuelans so desperately need.

10.56 am

Graham Jones: I thank everyone who attended the debate, which has been helpful and is timely, given the situation that developed over the summer and the events that led up to it. As I mentioned, it is important, not

just for the global interest but for our constituents, that the United Kingdom takes a greater interest in Latin America.

I asked the Minister about the drugs epidemic on our streets, including in my constituency. I reiterate my question: what are the Government doing to tackle that issue? The purity of drugs has reached alarming new levels. I asked him about the UK's input into the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and whether it would be possible for his office to facilitate dialogue between parliamentarians and that UN office.

Turning to the economic and political situation, condemnation is not enough. It is simply unacceptable for us just to sit by and condemn while people suffer. Many Members spoke about the suffering and hardship in Venezuela. I do not think that the situation has been exaggerated; it is probably far more dire than it has been painted in this debate. I urge the Government to move from condemnation to action. The United States is taking action. Although large parts of our policy reside with the European Union, it is for the United Kingdom, while we are a member of the European Union, to advocate sanctions. It is for the United Kingdom to be the lead nation in the EU in showing the world that we stand up against human rights abuses and for democracy and the rule of law. We should not simply be on the sidelines condemning the Maduro Government.

I urge the Minister to look at what actions he can take to address the questions that he was asked during the debate, and to respond to those questions. We have oligarchs and an authoritarian communist regime that do not want to give up power. The idea that simple dialogue will bring about a transition to a peaceful Venezuela seems a long way off. Those people are making huge amounts. They are also concerned about what would happen in a transition. Would they be arrested? Would they be taken to the United States to face charges for various acts that they have committed? Where would they stand legally? They have entrenched to protect their position, which seems secure as long as Venezuela is a militaristic state.

I ask the Minister to make more effort to bring about action on Venezuela and, as he suggested, to work with the countries that are opposed to the current regime in Venezuela and with our partners around the globe to improve the situation for all Venezuelans and for the rest of the world.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Coventry City of Culture

[SIR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

11 am

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of Coventry's bid to be the 2021 City of Culture.

Thank you, Sir David. I am sure that you will chair the debate in your usual fair-minded manner. We have known each other a long time, but I would not expect any favouritism from you. It is a great honour and privilege to be here today to talk about the wonderful city of Coventry and its bid to be the city of culture for 2021. Coventry is often overlooked in favour of larger neighbours such as Birmingham, but that does not mean that Coventry is any less great. It is a welcoming city, with rich traditions and fantastic people. It is a city with a long history of culture and innovation. It was once celebrated for its mystery plays, which attracted travellers from far and wide. Some historians even believe that one such visitor was William Shakespeare. Coventry also has a proud history of fighting injustice. The legend goes that Lady Godiva rode through the city on horseback naked to protest against the high taxes levied on city folk.

Moving forward in history, we see that Coventry has always been an industrial city with an important place in the British economy. As far back as the 14th century, Coventry was an important centre for the cloth and linen trade. Since then, Coventry has developed into a thriving city for manufacturing—first for the manufacture of bicycles and, more recently, as the centre of the country's motor car industry, with world leader Jaguar Land Rover based in the city. It continues to be at the forefront of industry, with the London Taxi Company beginning to develop and manufacture electric taxis in its Coventry factories.

Coventry has also been, and continues to be, a strong trade union city, with the development of the labour and trade union movement and the shop stewards movement. The likes of Thomas Mann and Jack Jones were heavily involved in organising a union presence in the city.

During the second world war, Coventry was one of the hardest hit cities in the country. In just one night in November 1940, 568 people were killed, 4,330 homes were destroyed and thousands more were damaged. Seventy-five per cent of Coventry's factories were damaged, and the city's cathedral, built in the late 14th century, was also badly damaged in the bombings. Today, the old cathedral stands as an important reminder of the fortitude and resilience of the great city and people of Coventry. It is also a monument to reconciliation and international development.

During the war, Coventry became the first city in the world to twin with another, offering the hand of friendship to the people of Stalingrad, who had faced similar hardships, only on a larger scale. After the war, it was twinned with the city of Dresden in a further symbol of international reconciliation and peace. That tradition continues today, with Coventry enjoying the friendship of 26 cities around the world.

That heritage is proudly remembered and continues to inform the city's character. It has shaped Coventry into a city that should be celebrated. Coventry is not just an industrial city but a city of academic excellence.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a brilliant case, which I support, for Coventry being the city of culture. Does he agree that the bid gives an opportunity to not just Coventry but the wider local area to show what it is all about, including places such as Bedworth and Keresley in my constituency?

Mr Cunningham: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention and cannot disagree. It is a great opportunity not only for Coventry but for the west midlands in particular and, in a way, for Warwickshire, which is part of the west midlands to an extent.

Coventry has two world-class universities in the form of Coventry University and the University of Warwick. Those universities attract students from all over the country, as well as from across the rest of the world.

As with the mystery plays in the middle ages, culture continues to be an important part of the city's life. The city pioneered theatre in education and it is now a vibrant centre for theatre and performing arts. It was the birthplace of 2 Tone music, a hybrid music that reflected the city's diversity. Today, Coventry boasts the Godiva festival, the largest free festival in Europe.

The regeneration of areas such as Far Gosford Street and the Friargate project have attracted people from all over the country. There is also a proud sporting tradition in the city—I am not referring to the football club at the moment—with several sports teams maintaining strong and passionate fan bases. It is a city fiercely proud of its achievements, and rightly so.

People who come to Coventry are constantly surprised by the city and all that it has to offer. It is a vibrant, bustling city, surrounded by a beautiful protected green belt. The people of Coventry are proud and passionate about their city, and rightly so. It is a city that deserves recognition. I can think of no better way of celebrating Coventry than by making it our next city of culture, and I strongly urge Members to back its bid.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I very much recognise what the hon. Gentleman says. He may have concluded his remarks, but I want to congratulate him on bringing forward this important debate to put Coventry's bid for city of culture on the map. From his remarks I have learnt a great deal about the city closest to where I live. Does he agree that the award would add to the resurgence of the city that we have seen in recent years, and particularly the welcome resurgence of manufacturing? With this bid, we will ensure that more and more people get to see the great virtues of the city of Coventry.

Mr Cunningham: I certainly agree. We are virtually next-door neighbours, and anything that benefits Coventry also benefits Rugby and the rest of the west midlands, as I indicated earlier. With that, I urge Members to back the bid.

11.8 am

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) on securing this debate. It is exciting for all of us to

[*Dame Caroline Spelman*]

know that Coventry has made the shortlist and is now in a five-way race to win this title. I declare my interest in that part of my constituency is covered by the diocese of Coventry, so I have many reasons to visit the city on a regular basis.

As the hon. Gentleman said, it is the indomitable character of the city, which rebuilt itself after terrible destruction in the second world war, that means it is a very strong contender for the designation of city of culture. As he said, the city has not just one but two outstanding universities in Warwick and Coventry, which are very much at the cutting edge of pushing the frontiers of science and technology in some of the industrial sectors in which our country leads globally. Most notably, the pursuit of driverless cars is building on the city's great traditions in the motor industry for our country.

In my role as Second Church Estates Commissioner, I have witnessed the excellent work that Coventry cathedral undertakes. It is one of the world's oldest religious centres. The terrible destruction of the cathedral in 1940 was a turning point in its history. Provost Howard stood in the ruins, which can be seen today, and made a Christmas day broadcast in which he pledged to make reconciliation for peace the focus of the cathedral's work. He spoke in that broadcast about building a kinder, more Christ-like world. There could hardly be a more poignant moment to argue the case for designating as city of culture one that has such a focus on the work of reconciliation and peace. We live at the moment in such a troubled, unstable world, and Coventry has a particular mission. As the hon. Member for Coventry South mentioned, it has 200 active partners around the world, in more than 40 countries, which are committed to sharing that ministry of reconciliation.

The cathedral church itself also offers great support to the bid for the accolade of city of culture. I mean not only the ruins that remain following the second world war but the new cathedral, which is an iconic building in its own right and which hosts many cultural events, not least the concerts of our own Parliament choir. I sing with the choir, and every other year we join with St Michael's singers from the cathedral to give a big concert. A great highlight that I will never forget was singing Mendelssohn's "Elijah", with Sir Thomas Allen. The cathedral, at the heart of the city, offers some of the best examples of what our country has to offer culturally. However, it is also used for other events that have nothing to do with music. I took part in a national conference about the threats that the environment faces, entitled "Reconciling a Wounded Planet", which drew people from all over the country to come and talk about what we can do about the deleterious effects of climate change.

Coventry is a city at the heart of the country, and incredibly well connected. It is easy to get to, and it is focused on human connectedness. I think that that makes it an incredibly strong contender to be made the city of culture.

11.12 am

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), on securing this timely debate. As other right hon. and hon. Members, irrespective of

political hue, would agree, Coventry is a great city, for many reasons. However, I shall briefly focus on its history, its industrial heritage and its multiculturalism.

Coventry grew to become one of the most important and strategically significant medieval cities in the UK. Today we have countless culturally significant medieval buildings and ruins dotted throughout the city. We are an historic symbol of the terror and devastation that war can cause, but also of the importance of reconciliation and peace. Equally, Coventry has made significant industrial contributions to cultural advancement. We were the birthplace of the modern bicycle and the motor car, and we continue to be a leading light in automotive engineering, thanks to the role played by Jaguar Land Rover, the London Taxi Company, the University of Warwick and Coventry University. Finally, Coventry's cultural identity is strengthened and enhanced by our city's multiculturalism. We have some of the most diverse and integrated communities in the UK, and I am proud to represent the most diverse area of the city.

Coventry has some great cultural assets, but it is also an understated city that has struggled to make the most of the historical and cultural resources at its disposal. That is why I am pleased that it has put itself forward to be the UK city of culture in 2021. I believe, of course, that we deserve to win. Winning the title would give the city a once in a lifetime opportunity to make sense of its cultural resources and use them to tell its story to the rest of the nation and the world, using the energy, excitement and hope that that would provide, to create a lasting economic and social legacy for current and future generations.

11.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (John Glen): May I say for the first time from the Front Bench what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David? I congratulate the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) on securing this important debate about Coventry's bid to become UK city of culture in 2021, and all those right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed—particularly the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher), but also my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) and my hon. Friends the Members for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey) and for Rugby (Mark Pawsey).

The hon. Member for Coventry South is a passionate advocate of the city, and this is clearly an exciting time for Coventry and the four other towns and cities shortlisted to be the next holders of the transformative and prestigious title in question. The UK city of culture programme is one of our nation's crown jewels. The winning area must build a high-quality arts and cultural programme that reaches a wide variety of audiences and participants. The title of city of culture acts as a catalyst that can regenerate and transform a place, enabling it to attract external visitors and investment while engaging and inspiring local communities and institutions, including universities, schools, health trusts and businesses. I note the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire about its value in the wider area.

Dame Caroline Spelman: In the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), who was a member of Coventry City Council, I would point out

that Coventry lost out under the structure of Advantage West Midlands. The Minister has spoken about investment; does he agree that the absolute commitment of the new Mayor of the West Midlands to back the bid, and for the region to get behind Coventry's case, should help us to win?

John Glen: My right hon. Friend's point is, as always, well made, and she is right. It is useful to have the widest possible base of support across the whole region.

This year, 11 places made an application to become the UK city of culture in 2021 and, following a recommendation from the independent panel chaired by the excellent Phil Redmond, I recently agreed a shortlist of five. It was not an easy decision, as all the bids had real merit. However, I am delighted that the shortlist contains cities representing England, Scotland and Wales, each of which makes a strong case. I have been impressed by the full engagement of all the places making bids. It is even more gratifying to see that making a bid has become a valuable process in itself. It has proved transformational in raising a city's profile and developing a clear set of cultural aspirations for the future. Feedback from the places that did not make the shortlist—Hereford, Perth, Portsmouth, St Davids, Warrington and Wells—confirms that.

Now, along with Coventry, the other shortlisted places—Paisley, Stoke-on-Trent, Sunderland and Swansea—are embarking on the final stages of the process. I shall announce the winner by the end of this year. There is clearly much to be gained by the winning city. Taking part in the arts can improve self-esteem and confidence. It makes people feel good about where they live and about themselves, raising aspiration and bringing communities together. The arts and culture, through their ability to engage, inspire and challenge us, are instrumental in helping to break down barriers to participation and engagement across race, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation and socio-economic disadvantage. The economic and social importance of culture to place making has never been more understood and acknowledged. That is underlined by the culture White Paper and is evident in emerging data and evidence coming from Hull—the incumbent UK city of culture.

Before I address Coventry's bid, it may be helpful to set the potential benefits that the city of culture title brings against what has happened in Hull this year. As recently as 2013, *The Economist*, which really should know better, suggested that declining northern cities should be abandoned. However, only three years later and still not even into its official year as city of culture, Hull became the only UK city to make Rough Guides' top 10 cities in the world to visit, alongside Vancouver, Reykjavik and Amsterdam. That seemingly remarkable transformation is now backed up by the data emerging from the evaluation of the first three months of this year, including hotel occupancy being up almost 14%, a 17% increase in rail passengers and 37% of local businesses reporting an increase in turnover.

Of course, it is not only about economic regeneration. It is extremely heartening to learn that, in the first three months of 2017, nine out of 10 people living in Hull took part in a cultural activity, and that Hull 2017's volunteers had already undertaken more than 100,000 volunteer hours. Those are amazing achievements for which Hull City Council and the Hull UK City of Culture 2017 company can be hugely proud.

On Coventry's bid to become UK city of culture 2021, I acknowledge that the city has much to be proud of. Its contribution to UK culture is already impressive, from Lady Godiva to The Specials and 2 Tone, and it is also home to some of our most important medieval and post-war architecture. Throughout the bidding process, it has sought to highlight its cultural diversity and its rich heritage. Coventry hopes to use the power of culture to cross boundaries, create understanding, nurture respect and embrace humanity. As a city of invention and reinvention—as we have heard from various colleagues—it wants to create a digitally connected and international place, to reimagine the place of culture in a diverse, modern Britain.

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): I am sorry for intervening so late in the debate, Sir David, but I knew I could count on your indulgence, for which I am very grateful, and, indeed, on the Minister's. I will say a few words along the lines of exactly what the Minister was saying about Coventry. It is all of the things he said, but it is also a city of youth—that is our appeal. On the grounds that Scotland and the north-east have had a city of culture, and Londonderry in Northern Ireland was the city of culture, if there is any sort of turn to be taken or regional coverage to progress, it is clearly time for the midlands to have one. Coventry is at the centre of the midlands, which is at the centre of our bid, and we can assure the House and the country of a very fine series of great, exciting and innovative events, in line with the long tradition of innovation in Coventry.

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman; I will reference him later in my remarks. His point about the engagement with youth and the value of the wider application of this title to the area was well made.

Coventry has a rich architectural heritage, with St Mary's Guildhall, the Charterhouse and, of course—as we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden—the magnificent cathedral, which is one of the city's most important assets and, as a living architectural symbol of the UK's post-war reconstruction and hope, perhaps one of the most important modern buildings in the UK. The city is also home to two universities, which both contribute to the cultural assets of the city and the UK. Coventry University has developed a strong reputation for the quality of its arts and media courses and for its work as an incubator of the next generation of young talent in the cultural and creative industries. I believe we have at least one of its alumni here today.

Some of Coventry's other great cultural assets include the Belgrade theatre—the main building-based producing theatre in Coventry—and Warwick arts centre, on the University of Warwick campus, which is one of the largest multi-art form venues in the UK, delivering an extensive programme of performing and visual arts and film. There is also the highly respected Coventry transport museum, which houses the largest publicly owned collection of British vehicles in the world and tells the story of Coventry and its people through the development of the automotive industry. The museum will no doubt hold many memories for the hon. Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson), who was involved in the motor industry there for many years. The city's arts and exhibition space, the Herbert art gallery and museum, hosts major touring exhibitions and permanent galleries chronicling the history of the city.

[John Glen]

Coventry is also home to a number of exciting contemporary arts organisations and individuals, and has shown how it can deliver exciting, large-scale events. For example, the Godiva festival is an annual free festival that attracts more than 140,000 visitors. It has a genuinely diverse family audience, drawing from a wide range of communities and across the age spectrum. There is also the Festival of Imagineers, run by Imagineer Productions, which is a week-long festival celebrating innovation linking art, design and engineering, and acting as a catalyst for new creative work at the intersection of art and engineering.

On funding, significant cultural investment has been made in those and other projects and programmes in Coventry over the years. In the 21 years since the Heritage Lottery Fund was created, more than £30 million has been invested in 125 separate projects, including more than £12 million on historic buildings and monuments and more than £4 million on parks. Over the past seven years, Arts Council England has invested more than £21 million, supporting a range of arts organisations and excellent, innovative projects.

In June, ACE announced future funding for 2018-22 to its national portfolio of organisations in Coventry of £8.3 million. That is an increase of almost a third, from £1.5 million a year during the current period to more than £2 million a year for the 2018-22 period. That four years of confirmed funding gives those organisations the ability to plan ahead and develop strategic partnerships, which in turn bring more cultural product and funding into towns and cities.

The cumulative impact of that investment has helped to drive the ongoing development of this historic city. I know there are many more plans in the pipeline, including

for Drapers' Hall, which has received £1 million from the Government, to develop as a venue for music performance and education. Most recently, Coventry has been awarded just under £1.5 million from the Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Fund's Great Place scheme to stage a programme of events celebrating the heritage and communities of Coventry. The award builds on the city's new 10-year cultural strategy, its cultural destinations award and its bid to be UK city of culture.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The Minister is certainly making an impressive case for Coventry. I have no doubt that Coventry would hold the city of culture title with distinction, and that Coventry 2021 would be a huge success. However, with the bigger emphasis on regeneration in this year's competition, does he agree that Paisley, with its economic and social needs, allied with its many cultural delights, has a strong chance of winning?

John Glen: I will not be drawn on the likelihood of that. It is abundantly clear from all that we have heard this morning that, in common with the other shortlisted areas, including Paisley, Coventry has the ambition, the heritage and the cultural infrastructure to be the next city of culture. I think it is apt to finish with some thoughts from a Coventry-based company of artists, Talking Birds, who specialise in acts of transformation. They talk about Coventry as a city rich in possibility, and even though its inhabitants like to think that they are not too attached to the place, the truth is that they are. They enjoy the city's contradictions and believe in its potential. I wish Coventry the best of luck in its bid. We do not have many more weeks to wait until the outcome.

Question put and agreed to.

New Housing Design

11.29 am

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

That this House has considered new housing design.

Good morning, Sir David. It is great to serve under your chairmanship. Britain needs more homes; I think we all agree on that. Rising house prices have made building more houses a social and economic imperative, so it is vital that we get the design and quality of these new homes right. I will make two points in my speech. I will argue that the majority of new homes should be built in a high-quality traditional design, so that they are popular with the public. Secondly, I will call for the creation of a new homes ombudsman, to give homebuyers redress for any problems with their new homes, to ensure the highest possible standards.

There was one policy in the Conservative election manifesto that I dare say I was delighted to recommend to everyone, unlike one or two others in the manifesto. We committed to building

“better houses, to match the quality of those we have inherited from previous generations. That means supporting high-quality, high-density housing like mansion blocks, mews houses and terraced streets.”

That commitment really stood out to me.

As someone who was a member of a planning committee for nearly 12 years, I know just how terrified some communities are of new development—not necessarily because people are nimbys but because they have seen how developments in the last 50 years have left communities with homes that are totally unsuitable for their area. That is backed by hard evidence. A recent survey of 2,000 British adults showed that a whopping 81% are unenthused about living in new build housing developments. What is more, 60% feel there are too many unattractive, poorly built new builds popping up across the country. Older properties and streetscapes in a traditional design are, on the whole, much more popular.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I agree with every word that my hon. Friend has said so far. Does he agree that it is possible to have attractive houses that have no net energy bills during the course of the year? That is not fantasy. The Building Research Establishment has proved that such houses can be built, and it has examples of them. Does he agree that we should go further down that route, to have not only attractive houses but houses that do not have energy bills?

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend makes a very interesting point. Houses need to be attractive not only architecturally; they are very attractive to live in if people will not have energy bills. That also, of course, reduces our commitment to produce energy as a country, so it makes our power stations and gas supply go a lot further. He makes a really good point that I very much endorse.

The survey showed that over two fifths of people feel that new build homes lack character and are an eyesore in the local community. Those are shocking statistics. We will never build support for new homes when people fear new housing designs. The latest research from the Department for Communities and Local Government

shows that over half of households would be less opposed to new house building if they had more say over the design and layout of developments.

A separate poll for Ipsos MORI shows that design clearly influences public support for new build homes. When people were asked about their local area, housing designs in traditional form and style commanded about 75% support. Less traditional development styles commanded very low support, from about a fifth to a third of those polled. The message is clear: people want and are happy to accept new housing if it has the right design, and if developers take local people with them when producing new designs.

We cannot go back to the mistakes of the '60s and '70s, when ugly modernist designs were imposed on communities, damaging trust in new housing for a generation. Of course, some of those properties proved not really fit for purpose, and some have actually had to come down. I say to the Minister that this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity, and we only have one chance to get it right. We must build new housing in the right way, with designs and forms sympathetic to local areas.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a really strong case for something that is terribly important. Does he agree that it is right to cater for all types of people? New homes are quite often very much built for young families, but in Somerset, the number of people over 75 will double within a decade. Is it not right that we should consider purpose-built, well-designed developments for them—low-level houses, with sliding doors, that look attractive, are perhaps modular and fit in with the vernacular? Is it not essential to put that into the whole planning process?

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend makes a really good point. We can still have a reasonably traditional design and regional design that also fits into the new type of living we want. Older people may well need wheelchair access, wider doors and all sorts of things in these properties, and those can be fitted in. Our housing almost fits into categories—affordable homes, homes for young people or homes for the elderly—but it should be a complete mix. When we have a complete mix within the design, we can then get it right. Traditionally, we would not have had one type of housing all put together; my hon. Friend makes a good point.

We must build new housing in the right way, with designs and forms sympathetic to local areas. Ruth Davidson hit the nail on the head when she recently wrote:

“The biggest ally we have in increasing housing supply is beauty—if new houses complement the local environment and avoid the disastrous design choices of the past we can help build sustainable local support for extra construction.”

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I must say, as a Scottish MP, that I found it rather ironic last week when Ruth Davidson talked about investment in housing and was looking to see if she might be getting the polish out for her brass neck; the Conservative party has left a massive social housing crisis in Scotland as a result of the disastrous right to buy. That has only been helped by the abolition of right to buy by the Scottish National party Government in Scotland.

Neil Parish: I have not had enough direct experience of what the hon. Gentleman is talking about in Scotland, so I do not intend to answer his question. As far as I am concerned, Ruth Davidson does a very good job—but he would expect me to say that, would he not? She is right; good-quality design will boost support for development and then encourage further growth. I would like to give a special mention to the social enterprise Create Streets. It has done fantastic work in the past three years to encourage the development of quality town and city homes. Its focus is on terraced streets of housing and apartments, rather than complex multi-storey buildings. We know that these designs are popular with the public.

So how do we achieve this? The key is strong community engagement. The tools are already there in the form of neighbourhood plans and design codes, but we need to ensure that neighbourhood plans are not then overruled by local district councils and others who decide that they still know best. I want to ensure that local people get a real input into the design. A design code is a set of drawn design rules that instruct and advise on the physical development of an area. Used well, they create certainty about what should be built, but they are not enough used. Local people should be given the encouragement and resources to create neighbourhood plans with their own design codes, and then, like I said, to actually put the plan in place. They could then plan the sort of development they want in their local area. This would have two main benefits: it would improve the quality of our housing stock and give local communities a stake and a sense of civic pride in the new development. They would be buying into the new development, and we need that to happen more.

Shelter recently published a report, “New Civic Housebuilding: A better way to build the homes we need”, with practical solutions for building high-quality, popular and affordable homes. It recommended a strong master planning process so that local groups, landowners and residents could influence the design of new housing in the area, which in turn will build public support.

The Royal Institute of British Architects has also recommended that every neighbourhood forum or parish council should have the funding to develop a design code for their area. This is a good idea. The village of Membury in my constituency has drawn up its own local plan; the problem is that the local district council is trying to overrule it. That is where the Government’s ideas are right. We must make sure that Membury can get its way because it had a local referendum and has done all the right things, but its plan is still being scuppered by the local district council. Imagine how this idea could stimulate interest in local design of housing and really boost support for new housing in towns and cities in England and across the country.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. Does he agree that if we want local people to engage properly in the manner he is describing, which is absolutely right, it is critical that their decisions, guidance and local plans are not overruled by remoter bodies over which they have very little control?

Neil Parish: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. A developer may put an exciting design on the table but then, further along the line, may decide that due to

economic or other circumstance they cannot build to that specification; or they may suddenly drop a water park that was in the specification. That is when people become cynical, which is why, when things are put forward and local people have an input, we need to build what they decided on, not something that is foisted upon them.

Developers need certainty about the standards they must hit instead of the current race to the bottom. Local people must have confidence that developers will build to their plans. A new town, Sherford, is being built in Devon, and in Cullompton a proposed garden village will have a water park and a lot of green open space. What I have seen so far is very exciting, but I want to make sure that the developers do what they say they will do, because it is a great example of how design should be done with a design code and proper consultation. However, the developers have now applied to change the town code to mere guidelines. That would be a retrograde step and must not be allowed to happen around the UK.

When communities come together to influence local housing design, they must know that the plans will be implemented. The local authority should amend them only in exceptional circumstances, not because they do not suit its plans for the future. Designs should not be railroaded by big house builders chasing extra profit and deciding that the economics have changed. I have a clear question for the Minister: how are the Government working to meet their manifesto commitment to support high-quality, high-density housing like mansion blocks, mews houses and terraced streets? How are they helping communities to shape design of houses in their local area?

The second part of my speech calls for a new homes ombudsman. The concept is simple: a new ombudsman focusing on complaints about new build homes. I suspect that no Member in the Chamber has not received complaints from constituents about new build. An ombudsman would give new homebuyers redress for any dispute with house builders or warranty providers. I am sure that every Member here today could reel off examples from their own constituency.

In Axminster and particularly Cullompton, in my constituency, there has been a problem with new homes. I name Barratt Homes and its offshoot, David Wilson Homes, not because there have been problems with their houses, but because they have not redressed those problems. They have been reticent to be contacted and difficult to get hold of. They take ages to make repairs, such as to roofs that are not sealed properly, and to wet rendering that is supposed to be damp proof, but is not. There have been all sorts of problems that they do not sort out quickly enough. That is where the new homes ombudsman could have a good effect.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): In my constituency, Bellway Homes has been negligent to my constituents. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with my constituents, Mr and Mrs Maine, that

“whilst numerous consumer groups have redress to an independent ombudsman consumers who have bought defective homes have no parity of redress and are therefore being discriminated against by the Government”?

Neil Parish: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I do not know about the individual case, but I suspect it is similar to those we all get when redress is not available.

An ombudsman could intervene directly to get the builder to rectify the situation quickly. That is what the issue is about. Builders often rectify problems eventually, if they have not gone bankrupt in the meantime or used other wheezes to make sure they do not carry out improvements and repairs. If someone buys a new house, they should be able to get quality, and redress if there is a problem. We must accept that when a new home is built, there can be problems with it. I accept that, but there must be proper redress.

Before this debate, I asked members of the public on the House of Commons Facebook page to give examples of problems they have had with their new homes. There was a very strong response. They reported leaky pipes, faulty front doors, abandoned rubble and necessary re-rendering. A whole host of new build problems were raised. The anecdotes were depressing and are backed up by hard evidence. The national new homes customer satisfaction survey showed that an overwhelming 98% of new home buyers had reported snags or defects to the building after moving in. Over four in 10 reported more than 10 faults. That is shocking in a new property.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): A new homes ombudsman would provide a great opportunity to look again at the system of warranties and perhaps assurances. As my hon. Friend will know, modern methods of construction offsite would require an assurance rather than a warranty. Is there an opportunity to look at assurances and warranties again and to give consumers the powers that they need to get decent homes and the good build that they require?

Neil Parish: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. That quality of assurance rather than a warranty would work much better. The National House Building Council can act, but once a builder has started repairs, it can do no more. If the builder takes a long time to instigate repairs, there is no real redress. That is where there is a role for an ombudsman and an assurance scheme so that building is delivered to a high standard and builders are held accountable. I value that point.

If a customer buys goods in a shop, there is an automatic power of redress, but if someone spends their life savings on a new home, they may struggle for years to get what they paid for. If we make the mistake of erecting millions of poor-quality homes in the next decade, the public will never forgive us. We are building to higher standards, including insulation standards, but we must make sure that houses are designed to fit in with the local area, with regional variations so that one does not see exactly the same designs all over the country, whether in the north of England, Devon, Wales or Scotland. One could almost say, “Well, we’ll have an off-the-peg development,” and all the homes would look the same. I have explained what I want to see in the future, and the cost will not be that much greater if we use a little more imagination as we build.

As things stand, the National House Building Council cannot step in if the builders claim that they are dealing with the problems, and there seems to be no time limit on how long a builder can spend dealing with problems. That is where a new homes ombudsman could step in to close the loophole. That would give a wake-up call to all house builders—many are good, but many are not—to sharpen up their act and build to the design standards

and quality that they promised. Builders would know that they could not cut corners, as redress would be swift and exacting.

The all-party parliamentary group for excellence in the built environment, chaired in the last Parliament by my then hon. Friend Oliver Colvile, published a report last year on the quality and workmanship of new housing. Its No. 1 recommendation was for a new homes ombudsman. I think that the screw is beginning to turn on this issue. We need to take action. This country is going to embark on a big house-building drive. Those properties are needed, but we must ensure that they are built in the right way. Let us seize the opportunity and give people the sort of housing designs that they want. I am talking about quality, popular designs, with community backing, and all backed up by a powerful new housing ombudsman. I look forward to the Minister’s response.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): Order. It is clear that a number of colleagues wish to speak. The winding-up speeches will start at 12.30 pm. I hope that everyone will bear that in mind and make speeches of four to five minutes at the most.

11.51 am

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on raising this issue. It is a really big issue in my city. Those of us who know Cambridgeshire know that the view for people coming across the fens used to be just King’s College chapel and the university library—two different examples of architectural styles—but now they see cranes everywhere. The city is being rebuilt around us. Whether we are building homes that people can afford or repositories of value is perhaps a debate for another day. Today, I want to raise two particular issues, which have already been addressed.

A few weeks ago, I was taken to see a new house in Cambridge. Inevitably it was a very expensive new home. There was a line of houses, and one looked like a building site because the people who had moved in had found so many problems that it had literally needed to be torn apart from the inside—I had never seen anything like it. After they had done it once, they went back in and there were yet more problems, so it has been done twice. Those people have not been able to be in their new home for more than a year; their lives have been wrecked and ruined, and I suspect that the same issues exist elsewhere. I will not name the house builder today, because I live in hope that it may be encouraged to do the decent thing. Exactly as has been suggested, if people get a defective product in any other walk of life, they are given the opportunity to have their money back and go elsewhere. That is what the house builder should have provided in this case, and it should still do that in my view. That is not the only case, as we have heard. I have had others in my constituency, but that one was particularly shocking. I think that this is partly a matter of the attitude from the house builders and how they treat their customers.

If there is an individual problem, there is also a collective problem, because—as has been said—communities feel that they have been disempowered.

[Daniel Zeichner]

There has been much talk lately of taking back control. From Cambridge's perspective, the people in Brussels are pussycats compared with the house builders and developers who, in many people's view, have not kept their side of the deal. If people come to Cambridge, they will see the new station development. Many promises were made many years ago, but as it goes down the line, things are taken out. Promises were made, and the local council does its best, but it is up against the power of the developers, who are, in many people's view, letting people down. Right at the end was a delightful Victorian terrace. It would not have been much to ask of the developer to leave that for the people of Cambridge, but no, it had to go as well.

When I asked the former Secretary of State in the Lobby—there are of course many Cambridge people in this place—he shrugged and said, “Well, there's not much I can do, either.” Talk about no control—the Secretary of State cannot do anything about it. The community cannot do anything about it, and in Cambridge there is no lack of engagement; it is a very engaged community. However, there is an imbalance of power.

The news is not all bad. There are some very good developments that have worked in Cambridge. On Saturday I am joining others to celebrate the opening of a very big new development in north-west Cambridge that has been developed with the University of Cambridge—Eddington. It will be a fantastic new development, particularly for post-doctorates, but I suspect that it has worked partly because the University of Cambridge is also a powerful player and has been able to deal with some of these issues, whereas the local community does not always have the same power.

On the issue of fighting back, I congratulate organisations such as BIMBY—“Not in my back yard” has been rejected by Beauty-In-My-Back-Yard. Organisations such as the Local Government Association and the National Trust are supporting that.

This is not just about engagement, but about the balance of power. That has to be addressed. There needs to be a new settlement between developers and house builders, and their customers and their communities.

11.55 am

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on calling the debate and giving so many people the opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns about this matter. I commend also my hon. Friend the Minister for coming today and the work of the Government in trying to innovate in the housing market. I am talking particularly about things such as self-build projects, which the Government have been so good at getting behind. My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) spearheaded a lot of the work in that respect. My constituency will be one of the pilot areas for that, and I am excited to look at the innovative thinking.

There has been a fundamental change in the house building market in this country, but that has not been reflected in any fundamental changes to the way the market is regulated. Most homes in this country are

now built by just a handful of house builders—about five or six—and now, more than ever, buyers rely on the Government to ensure that those well designed homes are also built well. I hope that the Minister can update the House today on the work that he is doing to update building regulations, because it is hugely important that they reflect the almost monopolistic market in which we operate.

It is sad to hear that more than half of homebuyers have experienced major problems with their new homes. That was in a YouGov report earlier this year. I would like to reflect briefly on four issues. First, we have to ensure that new design actually works. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton mentioned the report by the all-party parliamentary group for excellence in the built environment, which I have co-chaired. It talked about having in place an ombudsman to ensure that any problems that are experienced—problems are widespread, as we have heard—are mediated and resolved swiftly. Like many other hon. Members present, I have a number of ongoing cases in which major house builders are, frankly, dragging their feet over dealing with major problems with my constituents' homes, and making their lives hell. That is not good enough.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I am listening with interest to my right hon. Friend's contribution. Last year, I spoke at the Federation of Master Builders' annual conference, where the technical guru from the National House Building Council put up some slides of really shoddy workmanship. Interestingly, the largest number of examples of shoddy workmanship came from the largest house builders—the biggest of the top three. Does my right hon. Friend not find that surprising, as those are plainly the businesses that could do more about it if they chose, and is it not now time for the Government to stop the warm words and actually grip this issue?

Mrs Miller: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why an ombudsman would be so important—so that people could get redress. The house builders would know that there was someone holding their feet to the fire and now is the time to act.

My second issue is also about the warranties that house builders give. I think that most people do not realise that not all home warranties are the same. A Premier Guarantee is not the same as one from the NHBC. Consumers do not understand that, and I think that consumers are potentially being misled.

The Minister may know from looking through his in-tray from his predecessor that I campaigned very hard for a change in building control performance standards, because of the problems of inspections of houses on-site being carried out in a shoddy way. New performance standards came in on 1 April this year to reflect that. Will he update the House on how the implementation of those new performance design control standards is going, and in particular the improved role of the inspector?

New houses should promote wellbeing in our community; they should not promote disharmony and concern. As part of that review of building control standards, will the Minister look at a particular issue that has been raised by one of my councillors, Councillor Onnalee Cubitt, about sound insulation in houses? I have written

to the Minister about the fact that many new homes have poor sound insulation with plasterboard walls. That is not good design; it is not groundbreaking design. Should he not look at amending part E2 of the building regulations, which sets the standards for sound transmission in homes? I think that those standards currently fall short of what people need in order to have good mental health when living in new homes.

Finally, will the Minister indicate when the Government might respond to the Women and Equalities Committee report on the availability of housing to disabled people? Our report made a number of important recommendations about the availability of housing for disabled people. In particular, as people get old they perhaps get more disabled, as my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) mentioned in her intervention. When will he give me a response on that important set of recommendations?

12.1 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this debate.

This country faces a housing crisis that is unprecedented since the second world war and getting worse. By the Government's own admission, the housing market is broken and failing to deliver anything close to the 300,000 homes a year we need to address housing need in the UK. The broken nature of the UK housing market and the Government's failure to tackle it are stifling the number of new homes being built, but also damaging the quality of those homes that are being built.

Last year the all-party parliamentary group for excellence in the built environment, of which I was vice-chair jointly with the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), undertook an inquiry into the quality of new build homes entitled "More homes, fewer complaints". The inquiry was undertaken in response to an increase in complaints from people who had purchased a brand new home—the most expensive item that they had ever purchased—only to find when they moved in that there was something seriously wrong with it, such as rising damp, faulty electrics, the drains not being properly connected, or poor quality fixtures and fittings, and the very great difficulty that many people faced when they tried to seek redress. Research by Which? found that under this Government more than half of new homes have serious defects, indicating that this is a widespread and serious problem. Such situations are deeply distressing and completely unacceptable. Not only is the brand new home that someone eagerly anticipated moving into flawed, but the flaws can seriously undermine the quality of day-to-day life and physical and mental health, and can take months or even years to resolve.

The APPG made several recommendations to address the quality of new build homes, including changes to the building control inspection regime, with a defined minimum number of inspections, and the setting up of a new homes ombudsman. The new homes ombudsman must be properly resourced, have teeth and be able to react quickly to right the wrongs that it identifies. It and its compensation scheme should of course be funded by the development industry, providing an important incentive

to get new homes right first time and not to compromise quality standards in the rush to increase profits. I fully support the recommendation on the basis of the struggles that my constituents have had to access redress, but I would also like to focus this morning on some of the underlying reasons why the quality of so many homes in the UK is so unacceptably poor.

The first is the structure of the land market in the UK. It allows far too much speculation, driving up land prices and artificially inflating the amount of money many developers believe that they have to make as profit before they will build a scheme. This results in a structural focus across the UK development industry on the bottom line, and therefore on cutting costs. Since staff costs for development are relatively fixed, it is the cost of materials that is pared back to the minimum. On so many housing schemes, any generosity of design that was intended in the original plans is cost engineered out by using cheaper materials, meaner proportions, or cutting corners on the build itself. This is simply not an adequate basis for a housing market that needs to deliver so much so quickly, and it is not acceptable that short-term profits are being achieved at the expense of long-term quality and the health and wellbeing of residents.

The second is the systematic reduction since 2010 of the resource and regulation underpinning the design quality of homes in the UK. The coalition Government simplified planning policy in the national planning policy framework. There was no disagreement about the need for simplification, but they went too far and one of the casualties of that process was any real emphasis on design quality in national planning policy. There are just 12 short paragraphs on design quality in the NPPF, two of which relate to advertising hoardings.

Under the previous Labour Government, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, supported by a network of regional architecture centres, advised and reviewed the quality of many planning applications and masterplans for new homes, and published a huge body of work on design quality. CABE is now an independent organisation with a much-diminished resource, and since its services are no longer funded by Government, the number of local authorities that can afford design review services and choose to take them up is much reduced. There has been no comprehensive or systematic review of the quality of design of new homes being built across the UK for more than ten years, and there is no systematic post-occupancy evaluation of the quality of new homes.

Good design is about more than just the appearance of a new home; it is also about its sustainability, energy efficiency, durability, robustness and flexibility to the changing requirements of its residents. Since 2010, the Government have removed many of the policy requirements that had previously helped to drive up the quality of design, including the zero-carbon homes programme and the lifetime homes standard, which increased the number of homes being built to a fully accessible standard for disabled people. The Government have also refused to incorporate the nationally described space standards into building control regulations, resulting in a situation where the number of homes built below the standards more than trebled from 2013 to 2016, and some homes are being built in London at just 16 square metres. The house building industry is very responsive to the policy and legislative environment that it is in and will adapt to

[Helen Hayes]

meet new quality standards. Standards matter because many parts of the sector will only deliver the bare minimum the Government require. Leadership from the Government in this area is sadly lacking, and a clear and rapid change of approach is needed to set the standards UK residents require from their new homes.

Finally, the lack of direct Government funding for genuinely affordable social housing—a problem in itself in addressing the housing crisis—also contributes directly to the issue of poor design quality. The number of social homes built with Government funding since the start of the coalition Government in 2010 has dropped by a staggering 95%, and the Government have not increased the borrowing cap for councils. This means that the delivery of affordable housing—often not affordable at all if it is built to this Government's definition of affordability—is increasingly dependent on cross-subsidy from private sales, which also creates an incentive to maximise the number of homes at the expense of design quality, to minimise the cost of materials and to lower the specification. The Government must now do what the Labour party has pledged to do, and restore the building of genuinely affordable social homes and a civic purpose to the building of new homes.

We face such a huge challenge in the UK to build the number of homes that we need, but at the same time the Government must ensure that those that are built are high-quality homes that are energy efficient, have generous space standards, have high-quality open space, have good storage for refuse, recycling and bicycles and are pleasant places to live that can stand the test of time and become communities of the future. Ensuring that new homes built in the UK are consistently of a high quality requires structural change in the land market and reform of the deeply flawed and unacceptable viability assessments that are used to justify cutting costs. It requires a Government commitment to fund genuinely affordable new homes, built for a social and civic purpose, to meet our desperate need for housing, rather than for profit. That commitment is currently sadly lacking. It also requires properly resourced planning departments with access to good practice in design, and a policy and regulatory framework that raises the bar, in particular on environmental sustainability and accessibility in new homes.

12.8 pm

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): I join the chorus of congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on organising this important and timely debate. He nearly put me off my breakfast this morning as I woke up to his dulcet tones on Radio 4, but he made some very important points, in particular about the commitment in the Conservative party manifesto to higher-density urban housing—mews houses, mansion blocks and the like.

I join him in emphasising the importance of this matter. I thought his speech rather neatly summarised the slightly schizophrenic approach that we have in this country—it does not matter where on the political spectrum or what part of the country someone is in—to taller buildings, if I can put it that way. If high-rise living is mentioned, people automatically picture some sort of brutalist, 1960s tower block and their hackles

start to rise. They get concerned about the quality and design of the build and the impact not only on the people living in that particular development, but on the surrounding public realm, which is influenced because everyone can see it from a good distance around.

But mention mansion blocks, terraced streets or mews houses, built altogether on a more human scale—four, five or six storeys tall; the sort of thing that can be seen in many long-established city centres such as London, Bath, Bristol and the prosperous Victorian cities of the midlands and the north—and people take a different approach. They are much more welcoming, because those designs have stood the test of time. My hon. Friend's comments about ensuring local buy-in are particularly important. There may be a local vernacular style, often using local materials, but such houses can be built using modern building techniques to a high modern building standard, allowing them to deliver at the same time some of the other things mentioned by colleagues in interventions, such as greener buildings, energy efficiency and so on.

Rebecca Pow: My hon. Friend is making a good point about higher density, but is it not right that green spaces must be included, if not in properties—not everyone needs a garden—then nearby? Royal Horticultural Society surveys indicate a direct link between our health and wellbeing and green space.

John Penrose: My hon. Friend and near neighbour in Somerset makes a tremendously important point. The advantage of building up, not out—if I may paraphrase the manifesto commitment to higher-density living—is precisely that it can preserve, and in some cases enhance, available green space. We could increase the density of existing urban centres—not necessarily city centres; they could be the centres of market towns or seaside towns such as Weston-super-Mare, which I represent—while working within existing street plans and plots.

Many of our town centres are an average of two or three storeys tall. Walking down the main streets of most towns and looking up, one can see large amounts of fresh air, which could be incredibly economically valuable if only it were developed, providing that it were developed in a modern style—not necessarily a modernist style, but with modern materials—in keeping with the local style. Many of the problems mentioned by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), who immediately preceded me—problems to do with value engineering and the difficulty of ensuring economic value—would go away.

If there is an existing plot on which a couple of extra storeys can be put, taking it from two storeys to four or five, there is no need to trip over the problems with high-rise living that my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton discussed. People will accept it. We need only walk through town centres, such as the ones near where we are standing now, to see that people will accept it. It is extraordinary to consider that Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster, where we are currently debating this issue, have some of the highest-density housing developments in the entire country, and they are hardly bywords for inner-city and urban decay. They are good examples of designs and systems of living that have stood the test of time.

I want to sing a hymn of praise to building up, not out. It attracts new investment into our existing towns and city centres, helping urban regeneration. It also reduces urban sprawl, helping to preserve green spaces by increasing the density of existing urban spaces and reducing the need to build out on the fringes, eating into green belts. As we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), it also breaks the stranglehold of the established housing developers, who are often not keen on building on small plots in town centres. Small local developers and builders are much more keen to do so. That is greener. It cuts commuting times, as people can live closer to work, and allows building to be done in an energy-efficient fashion.

My query to the Minister is, how we can make the manifesto commitment—to build up, not out; to increase urban density—move much faster? He will be aware, I am sure, that I made a submission after the White Paper for permitted development to allow people to build up, not out. I hope that he will take it seriously. Will he also consider whether we can increase the level of credit that local authorities, in making their local plans, get for local development orders so that people can build up in the middle of towns? Housing inspectors, when considering whether local plans are acceptable, should give credit for extra building that might happen. They do not currently accept as part of the assessment of local housing need whether plans will provide the necessary local incentives to local communities so that people will want to build beauty in their back yards.

12.14 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I commend the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this debate. Before I was elected, I worked for a consultancy advising people how to build controversial buildings, from skyscrapers to new housing developments, so I know a bit about the issue.

I think we all recognise that more housing is needed, and I recognise the Create Streets agenda, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, as powerful not only in big cities such as Manchester and London but in places such as Plymouth, which I represent. However, we must ensure that the quality of the housing that we build makes it not only attractive on the outside but usable and sustainable on the inside as well. That is why we must consider not only the environmental sustainability of those homes but the fact that people might live in them for a lifetime. That is essential to building in quality of life.

I am concerned that in the push to address the real and pressing housing crisis, poor-quality housing is being built. We have heard a bit about housing bought on the open market, but I am also concerned about affordable housing built by developers and then transferred either to local councils or to housing associations. The affordable housing built in the Mount Wise development in my constituency lacks the sound insulation mentioned earlier by the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), creating negative social impacts for the people who live in those properties. Not enough sound insulation was installed when the houses were originally built, and it is difficult to retrofit it once they have been built.

A quality product does not need to be expensive; we need to ensure that that is at the heart of the housing strategy from now on. However, that is not always

my experience of new builds in Plymouth. Plymouth is experiencing a housing boom, but in student accommodation. In the city centre, new student blocks are being built left, right and centre. Some of them are being retrofitted mid-build—in the light of what happened at Grenfell tower, the cladding is being removed and replaced to ensure that it is safe—but too many of those student blocks look poor-quality from the outside as well as inside. I am concerned that they are being built quickly and cheaply, with the intention that they will last for 20 years and then be knocked down again. That may look good on an accountant's spreadsheet, but when it comes to the practicalities of it in 20 years' time, those buildings will still be there, and will exist for another 20 years.

We must also be clear about where blocks should be built. Too many student blocks with poor-quality design inside and out are being built in the wrong place, such as the Royal Eye Infirmary development, which people going into Plymouth station can see on the right-hand side. It has been built in the wrong place. Local people objected to it and the local council rejected it, but sadly the Government planning inspector approved it in the end. That does not seem like localism in action.

There are superb examples of housing being built. To single out one example in Plymouth, the Nelson self-build project is creating 24 affordable homes in Millbay. The project is being run by veterans, the Devon community, DCH and Interserve. The homes are being built by veterans who were previously homeless. Not only are they building their own homes, which will be ready shortly; they are gaining skills that will help every veteran who has worked on the project to secure a job in the construction industry on other sites. In terms of learning from good-quality design, although that project is only 24 units and we need many more, the idea is scalable. I encourage the Minister to look at what is happening at the Nelson project and to encourage self-build by veterans, as a way of helping homeless veterans in particular to build skills and a home of their own. In our haste to build, let us ensure that we build well.

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): The remaining speakers have four minutes each.

12.18 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I join the chorus of congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this essential debate. I have been interested in the topic ever since childhood, when my father, who worked for a house building company—I declare an interest—took me to see Poundbury, the village in Dorset designed under the auspices of the Prince of Wales. It is a model village, and the whole point of it is that the houses are built to look individual, with detail and architectural merit.

I draw attention to that project because it seems to me that, as many Members will have seen in the objections of members of the public to planning applications in their constituencies, people object, broadly, on two grounds. The first is practical: how can I get to work? Will the doctor's surgery be able to cope? Sir David, you will forgive me if I do not address that in any detail

[Robert Courts]

during my limited time, given the topic of this debate. The second is: will it wreck the nature of the place that I love and call home? Housing design is critical to that second aspect, but the issue is how we square the circle.

Most people's attitudes to development are entirely reasonable. They do not want to see all the fields near them concreted over, but they understand that there is a need for housing because our young people need somewhere to live. That is the challenge we face in housing: we need to ensure that numbers are not unsustainable, but it is critical that as politicians we do not develop an obsession with the numbers. It is to that issue that I wish to address my brief comments.

I urge all members of the public and all Members, when walking down the streets of any market town—particularly those around London, but we all have examples of such towns in our constituencies—to look up. If they do, they will see all sorts of features that used to be commonplace in the days of Victorian or Georgian housing and that are still built abroad today. There is no reason why we cannot continue to create such features: Flemish brickwork, work on chimneys, crown mouldings or details, guttering that has design merit, door surrounds—there are so many possibilities.

Developers will always say that the cost implications are prohibitive, but that is simply not the case. CABE, which has already been mentioned, has produced a report that states that cost implications do not necessarily increase. Taking this approach means that a new development is not about vast amounts of numbers being put on the outside of an attractive village and fundamentally changing its nature. In my constituency, for instance, Cotswold stone and slate roofs are particularly important. Ensuring that buildings complement their area is one of the ways to get public consent for the buildings we need. Unless people are satisfied that they will be able to get to work, but that the nature of their village and their homes will not change, we will not have public consent for the housing that is required.

The planning process is particularly important. The local planning process is essential, as my constituents realise, because it is one of the ways to combat speculative development. Developers who come in, impose housing on a village that may not want it in that form, and then leave, are part of the problem. Part of the solution is to use local small builders, of which there are some superb examples in my constituency. Someone who was born locally, who works locally, whose company builds houses locally and whose children go to the local school and stay in the area long after the houses have been built and have weathered into the environment will ensure that their housing and their development complements the area instead of blighting it. That is critical, as is self-build, which has been referred to; I wholeheartedly agree with it, but given time constraints I will not go into it in detail.

My last point is about cost. Timber frame is used in many other countries, but for many years it was absolutely forbidden in this country. Happily, that taboo is starting to be lifted. Timber frame offers speed of construction, lower cost and environmental benefits—again, I have outstanding examples in my constituency—and we should look into using it a great deal more. The same is true of

prefabrication, which was used after the war. It seems to have a dirty name, but it should not, because outstanding examples that have all those benefits are available.

In conclusion, the White Paper on housing, to which I made a detailed submission, was an excellent start, but I ask that it be the start of the conversation, not the end. I welcome its focus on local communities having a local say and on design quality and architectural merit. When we are building houses, we must have public support and we must not be obsessed purely with numbers. We need the infrastructure, but the built environment is crucial. We are building homes, not houses. We must always remember that we are building places, not just filling spaces in our countryside.

12.23 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this debate on new housing design, a very important issue in my constituency. I declare an interest as chair of the all-party group on healthy homes and buildings.

I would like to concentrate on health as well as design. The ramifications of poorly designed and constructed buildings are felt by my constituents and by constituents throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I believe it is incumbent on us to act to deliver a built environment that is healthy and safe. Everyone loves moving into a new home, whether it has been freshly built or is just new to the owner, but it is important that we live in safe and healthy homes. The all-party group was established to highlight the health and cost benefits that can be achieved by constructing our buildings and homes to the highest quality and standards.

Given that we spend 90% of our time indoors, it is important that we look at these issues clearly. Our homes should be fit for purpose and should not exacerbate or cause ill health. The costs to our health services of poorly constructed homes and buildings are monumental. Perhaps some figures will illustrate why it is important to get it right: the Building Research Establishment estimates that poor housing throughout the UK costs the health service £2.5 billion every year. Getting the homes right will address some of the issues associated with ill health and its costs. Poor insulation, poor indoor air quality, damp, and poor light quality have all been proven to cause or exacerbate a variety of health problems, including respiratory ailments, child and adolescent development problems and mental health problems. Those are the issues that failure to design homes to a safe standard leads to.

I encourage all hon. Members to read the all-party group's green paper, "Building our Future: Laying the Foundations for Healthy Homes and Buildings", which was recently put out to consultation. If the Minister and the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton do not yet have a copy, I will make sure that they get one. The green paper makes a number of key recommendations to ensure that our homes are built to promote good health and wellbeing.

First, leadership on health and housing issues has been disjointed, with responsibilities spread across multiple Departments. This undermines the Government's ability to tackle the problem. We want a cross-departmental

committee for health and buildings to champion change in the sector, recognising the interaction between buildings, health, education and the economy.

Secondly, we ask that the Government continue to support and expand projects such as NHS England's "Healthy New Towns", which promise to rethink how health and housing services are delivered, as well as building a solid evidence base for the dynamic between health and housing provision. It is quite clear that the two have to work together.

Thirdly, a recent report by the UK Green Building Council estimates that four out of five homes that will be occupied in 2050 have already been built, so it is insufficient to talk only in terms of new housing design. The retrofitting and renovation of existing homes to acceptable health standards must be a Government priority. My constituency of Strangford in Northern Ireland has a lot of small construction firms of the kind that have been referred to by other Members. They build lots of individual houses, but also do lots of development. We in Northern Ireland have invested in training and upskilling in our construction industry. That must be one of the first steps in moving forward. It is not simply about training our young people in new methods of building but about engaging, upskilling and retraining older members of the construction industry.

I am conscious that you are giving me the eye, Sir David, so I will conclude. We have had various initiatives in Northern Ireland, such as the warm home scheme, which funded insulation and part-funded new safe boiler heating systems. These schemes really made a difference to the quality of homes, but it is surprising how many homes in Northern Ireland did not have a 10-year warranty. There has been a lack of insulation, among other things, which shows that not every home has been built even to the bare minimum standard. More needs to be done, and I do not believe that it can be achieved merely through regulation. We must also look at skills training, for the safety and benefit of families throughout the UK.

12.27 pm

Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) (Lab): I am very happy to have the opportunity to talk about a subject that I have been writing about for most of my career. I concur 100% with my hon. Friends on the issues that they covered.

I must challenge the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on his view of modern design as ugly. It is not ugly to everybody; it is a question of personal taste. We should remember that the '60s gave us some rotten buildings, but they also gave us some amazing estates such as Trellick Tower, which is very solid, Cressingham Gardens, Golden Lane, Pepler House and of course Grenfell Tower, which amazingly is still standing despite what happened there. The structure is still there; it was very solidly built. Some of those buildings could continue for ever.

[JOAN RYAN *in the Chair*]

It has been interesting to witness how the debate has moved from design to construction quality. I have a lot of very new builds in my patch, such as Catalyst Housing's developments in Portobello Square. I actually have more

casework from new buildings than from old buildings—collapsed ceilings, collapsed floors, you name it. It is absolutely appalling.

Poundbury, I am afraid to say, is also suffering as a result of very poor construction quality—so I have heard from people who visited it recently. So from Portobello to Poundbury we have the same problem, and it must be addressed. As I have found when trying to deal with Catalyst's development, a lot is down to what can and cannot be done. Planning officers came and shook their heads—

Mr Bacon: I have visited Poundbury several times and have seen some good construction quality. Can the hon. Lady say who is talking about poor quality? Poor quality has not been my experience when I have visited.

Emma Dent Coad: An esteemed architectural journalist who has written widely about it in the press told me about it. I have not visited myself.

Mr Bacon: I am sorry to trouble the hon. Lady, but on that point will she give way again very briefly?

Emma Dent Coad: Yes, I will.

Mr Bacon: Is the hon. Lady aware that there are many architects among what one might call the ancien régime of the architectural establishment who, despite the fact that lots of people who live there love it and think it is great, hate Poundbury and campaign against it?

Emma Dent Coad: I am talking about the construction quality, not the design. If I may continue, we were talking about what we can and cannot do with the new homes ombudsman. In theory, it is a good idea, but there should be another whole level of monitoring way before we get to that stage because planning officers will shake their heads on odd points of design that may or may not have been dealt with correctly yet there is no proper enforcement in terms of quality at that level. There really should be a level at which building enforcement officers can come in before a building or a ceiling actually collapses and look at its quality. All of that is to do, of course, with local government funding, the funding formulas for how buildings are put together and the cost savings that have to be made, as we have heard recently—but that is for another day. We really must review the whole way in which design and build has diminished the quality of the buildings that are delivered.

12.31 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this debate on an important and timely subject. I certainly always welcome the opportunity to debate housing and house building, and I will try to focus more in my remarks on social housing and affordable housing, which is something I am glad to see the Labour party doing as well, in some respects.

The most important thing about housing policy is ensuring that we have an adequate supply of safe housing, which is what the Scottish National party-led Scottish Government are doing. As the MP for Glasgow's east

[David Linden]

end, I am particularly proud to follow in the footsteps of the late great John Wheatley, who served my constituency as the MP for Glasgow Shettleston from 1922 to 1930. On being appointed Health Minister by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, John Wheatley introduced legislation to tackle the social housing crisis at the time. The Act famously became known as the Wheatley Housing Act and allowed the Government to provide subsidies to build public housing. As a result of Wheatley's Act, more than 500,000 council homes had been built in the UK by 1933. Wheatley's housing legacy lives on today, and I am delighted that Parkhead Housing Association in my constituency will, as it celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, once again host the John Wheatley lecture. I will be proud to introduce the lecture, which will be delivered by Dame Elish Angiolini QC.

I have mentioned that the debate is timely, and I touched on this matter in my intervention on the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton. Last week, the leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party, Ruth Davidson, suggested that the Scottish Government should build more new towns and council houses in Scotland to ease the country's housing shortage. I am afraid I was not alone in being taken aback by the sheer rank hypocrisy of a Conservative politician lecturing us on the need to invest more in social housing, not least because it was a Conservative Government under the stewardship of Margaret Thatcher who sold off vast swathes of social housing. Worse still, the housing stock was not replaced, which has left generation Y struggling to get into social housing and being squeezed into the hands of the private sector.

Before I move on to the substance of today's debate, it would be remiss of me not to highlight the excellent work undertaken by the Scottish Government to build good quality affordable housing in our communities. I mentioned the mismanagement of our housing stock by the Government of the 1980s, and I am afraid that the initial delivery of devolution did not vastly improve housing under the first Labour-Lib Dem Administration. Since 2007, and under the SNP, house building has come on leaps and bounds, with more than £590 million available this funding year to increase the supply of affordable homes across Scotland, which is an increase of £18 million on the 2016-17 figure. Of that, all 32 councils will share £422 million to deliver more affordable homes in their local communities.

Due to our action, we have maintained higher build rates and lower price inflation than in England. If we had built at English rates since 2007, we would have about 20,000 fewer affordable new build homes. In 2009-10, we reintroduced council house building and, since then, we have delivered more than 7,500 council homes. Between 2003 and 2007, Labour in government delivered six—yes, six—council houses in an entire Parliament. We are investing more than £3 billion to deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes over the lifetime of this Parliament—a 76% increase on our previous five-year investment. Some 35,000 homes out of the 50,000 target will be for social rent, which is a 75% increase on our previous social rented target. I mention that because a huge part of the debate today has focused on the private sector and, in my capacity as spokesperson for the third party—the SNP—I want to bring Westminster back to looking at our investment in social housing

as well. We are determined to increase and accelerate housing supply across all tenures and to support the industry and local authorities in delivering their housing priorities, with quality homes in mixed communities that fit local needs. More Homes Scotland includes a new mid-market rent offer to alternative providers, which is a further option to help deliver the 50,000 target, and we have increased housing subsidies by up to £14,000 for social homes and affordable homes for rent, being delivered by councils and registered social landlords.

When preparing for today's debate, I was pleased to come across the Scottish Housing Regulator's 2017 national report on the Scottish social housing charter, which states:

"Average satisfaction with the quality of homes has increased for RSL tenants to 88%".

At this juncture, I pay tribute to CCG (Scotland) Ltd, which is based in my constituency and provided the kit homes we saw built in the Dalmarnock area of Glasgow for the Commonwealth games. Some 700 homes were put together in a year or two. So while the Conservatives and Ruth Davidson sit polishing their brass necks and giving us lectures on investment in housing and building new communities, we will get on with the actual job of building communities and homes for the people of Scotland.

I want briefly to touch on housing design. I am mindful that the focus of the debate is policy, which is a devolved competence, so I seek only to introduce a different dimension, namely what we are doing north of the border. I commend to the House—and will place a copy of it in the Library—the document entitled "Places, People and Planning: A consultation of the future of the Scottish Planning System", which the Scottish Government published in June of this year. I know that colleagues in the Scottish Parliament will today announce the programme for government and I expect there might be something in it on new planning legislation, which is welcome, and long overdue. One suggestion in that June 2017 document is that local development plans be considered over a 10-year rather than a five-year period, and that is certainly worthy of being thrown into the mix.

Another aspect I would like to introduce from a Scottish point of view is tenement stock. Whereas Aberdeen is famous for its granite buildings, my own city of Glasgow is famous for its sandstone tenements, and I am mindful that many of them are of an age at which they require a lot of attention. I very much hope, therefore, that the Government in Scotland, housing associations and local authorities factor into their plans investing in and looking after the current tenement stock as well as investing in new housing supply.

To sum up, the point made by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton about a new homes ombudsman is pertinent. Last night, before catching the sleeper train down to London, I attended a public meeting in my constituency. The hon. Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) made a point about Bellway. Too often, we see house builders come along and make promises to communities for which they are not held accountable—Broomhouse and Eastfields are just two communities in my constituency where that has happened—which is why I am keen that housing associations should be able to take through the whole process of building new developments. I am, therefore, keen to pursue the idea of a new homes ombudsman.

We have heard excellent speeches from the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) and the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). I agree particularly with the points made by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). It is good to see a focus on tackling the housing crisis by way of investing in social housing and affordable housing. The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) talked about people's perceptions of homes. Before I came along to the debate, I was in the Tea Room, chatting about perceptions with some of my colleagues. If you ask kids to draw a house, they all draw a little detached building that looks like a bungalow—there is a point there.

The point about building up and not out is absolutely worth considering. As a new Member, I am looking to move into a flat in London, and as I have gone around various parts of the city I have been interested to see more developments that go up than go out, which is not necessarily the case in my constituency. The hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts) spoke about looking up, and I encourage him to come to Glasgow because we are a city that is renowned as a place where people look up to the architecture. I pay tribute to the work of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) in the all-party parliamentary group on healthy homes and buildings.

I started by talking about the legacy of John Wheatley. I am confident that in Scotland we are working towards tackling the legacy of a lack of investment in housing, but I will finish with a word of advice for colleagues here in England. We need to look at abolishing the right to buy. I know it is not popular in this Parliament. We abolished it in Scotland, where it is bearing fruit. It is difficult to build more homes and get people into social housing when we sell off such housing. That is a conversation that colleagues need to have. Ultimately, we need to identify a new John Wheatley.

12.40 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this important debate. Much of what he said would create a consensus across this Chamber and, indeed, across these nations of ours. There have been creditable contributions all round and a wealth of experience from the Members who spoke. I will not run through every constituency at this stage, but serious points were made for the Minister to take on board.

No serious debate can begin without our recognising that we are in a bad place at the moment. Every Member who spoke has illustrated the fact that things are not going in the way they should be. It is important to recognise that, because we look to the Government to institutionalise significant change. Houses are not simply bricks and mortar, as Members have said. They are homes and parts of the communities in which people make their lives, and we must do better than we are doing now.

I will add some words of caution. First, it is worth recalling that almost everything that has been said, particularly about the environmental impact of homes and noise insulation and so on, applies just as much to the existing built stock. The bulk of homes that will be around in 20 years' time are already in existence. Probably

some 80% of them already exist. We have got to do something about retrofitting to improve existing homes. Even if we are to see the building boom that we await—I hope the Government's ambitions are brought into reality—there will be some real impacts, one of which we have seen in the past: when there is a housing boom, unfortunately the quality of the build does not always keep pace with the scale.

One issue in the construction industry that the Government are not addressing is the ageing workforce and the lack of adequate training places for young and not so young people coming into the construction industry. We must deal with that if we are to have construction workers to deliver quality homes of the future and retrofit the homes of the past.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad) in saying that unless we have adequate funding for our local authorities, including the funding of building control and planning, which have been cut across our nations because of the austerity budgets, we will not see the type of ongoing control that we need to guarantee that the build of the future avoids the mistakes of the past. To make an obvious point—bearing in mind the experience of Grenfell Tower—we have first class and second class housing in this country. Social tenants' housing must be of exactly the same quality of design and build as we would expect for anybody else. So that is the background to the debate.

The Government face real challenges. On issues of design and high quality homes, clearly the Government have a central responsibility to assess standards and provide a framework. Good design is aesthetically pleasing. I agree with the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with building up, although, like everything, it is a question of whether the design is of an acceptable standard. My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington is right: let us not be so concerned with replicating the past that we fail to take advantage of what the future can offer. Amazing buildings are going up all around this country because new building technologies allow more experimental and more interesting buildings than some of those in the past.

John Penrose: I think the hon. Gentleman is saying we should not allow awful tragedies such as Grenfell Tower to sway us against the advantages of greater density and building a little higher, provided it is done in a sensible way and with the right standards and design.

Tony Lloyd: Indeed. If I can repeat the point, we already have a building stock of homes in the sky. I am old enough to remember when we were told we were going to build vertical streets. I give away my age when I say that. People live in vertical streets. Whether built in the future or existing stock, we have to make sure they are fit and proper homes. Let us agree on that.

We have to face the challenges of new builds. I was involved when Greater Manchester was looking at the spatial framework for the future. There were a lot of objections, some inevitable. There was some nimbyism in people's objections, but people have legitimate objections if they see that a new development is not accompanied by the kind of infrastructure investment that is fundamental to making communities work. It is not simply about the

[Tony Lloyd]

new community that is being built, but whether it is compatible with the existing community. Transport links, local schools and local medical facilities, and access to the world of work are legitimate concerns because such things make real communities work properly.

Along with local infrastructure, people need to be able to move homes as their lives change. The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) made the point about people's circumstances changing with age. Sometimes an ageing couple have an issue with disability. It is not impossible to adapt existing homes, but nor is it impossible to keep people within their own community where they may prefer to make a move. So it is sensible to design communities around people's progressive needs.

An issue raised already is the question of space. The Government have a real challenge. When the former Brent Council building is now seeing homeless single persons offered 16 square metres of floor space, we have a real issue. That is way below the national space standards for housing design, which the Government introduced. I say to the Minister it is time those space standards were implemented nationally and made mandatory, because they are an acceptable minimum. In any case, there is always the capacity to use adequate design as a reason for eroding that standard, but that should be firmly lodged with the local planning authority as the guarantor of the safeguard, so we do not see developers overreaching themselves.

Often when space standards have been eroded, it is consistent with offices and retail premises being converted into homes. The Minister needs to look hard at blocking such loopholes if we are to prevent ridiculously small homes being built.

On section 106, I was bemused rather than amused to see an advert by a company called Section 106, which tells would-be developers about affordable housing. It talks about its own performance and references a development in Gloucester Place in London where an affordable housing contribution of £646,000 demanded by Westminster Council was reduced to a nil contribution. It goes on to tell would-be developers that they can go on a holiday with the money they have saved. That is simply not a responsible use of section 106; it is not what it is there to provide. The Minister must look again at making the section 106 process transparent, so there can be public tests, and enforceable by local authorities. If we are to have the homes for the future that the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton is demanding—and he and other colleagues are right to demand them—our local authorities must have the capacity to say to developers that developments must be of an acceptable standard, and that they have the power to control the rogue builders and developers.

Joan Ryan (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, I remind him that he may wish to leave time at the end for the mover of the motion to wind up.

12.50 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Alok Sharma): Thank you, Ms Ryan. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, I think for the first time in this Parliament. I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this debate on

new housing design. He is a long-standing advocate of high-quality development and his passion about the subject has come through clearly today and in the media as well; indeed, all Members who have spoken today have spoken with passion about why design is important.

We all acknowledge that it is critical that we build more homes. Our housing White Paper, published earlier this year, set out how we intend to tackle that challenge. Just as important as building more homes is the need to ensure that they are of good quality, are well designed and respond positively to the local context.

Around the country, there have been some fantastic examples of good design in new house building and a number of colleagues have pointed to examples in their own constituencies. However, we can also all point to soulless developments that ultimately destroy the character of a local area. That is something we must change.

The Government have put in place a robust framework that promotes and supports high-quality design. Both the national planning policy framework and our planning guidance emphasise the importance of good design and provide advice on planning processes and tools, which local planning authorities can use to help achieve that aim. Over the months ahead, the Government will engage with the housing industry to showcase good practice and develop new policies that support that ambition, but we know we must do more.

The housing White Paper contains proposals to improve the quality and character of new development. We want to strengthen the national planning policy framework to introduce an expectation that local and neighbourhood plans in development plan documents should set out clear design expectations. That will provide greater certainty for applicants about what types of designs are acceptable in a local area.

We also want to use national planning policy to strengthen the importance of early, pre-application discussions, as a means to encourage more valued discussion of the design of new homes between communities, developers and local authorities. The Government also have a longer-term ambition to support the development of digital platforms on design.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton talked about a number of surveys. He concluded that people would support the building of homes if they are well-designed and in keeping with their local area. It is important that local authorities and developers work with communities to ensure that they get the quality of new housing development that they want. A range of tools is in place to engage the local community, both when preparing plans and at planning application stage, yet I know community engagement is far too inconsistent. Far too often local people hear about new housing schemes late in the day, after a planning application has been submitted.

There are of course good examples of where engagement works. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) talked about the Beauty-In-My-Back-Yard toolkit; there are of course others. Our housing White Paper proposals will go a step further to help make sure that local communities are not left behind.

A number of colleagues have mentioned neighbourhood planning. I see plans driven by local people with a vested interest in the quality of design for the place they

live in as an incredibly valuable tool to achieve good design and local engagement. Since 2012, more than 2,200 groups have started the neighbourhood planning process in areas covering nearly 13 million people. In some areas, neighbourhood planning groups are keen to ensure that good design does happen in practice. For example, the plan for Bristol Old Market Quarter sets out design principles for the development of key sites to ensure that new buildings make a valuable contribution to the character of the neighbourhood. The Government recognise the significant effort neighbourhood planning groups make and that is why we are supporting them with funding. The housing White Paper sets out our commitment to further funding for neighbourhood planning groups in this Parliament. We are committed to providing £25 million of funding to boost the capacity and capability of local authorities for a three-year period, starting this year, which will open up opportunities to support and provide design resources to neighbourhood planning groups.

Turning to the issue of a new housing ombudsman, we have already published proposals to tackle unfair lease practices, including banning the sale of new leasehold houses, but it is the case that, according to the latest Home Builders Federation survey, 84% of new home buyers would recommend their builder to a friend. That figure has fallen steadily from 90% over the last four years, and means that 16% of new home buyers would not recommend their builder. In any other market, that would spell the end of the most poorly performing companies. I am having a set of discussions with developers; I also make the point to them about the need to improve quality and design.

Mr Bacon: Is the Minister aware of the survey conducted by Ipsos MORI for the Home Builders Federation, the trade body for the largest volume house builders? It said that 67% of buyers would prefer not to, or are unlikely to, buy the product of volume house builders.

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend makes the point perfectly. It shows that customer satisfaction is absolutely key. House builders need to step up to the plate.

The housing White Paper sets out the Government's plan to diversify the housing market, which will play a part in helping to improve quality. My hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) and the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) talked about custom building and the importance of small and medium-sized builders as well.

Of course mechanisms are in place for redress, such as the consumer code for home builders, which a number of colleagues have talked about. I have been encouraged by the industry's response to last year's report by the all-party parliamentary group for excellence in the built environment, "More homes, fewer complaints". A working group was set up by the Home Builders Federation and has commissioned an independent report into consumer redress. We expect that to come forward in the next few weeks. I will review the report in detail and I will consider the call from my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton for a new homes ombudsman.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) talked about the Women and Equalities Committee's report. We expect to respond next month. Colleagues also raised the issue of space. As the hon. Members for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) will know, we have committed in the White Paper to reviewing the nationally described space standards, because of feedback from the sector.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) talked about building out. We will amend the national planning policy framework to address the scope for higher density housing in urban locations.

The Government will continue to work with industry, local communities, developers and all those with an interest in the quality of new homes to drive up standards and create the type of places that people want to live in. It is clear that Members and their constituents want that to happen, and I want that to happen too.

Tony Lloyd: Before the Minister sits down, will he give way?

Alok Sharma: Of course.

Tony Lloyd: May I press the Minister on this point? He said that the Government's intention is to review the national space standards. That is welcome, but the suspicion is that the review will reduce the standards rather than enforce them. Will part of the review be about making them obligatory across the length and breadth of the appropriate domain?

Alok Sharma: Let me be clear: we are not talking about a race to the bottom. We want new development to be well designed, but that does not mean that current space standards are sacrosanct.

12.58 pm

Neil Parish: I thank the Minister very much for his comments, particularly on the fact that he will consider a homeowners ombudsman. It would be a really good idea to bring that forward and I would very much welcome it.

The Minister also talked about redress for those who can get it. There are many good builders out there, but it would be good if the Government could highlight those who are not, as that would put pressure on them and make sure that people had choice.

I thank all hon. Members for their contributions—I cannot mention them all by name as I am short of time. It is interesting that when it comes to architecture, beauty is very much in the eye of the beholder, but if we can take local people with us, we have a greater chance that they will support development and we could take out a lot of the objections to further development. We need quality homes—we have talked again about the need for good insulation, good building standards, and building quality homes for the future. I believe we can do that and I very much welcome the Minister's remarks.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered new housing design.

Northamptonshire: Combined Fire and Police Service

1 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of a combined fire and police service in Northamptonshire.

I welcome you to the Chair, Ms Ryan, and I welcome the Minister to his place. I thank Mr Speaker for giving me the honour of having this debate on an important issue for my constituents in Kettering and for everyone across the county of Northamptonshire.

The title of the debate is not very accurate, which is probably my fault, because we are actually talking not about a combined fire and police service but about the combined governance of the fire and police services in Northamptonshire. In my more optimistic moments, however, I hope that one day we will have a fully combined fire and police service, and I urge the Minister to consider that.

To set the context for any constituents who in a weak moment might have tuned into today's proceedings, Northamptonshire is a county of more than 720,000 people, with a single police force and a single fire and rescue service, which have coterminous boundaries—that in itself is helpful when thinking about joining the two together. The picture for policing and for fire and rescue is changing, and has changed rapidly in the past decade.

For fire and rescue, demand for fire-related emergencies has reduced by 50% in Northamptonshire, compared with a national decline of some 40%. Fire and rescue has had to diversify into more proactive activities and now provides a first response and co-response service to medical emergencies with East Midlands ambulance service. On a recent visit to the fire and rescue service in Northamptonshire, I was amazed and pleasantly surprised to learn that 60% of its calls are now for medical emergencies, so the emphasis is very much on rescue as opposed to fire.

I ought to say that the reason I attended the fire and rescue service is that I have taken part in the fire service parliamentary scheme. I spent one year with the London fire brigade, and the second year with the Northamptonshire fire and rescue service. I also completed two years with the police service parliamentary scheme—with the Northamptonshire police force some years ago—and I have also been a special constable with British Transport police. I placed a great deal of emphasis on talking to individual police officers and fire and rescue officers to find out what life is really like for them at an operational level.

I want to place on record my thanks to all the wonderful police and fire and rescue staff we have in Northamptonshire. We are truly blessed as a county to have so many individuals of such dedication, resolution and resolve, who day in, day out and week in, week out are prepared to serve the local public as best they can.

The Northamptonshire police force has a budget of £116 million, 1,242 officers, 95 police community support officers, 860 police staff, 488 specials and 84 volunteers, and operates off 38 sites. Northamptonshire fire and rescue service has a budget of £24 million, 242 whole-time firefighters, 254 retained firefighters and 74 support staff, and operates off 24 sites. In terms of the scale of

the operations, they are therefore quite different, but police officers and firefighters attend many of the same incidents.

In southern Northamptonshire, indeed, we now have two rural intervention vehicles, or RIVs, which on one side are badged with the Northamptonshire police livery of blue, yellow and white, and on the other side are badged with the fire and rescue service livery of yellow, red and white. On one side of the vehicle is a police officer and on the other a firefighter. They go around the rural parts of the county in response to call-outs. It is an incredibly efficient way to manage policing and firefighting resources. That is evidence of something I know the Minister will appreciate—the boys and girls in the service getting on with mixing up their operations to increase local efficiency, regardless of what happens with governance at the senior level. On the ground, individual police officers and firefighters are already operating jointly in many cases.

I back 100% the business case presented to the Minister by Stephen Mold, the police and crime commissioner for Northamptonshire, for him to become the police, fire and crime commissioner for Northamptonshire.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): I am very pleased that the Northamptonshire police and crime commissioner has taken the opportunity to look at the governance model and to consider becoming a police, fire and crime commissioner. Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the news that that is happening in Staffordshire too? The consultation has recently been completed. The police and crime commissioner taking the fire authority into his role would enable greater collaboration and joint working.

Mr Hollobone: I am delighted to hear that positive news from Staffordshire. My hon. Friend is developing a well-deserved reputation for being thoroughly on top of local issues in her constituency. I join her in welcoming the news from Staffordshire. I believe that seven police and crime commissioners are now actively consulting on taking over fire service responsibilities. I very much hope that they all succeed. I would like Northamptonshire, Staffordshire and the five others to be successful role models for authorities around the country, because it makes huge sense to me that delivery of emergency services should be as joined up as possible.

My understanding is that under the Police and Crime Act 2017, which my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling), the Minister and I supported, four options were given to police and crime commissioners and the local fire and rescue authorities. Option 1 was a duty to collaborate, but with no change in governance; option 2 was for the police and crime commissioner to take a place on the fire and rescue authority; option 3 was for the police and crime commissioner to become the fire commissioner as well; and option 4 was to combine the services.

Ultimately, I hope that option 4 is delivered in Northamptonshire, but I fully recognise that option 3 is the right place to be at the moment. Operationally, the police service and the fire and rescue service will be two different organisations, but the police, fire and crime commissioner will be the head of both. Although structurally separate organisations below the commissioner, on the ground police officers and firefighters are increasingly

working together already. Indeed, I think there are now three fire/police/ambulance stations in Northamptonshire. At Rushden, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), there is certainly an all-singing, all-dancing police, fire and ambulance station with all three services together. I think the same is true at Thrapston.

I do not see why we should not be really ambitious. Ultimately, I would like to see a Northamptonshire-wide police, fire and ambulance service dedicated to Northamptonshire. I do not see why East Midlands ambulance service needs to provide ambulance services to Northamptonshire; the police, fire and crime commissioner would be well able to run ambulance services locally. I invite the Minister to come to Northamptonshire if he ever would like to pilot such an initiative, because I think we could persuade the police and crime commissioner that that might be a good idea, especially since 60% of calls to the fire service are already for medical emergencies.

Both services will remain operationally distinct, but joint working is increasing. That does not mean that police officers will put out fires, and it does not mean that firefighters will have the power of arrest; it just means that they will work sensibly together. This is not a police takeover of the fire service or a merger of the two; it is just a shared governance structure that should lead to sensible joint decisions. If this move is approved by the Minister, it will accelerate collaboration and better protect the frontline than the existing model. At the moment, the fire service is part of Northamptonshire County Council. With the best will in the world, any fire and rescue authority in a county council structure will not get the funding certainty that can be provided by governance by a separate police, fire and crime commissioner.

Amanda Milling: I am grateful for the opportunity to intervene again. Does my hon. Friend agree that having a police, fire and crime commissioner would improve the democratic accountability of the fire service? Councillors are appointed to the fire authority, but they are not electorally accountable to the public.

Mr Hollobone: My hon. Friend demonstrates once again that she has a wise head on young shoulders. That is the same as the argument in favour of police commissioners. Who knew who the members of the local police authority were? No one did. Sometimes, even members of the police authority did not know who the other members were. The same is true of the fire and rescue authority. Accountability and transparency, along with more funding security and certainty, are big drivers behind the proposal.

I am pleased that people in Northamptonshire basically agree. Some 1,200 people responded to the police commissioner's consultation. Some 61% of them, and 92% of people working in the fire and rescue service, are in favour of the proposals, which they know will deliver efficiency, effectiveness, economy and improvements in public safety because of increased funding certainty. Those are impressive results—they certainly impressed me, and I hope that they will impress the Minister.

The business case is now on the Minister's desk; it requires his signature for the proposals to be moved forward. If it gets his signature, in his distinguished

hand, the change could come into effect from April 2018. I urge him to study the case and approve it. Northamptonshire has demonstrated that police officers and firefighters are getting together on the ground to deliver sensible joint working, and the governance structure is now catching up with that. If we can get Home Office approval, we can move on over time—not too long, I hope—to stage 4, which is combining the services. Crucially, the proposed change should not lead to increased costs for the taxpayer, because the money that is now given to the county council to fund the fire and rescue service will be given to the police, fire and crime commissioner, but there will be a separate line on people's council tax bills for the fire authority precept, which will improve transparency and accountability.

Thank you for your patience with me, Ms Ryan. I hope that I have outlined my 100% support for these proposals. The Minister is diligent, assiduous and very much on top of his game, and I know that he will take the proposals seriously. If he agrees with the police and crime commissioner and approves the business case, we in Northamptonshire are up for the challenge of delivering the country's best combined police and fire service.

1.14 pm

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan, I think for the first time, and to respond to this welcome and timely debate, which my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) secured. We came into the House in the same year—back in 2005—and since then he has been a tireless champion of the interests of the people of Kettering. I was therefore delighted to hear him express his 100% support for police and crime commissioner Mold's proposals, and I heard him urging me to go even further in terms of ambition. It is typical of him that, to get insight into the operating reality of the people serving his constituents, he invested time in the parliamentary fire and police schemes and was himself a special constable, and I congratulate him on that.

I note the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer), who is presumably here to support my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering in registering what appears to be a consensus across Northamptonshire and clear popular support for this initiative, which to some degree, as he noted, reflects the reality on the ground. Northamptonshire is well known to be in the vanguard of collaboration between the emergency services, and I place on the record my congratulations and respect for everyone involved in the leadership that has been shown there. The debate is very welcome.

I can give my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering immediate reassurance about the Government's support for the principle of enabling police and crime commissioners to have greater involvement in fire governance. That goes beyond words: we have already approved the first proposal, from Roger Hirst in Essex. We are encouraged to see that about a dozen areas, including Staffordshire—I very much welcome the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling)—have responded to the legislation that enables that greater involvement and are actively developing proposals to take on governance for fire and rescue. As I said, I am particularly pleased to see areas such as Northamptonshire leading the way.

[Mr Nick Hurd]

As we MPs all know, the reality is that our public services—particularly our emergency services, which do an incredible job—responded impressively to pressure to control costs and find savings. Many of them have embraced collaboration, which is easy to talk about but quite difficult to do in practice. We are keen to encourage leadership to go even further in that direction, not just in the interests of using taxpayers' money better and finding efficiencies, but to deliver a better service to the people we serve.

In that context, I pay tribute to police and crime commissioner Mold and his team for the hard work that they put into developing the proposal that gave rise to this debate. Indeed, they worked at such pace that they have already submitted the proposal. I must correct something that my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering said: the proposal is not actually sitting on my desk; it is sitting in the bowels of the Home Office being processed by officials, because it has only just come in. It will come to me, I will take a view, and it will go to the Home Secretary. That is the process. That means that I am a bit restricted in what I can say about the detailed business case, because I have not seen it. However, I will see it and we will test it robustly, not least because my hon. Friend will want the reassurance that I want that it is sensibly rooted in good economics, will result in a better service for his constituents and will leave Northamptonshire County Council with a solid financial base. The statute requires us to make various tests of the business case, which is in the system and will be processed as quickly as possible. I am a bit restricted in what I can say, but I absolutely note his message to get on with it.

Mr Hollobone: I am sure the Minister will welcome the fact that Northamptonshire County Council, unlike some county authorities, supports the case. We are all singing from the same hymn sheet in Northamptonshire, if that gives him any encouragement.

Mr Hurd: I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, because he makes an important point. As I have said, this is easy to talk about, but difficult to do. In particular, some of the work, which he talked about, that the county council has to do with the police and crime commissioner on data is complicated. He is quite right that some county councils have set their face against these changes, so I place on record my respect and thanks to Northamptonshire County Council for the leadership it has shown in fully co-operating with this complex task.

By way of conclusion, I would like to draw out a couple of key themes. First, I join my hon. Friend in placing on record my personal thanks and the Government's thanks for the hard work and the service that the police and fire officers in Northamptonshire and across the country perform on our behalf. He is right that there are operational aspects to emergency response that are common to police, fire and ambulance, so it must make sense to explore where those services can be more effectively joined up to maximise capability, resilience and everything he talked about in his remarks. There are some fantastic examples of collaboration out there, including joint control rooms, multi-agency intervention teams and joint prevention and support capability.

The Government have invested more than £88 million since 2013 in local blue light collaboration projects. We are not just sitting here, saying, "Get on with it." We are actively trying to provide support, such as initiatives in Northamptonshire that include £4.5 million for police innovation and £3 million for fire transformation.

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Hollobone: I get the sense that we are perhaps not in danger of going over the time limit, so I want to intervene again and say that we are blessed in Northamptonshire with two outstanding senior officers. The chief constable of Northamptonshire, Simon Edens, is fantastic. He is down-to-earth and hands-on, and he knows all his officers. Likewise, the chief fire officer, Darren Dovey, has years of experience and knows all the boys and girls in the fire service. The two are determined to work together operationally to make things work, whatever the governance structure will be. The changes to the governance structure will help them to do what they are already doing.

Mr Hurd: I am sure that my hon. Friend's intervention will be noted by both those officers. In this place, we perhaps do not do enough to celebrate and recognise individuals who do outstanding work in public service. In the course of my process of engaging with police officers, I have spoken to the police chief on the phone, and I very much look forward to visiting Northamptonshire and meeting him and the fire chief in person, not least because it is clear that Northamptonshire has been at the forefront of many collaboration initiatives, including estates co-location, interoperability and joint community prevention work, as my hon. Friend brought to life in his speech. Frankly, I am very encouraged that PCC Mold has made collaboration and emergency services integration a running theme in his police and crime plan, for which he is accountable. His conviction about the benefits of service transformation is evident and encouraging.

While we know that good work is going on in some local areas, it is fair to say that nationally the picture remains a bit patchy, as my hon. Friend alluded to, and more can be done. In some ways, the pace and ambition with which policing has been transformed since 2010—it is much to the credit of police leadership across the country—can serve as a model for the changes we want to see in fire. With the Home Office now responsible for this area, we are able to support what we hope to see as the continuous improvement of fire and rescue services, enabling them to be more accountable, effective and professional than ever before. My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase pointed out the important scope in the governance reforms to introduce much greater transparency and accountability, not least around funding streams into fire services, which the public we serve are obviously going to be increasingly interested in post-Grenfell.

To support the fire service along this journey, we are establishing an independent inspection regime for fire and rescue to be delivered by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services. There is consensus about the need for that. We are also making progress in setting up a professional standards body for fire. However, we want the bulk of the fire reform programme to be owned and delivered by the service itself.

For example, we want the fire service to get better deals when buying equipment. There is still a lot of scope to improve that area, and we believe that a true commercial transformation and radical improvement to procurement processes are needed. We also want the service to look at workforce reform, increasing diversity and more flexibility in terms and conditions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering made a very good point about how the police and crime commissioners have developed in the consciousness of the public. The system we had before was sub-optimal in terms of public accountability. Police and crime commissioners were a bold reform that is beginning to develop momentum, thanks not least to the individuals involved, such as PCC Mold, who has shown great leadership since his election. That includes action on cyber-security, domestic violence and children and young people's safety. Such examples convince us that PCCs are ideally placed to support emergency services collaboration and the fire reform agenda. In bringing together local police and fire under a single leadership, we hope to see PCCs driving through transformation that truly delivers for local people. We expect to see improved visibility and transparency, direct accountability to the electorate and a renewed impulse to police and fire collaboration, which my hon. Friend is calling for. That is why we want PCCs to explore the opportunity.

A transfer of fire and rescue governance is not the only option for involving PCCs. As my hon. Friend mentioned, they can request a seat on their local fire and rescue authority, which can come with full voting rights, subject to local agreement. There are options, but I am clear that where PCCs are up for the governance option, are convinced that they have a strong business case, feel that they have the public on their side and, ideally, have the local authority on their side as well, they will have our support, subject to the rigour and robustness of the business case. It is up to local areas to decide what arrangements will work best for them. That is why the Government chose not to mandate the involvement of PCCs in fire governance.

Successful transformation has to involve local people and key stakeholders, and that is exactly what has happened in Northamptonshire. We want everyone to

get behind the changes and what they hope to achieve, so that we can really see the benefits of improved accountability and greater collaboration. That is why we have encouraged early dialogue with local communities, local leaders and fire and rescue staff about the future they see for their fire and rescue services. Northamptonshire has shown that a constructive dialogue between PCCs and partners, including the county council, is possible, and I strongly urge other areas to follow that model and leadership.

Mr Hollobone: I am grateful to the Minister for his response, but I am going to press him into an area that is a little off-piste and where he might be a little uncomfortable. Would he welcome innovative proposals that came forward from a county, such as Northamptonshire, to go for the full Monty: to combine fire, police and ambulance in some kind of sensible, county-wide emergency provision? That would enjoy huge popular support. I know it is very early days, but if someone were to produce a sensible plan, would the Home Office look at it?

Mr Hurd: I thank my hon. Friend, not least for the heads-up that he is encouraging me to go off-piste. We are operating in tough conditions. The situation requires outstanding leadership and for authorities, the system, the Home Office and the Government to be open to new proposals, because this is an environment in which we need to innovate. My instinct is always to be open to new ideas, and I will always ask, "Is there local support for this? Is there a business case and an evidence base to support this?" We feel strongly that there is an opportunity to go further with the governance of emergency services and police and fire in particular, which is why we enabled that through legislation. I am absolutely delighted that Northamptonshire is in the vanguard in responding to that opportunity, as I would expect. I can assure my hon. Friend that when the business case is released from the bowels of the Home Office and on to my desk, I will process it as quickly as possible. In the meantime, I congratulate him on securing this debate and thank him for his approval.

Question put and agreed to.

Blacklisting

1.30 pm

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): This is a one-hour debate. As colleagues know, there will be five minutes for the two Opposition leads and 10 minutes for the Minister. If the contributions of Back Benchers were to end a little earlier, I would be inclined to allow six minutes to the hon. Members for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) and for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), but it may be just five.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): I beg to move,
That this House has considered blacklisting.

I should say at the outset that I am pleased that the Minister for corporate responsibility will respond to the debate, because, as she responded to the debate that I held in the previous Parliament earlier this year, she will be familiar with the issues.

For the benefit of the record in this Parliament, I want to recap what we are talking about. Imagine a person who has spent years acquiring the skills to work on construction sites around the country. No one ever complained about the quality of their work or their work ethic. They happen to be an active member of their trade union, keen to ensure that they and their colleagues have a safe and pleasant working environment—nothing out of the ordinary. Then, on one occasion, they raise a serious health and safety concern—no small matter, given that an average of 39 construction workers are killed at work every year in the UK—and ever since they have not been able to get work. That is what happened to thousands of construction workers for decades. They were blacklisted, and no one has ever been brought properly to book for it.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, far from being barred from employment, those people in construction who raised health and safety issues and have been blacklisted should be commended and saluted?

Chuka Umunna: Absolutely—I could not agree more. I will outline some of the things people have done and matters on which they have campaigned for justice. Blacklisting is the shady, underhand practice of sharing information on workers without their knowledge and then systematically denying them employment on the basis of that information. The practice first hit the headlines in 2009, when the Information Commissioner's Office raided the premises of a disreputable organisation called the Consulting Association. When it raided that association, it found a blacklist of more than 3,000 construction workers. The association was funded and used for years by more than 40 of the country's biggest construction firms to vet employees.

The association, set up in 1993, was the successor to another disreputable organisation called the Economic League, which I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) will mention later. The construction companies fed the association detailed information about workers without their knowledge. Whenever the companies made hiring decisions, they checked applicants' names against the

association's list. If they were on it, they were usually refused work—they were denied the ability to do their job and provide for their family.

Essentially, the system facilitated systematic victimisation and denial of work simply because workers had raised legitimate health and safety concerns in the past or because they were a member of a trade union or a political party. It was, and still is, an outrage. The nature of some of the information held about people on the list—their religion, national insurance number, car registrations and so on—strongly suggests that the data were collected with the collusion of the police and/or security services. That is why it is entirely fitting that the Blacklist Support Group members, many of whom are here, have been granted core participant status in the Pitchford inquiry into undercover policing.

Those who suffered and are victims now have three principle routes of redress. The Employment Relations Act 1999 (Blacklists) Regulations 2010 now outlaw blacklisting, but they came into force too late for those who suffered at the hands of the Consulting Association. The Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 stops people being discriminated against on the basis of being a member of a union, and the Data Protection Act 1998 can be used against those who abuse and misuse people's personal data. The late Ian Kerr, who was chief officer of the Consulting Association, was fined a paltry £5,000 after the ICO's raid because only later were fines levied under that Act substantially increased.

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): My constituent Sandy Macpherson of Ilkley was one of the plaintiffs in the recent case. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is now a strong case for making blacklisting a criminal offence with strong sanctions, including big fines and possible imprisonment in the worst cases?

Chuka Umunna: I wholeheartedly agree. My hon. Friend talks about litigation, and in July 2014 Balfour Beatty, Carillion, Costain, Kier, Laing O'Rourke, Sir Robert McAlpine, Skanska UK and VINCI plc, which were all involved in blacklisting and in funding the Consulting Association, established a compensation scheme for individual workers affected by blacklisting and made an apology of sorts for what happened. However, their scheme was established unilaterally without agreement on the terms with the trade unions representing workers. Other firms that were part of the hall of shame involved with the association such as the Amec Group, Amey, BAM Construction, Morgan Sindall and Taylor Woodrow did not sign up to the scheme.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): As my hon. Friend knows, this is an important issue to me as I represented blacklisted members of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians in the High Court. Does he agree that no firm involved in historical blacklisting should be given a public contract until it demonstrates regret for its actions by supporting a public inquiry, offering retraining to victims and demonstrating that its recruitment processes are transparent and fair?

Chuka Umunna: I completely agree, and I commend my hon. Friend and the huge team of people who have worked on all the litigation we have seen in the High Court brought by a number of unions including UCATT—

now part of Unite—which I am proud to say is headquartered in my constituency, and the GMB. Those unions deserve huge credit for the efforts they put into uncovering exactly what went on and then getting redress, working with my hon. Friend and others in the courts. Those cases have been settled in the past two years and millions have been paid, but the fact remains that not one director of the firms who funded the Consulting Association has ever been properly brought to book, fined or subjected to any individual court sanction for the misery they visited on construction workers over the decades. No one has been brought to book properly for that.

In fact, we are behaving as if all has been forgiven. Tears were apparently shed last month over the fact that we will not hear Big Ben's bongs for several years. We should be far more concerned about the fact that Sir Robert McAlpine, a firm implicated in all of this, appears to have bagged a multi-million pound contract for the work that is to be carried out on Big Ben tower to fix those bongs.

Let us be clear about the role that the company Sir Robert McAlpine played. Cullum McAlpine, a director of Sir Robert McAlpine, was chairman of the Consulting Association when it was formed in 1993. Later, David Cochrane, the head of HR at that firm, succeeded him as chair of the association. During a hearing of the Scottish Affairs Committee's inquiry into all of this in 2012, the late Ian Kerr, who died that year, admitted that his £5,000 fine for breaches of the Data Protection Act was met by Sir Robert McAlpine

"on the basis that I had put myself at the front and took the flak, if you like, for it all, so that they wouldn't be drawn into all of this. They would remain hidden."

How, in the light of that, can we parliamentarians sit here and say to the victims—many of whom are watching the debate in the Public Gallery—"It is an outrage", while we stand by as Sir Robert McAlpine is awarded the contract to do the work on the parliamentary estate? There must be consequences when those who bid for public contracts are found to be involved in such practices. Will the Minister explain why on earth, given its disgraceful role in blacklisting, we are giving Sir Robert McAlpine the contract to fix the bongs of Big Ben, which so many parliamentarians have shed tears over?

I took up the blacklisting issue originally as a constituency issue, having been alerted to the scandal by my good friends at Unite; I took an even stronger interest when I was shadow Business Secretary, and I instigated the first full debate on the topic on the Floor of the House in 2013. As I have said, I instigated another debate on it earlier this year, because we must have a proper public inquiry into blacklisting, and the victims are continually denied it.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): One of my constituents, Alan Wainwright, is a victim of blacklisting, and was party to exposing it—he was a whistleblower. He has submitted a file of evidence to the Minister's office on the very point about the public inquiry. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister should examine it seriously and in detail as part of the inquiry?

Chuka Umunna: I completely agree; I have met my right hon. Friend's constituent. In the end, we need the inquiry because we need to know who knew what was

going on. It was happening not just in the private sector but in the public sector. There are allegations that it was going on at the Olympic sites, Portcullis House and Ministry of Defence sites. Who knew it was going on? Did the permanent secretaries or the Ministers at the time know? Were the Departments that commissioned construction projects complicit in it? We do not know. Does the law need to be changed or tightened? To what extent is it still going on?

Each time we have debated the issue here the coalition and subsequent Conservative Governments have specifically refused to set up a public inquiry, saying that there is little evidence that blacklisting still goes on. Today I will present compelling evidence showing that the practice is definitely still going on, and that it is happening on one of the biggest construction sites in Europe—Crossrail, a publicly funded project that I have visited. Let us not forget that a construction worker died after being crushed by falling wet concrete, in March 2014, and that two other men were seriously injured in separate incidents in January 2015, working on Crossrail tunnels around the Fisher Street area in central London. In July this year the contractors concerned, BAM, Ferrovial, Keir—the BFK consortium—pleaded guilty to three offences following an investigation by the Health and Safety Executive, and were fined more than £1 million. The HSE said that had simple measures such as properly implemented exclusion zones in high-hazard areas been taken, all three incidents could have been prevented. That shows why it is so important that construction workers should feel free to raise health and safety issues without fear of retribution.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): My hon. Friend outlines the human cost to the blacklisted workers and their families, which is almost the point that I want to make; but is there not also a sinister reason—intimidation of those engaged in legitimate trade union activity, to boost profits, often at the cost of the lives of a company's own workers?

Chuka Umunna: My hon. Friend makes a good point: to what extent is profit being put before safety? Why is there such paranoia when employees and workers raise such issues? I find that hard to fathom, given the fatalities that occur in the construction sector.

The first case that I want to mention concerns surveillance of workers that took place at a peaceful demonstration at a Crossrail site in 2016. I have seen and read emails that passed and were circulated between contractors and the employee relations department at Crossrail, which detail questionable surveillance practices. The surveillance operations involved named individuals who were implicated in and involved with the activities of the Consulting Association. The evidence that I will supply to the Minister after the debate shows that a number of construction workers were being closely watched there, and that sensitive personal information was being collected in relation to them. It is not clear where those data were subsequently posited or by precisely whom, but those collecting information on the workers had to fill in a form, which was definitely filed somewhere.

Two of the workers who were subject to that surveillance have since sought to obtain further employment on Crossrail through employment agencies advertising positions. In each case they approached the job agency

[Chuka Umunna]

about the vacancy, and had the required skills to fill it. However, as soon as they relayed their names there was a delay; they were subsequently given an excuse as to why the positions had been filled. Unite does not believe that what happened to the two workers is coincidental, and it has already informed the Information Commissioner's Office of its concerns about the case. Clearly, subcontractors were explicitly discouraged from employing certain known trade union members. One subcontractor has actually told Unite that the consequences of his employing a Unite member would be the refusal of future work. For obvious reasons, the subcontractor does not wish to disclose their identity.

The Information Commissioner's Office, having been contacted about this, has stated that the evidence

"raises the possibility that surveillance is being undertaken without appropriate checks and balances being in place"

and that the

"collection of this type of data is potentially excessive"

under the law.

The second case that I want to highlight is that of an electrician who has been trying to obtain work in the construction industry since raising a grievance while working on Crossrail. He has since applied for hundreds of job vacancies, almost always being turned down. He never received any criticism about the quality of his work. He is an intelligent young guy, who is conscientious about his work and who takes his health and safety duties to himself and his colleagues particularly seriously. He is not particularly political: he is a construction worker and his focus is his work. He served Crossrail with a subject access request that compelled it to provide him with the information it held on him. I have been passed the documents and had a chance to read them. They reveal that Crossrail and three of its contractors exchanged personal data, and sensitive personal data, concerning the individual's previous employment and the issues and grievances that he had raised there. On the face of it, the data appear to have been processed for the purpose of determining the individual's suitability for employment related to his trade union activities. The very strong inference from the documents is that some kind of vetting operation was in operation between Crossrail, its contractors and the agencies involved. Again, I will pass the information and the documents to the Minister after the debate.

Those are just two examples, but clearly they show that blacklisting is still going on. I do not think that it is being carried out in the way that it was before, with a centralised system collectively funded by the construction companies, not least because for those caught under the data protection legislation there is a much bigger fine, and the blacklisting regulations are also in force, of course. However, clearly it is still being done, but in a more covert way, making it a lot harder to identify.

The ICO has said it will put out a call for evidence about ongoing blacklisting next year. It should really get on and put out the call for evidence now, without further delay; but it is no substitute for the public inquiry that we seek. The ultimate way to get to the bottom of what happened and is still happening is a proper investigation of that kind. The law clearly needs to be reviewed, even though the Minister told me earlier

in the year that that was not necessary. I would like workers to be given a positive right not to be blacklisted. The suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (John Grogan) that it should be made a criminal offence was well made. I would also like protection against blacklisting to be extended to include trade union-related activities, as opposed to the current definition, "trade union activities".

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that we should commend the work of trade unions on the issue? The GMB, for example, has already secured £630,000 in my region of Yorkshire, but it is clear that there is more to do.

Chuka Umunna: That is absolutely right. All Members who have spoken or undertaken any activity on this issue would have found it much harder to do what we have done without the trade unions providing support and information and uncovering what happened.

I have to say to the Minister that I just do not understand why the Government and her Department are so resistant to having a public inquiry. What are they so afraid of? At the end of the 2010-15 Parliament, I made it very clear to her Department, which I was hoping to run after the 2015 general election, that, if Labour won that election, I would be giving instructions for the establishment of such a public inquiry. I was very clear on that to the permanent secretary. It can be done, it needs to be done and, above all, the thousands of people who have suffered need it to be done. At the same time that they need it to be done, those who were ultimately responsible for all of this have got off scot-free.

I have provided the evidence to the Minister orally—I will provide the documents so she can see them in detail—that this is still going on. To her and the Government, who claim to look out for the interests of workers, I say: put your money where your mouth is, deliver on the public inquiry and let us get justice for those who have suffered and those who are still suffering.

1.50 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I will make one comment on the public inquiry. There could be reasons why the Government are a little reluctant to hold one, because, if we look at history, we will see that there were, of course, previous blacklisting organisations. We know of the unanswered questions—or rather, the unjustly resolved questions—relating to Shrewsbury in 1973, and we know about the Economic League blacklist. I put it to my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna), to the House and to the Minister that we should not be scared of taking this on. I believe there were people working inside Parliament who were a part of the creation of the Economic League blacklist. They were working for MPs and using the facilities here. Who is to say that they have not actually continued those activities, because the same companies keep coming up?

Blacklisting happens to all sorts of people. I think there is a view among some of the more naive MPs that this is perhaps something to do with extreme militants battling away. Let me tell hon. Members about one extreme militant who was on the Economic League blacklist and was refused a job because of it: me. I probably do not fit the normal view of an extreme militant. Some would say I am far from it; I will leave

colleagues to make their own judgment on that. However, when I was given a job in Manchester by Ciba-Geigy in the 1980s, it was withdrawn, which was a bit of a surprise. I asked them why. I said, "You've given me a job and now you've taken it away." They said, "You're on some list, and we're afraid"—they were very apologetic—"we can't give you it."

Then, by some coincidence, someone got hold of that list, and it was made public. I remember very vividly a meeting at the University of London Union. I think Ricky Gervais was the events officer there at the time. I went in this student room and there were desks there. I thought I would go and see—nosey in; have a look—and I went through and looked under "M" and I found my name there. I have no idea why I was on the Economic League blacklist, and I do not know who put me on it or why. Frankly, it has not affected me, because I was not bothered about the job, unlike some people, whose lives and income and those of their families have been blighted ever since.

I could not have known I was on that list if the person who told me had not apologetically pointed it out to me. They could easily have not said a word, or said, "No, we haven't got the money. There is no job there. Sorry. No contract has been signed." I also would not have known if I had not read that the list was being shown—I read it somewhere; I do not know where—and thought that I would stick my nose in and have a look at the list, as you do, curiously. It was a bit of a shock when I found my name on that list. I wondered who it was who put it on there. I can tell hon. Members who it was, because I did some research in some good publications from the time. There were a lot of names of people in the Economic League, and some of those people were working for Tory MPs here, and there were Tory MPs in the middle of it.

Let us have a public inquiry and have everything revealed. Let us go all the way back through the 1970s and 1980s for those who have not gotten justice—I am not bothered about me; I will be all right—such as those in Shrewsbury. Let us have some justice there. There are a lot of people out there who do not even know why they did not get jobs that they went for. That was in construction, but it is not only in construction. I tell hon. Members that, today, it will be parts of the NHS where this kind of informal blacklisting is going on as well, not just construction. It is therefore crucial that we change the law, so let us get on with it and let us have an inquiry.

1.55 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I did not actually intend to speak in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) mentioned the Shrewsbury case. That alleged conspiracy took place in my constituency, in the Bull and Stirrup. It was a bunch of fellows trying to defend their livelihoods, and that sore continues today, 40 years later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna), who led the debate—I pay tribute to his persistence on this issue—mentioned the attitudes of the Minister and the Government on this, which is that they do not want a public inquiry because blacklisting has stopped. However, whether in the Shrewsbury case from 40 years ago or for workers today, even if blacklisting had stopped, its effects—the poverty, the shame and,

frankly, the humiliation—are still there for decent, hard-working, skilled men and women who have been denied that livelihood and have been suffering the economic consequences ever since. The effects, the human consequences and, above all, the sense of injustice are still with us.

We cannot turn our back on that sense of injustice, whether for the families of Des Warren and Ricky Tomlinson in my constituency 40 years ago—it was not my constituency then, but I will still lay claim to it—or for the other men and women who have suffered perhaps thousands and thousands of pounds of financial loss and heaven knows what kind of human and psychological damage and who are still living with the consequences of that today. Even if blacklisting is not taking place—I am minded to agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham that it is—the consequences are. I believe the Government have a responsibility to address those current consequences.

1.57 pm

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I will just make a couple of very quick comments. I did not intend to speak in detail, but given that there is time, I will do so. I happen to be the Member of Parliament for six members of the Shrewsbury 24. I know, even today, how they live with the consequences of that blacklisting. One of my constituents has been the Labour mayor of the town I live in, has been a Labour councillor and sat on the police authority. However, even today he cannot travel to the United States because of that conviction and because of the investigation into a whole range of matters to do with health and safety in the workplace and the allegations that were made.

The Government still need to address the information they hold that they could publish about the records of the Shrewsbury 24 at that time. I ask the Minister to look at that issue in general terms, and to revisit what was visited very strongly in this Chamber in the last Parliament: the consequences of the Government not releasing information to do with the Shrewsbury 24, which they promised to release, but which they have failed to release.

The main reason I stand is to say that I was approached in the last few weeks by my constituent, Alan Wainwright, who is a victim of blacklisting and who was part of the whistleblowing in the blacklisting exposure that is taking place. There was a *Guardian* article last Tuesday that detailed his experiences, and he has also produced a detailed report of his experiences of his dealings with trade unions and with business, which he has submitted to the Minister's Department for her to examine. He has also submitted it to the general secretary of Unite, Mr Len McCluskey, who has himself ordered an inquiry into this matter within the Unite union. Mr Wainwright asked me to ask the Minister if she will confirm that she has received that report, consider the evidence and look at a possible inquiry into all the allegations he has made, in addition to the points made very ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna).

1.59 pm

Sir David Crausby (Bolton North East) (Lab): When I was a young trade unionist, there was a feeling about that those people who were blacklisted or sacked on

[Sir David Crausby]

strike were generally revolutionaries and pretty bad people, in the main. I rather suspect that that view is still harboured in the dark corners of some people's minds.

Nearly 40 years ago, I was a works convenor in a medium-sized factory, and after a 19-week strike, the employer decided to sack me for being nothing more than the works convenor of the people who had been on strike. People may well have said at that time that I was a pretty aggressive individual and might well have deserved it, but the reality is that my wife and two little children had not done anything wrong. I never really got over the fact as to why I should be victimised in that way.

Earlier this year, Prince Charles, on the instruction of the Queen, knighted me. So I ask the question: in the long term, who was the villain—me, a Member of Parliament, or the employers who decided to victimise me and, much more importantly, my family?

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): We have a little extra time, so I will allow each shadow Front Bencher seven minutes, which will give the Minister a little longer, if she requires it. I call Mr Stephens.

2.1 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Walker. First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) on giving a very vivid account of blacklisting in this country.

I have argued since the general election that in this House of minorities, there is potential for this Parliament to be called the justice Parliament. That is by ensuring there are inquiries to deal with the Shrewsbury conspiracy, the wrongful conviction of miners during the miners' strike and this issue of blacklisting, as well as for those caught up in contaminated blood. While there is now an inquiry into contaminated blood, which I welcome very much, I support the efforts of the hon. Member for Streatham and others to have a public inquiry on blacklisting.

Blacklisting is covered in a fantastic film called "The Happy Lands", which is based in Fife. The historical context is the general strike there, and in that film blacklisting is revealed. It is difficult to comprehend the extent of blacklisting in this country, thanks to the levels of denial and secrecy surrounding this odious practice, but what is not difficult to understand is the dreadful effect that blacklisting has on people's lives and the suffering of not just the workers targeted for their trade union activity but their family members as well. Denial of the most basic of human rights—the right to work and provide for your family—by the same companies that have grown rich on lucrative public sector contracts is a shameful act and an abuse of power.

Make no mistake: blacklisting is a deliberate decision taken by company directors and managers who are in the business of maximising profits for shareholders by punishing those who seek to stand up for their rights and the health and safety of their fellow workers. The account given by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) of his personal circumstances is commonplace in the construction industry, where people turn up for

work and within a day or two are told that there is no longer a position for them, because companies have been looking at the blacklist.

The Scottish National party is clear that blacklisting in any form is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Despite employment law being a reserved matter—which is unfortunate, given the consensus in Scotland that it should be devolved—the Scottish Government have introduced legislation: the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2015 and the Procurement (Scotland) Regulations 2016, which came into effect in April last year. Those changes will ensure that any company in Scotland found to be involved in the practice of blacklisting will be excluded from bidding for public sector contracts. The general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Grahame Smith, has welcomed that action and said that any company applying for new public contracts where blacklisting has taken place in the past must make an apology to the affected workers, issue a statement on future conduct and prove compliance with any tribunal ruling made against it in relation to blacklisting.

I share the concerns of the hon. Member for Streatham about the delays to 2018, flagged up by Unite the union. That is more pathetic, Brexit-induced stalling, and yet another kick in the teeth to those who want not just justice for past wrongs but security for present and future workers.

Some of the context for the move towards greater transparency has come through action through the High Court. In an attempt to body-swerve liability, a number of construction companies attempted to almost name and shame themselves, including Laing O'Rourke, Costain, Kier and Sir Robert McAlpine, which I will come on to later. Let us make a mental note of the last company named there. One of its directors, Cullum McAlpine, who has already been mentioned, was interviewed under oath by the Scottish Affairs Committee when it conducted its inquiry into blacklisting. As an important aside, I hope that the Scottish Affairs Committee now goes back to that inquiry, which was chaired by my predecessor, Ian Davidson. The three interim reports all made clear that there is a case for a full public inquiry, which is essential if we are ever to expose the true extent of the practice and take measures to stop it.

I return to Sir Robert McAlpine, which was a founding member of the Consulting Association. Cullum McAlpine refused to answer many of the questions put to him by the Scottish Affairs Committee members and relied heavily on his lawyer for advice throughout the session. Despite that, he was forced to admit that the company had used the blacklist to vet workers on the Olympic stadium. In the light of that, it is most shocking, as the hon. Member for Streatham rightly said, that the company has been awarded a £20 million contract to refurbish Big Ben—one of the most iconic buildings in the country, symbolising the seat of power and London as a global destination.

I am calling today for McAlpine to be stripped of that contract. It is an absolute disgrace and scandal that it was awarded the contract in the first place and that none of the actions taken in Scotland are happening here in Westminster. The Government should look at what the devolved Administrations have done about companies in the public sector that have engaged in blacklisting. It signals bad faith that one of the main

perpetrators of this conspiracy—and blacklisting is a conspiracy—is accessing public money to boost its profits.

I support the hon. Member for Streatham in relation to a public inquiry. I hope that the Government will announce a public inquiry into blacklisting, because there are many, many unanswered questions. I congratulate him once again and all those who have spoken so far. They have the support of the SNP for a public inquiry into blacklisting.

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): Mr Dromey, you have until exactly quarter past 2.

2.7 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Walker. May I first congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) on his outstanding advocacy of a noble cause?

Trade unions are a force for good. To be denied work because you are a trade unionist is an affront to democracy. Blacklisting is not history; it is a scandal that has never gone away. Forty years ago, when I came out of the Grunwick strike, I was blacklisted by the Economic League. I was one of the 30,000 subversives, as they defined us at the time. I was out of work for a matter of months and then became an officer of the Transport and General Workers' Union, but tens of thousands of others paid a very heavy price, some of them for decades. I then worked with *The Guardian* to expose the Economic League, leading ultimately to its demise, but it is absolutely scandalous that it was then reincarnated as another organisation, with the same practices.

It is absolutely scandalous that two generations on from the 1970s, we still have an industry—the construction industry—that has not learned the lessons of history and has not recognised that, as Keith Ewing, professor of public law at King's College London has said, blacklisting is

“the worst human rights abuse in relation to workers” in Britain in half a century.

Blacklisting has been outlawed, but the law is simply not strong enough. There has been some compensation for some of the victims of blacklisting, but it is not good enough, and that cynical manoeuvre was about companies trying to protect themselves from public scrutiny and escape their crimes being made public. No user company has been punished for blacklisting. No director has ended up in the dock, and that is completely wrong.

The scale of blacklisting over the years is tens of thousands of workers. There is a long history of Government, the police and construction firms acting in collusion and, as we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham, blacklisting is happening right now by major and allegedly reputable companies that enjoy enormous public contracts such as Crossrail and Big Ben. It is important to reflect on the human consequences of continuous blacklisting and we have heard powerful testimony of that today.

Workers take a pride in their work and define themselves through their job. The issue is self-worth and identity. To be out of work for years not quite knowing why and then discovering it was because they did nothing else but ask for a safe workplace is a scandal.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): My constituent, Danny Regan was an electrician until he was blacklisted. He is not an electrician anymore and he still cannot work in that field because of the history of blacklisting. In supporting the call today for a public inquiry, does my hon. Friend agree that it should address the legacy of the impact of what happened in the past?

Jack Dromey: Without hesitation, I agree with my right hon. Friend, and I will come to that.

Over the years, hundreds of individuals have been blacklisted and I will give one example today. Dave Smith, joint secretary of the Blacklist Support Group, became virtually unemployable as a consequence of his file, which was first held by the Economic League and then by the Consulting Association. It was 36 pages long and stretched from 1992 to 2007, from his very first job with Balfour Beatty all the way through successive employment. His sin with Balfour Beatty was to take part in a dispute about unpaid wages. His file included personal information, including address and national insurance number, but also details of his wife and brother. That is an affront to democracy and the rights of working people, and demands further action. Members today were absolutely right when they said we need first and foremost a public inquiry into blacklisting, its use in the past, its current use, steps going forward to eradicate blacklisting, the role of the special demonstration squad, the role of the Consulting Association, and examination of evidence of blacklisting in publicly procured contracts. The truth needs finally to be fully told.

Secondly, we must strengthen legislation to stop the continuing practice of blacklisting and criminalise it. We must also ensure that the law is not limited to employment relationships because, by definition, if a worker is blacklisted he or she does not have an employment relationship. As Unite has argued, we must also tackle patterns of work generally in construction, such as bogus self-employment. The argument is that 10 million workers are in insecure employment where employers can abuse without fear, and blacklisting very often follows.

Thirdly, we need strong rules covering Government contracts awarded to firms complicit in blacklisting. There must be consequences for blacklisting. It is a scandal that the Big Ben contract has gone to McAlpine, one of the first blacklisting offenders. I suspect that we here do not give a damn about the Big Ben bong, but we give a damn that that firm, which blacklisted workers and treated them shamefully, has an iconic contract just yards from where we are.

We need effective action, including at local authority level. I particularly praise Liverpool for its social value charter, which refers to respect for all individuals and does not engage in any form of discrimination or blacklisting practices—in other words, an unmistakeable message must be sent and enforced that a company suspected of blacklisting does not get public contracts.

Fourthly, we must make sure that specific laws banning blacklisting and data protection are retained after we leave the European Union.

In conclusion, as we have heard today, blacklisting is not history. We must learn from the lessons of history and ultimately confine blacklisting to history. That is why we need a public inquiry, strengthening of the law

[Jack Dromey]

and absolute clarity that companies do not get public contracts if they blacklist. The time has come to blacklist the blacklisters.

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, may I ask her to leave a minute or two at the end for Mr Umunna to sum up?

2.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) on securing this important debate and on his opening remarks, which I listened to intently.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this debate and I want to make it clear that the Government take blacklisting extremely seriously. We hope and trust that blacklisting has already become and will remain a thing of the past, but we are not complacent, and I am even less complacent, having heard from the hon. Gentleman who introduced the debate about evidence that he wishes to put before me afterwards. I was shocked by what I heard and I share his view and that of other Members that blacklisting of trade union members and activists is completely unacceptable. It has absolutely no part to play in modern employment relations.

As hon. Members have noted, we have in place regulations targeted specifically at trade union blacklists and I believe they are both proportionate and robust enough to prevent abuse from occurring. I accept the point that has been made that the horrendous abuse of the past, which was overt, organised and clearly in breach of the law as it stands today, may have been replaced by a more covert approach. That must be borne in mind, but the Employment Relations Act 1999 (Blacklists) Regulations 2010 made it unlawful for an individual or organisation to compile, sell or make use of a blacklist of trade union members or those who have taken part in trade union activities.

Since the introduction of those regulations, no evidence has been presented to the Government or the Information Commissioner that these practices are recurring. If that is no longer the case, naturally I want to know about it. Any individual or trade union who believes they have been the victim of blacklisting practices has the right to take action. They do not have to wait for an independent investigation. They can enforce their rights under the regulations through an employment tribunal or the county court. Anyone who believes they have been affected has the right to pursue justice through these means and we would encourage them to do so.

The measures in the 2010 blacklisting regulations are reinforced by powers in the Data Protection Act 1998, which protect the use of personal data—that was very much needed in the examples we have heard this afternoon. I emphasise that this includes information on trade union membership and sensitive personal data. The Government take the protection of personal data very seriously.

The Information Commissioner's Office is the regulatory body and was set up to investigate breaches of the Data Protection Act 1998. It has power to take enforcement

action, including searching premises, issuing enforcement notices and imposing fines of up to £500,000 for serious breaches. The Government continue to bear down on those who seek to exploit personal data. We have published a statement of intent in relation to the proposed data protection Bill that was announced in the Queen's Speech. The Bill will implement the general data protection regulation into UK law and will give us one of the most robust and dynamic sets of data laws in the world. It will give people more control over their data, require a higher standard of consent for its use, and prepare Britain for exiting the European Union.

As a result of the general data protection regulation, the Information Commissioner's fining powers will increase substantially from 25 May 2018, to 4% of an organisation's annual global turnover or €20 million, whichever is greater.

It is clear that data collection and data analytics in the workplace are gaining in importance. In the light of that and the strengthened framework that the general data protection regulation will create, the Information Commissioner's Office intends to open a call for evidence, to which hon. Members have alluded, on the implications of modern employment practices in recruitment and selection, and the obligations of employers. The hon. Member for Streatham says that that should happen sooner rather than later. I agree with him. I believe that the call for evidence is scheduled for next year. I will talk to the Information Commissioner's Office to see whether it can be brought forward.

The call for evidence is an important step in trying to establish not only the true picture of the level of blacklisting that may or may not take place in practice now, but how growth in digital services has created potential new risks for employees and how those may be addressed.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): In my previous capacity on Suffolk County Council, when the council decided to outsource its highways to Kier, we took a motion to council calling for it to ensure that there was no blacklisting in relation to employees of Kier working for Suffolk County Council. That motion was passed unanimously, because Conservative members of Suffolk County Council—like, I am sure, Conservative Members of this Parliament—were vocally opposed to blacklisting. However, nothing was done to find out whether blacklisting was actually taking place. The Minister is talking to us about a search for evidence, but without a public inquiry to find out what has actually taken place, surely there is no way we will get to the bottom of this.

Margot James: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I can reassure him. If people in his borough have any evidence, the best thing they can do at the moment is to take it to the Information Commissioner, who will investigate it. In fact, the Information Commissioner does not need particular examples even. If they are seeing allegations made against a particular employer or within a sector, they will commit to investigating the issues that his constituents have raised.

Chris Stephens: The hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin), who made the previous intervention, mentioned procurement. Will the Minister tell us what steps the

Government are taking on procurement to ensure that companies that blacklist workers do not get public sector contracts?

Margot James: I will write to the hon. Gentleman on that matter. We expect high standards of corporate governance for major contracts awarded by the Government. If there is evidence of companies acting in the present day in not only a disreputable but a potentially illegal manner, that will be taken into consideration.

Jack Dromey: To press the Minister further on that point, we have heard powerful evidence today in relation to both Crossrail and Big Ben. Does she agree that if there is evidence of complicity in blacklisting, the companies concerned should not get public contracts until such time as they have remedied the bad practices of the past and, indeed, the present?

Margot James: The shadow Minister makes a very reasonable point, which I will consider further. I think there is nothing to disagree with in what he has said.

We want to build on the work already undertaken by the Information Commissioner's Office looking at profiling and big data analytics. The Information Commissioner's call for evidence, once complete, will be the most recent and authoritative source of data that we have. I can assure hon. Members that the Government will consider the evidence collected and the report on it very carefully indeed.

I want to acknowledge the request from the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson). I have indeed received correspondence from Mr Alan Wainwright. I have looked at it briefly and will examine it thoroughly. The right hon. Gentleman also asked me to look again at the situation with regard to the Shrewsbury 24, and I will write to him on that subject as well.

The Government will continue to take a very close interest in this matter. If the Information Commissioner finds any evidence of current blacklisting, perpetrators can expect to feel the full force of the law, and I am sure—to go back to the shadow Minister's intervention—that that would have implications for contracting as well. In the meantime, in the absence of clear, strong and compelling evidence to the effect that blacklisting is widespread, we remain of the view that the blacklisting regulations, alongside the proposed changes to the data protection rules, are appropriate and robust tools—the increased fines and accountability are further disincentives—to counter this abhorrent and illegal practice.

I urge all hon. Members to talk to their constituents who raise these matters with them and to the trade unionists in their constituency who have been affected, and to use the call for evidence as a means of exposing any current practice that might be continuing, so that we can eradicate this appalling abuse of people's human rights at work once and for all.

2.26 pm

Chuka Umunna: I am very grateful to all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate, and for the powerful testimony that several have given. I will just say three things.

First, I welcome the Minister's saying that she will press the Information Commissioner to do the call for evidence this year, not next year. I also welcome her saying—if I heard her correctly—that the Government will consider taking into account whether people were or are involved in blacklisting in relation to public procurement decisions going forward. That is most welcome.

Secondly, there are clearly good and bad sides to this industry. I have seen some of the good sides in my constituency during the past couple of weeks while visiting big construction sites, on Streatham High Road and the Clapham Park estate, that will make a positive difference to my community. However, this scandal exposes the ugly underbelly of the sector, which continues to go unaddressed.

I will wrap up by saying this to the Minister. She accepts that this practice is an outrage and has said that the Government take it seriously and are not complacent about it. I still fail to understand why she was not able to come here today and commit to a public inquiry. I do not understand what the Government are so afraid of. If it exposes embarrassing things for people politically that happened in the past, so what? Surely justice is the key here. That is how we prove that this Parliament is relevant. For all the bad press that this place gets, and given how disillusioned people are with the political process, at least with this we can illustrate that we deliver the goods and care about people, so I ask the Minister to please think again about doing a public inquiry. Do not be scared; just announce that you are going to do it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered blacklisting.

2.28 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 5 September 2017

TREASURY

Finance Bill

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):
The Finance Bill will be published on 8 September.

Explanatory notes on the Bill will be available in the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office and placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 12 September.

Copies of the explanatory notes will also be available on gov.uk.

[HCWS107]

Contingent Liability

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):
The Governor of the Bank of England requested on 3 August 2017 to raise the limit on purchases that may be undertaken by the asset purchase facility (APF). This will ensure that the term funding scheme (TFS) can continue to lend central bank reserves to banks and building societies during a defined drawdown window at rates close to Bank rate, to ensure that the very low level of Bank rate is passed through to households and businesses.

When the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) first introduced the scheme in August 2016, I agreed with the Governor of the Bank of England that total TFS drawings would be determined by usage of the scheme. I have therefore authorised an increase in the total size of the APF used to finance the TFS from £100 billion to £115 billion, in line with the current profile of TFS drawings and based on a drawdown window that will close at the end of February 2018. This will bring the maximum size of the APF to £560 billion.

In line with the requirements in the MPC remit, the amendments to the APF that could affect the allocation of credit and pose risks to the Exchequer have been

discussed with Treasury officials. The risk control framework previously agreed with the Treasury will remain in place.

The Government will continue to indemnify the Bank and the APF from any losses arising out of, or in connection with, the facility. If the liability is called, provision for any payment will be sought through the normal Supply procedure.

On 3 August 2017, I wrote to the Chairs of the Public Accounts Committee and Treasury Committee and invited them to raise any objections to my decision. A full departmental minute is laid in the House of Commons providing more detail on this contingent liability.

[HCWS108]

DEFENCE

Iraq

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon):
Since my quarterly counter-Daesh statement on 13 July, *Official Report*, column 445, after a period of reset and recovery, the Iraqi security forces have delivered a swift victory over Daesh in Tal Afar. On 20 August, with coalition support, they began the operation to retake the town. On 31 August, Prime Minister Abadi announced the liberation of Tal Afar and all of Ninewah province. I congratulate Prime Minister Abadi, and all of the Iraqi security forces for their success. There is, however, still more work to be done and the UK will continue to support the ISF in their efforts to finally clear Daesh from Iraq.

As part of the next phase of the coalition plan to defeat Daesh, the coalition asked the UK to provide additional support in constructing supplementary accommodation and office space at Al Asad air base in Iraq to enable operations in the Euphrates river valley. A team of Royal Engineers infrastructure specialists has therefore deployed for a period of around five months, to undertake this vital work. The soldiers had been held at readiness in the UK for such a task. These troops will remain inside the secure air base. This deployment will temporarily raise the number of UK troops based in Iraq as part of Operation Shader to just over 600.

[HCWS106]

Petitions

Tuesday 5 September 2017

OBSERVATIONS

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Planning application in Irthlingborough

The petition of the residents of the UK,

Declares that the planning application 17/00969/OUT should be rejected; further that local roads are not suitable for increased traffic flow, and already pose issues for emergency vehicles; further that local schools are already at full capacity; further that local doctors and dentists are already at full capacity; further that the land is situated next to the Nene Wetlands conservation area and it is known that various species live on or around that land; further that the land is on a flood plain and the developer has been unable to satisfy the requirements outlined by the Environment Agency in respect of this; further that, the land was sold for use as agricultural or equine land, and it is believed that when the land was put up for sale an interested party approached the council to seek outline planning permission to build stables on this land and permission was denied; and further that the developer has not carried out an acoustic survey in relation to the electrical transformer as requested by environmental protection.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to compel East Northamptonshire Council to reject the planning application to build 124 houses on green belt land to the rear of Nicholas Road, Irthlingborough.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Tom Pursglove, Official Report, 20 July 2017; Vol. 627, c. 1096.*]

[P002049]

Observations by the Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Alok Sharma):

East Northamptonshire Council is responsible for the day to day planning matters in its area. The Government's policy is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of a local planning authority unless it is necessary to do so. This is because local authority councillors are elected to represent the views of local people and, in the main, it is these councillors who are in the best position to decide whether a development should go ahead. In determining a planning application the local planning authority are required to have regard to all material considerations including the development plan, national policies and views expressed by third parties. It is, of course, for local planning authorities to provide whatever justification that may be appropriate for their decisions and procedures.

The Government are committed to giving more power to councils and communities to make their own decisions on planning issues, and believe planning decisions should be made at the local level wherever possible.

EDUCATION

Adoption

The petition of Rebecca Gaffney,

Declares that the petitioner is the mother of a four year old girl who has been placed for non-consensual adoption by Essex Children's Services. The arguments used to justify this by the Local Authority have varied over time, including relying on hearsay. Further, although she passed all drugs tests from her General Practitioner, a court-appointed expert made findings against her. She was given permission to appeal, and the court-appointed expert accepted he was wrong. However, her child was not returned to her care as she was considered to be settled with adopters.

The petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons Education and Justice Committees investigate the use of adoption targets by Local Authorities and whether they impact on the independence of evidence provided to the courts; further requests that cases like hers, where children are adopted even though the case against the parent is disproven, are considered when reviewing how procedures operate in care proceedings, and how experts are not prosecuted for giving false information, and how people in her position might obtain a re-hearing of the case.

And the petitioner remains, etc.—[*Official Report, 6 March 2017; Vol. 622, c. 19P.*]

[P002023]

Observations from the Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Robert Goodwill): The Government do not set targets in relation to adoption. Whilst it believes that adoption can be the right permanence option for some children, it is also clear that decisions must be made in the best interests of each individual child and by the independent courts (drawing on evidence from local authorities and others).

It is important also to recognise that the Association of Directors for Children's Services (which represents senior leaders in local authorities across England) has commented on targets:

"Local authorities were challenged to increase the effectiveness of their adoption processes several years ago including increasing the number of adoptions as children were perceived to be waiting too long for adoptive parents or ending up missing the opportunity for adoption due to lengthy care proceedings...Some are likely to have set targets to increase adoptions if they have been challenged for the low number of adoption outcomes achieved. Irrespective of any targets in place the welfare of the child remains the paramount consideration during care proceedings and where adoption is not in the best interest of the child it will not be pursued...The ultimate safeguard is the court which will not agree to the removal of a child into care unless this can be evidenced to be right for the child and will not agree to adoption as a plan unless that is also believed to be right for the child".

It follows that the Government believe that the law in this area is clear and that there are sufficient safeguards in place to ensure that the views of birth parents are heard before any court decisions are taken on whether a child should be taken into the care of a local authority or be adopted in England.

The law sets out that children should live with their birth parents wherever possible, and that families should be given extra support to help keep them together. In most cases, support from the family's local authority enables any concerns about the child or their family to be addressed and for children to remain with their families.

However, in some situations where a child is identified as suffering significant harm (or at risk of suffering significant harm) and that is attributable to the care given to the child the local authority has a statutory duty to intervene to undertake child protection enquiries and to take action to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

In every case where a child is taken into care, the local authority must apply for an order before a court and the parents will have the opportunity to refute any allegations being made and contest the case. The court must consider all the evidence before it and then can only make a care order where it concludes that there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is suffering from, or is likely to suffer, significant harm and this is attributable to the care given to the child, or likely to be given to him if the order were not made. Where the court makes an order placing a child in the care of a local authority, the authority should continue to work with the family with a view to the child returning home. However, a stage may be reached where it is apparent that the child cannot return home. It is at this stage that the local authority must make alternative plans to provide the child with a permanent placement.

When considering placements for children in care, local authorities have a legal duty to first consider care arrangements by family and friends, including those living outside the UK. Where a placement with the child's parent is not possible, the responsible authority should place the child in "the most appropriate placement available", that is, the one that they consider will best promote and safeguard the child's welfare. In determining which is the most appropriate placement the local authority must "give preference to" a placement with a connected person i.e. a relative, friend or other person connected with the child who is also a local authority foster parent, reflecting the principle that children should, wherever possible be brought up in their families and communities. The court will consider whether local authorities have met their legal duties on this issue.

Adoption is one permanence option that is open for a local authority to consider. The law on adoption makes clear that children cannot be adopted without their parents' consent unless the court is satisfied that the welfare of the child requires the parents' consent to be dispensed with. This might be because the court is satisfied that the parents cannot be found; because they are incapable of giving their consent or because it has reason to believe the welfare of the child requires consent to be dispensed with.

It is important to be clear that parents have legal representatives who are appointed to support them and ensure their views are heard, and to help them challenge any evidence put forward. Where, despite these checks and balances in the system, there are concerns about any individual case and its conclusion, cases can be subject to appeal. Birth parents are able to appeal against: the decision to take their child into care; contest decisions to place the child for adoption; and they may

also seek leave to appeal a decision to make an adoption order. Legal representatives will be able to advise parents on appeals processes. The paramount consideration of the court when making any decision is the child's welfare throughout his or her life.

Further details of the legislative framework can be found in statutory guidance issued by the UK Government to local authorities in England called *The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations—Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review* which can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441643/Children_Act_Guidance_2015.pdf ;

in *Statutory Guidance on Adoption* which can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/270100/adoption_statutory_guidance_2013.pdf

in *Statutory guidance on Court orders and pre-proceedings* which can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/306282/Statutory_guidance_on_court_orders_and_pre-proceedings.pdf

The Government, of course, review legislation, statutory guidance and procedures from time to time—both to reflect changes in policy but also the experiences of those either working in or engaging with child protection authorities and the wider family justice system.

In relation to expert witnesses and the evidence that they give, the *Children and Families Act 2014* contains provisions which set out the threshold relating to the use of expert evidence. This includes a duty on the court to permit expert evidence to be put before it only when it is necessary, in the opinion of the court, to assist the court to resolve the proceedings justly.

Where the court does give permission for expert evidence to be put before it, the expert has an overriding duty to the court (rule 25.3 of the *Family Procedure Rules 2010*). It is the duty of the expert to help the court on the matters within their expertise. The duty to the court overrides any obligation to the person from whom the expert has received instructions or by whom the expert is paid.

The overriding duty to the court is referred to in paragraph 3.1 of *Practice Direction 25B* entitled "The Duties of an Expert, the Expert's Report and Arrangements for an Expert to Attend Court". Paragraph 9.1 of this *Practice Direction* sets out what the expert's report must contain and this includes a statement that the expert understands their duty to the court and has complied with that duty. The expert also has to state that he or she has complied with the *Standards for Expert Witnesses in Children's Proceedings* set out in the Annex to *Practice Direction 25B*. One of the standards is that the expert has a working knowledge of, and complies with the requirements of *Practice Directions* relevant to providing reports for and giving evidence to the family courts in England and Wales. The expert's report then has to be verified by a statement of truth given by the expert.

Practice Direction 25C (Children Proceedings—The Use of Single Joint Experts and The Process Leading to An Expert Being Instructed Or Expert Evidence Being

Put Before The Court) states that wherever possible, expert evidence in children proceedings should be obtained from a single joint expert instructed by both or all of the parties. “A single joint expert” means a person who provides expert evidence for use in proceedings on behalf of two or more parties (including the applicant) to the proceedings.

Statutory guidance – “Court orders and pre-proceedings”
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/306282/Statutory_guidance_on_court_orders_and_pre-proceedings.pdf—for local authorities, produced by the Department for Education, outlines the provisions for the use of expert witnesses in courts.

We would expect local authorities and the courts to act in accordance with the statutory guidance and practice directions, ensuring that any expert witness is just that.

In relation to the prosecution of expert witnesses for giving false information, like all those called to give evidence in court, expert witnesses are required to give evidence under oath and to be cross examined by the legal representatives of the parties to the case in which they are giving evidence. If it is proven that an expert witness told a deliberate lie under oath then, depending on the status of the case, they could be open to potential action (including prosecution) under either contempt of court provisions or the laws pertaining to perjury. However, it is important to be clear that a distinction has to be made between an expert witness telling a deliberate lie and simply offering their expert opinion—which might be based on research or professional practice—with which a party to a case may disagree.

HEALTH

Higham Ferrers General Practise Surgery

The Humble Petition of residents of Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire and the surrounding area,

Sheweth,

That the Petitioners believe that the Higham Ferrers General Practise Surgery is facing significant strain and requires support to meet its waiting time and quality of care obligations to patients.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urges the Department of Health, NHS England and the Higham Ferrers Surgery to work together to ensure that waiting times are reduced and the quality of care improves at the Higham Ferrers Surgery.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.—[*Presented by Mr Peter Bone, Official Report, 20 July 2017; Vol. 627, c. 1096.*]

[P002048]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Steve Brine): We recognise the workload and recruitment pressures on GPs in the East Northamptonshire area. NHS England (Central Midlands) is holding regular meetings with the Higham Ferrers practice and we understand that Higham Ferrers is also working with nearby practices to find ways to improve the services they provide for their patients.

We are committed to improving GP services for patients. The General Practice Forward View published in April 2016 announced that investment in General Practice will increase from £9.6 billion in 2015/16 to over £12 billion by 2020/21, representing a 14% real-terms increase, almost double the real-terms increase for the rest of the NHS. As part of this, a £508 million five-year Sustainability & Transformation package is supporting practices in reducing workload, increasing efficiency and modernising infrastructure and technology.

Ministerial Corrections

Tuesday 5 September 2017

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration Act 2016: Section 67

The following is an extract from proceedings on an urgent question about the implementation of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 on 19 July 2017.

Brandon Lewis: We consulted local authorities, which is what we said we would do when the legislation was in front of the House. That is what has led to the figure of 480, and the FOI request he is talking about does not consider what local authorities can provide. It is about the 0.7% threshold, which is an entirely different calculation, so perhaps he should go away and look further at that.

[Official Report, 19 July 2017, Vol. 627, c. 856.]

Letter of correction from Brandon Lewis:

An error has been identified in the response given to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) during proceedings on an urgent question about the implementation of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016.

The correct response should have been:

Brandon Lewis: We consulted local authorities, which is what we said we would do when the legislation was in front of the House. That is what has led to the figure of 480, and the FOI request he is talking about does not consider what local authorities can provide. It is about the **0.07%** threshold, which is an entirely different calculation, so perhaps he should go away and look further at that.

The following is an extract from proceedings on an urgent question about the implementation of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 on 19 July 2017.

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend, with his experience, is absolutely right: we must ensure that we do not create a pull factor. It must be remembered that under our schemes we have already brought over some 7,000 children from the region.

[Official Report, 19 July 2017, Vol. 627, c. 856.]

Letter of correction from Brandon Lewis:

An error has been identified in the response given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) during proceedings on an urgent question about the implementation of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016.

The correct response should have been:

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend, with his experience, is absolutely right: we must ensure that we do not create a pull factor. It must be remembered that under our schemes we have already brought over some 7,000 children **and families** from the region.

The following is an extract from proceedings on an urgent question about the implementation of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 on 19 July 2017.

Brandon Lewis: Transfers have been happening, and we are determined to deliver on exactly what we set out. We will continue to do so—it is part of the 23,000 people, and it should be remembered that we have brought over 7,000 children already.

[Official Report, 19 July 2017, Vol. 627, c. 858.]

Letter of correction from Brandon Lewis:

An error has been identified in the response given to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) during proceedings on an urgent question about the implementation of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016.

The correct response should have been:

Brandon Lewis: Transfers have been happening, and we are determined to deliver on exactly what we set out. We will continue to do so—it is part of the 23,000 people, and it should be remembered that we have brought over 7,000 children **and families** already.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Grenfell Tower

The following is an extract from the statement on Grenfell Tower on 20 July 2017.

Sajid Javid: The police continue to list 80 people as either dead or missing and presumed dead. Thirty-nine victims have so far been formally identified, with 39 inquests opened by the coroner and adjourned pending the public inquiry and the police investigation.

[Official Report, 20 July 2017, Vol. 627, c. 1021.]

Letter of correction from Sajid Javid:

An error has been identified in my statement on Grenfell Tower.

The correct response should have been:

Sajid Javid: The police continue to list 80 people as either dead or missing and presumed dead. **As of 20 July, 39** victims have so far been formally identified, with **38** inquests opened by the coroner and adjourned pending the public inquiry and the police investigation.

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 5 September 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
JUSTICE	1	JUSTICE—continued	
Child Sex Abuse: Compensation	7	European Court of Justice	14
Child Sexual Exploitation: Sentencing	12	Legal Aid: Access.....	1
Courts: Victims and Witnesses	15	Offenders: Education and Employment	8
Cyber-crime	6	Prison Officers: Recruitment.....	17
Drones	13	Prisons: Extremism and Radicalisation	10
Employment Tribunals.....	14	Topical Questions	18
Employment Tribunals: Rebates	3		

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Tuesday 5 September 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
DEFENCE	2WS	TREASURY—continued	
Iraq	2WS	Finance Bill	1WS
TREASURY	1WS		
Contingent Liability.....	1WS		

PETITIONS

Tuesday 5 September 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ..	1P	HEALTH	5P
Planning application in Irthlingborough	1P	Higham Ferrers General Practise Surgery	5P
EDUCATION	2P		
Adoption	2P		

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Tuesday 5 September 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ..	2MC	HOME DEPARTMENT	1MC
Grenfell Tower	2MC	Immigration Act 2016: Section 67.....	1MC

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Tuesday 12 September 2017**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 5 September 2017

List of Government and Principal Officers of the House

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Justice

Violence in Rakhine State [Col. 25]
Answer to urgent question—(Mark Field)

EU Exit Negotiations [Col. 42]
Statement—(Mr David Davis)

Grenfell Tower and Building Safety [Col. 69]
Statement—(Sajid Javid)

Korean Peninsula [Col. 83]
Statement—(Boris Johnson)

Exiting the EU: Devolved Administrations [Col. 96]
Application for emergency debate under Standing Order No. 24

Bills Presented [Col. 98]
Bills presented, and read the First time

Telecommunications Infrastructure (Relief from Non-Domestic Rates) Bill [Col. 112]
Considered in Committee; not amended, considered; read the Third time and passed

Incontinence [Col. 127]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall
Venezuela: Political Situation [Col. 1WH]
Coventry City of Culture [Col. 25WH]
New Housing Design [Col. 33WH]
Northamptonshire: Combined Fire and Police Service [Col. 59WH]
Blacklisting [Col. 67WH]
General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 1WS]

Petitions [Col. 1P]
Observations

Ministerial Corrections [Col. 1MC]

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