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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 14 September 2017**

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# House of Commons

*Thursday 14 September 2017*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Cultural Industries

1. **Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): What steps she is taking to protect the interests of cultural industries after the UK exits the EU. [900834]

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley):** I think I may have upset you, Mr Speaker, by correcting you on Tuesday. The Government want to ensure the best deal for Britain on leaving the European Union and to provide as much certainty as we can. I have held a series of roundtable discussions within the cultural and creative sectors on the impacts and opportunities affecting them as a result of the UK's exit from the EU. My Department remains committed to working closely with the cultural and creative sectors to ensure that their needs and views are understood.

**Maria Eagle:** Given that leaving the EU will result in new rules that restrict freedom of movement, and with music exports growing enormously and worth more than £4 billion to the UK economy, what will the Secretary of State do to ensure that the UK's touring musicians—they and their crews can, at the moment, just go to Europe to play—do not face the logistical nightmare and extra costs of having to apply for new visas and permits?

**Karen Bradley:** Of course, those touring musicians tour worldwide, not just in the 27 member states of the European Union, and they have great expertise and experience. I was with the London Symphony Orchestra in Seoul earlier this year, for example. We have seen that the sector is very successful and that they can make a success of what they do throughout the world. I am, of course, mindful of the concerns about free movement. I had a meeting with the Minister for Immigration earlier this week. I will continue to make the point that we need as much flexibility as possible in the immigration system to allow those high-skilled, highly trained musicians to export their great success.

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree with the former chairman of the Arts Council, Peter Bazalgette, who said in his evidence to the then Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport that we should look seriously at maintaining our membership of organisations such as Creative Europe that have supported creative and cultural organisations in this country and are open to non-member states?

**Karen Bradley:** I am aware of those concerns, and the Department is looking carefully at them. Clearly, this is part of a negotiation, but we are looking carefully at the areas in which it is important that we continue membership.

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): European regional development fund money has helped Yorkshire's film and TV industries to grow faster than those in any other part of the UK. What is the Secretary of State's plan to ensure that that growth continues in Yorkshire when we leave the European Union?

**Karen Bradley:** I am well aware of that, and of course it was the Conservatives who brought in the original funding streams. It is important to recognise that in European structural funds, there are sometimes restrictions that do not work in the United Kingdom as we would want. We are looking carefully at how we make sure that we get funding in the right places, in a way that works for Britain.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): Of course, in 2021 we will be out of the European Union and we will have the Commonwealth games. May I thank my right hon. Friend for choosing Birmingham as the UK's candidate to host those games? I hope that she will put pressure on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that he does what is needed. May I just say to you, Mr Speaker, to make it absolutely clear, that I will not be appearing on "Naked Attraction"?

**Mr Speaker:** Whether, if you were to do so, it would constitute a cultural industry is probably a divisible proposition in the House.

**Karen Bradley:** My breath is taken away by the very suggestion. I do not like to correct my hon. Friend, but 2021 will be the City of Culture year. I will not be making any further comments on that, given the shortlist. The Commonwealth games will be in 2022, and he will have heard the Prime Minister's comments at Prime Minister's questions yesterday, when she gave a very firm backing to Birmingham's bid.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The UK's creative and cultural industries have benefited greatly economically, creatively and culturally from being part of Europe for the past 40 years. That explains why 96% of the Creative Industries Federation voted to remain in the European Union. Other than assuring them that it will be all right on the night, can the Secretary of State tell me what she is doing to ensure that the creative and cultural industries will be able to access the talent and skills that they need from across the European Union? Does she agree that the UK staying in the single market, at least, is the best way to do that?

**Mr Speaker:** Too long.

**Karen Bradley:** As I have said, the creative industries are an enormous success story for the United Kingdom, but they take talent from the whole world, not just from 27 countries in the European Union. Of course I am very aware and mindful of the concerns about free movement, but we can learn a lot from the creative industries and the way in which they have been able to sell music, television, film and so on throughout the world.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to be back on the Front Bench. I always knew there were going to be risks with growing a beard, and so it seems—here I am. I hope that the Minister for Digital, in particular, will find me a constructive critic over the years to come.

I need to ask about data protection this morning, because we cannot have strong cultural industries without strong data protection, and last week we saw Equifax lose the records of 44 million Brits. Of great concern to me is the fact that Equifax signed a multi-year, multimillion-pound contract with the Government in 2014 for debt recovery services. Equifax must not profit from the British Government until it is straight with the British people, so will the Secretary of State tell us today: do the Government remain a customer of Equifax, which Departments use Equifax, and which Departments have had their data exposed by Equifax? We need to know.

**Karen Bradley:** I am not quite sure how that relates to protecting the interests of cultural industries after the UK leaves the EU.

**Mr Speaker:** You are not the only one.

**Karen Bradley:** My right hon. Friend the Minister for Digital met the Information Commissioner yesterday specifically on that point. On the matter of data and leaving the European Union, the right hon. Gentleman will I hope welcome the position paper that we issued over the summer about our position on data and will also, I am sure, work constructively with the Government to ensure that the Data Protection Bill becomes an Act of Parliament, so that we remain compliant with the general data protection regulation and have the best, world-leading data protection industry in the world.

### Inward Tourism

2. **Ben Bradley** (Mansfield) (Con): What assessment she has made of trends in the level of tourism to the UK in the next five years. [900835]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (John Glen):** Data from Visit Britain show that 2016 was a record-breaking year for tourism, with 38 million inbound visits, and the Government are working hard with Visit Britain and the sector more broadly to achieve the aim of 40 million visits per year by 2020.

**Ben Bradley:** Mansfield is the biggest and best town in Nottinghamshire, with a wonderful theatre, a nationally acclaimed museum and Sherwood forest on its doorstep,

but we do not make the most of those assets. In fact, we do not have a single major hotel in the constituency. Will the Minister join me in commending the work of Mansfield Town football club, which is striving to bring such a hotel to the constituency, and will he offer the Government's support in making Mansfield a tourist destination in the future?

**John Glen:** I commend my hon. Friend for his ambition, in his first three months in the House, and I certainly pay tribute to Mansfield Town football club. I would say to him and to all hon. Members that there are such opportunities, particularly looking at the Discover England Fund, which specialises in supporting tourism products outside London. I would draw his attention to that in the first instance.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): North Wales has been identified as one of the places to go to in the world this year, and with Chester on our doorstep and Liverpool close by, we are a tourist destination of choice. When can the Minister give certainty about visas, or the potential for visas, for European Union citizens post the EU exit, because we service Ireland and we have many visitors from the mainland EU?

**John Glen:** I certainly recognise the many attractions of the right hon. Gentleman's part of the world, and I visited Liverpool during the recess. With respect to visas, I will be having a roundtable discussion with many representatives from the tourism sector in two weeks' time, and I will be looking to take this forward across the Government in the coming weeks.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): Stafford has wonderful tourist attractions, not least the town centre, but also Shugborough and Weston Park. However, to get to Stafford from the M6, people have to come off at junctions 13 or 14, both of which are blighted constantly by lots and lots of litter. What can my hon. Friend do to persuade Highways England of the need to keep our major roads cleaner to attract more tourists?

**John Glen:** I have experienced that difficulty in my constituency, and I am very sympathetic to what my hon. Friend says. Perhaps I could have a conversation with him to work out where those particular spots are and approach Highways England to see whether we can get a resolution.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): My constituency, Edinburgh West, is—like the rest of Edinburgh and much of Scotland—highly dependent on tourism. We have the new attraction of the bridge, Edinburgh zoo, the rugby and the world's biggest international festival. Will the Minister assure me that he will press Her Majesty's Treasury to take the same sort of initiative on lowering VAT for the tourism industry that our partners in the EU have done to support that industry and boost their communities?

**John Glen:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. The Secretary of State and I visited Edinburgh during the recess, and we saw the many attractions, particularly the festival. I certainly listen very carefully to representations from across the tourism sector about what we can do to encourage more visitors, and I take her point on board.

### ATMs: Listed Phone Boxes

3. **Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): If she will make it her policy to allow the installation of community ATMs in listed phone boxes without their having to first be de-listed. [900836]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (John Glen)**: Amending the listed status policy in the way that my hon. Friend suggests will not be possible, but the installation of community ATMs in listed phone boxes is possible provided listed building consent is granted by the relevant planning authority.

**Mr Jayawardena**: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for that clear answer. BT provided a phone box cashpoint in Odiham in my constituency, and I have asked it to do the same in Hartley Wintney, but it is restricted by the listed status there. Will my hon. Friend meet me to discuss how the community benefit can be delivered either through amendments to the listed status or through other measures, which could prevent the boxes from being removed in future?

**John Glen**: I commend my hon. Friend on his determination to get this sorted. I will work with him and the residents of Hartley Wintney to look at what the local authority can do, because it is the prime mover and can provide the listed building consent that he seeks.

### Public Service Broadcasting Contestable Fund

4. **Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): What progress her Department has made on establishing a public service broadcasting contestable fund. [900837]

**The Minister for Digital (Matt Hancock)**: As part of the BBC charter review, the first part of which took place under my right hon. Friend's wise leadership, the Government committed to establish a pilot for a new contestable fund. The Government's consultation closed earlier this year, and we will publish the response and the next steps in due course.

**Mr Whittingdale**: While I recognise the BBC's huge contribution to public service broadcasting, does the Minister agree that some TV genres are underserved and that a public service broadcasting contestable fund could increase competition and innovation? Will he confirm that the Government intend to go ahead with a pilot in due course?

**Matt Hancock**: Yes, I agree with everything my right hon. Friend said, and I can confirm that that pilot will be going ahead.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I love the BBC, even though Sarah Sands, the new editor of the "Today" programme, and Nick Robinson seem to be destroying that programme at the moment. I therefore start with a prejudice, but when I look at the sort of deals that have always been favoured by Conservative Members who want to privatise by the back door, I see MediaCom, Singapore and the black hand of international companies such as the Murdoch empire.

**Matt Hancock**: I normally think the hon. Gentleman is sensible, but today he seems to have avoided that. The contestable fund is about ensuring that we have a great diversity of success in broadcasting in our nation. As for the "Today" programme, I thought Nick Robinson's broadcasts from Silicon Valley yesterday were superb. They were all about the interesting changes that are going on in the world and the economy due to artificial intelligence and digital. I thought that was another excellent direction for the BBC to be taking.

**Mr Speaker**: Stella Creasy? Not here. I call Kelvin Hopkins.

### National Trust

6. **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): What recent discussions her Department has had with the National Trust on its stewardship of places of cultural value and heritage. [900839]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (John Glen)**: My Department has regular conversations about shared interests with the National Trust, such as conservation, participation and world heritage. I will be meeting Dame Helen Ghosh, director general of the National Trust, next month.

**Kelvin Hopkins**: I thank the Minister for his answer. I should say that I am a member and a supporter of the National Trust. I must ask, however, whether the licensing for trail hunting on National Trust land is consistent with his aim of preserving and protecting historical places and spaces, considering the growing evidence of illegal hunting, particularly under the false alibi of trail hunting, and the damage that can cause.

**John Glen**: That is certainly a matter I will need to raise with the director general of the National Trust. Such matters are for National Trust members, and the National Trust has its own policies in place. I believe that a resolution is going to its annual general meeting in the autumn. This is a matter for it to resolve.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I thank the Minister for his recent visit to Cornwall. I am pleased to be able to confirm to the House that the Minister is a fine figure of a man when wearing a wetsuit. On his visit, I am sure he will have learned that Cornwall has a disproportionately high number of National Trust properties, many of which are kept going not just by the paid staff but by an army of volunteers. Will he join me in paying tribute to those volunteers and thanking them for their excellent work in maintaining our National Trust properties?

**John Glen**: I thank my hon. Friend. I do not know about my bodyboarding, but I certainly enjoyed visiting Watergate Bay, which is a fine destination in Cornwall. Volunteers across so many cultural, arts and heritage organisations do a wonderful job. It is great that they can contribute and offer so much up and down the country.

**Mr Khalid Mahmood** (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): Alongside the National Trust, the Minister will be aware of the press coverage over the weekend about a number of high-profile charities that own seats in the Albert Hall. Trustees of those charities have been selling

those seats at a very high price. That is a despicable practice; it is no way for such charities to act in a modern society. Will the Minister support the Charity Commission in trying to resolve that issue to ensure that despicable practice stops?

**John Glen:** This is a matter for the Charity Commission, as the independent regulator of charities. I am aware of the controversy reported this week, and I welcome the commission's attempts to resolve this long-standing and complex issue.

### EU Withdrawal Negotiations

7. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union on her departmental priorities for the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU. [900840]

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley):** I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union on a range of issues affecting Department sectors in the context of leaving the EU.

**Deidre Brock:** Once again, the Edinburgh festivals were adversely affected this year by UK Visas and Immigration decisions that blocked performers from attending. Will the Secretary of State make representations to the Brexit Secretary that freedom of movement should be maintained after the UK leaves the EU, so that EU performers do not face the same difficulty getting to the Edinburgh festivals—and other festivals—as performers from elsewhere in the world already face?

**Karen Bradley:** As I said earlier, I visited the Edinburgh festival—as did the Arts Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen)—this summer and I had a fantastic time. I was not aware of any issues with the UKVI blocking performers, but perhaps the hon. Lady can write to me on the specifics. She is talking about a situation where we already have free movement, so I am not sure how that particular issue affects leaving the European Union. All I would say is that I am mindful of the concerns about free movement and want to make sure we have as flexible a visa system as possible for performers from throughout the world.

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): As the Secretary of State will be aware, international broadcasters based in London are very concerned about Brexit and their future. They are already looking at relocating to continental Europe, which will affect jobs and investment. What steps has the Secretary of State taken to reassure those companies that they will not face a great switch-off on exit day?

**Karen Bradley:** I think the hon. Gentleman said broadcasters based in London. I am concerned about broadcasters based across the whole United Kingdom. I am, of course, aware of the concerns about the country of origin principle and I am working hard to ensure we get the most favourable deal for UK broadcasters, so that they can continue to thrive in the world-class industry we have at the moment.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I hope the Secretary of State will be aware of the ongoing problems that UK musicians have trying to get visas to tour in the United States. Will she assure me that as well as addressing those problems, which I am told have got worse recently, we will not see a replication of them when we leave the EU, and that musicians will not have to have visas to travel and tour around Europe?

**Karen Bradley:** As I said, I met the Immigration Minister earlier this week. The experiences of UK musicians touring throughout the world are very important in helping us to design an immigration system that not only works for the 27 member states, but the whole world.

### First World War Commemoration

8. **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): What plans her Department has to commemorate the first world war. [900841]

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley):** The Government have delivered successful national commemorations marking the centenary of the outbreak of war on 4 August 2014, the battle of Gallipoli in 2015, and the battles of Jutland and the Somme in 2016. In July this year, we commemorated the centenary of Passchendaele, the third battle of Ypres, and I was fortunate to be able to attend. It was a moving occasion and my thanks go to all those involved in helping, including national citizen service graduates.

**Luke Hall:** Thornbury will be marking the centenary of the first world war by hosting south Gloucestershire's Armed Forces Day for the first time. Will the Secretary of State consider visiting Thornbury to see the work that is being done and to meet and thank the volunteers who are working so hard to make that day a fitting tribute?

**Karen Bradley:** It is fantastic to see so many communities around the country commemorating world war one and having armed forces days for the first time. I pay tribute to Thornbury for that. I will, of course, look at my tours and see what I can do to accommodate it.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will know that many of the poppies that surrounded the Tower of London to commemorate the centenary of the beginning of world war one are now forming a "poppy wave" over the old navy war memorial in Plymouth. Does the Secretary of State agree that the synergy of fantastic art by the artists Paul Cummings and Tom Piper, and sympathetic lighting, can be a way to reconnect war memorials with modern communities, especially young children?

**Karen Bradley:** The tour of the poppies around the country is one of the most wonderful things. They were in Hull for its City of Culture and next year they will be in Stoke-on-Trent, which I was very pleased to note as it is very important for the ceramic poppies to appear in the home of the Potteries. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is one of the most wonderful installations, which can be seen by so many people around the country.

### Fixed Odds Betting Terminals

9. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): When her Department plans to make an announcement on its review of fixed odds betting terminals. [900842]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** As I made clear in questions before the recess, there will be no further announcement on this matter before October.

**Diana Johnson:** I thank the Minister for reiterating that answer, but has she given any thought to the fact that the gambling industry is failing to meet the 0.1% donation suggested by GambleAware to help to fund research and the treatment of people suffering from gambling addictions? Will she now act on that?

**Tracey Crouch:** Of course I give this regular thought. That is a voluntary commitment from the gambling industry, but I have met GambleAware, and it is sometimes quite shocking to hear some of the stories. For example, one bookmaker—not a national bookmaker, I hasten to add—sent GambleAware a cheque for 1p as part of its contribution. That is not good enough. We have to consider the issue of gambling alongside that of social responsibility, and I would like the bookmakers to take responsibility for that.

**Mr Speaker:** Ah, yes: Hollobone on hockey.

### Hockey

10. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): If she will encourage greater participation in local hockey clubs. [900843]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** Not only do I support the continued investment of Sport England in grassroots hockey via England Hockey, but during the recess I put my own shins at risk, borrowed a stick and did a “back to hockey” session at a local club. While I was absolutely shattered, I loved it more than I ever did when I was at school.

**Mr Hollobone:** Will the Sports Minister join me in congratulating all the hard-working volunteers and talented players at Kettering hockey club on their brand-new astro turf pitches, which are located in the heart of Kettering and generously funded by Bishop Stopford School? The hockey facility is now the best in Northamptonshire.

**Tracey Crouch:** I would be delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Kettering hockey club. A number of hockey clubs across the country are investing in their facilities to attract more people to participate in hockey.

### Sport: Discrimination

11. **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to tackle discrimination in sport. [900844]

**Mr Speaker:** I call Tracey Crouch.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** It is a good job I am fit, Mr Speaker.

There is no place for discrimination of any kind in sport. All forms of discrimination are unacceptable, and the Government are committed to tackling it.

**Vicky Foxcroft:** Following the successful “This Girl Can” campaign, which encouraged an extra 250,000 women to play sport, it remains disappointing that those from working-class backgrounds are 13% less likely to take part in sport. Do the Government have a strategy for tackling that? If so, what is it, and is it properly funded?

**Tracey Crouch:** There is a stubborn gender gap in sports participation. We are addressing it through a variety of initiatives, including the “This Girl Can” campaign—although that is not the only thing; there are a number of excellent initiatives out there—and we are helping to shift the gender gap through investment in not only grassroots sport but in elite sport, in which we saw several successful women’s teams during the summer and beyond, which will inspire other women and girls to get involved in sport.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): Will the Minister congratulate the people who organised the International Mixed Ability Sports rugby tournament in Spain this summer? As she knows, the first of those tournaments was held in Bingley in my constituency. The organisation wants to expand mixed ability sport, so that it covers many more sports, but it needs much more funding to do so. The Minister has given the organisation great support, but will she give it more support to get the funding it needs, so that more people can play mixed ability sport?

**Tracey Crouch:** That is a question from my hon. Friend that I can agree with.

It was a pleasure to meet the mixed ability sports rugby team about 18 months ago to discuss their tournament in my hon. Friend’s constituency, and I was pleased by their success over the summer recess. I would, of course, be happy to meet them again, and him, to discuss taking this forward.

18. [900851] **Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): Will the Minister join me in congratulating the England team who took part in the women’s rugby world cup in Ireland over the summer? I watched them play and they were magnificent.

The organisation Sports Coach UK has said that one reason for lower participation rates in physical activity among black, Asian and minority ethnic women and girls, and women and girls in general, is that women are under-represented in coaching. What further steps are the Government prepared to take to provide tailored and targeted support to help to develop women coaches from BAME communities?

**Tracey Crouch:** I am happy to join the hon. Lady in congratulating the England women’s rugby team, and also, of course, the England women’s cricket team, who won the world cup as well. I was a coach in an all-girls football club, but I was the only female coach at that club, so I completely understand the point that she has made. The sports strategy sets out, very carefully, our wish

to see more female coaches. We need to ensure that mums who take their kids to sports events become involved, rather than just cheering the kids on in the background, and we have tried to address that through the implementation of the sports strategy.

14. [900847] **Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): Yeovil Town ladies football club has achieved great success. It has reached the Football Association's Women's Super League 1, and is inspiring girls and women throughout the south-west. What more can the Minister do to help it to continue to inspire?

**Tracey Crouch:** Yeovil Town is indeed an example of great success in women's football, and I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the club on what it is doing. I also congratulate other female football clubs around the country that are doing their bit to inspire the next generation of girls to get involved in football.

**Mr Speaker:** While we are on the matter of congratulations, I hope that the whole House will want me to join me in congratulating Jamie Murray and Martina Hingis on winning the mixed doubles title at the US Open.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): It has been a successful summer for British women in sport, and I hope that the Secretary of State and the Minister will join me in paying tribute to all the women who took part in sporting events on behalf of our nation. However, in recent months, a senior football manager has threatened a female supporter, the body that governs English rugby has refused to extend contracts to the women's national team, a high-profile radio presenter has questioned the nationality of one of our own Wimbledon stars, and serious allegations have been made of racism in the England women's football team. At this delicate time, women in sport need to know that discrimination will not be tolerated. Will the Minister update the House on what she and her Department have done in response to the four incidents that I have outlined?

**Tracey Crouch:** It is great to see the hon. Lady back after the summer recess. I know you will be shocked to learn, Mr Speaker, that, owing to a conspiracy, she and I were disqualified from the three-legged race during the parliamentary sports day. Thankfully a full inquiry is under way to relieve the shame on Parliament.

The hon. Lady raises some extremely serious issues. Obviously, I have been keeping abreast of them. I talk regularly to all the national governing bodies. We need to have best practice in place to ensure that there is no discrimination in any of those bodies and that such issues do not deter other women from participating in sport at either grassroots or elite level.

#### Heritage Sites

12. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What progress she has made on improving accessibility to heritage sites. [900845]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (John Glen):** My Department and arm's length bodies are committed to ensuring that our heritage is protected for future generations and

accessible to all. The Heritage Lottery Fund issues awards to projects that make heritage relevant to everyone, regardless of their personal background, and actively challenges grantees to reach beyond the traditional heritage audience.

**Rachael Maskell:** Clifford's Tower in York is about to have a £2 million upgrade, but it will not be accessible to disabled people afterwards. It is 22 years since the passing of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, yet heritage organisations hide behind the term "reasonable adjustments". What is the Minister doing to ensure that heritage sites are accessible to everyone?

**John Glen:** I am familiar with the case that the hon. Lady mentions. Clifford's Tower is a particularly difficult site to deal with, but I shall be happy to meet her to discuss her specific concerns, and I will take them to English Heritage directly, if that will help.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): On 21 October, the town of Wellington will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone that commemorates the Duke of Wellington's success at the battle of Waterloo. Although that wonderful monument, which can be seen from the M5, is accessible from the outside, the staircase on the inside is not, because the monument is undergoing a massive restoration project. Will the Minister join me in wishing all the people of Wellington well in the celebrations—in which I will take part—and does he agree that it is very important to restore monuments of such magnitude? That benefits not just local people, but those nationally and internationally, because such monuments are very important to our history.

**John Glen:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election to the DCMS Committee and endorse everything that she says on this matter. I will be looking at progress as these improvements proceed, and it was a pleasure to visit her constituency in the recess.

#### Topical Questions

T1. [900865] **Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley):** As has previously been referred to, since the last oral questions, my Department has changed its name—the "D" in DCMS now stands for "Digital" in recognition of our responsibility for a massive and growing industry. We have also through the course of our questions mentioned many of the great successes of the summer: the Edinburgh festival, and the great sporting successes for England women's cricket in the world cup, and the under-20s in the football world cup. I want to particularly mention, in addition to the others mentioned before, Chris Froome, who once again won the Tour de France and has secured a historic double by winning the Vuelta a España.

Please forgive me, Mr Speaker, but I do want to make another comment in this statement. On Tuesday I set out that I was minded to refer the proposed merger of 21st Century Fox and Sky on the grounds of genuine commitment to broadcasting standards, as well as media plurality. Yesterday I received letters on behalf of both parties to the merger confirming that while they disagree



with my “minded to” decision, they would not be making substantive representations in relation to it. As a result, I can confirm that my “minded to” decision is now final, and I will now refer the merger to the Competition and Markets Authority for a phase 2 investigation on the grounds of media plurality and genuine commitment to broadcasting standards.

I will issue and publish my formal referral decision in the coming days. I will also publish the substantive representations I have received during this process shortly. From the point of referral, the CMA has 24 weeks—around six months—in which to investigate the merger and provide me with advice. I must then come to a final decision on whether or not the merger can proceed, including any conditions that will apply in order to do so. I hope you will understand, Mr Speaker, that I did want to put this to the House before anyone else, which is why I have extended this statement accordingly.

**Mr Speaker:** Of which the Secretary of State was courteous enough to notify me in advance, and I am very content with that—it is in the interests of the House, as it also is that the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson), should have some modest latitude in his interrogation.

**Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab):** Does the Secretary of State believe our gambling laws are fit for purpose?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The comprehensive character of what the Secretary of State had to say was such that I excluded the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight), and he might be feeling discriminated against, which would be a sadness. So before we hear from the hon. Member for West Bromwich East, we shall hear from Mr Knight—let’s hear it man.

**Julian Knight:** It will be worth waiting for.

The west midlands creative industry punches well above its weight, yet over the years we have seen poor investment from the BBC and, to a lesser extent, ITV. Is there not a great opportunity for Channel 4 to make use of our diverse communities and talent, blaze a trail, and relocate to the west midlands?

**Karen Bradley:** I would not wish to say where might be a suitable location for Channel 4, but I have been clear that I do want Channel 4 to make more of a contribution to the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. I will be publishing the responses to my consultation on the contribution that Channel 4 can make to the nations and regions, and I am sure that the board of Channel 4 will have heard my hon. Friend’s suggestion of the west midlands and will take that into consideration.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Tom Watson.

**Tom Watson:** Mr Speaker, surprise is everything in politics: does the Secretary of State believe our gambling laws are fit for purpose?

**Karen Bradley:** Gosh; I am completely caught off guard. The hon. Gentleman knows that we made a call for evidence on the matter of gambling as part of the triennial review last year, and we will be publishing the results of that shortly.

**Tom Watson:** From that answer, I feel that our cosy consensus over the future of Sky and Fox might be breaking apart, because Labour Members believe that recent research has shown that Britain has a hidden epidemic of gambling addiction. Moreover, research over the summer has shown that our children are exposed to gambling advertising more than ever before. Let me try to rebuild our spirit of partnership and say to the Secretary of State that if she brings forward a new gambling Bill fit for the digital age, we will support her in that. If she does not, a future Labour Government will have to do so.

**Karen Bradley:** The Government of which the hon. Gentleman was a supporter—and I think at times a member—were the Government who brought in the Gambling Act 2005. We are now conducting the triennial review of the Act and it is important that we look at all the available evidence. I note that he made a statement over the summer about the sponsorship of football shirts, saying that a future Labour Government, should there be one, would ban the sponsorship of football shirts by gambling companies. I see the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) in the Chamber. I think that the supporters of Stoke City would be quite concerned if they were to discover that their stadium could no longer be called the bet365 stadium and that the company could no longer be a shirt sponsor. They might wonder where they would be able to purchase players from. And I just wonder what West Brom is doing in terms of its sponsorship at the moment.

T4. [900868] **Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con):** Many businesses in Wealden are forced by BT to depend on slow, unreliable broadband, and they get appalling service if they are ever unlucky enough to have to contact the company. Can the Minister update the House on progress to improve rural broadband, especially in Wealden?

**The Minister for Digital (Matt Hancock):** Yes, I can. More than 90% of homes and businesses in Wealden now have access to superfast broadband, and 16,000 homes and businesses get that because of the Government’s support for the roll-out. We recognise that that leaves just under 10% without it, which can be incredibly frustrating, so we are bringing in a universal service obligation. At the weekend, we announced a further amount of just over £600 million for the roll-out of superfast broadband to make this country fit for the modern age.

T2. [900866] **Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP):** Scottish politics can be rather tribal, but yesterday Scottish politics united in support of Paisley’s bid to become the UK City of Culture in 2021. Paisley’s bid is now Scotland’s bid. The final stage of the competition is looming, and a win for Paisley would create a bigger legacy than a win for anywhere else. Will the Minister join us in supporting Paisley 2021?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (John Glen):** I support all the bids as they reach the final stages. In two weeks’ time they will be submitted to the panel, which is chaired by

Phil Redmond, and I am watching the process closely. I look forward to making an announcement on the successful city at the end of the year.

T7. [900871] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The Minister will be aware of the great success of initiatives such as the Seafood Coast in promoting tourism in Torbay. What further support will the Government offer to encourage more people to come to the coast in the south-west?

**John Glen:** I am looking carefully at the options. As I said, I will be meeting representatives of the tourism sector in two weeks' time. I hope that the Discover England fund can be extended to encourage more initiatives such as the one my hon. Friend mentions, because they are transformational to local tourism economies.

T3. [900867] **Thangam Debonnaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): Following the creation of the Ebacc, the take-up of music education is going down. Given the value of the UK's world-leading music industry to our economy—it was £123 million in Bristol alone in 2015—will the Minister please listen to the music industry, reverse the Ebacc and invest in music teaching?

**John Glen:** I acknowledge the challenges to arts, cultural and music education, and I am looking at what can be done, through the cultural development fund, with the Arts Council to find ways of promoting increased participation. I am in active dialogue with other Departments over how we can deal with this reality.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): It is almost a year since World Rugby established its hall of fame, appropriately at the birthplace of rugby in the Rugby art gallery and museum. We will shortly have the annual induction of more greats of the game. Does the Sports Minister agree that this could play a major role in attracting local and international tourism?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** The hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson) said that surprise was the name of the game, but I am not surprised by my hon. Friend's question about rugby. We all understand the importance of rugby in his constituency, and the hall of fame has provided a great opportunity for tourism and heritage. I join him in his support of that.

T5. [900869] **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): Further to the answer that the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson), the online gambling industry has exploded since the Gambling Act 2005 and is now worth more than £6 billion a year. Too much advertising is now reaching young people, particularly through social media outlets. What is the Minister doing to regulate advertising through social media outlets and the offers that allow young people to gamble for free?

**Tracey Crouch:** The Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Act 2014 brought all online gambling sites under the regulatory remit of the Gambling Commission. The commission keeps all such matters under regular review, and the outcomes of that include a recent fine for 888. We continue to look to ensure that the regulation of both online and land-based gambling is robust.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): The Sandstone Ridge arts festival in my constituency is looking to have a suffragette theme next year to celebrate women getting the vote. What funds are available for community arts programmes to celebrate that magnificent achievement?

**John Glen:** That sounds like an excellent initiative. Funds are available either through Arts Council England or the Heritage Lottery Fund, and I am happy to work with my hon. Friend to identify the most appropriate route for an application.

T6. [900870] **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): Blaydon has a growing number of small and micro-charities, many of which are trying to fill the gaps left by Government cuts to local authorities, and their survival is often precarious. Following the Secretary of State's discussions within the sector, what action is she taking to help those charities with fundraising and other support?

**Tracey Crouch:** We are working on a programme to promote local and small charities later this year, further details of which will be announced shortly. If the hon. Lady has any particular concerns about small charities in her constituency, I would be happy to meet her to discuss them.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): We simply must take steps to protect online users, particularly through education about online responsibility. How will the Government's Data Protection Bill, which I welcome, benefit people in terms of the data held about them? I am thinking in particular of the use of children's data and consent.

**Matt Hancock:** The Data Protection Bill, which we published in the other place today, is about giving citizens more power over their data while ensuring that data can be used innovatively and effectively. It also introduces new powers to protect minors and to allow people to request the deletion of their data on social media sites at the age of 18, ensuring that they are more in control of their online data.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I welcome the inclusion of "Digital" in the Department's title. However, despite that bold and innovative step, the availability of superfast broadband in Orkney and Shetland remains disappointingly low. I suspect that the roots of the problem lie in how the contract was tendered under the Broadband Delivery UK system, so will the Minister work with the Scottish Government to ensure that the mistakes in that process are learned?

**Matt Hancock:** I am also delighted that "Digital" has been added to the Department's title. The Scottish Government have been the slowest of all the different organisations around the country to contract the broadband that we so desperately need. That is why Scotland is behind. We are offering technical support, but they are behind every English county and behind both the Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Government, and they need to get a move on.

## ATTORNEY GENERAL

*The Attorney General was asked—*

### Serious Fraud Office

1. **Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): What plans the Government have for the future of the Serious Fraud Office. [900852]

**The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright):** The Serious Fraud Office does vital work in tackling the most serious instances of fraud, bribery and corruption. We will continue to consider how best to allocate resources and improve joint working between all the enforcement agencies involved in combating economic crime.

**Jo Stevens:** Blockbuster funding can make up a significant amount of SFO funding. Does the Attorney General agree that it would be better to have a greater level of permanent funding?

**The Attorney General:** The hon. Lady is right that blockbuster funding forms a significant component of the SFO's funding. I think that is likely to remain the case because, as she will appreciate, it is difficult for the SFO to predict exactly the number or severity of the cases it will deal with in any given year. However, there is an argument for relooking at how core funding is developed for the SFO, particularly so that it can attract and retain the best quality staff.

**Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con):** The SFO's reputation has been greatly enhanced under its current director David Green, who is shortly to retire. It is critical that a director of equal quality is appointed to succeed him, so can we put to rest once and for all the suggestion that the independent SFO is likely to be merged into the National Crime Agency? That would be a grossly retrograde step for the efficiency and reputation of our fight against economic crime.

**The Attorney General:** On the importance of good leadership, I belatedly congratulate my hon. Friend on retaining the Chair of the Select Committee on Justice. My hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General and I look forward to appearing before his Committee again.

On the future of the Serious Fraud Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) is right to recognise the work that David Green and, of course, many others within the organisation have done to improve performance, and I would expect that to continue. I would also expect that, whatever we do, we will hold fast to the crucial requirements that any organisation combating this kind of crime must be effective and independent. Whatever changes are made, my hon. Friend has my assurance that that is what I will require as an end result.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab):** As we leave the European Union, the Labour party is very committed to the highest standards of corporate governance and will never tolerate the UK economy becoming some sort of refuge for dirty money. As a step to achieving that, a future Labour Government will definitely safeguard the future of the Serious Fraud Office. I am making that commitment from the Dispatch Box. Can the Attorney General do the same?

**The Attorney General:** I am glad the shadow Solicitor General recently had the opportunity to visit the Serious Fraud Office, and I am glad that he took up that opportunity. He will have seen the level of commitment within that organisation to combating economic crime. As he has heard me say before, it is about effectiveness and co-operation across the landscape of different organisations that deal with economic crime. It is not

about whose name is on the letterhead; it is about how they do the job. We are committed to making sure that, whoever is doing the job of combating economic crime, they are effective, they are properly funded and they have the necessary independence to deliver the results we all want to see.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** Yes, I did visit the Serious Fraud Office with my noble friend the shadow Attorney General last week, and we saw the commitment and dedication of its staff. The ongoing uncertainty that has been caused by the Attorney General's position with regard to the Serious Fraud Office is not helping morale or recruitment. I say again that it would help significantly if, rather than giving the answers from the Dispatch Box that he has given today, he were far more definite about his commitment to the Roskill model and the independence of the Serious Fraud Office.

**The Attorney General:** I am sorry to say that I think the hon. Gentleman, who is usually very assiduous in paying close attention to our proceedings, may not have been listening carefully enough. I have given repeated commitments to the Roskill model, which is clearly demonstrating its success in bringing together prosecutors, investigators, accountants and others to make sure that cases of this complexity are properly addressed. I am a full supporter of the Roskill model, as I have said on many occasions.

## Hate Crime

2. **Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con):** What steps the Crown Prosecution Service is taking to implement the Government's plan for tackling hate crime. [900853]

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland):** Last month, the CPS took new steps to fulfil one of its commitments in the cross-Government hate crime action plan by publishing revised public statements and legal guidance on all strands of hate crime.

**Mr Clarke:** Homophobic and transphobic hate crime prosecutions in the north-east are up by 55% in recent years. Will my hon. and learned Friend join me in welcoming that increase in prosecutions and, crucially, will he inform the House of what he is doing to encourage the spread of best practice in how we continue to bear down on this horrible crime?

**The Solicitor General:** On my visit to the north-east CPS, I met representatives of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community to discuss the ways in which the regional CPS is engaging with that community. I am glad to say that, on a wider basis, the CPS is developing a training package on these issues with input from the relevant leading organisations in the field.

**Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con):** Alas, we have seen an increase in the use of all types of social media as a vehicle for all types of hate crime. What steps has the CPS taken, is it taking or does it plan to take to deal with all types of online hate crime?

**The Solicitor General:** Last month, the CPS published revised guidance committing it to treat online hate crime as seriously as offline offences, taking into account the impact on the wider community when deciding the question of prosecution in the public interest.

### Modern Slavery

3. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What progress the Crown Prosecution Service has made in improving conviction rates for offences of modern slavery; and if he will make a statement. [900854]

**The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright):** The CPS is dealing with increasing numbers of modern slavery and human trafficking offences, and the number of convictions for those offences in 2015-16 was 48% higher than the year before.

**Michael Fabricant:** My right hon. and learned Friend will know that in counties such as Staffordshire there is a growing trend of gangmasters exploiting vulnerable people for things such as drug pushing. How can we use the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to try to restrict that? What guidance does he give the courts on this?

**The Attorney General:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, which is that modern slavery offences are often found alongside other types of offending, in particular, drug offending. We already have strict penalties available for the drug offending elements of that kind of activity. What the Modern Slavery Act gives the prosecution, and then of course the court, is the opportunity to pursue the modern slavery aspect of this offending, which is hugely important. As I have indicated, we are starting to see an increased volume of those offences going through the courts.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Attorney General join me in congratulating all those involved in the highly successful, high-profile recent prosecution of people involved in modern slavery? Such cases are very expensive to prosecute, so will he assure the House that the required money and resources will be available? This activity is endemic up and down the country, not just in London, and we need the resources for the police to be able to conduct these cases.

**The Attorney General:** I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance, and there should never be any question but that where this type of offending is prosecuted successfully and convictions are recorded, people receive the appropriate punishment. In the case I suspect he is referring to, where sentences were handed down recently, a clear signal of that has been given. There were 11 defendants, all members of one family, as he knows, and they received a total of 79 years' imprisonment. That is appropriate for offending of the type involved in that case—it was truly horrendous behaviour.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Which regional office of the CPS is performing best at prosecuting modern slavery and how might its best practice be rolled out to others?

**The Attorney General:** My hon. Friend will be shocked to learn that I do not have that figure at my fingertips, but I will find it out for him. He will understand that these can often be complex investigations and prosecutions, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) has just correctly said. There may not be uniformity of experience across the different regions; some regions may not have seen many of these cases, whereas others may have seen a great deal of them. So we will have to be cautious in the comparison he invites me to make, but I will have a look at the figures and see what I can sensibly tell him.

### Leaving the EU: UK Legal Systems

4. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on the functioning of the different national legal systems in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. [900857]

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland):** The Ministry of Justice has had recent contact at ministerial and official level with counterparts in the devolved Administrations; they discussed how we work together on matters relating to Brexit that will affect the different legal systems in the devolved Administrations of Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Government have also engaged with Welsh counterparts to update them on matters affecting justice.

**Martyn Day:** The president of the Law Society of Scotland has said that there needs to be a “whole of governance” approach to the UK withdrawal from the EU that takes into account the devolved Administrations. Does the Solicitor General agree with that statement?

**The Solicitor General:** Yes, I do, which is why the Government are taking an approach that will ensure the required continuity and certainty, so that, where necessary, a UK-wide approach will be taken and, where appropriate, there will be devolution to the devolved Assemblies and Parliaments.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): Will the Solicitor General take this opportunity to reassure the House and Opposition Members that the leaders of all the devolved Administrations, in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, when we have one there, will be consulted and respected on the broader issues of Brexit, including those relating to his office?

**The Solicitor General:** I am happy to give that assurance and that is reflected in the bilateral work of government, where there is continuing dialogue at official and ministerial level. This is all about mutual respect and getting the best outcome, not only for Britain, but for all its constituent parts.

### Hate Crime

5. **Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service has adequate resources to tackle social media hate crime. [900858]

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland):** The CPS prosecutes cases where they meet the test for prosecution. It allocates its resources accordingly, and will continue to do so, and I welcome its commitment to treat hate crimes on social media as seriously as other sorts of hate crime.

**Holly Lynch:** I am grateful for that response, but will the Solicitor General go further and outline what steps are being taken to address the significant variations in conviction rates across different regions, with particular reference to the 4.7% fall in successful convictions for religiously aggravated hate crime in 2015-16?

**The Solicitor General:** The hon. Lady is right to look in detail at regional variations. Overall, progress is still encouraging: the conviction rate for all strands of hate crime increased slightly again last year, and the number of hate-crime prosecutions has now reached record levels—it is in excess of 15,000. The answer to her question lies in the sharing of best practice among different regions. Earlier, I talked about engagement with the trans community in the north-east, and there are examples from other regions of how, if we work closely with the communities, we can increase conviction rates. In the hon. Lady's area, work with disability communities has resulted in improved disability hate-crime prosecutions.

**Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab):** Earlier this year, the Kantor Centre identified an 11% increase in anti-Semitic abuse in the UK, much of which is driven by online and social media-based abuse. I am sure the whole House would want to condemn anti-Semitic abuse, but we need to do much more to tackle it, to prosecute it and to make it clear how unacceptable it is.

**The Solicitor General:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for raising the appalling crime of anti-Semitism. It is on the rise and it is not acceptable. We all need to speak out together to stamp it out. I am glad to say that the CPS is now encouraging prosecutors to look into the wider community impact, particularly of online hate crime, when they assess whether or not to prosecute. The right hon. Lady is right, and if we tolerate it online, the culture will gradually change and anti-Semitism will become mainstream. We cannot allow that to happen.

### Leaving the EU: Hate Crime

6. **Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on the level of prosecutions for hate crime towards EU citizens. [900859]

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland):** The Crown Prosecution Service does not disaggregate its data by victims' nationalities, but it has a strong record in tackling racially and religiously aggravated hate crime. In 2015-16, there were just over 13,000 prosecutions for this type of hate crime. That was 84% of total hate-crime prosecutions, showing a 1.9% increase on the previous year.

**Thangam Debbonaire:** I am grateful for that response, but what I really need to know is what steps the Solicitor General will take to reassure my constituents, who tell me of increased hate crime directed at EU citizens.

Local organisations that tackle hate crime, such as SARI—Stand Against Racism & Inequality—tell me the same thing. What will he be doing to reassure my constituents that their safety is valued and that the law will protect them?

**The Solicitor General:** The hon. Lady is right to say that all parts of our community deserve protection from the law. Only a few weeks ago, I was glad to take part in a hate-crime awareness campaign, which was launched alongside the CPS's publication of new, revised guidelines, which particularly emphasise the scourge of online hate crime. I assure her residents and, indeed, those in my constituency that when such crimes are perpetrated, no effort will be spared in detecting the perpetrators and dealing with those crimes, because there is a clear public interest in doing so.

**Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP):** In relation to crime, and bearing in mind the Government's insistence on excluding the EU charter of fundamental rights, does the Solicitor General agree that it is wrong for them to allow what the Law Society of Scotland called "the potential for the erosion of human rights", despite different parts of the UK having voted to remain in the EU?

**The Solicitor General:** I do not see an erosion in human rights. The Government are absolutely committed to our membership of the European convention. The charter of fundamental rights does not add anything substantive to UK human rights law, and the underlying principles of EU law will, of course, be brought into our domestic law by virtue of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. The hon. Gentleman can reassure his constituents that the Government are utterly committed to rooting out hate crime wherever it exists.

### Domestic Violence

7. **Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab):** What discussions he has had with the Crown Prosecution Service on cases involving domestic violence. [900860]

8. **Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab):** What discussions he has had with the Crown Prosecution Service on cases involving domestic violence [900861]

9. **Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab):** What discussions he has had with the Crown Prosecution Service on cases involving domestic violence. [900863]

**The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright):** I discuss offences connected to domestic abuse with the Director of Public Prosecutions on a regular basis. Such cases are forming a higher percentage of the CPS case load, and prosecutions and convictions in them are at their highest ever level.

**Diana Johnson:** Last weekend, I met a woman who had been subjected to horrific domestic abuse by her partner since the age of 13, and it had carried on for many years. She was concerned that the relatively new offence of coercive and controlling behaviour had never been used against that perpetrator and that it may not be being used as much as it should be. Will the Attorney General look at that when he next meets the DPP?

**The Attorney General:** I will certainly do that. I understand the concern that the hon. Lady has expressed. As she knows, this offence is relatively new, and there have therefore been relatively few cases where it has been deployed. There have been convictions, and the more that there are, the more the signal will be sent that this is the kind of behaviour that will result in criminal action, prosecution, conviction and sentencing. I hope that that will increasingly be the case, but of course it cannot act retrospectively. In relation to the future, we are making good progress.

**Laura Pidcock:** It is apt to say in these questions that our thoughts are with Doreen Lawrence whose son, Stephen Lawrence, would have been 43 yesterday.

An estimated 1.8 million adults aged 16 to 59 were victims of domestic abuse in the year ending March 2016. Will the Attorney General consider whether electronic-only evidence submissions to the CPS is the most effective way of capturing a case and the experience of a victim?

**The Attorney General:** We will always consider ways in which we can capture the evidence from victims, and other witnesses of course, in the most effective way. The hon. Lady will know that some of our recent changes involve the opportunity for particularly vulnerable witnesses to give evidence without being in a courtroom physically and to do so in advance of the rest of the case, so that they can get their part in the case done quickly. We will always look at ways in which we can do that better. It is a crucial part of encouraging people to come forward and report abuse and stick with the purpose and the process of prosecuting those who are responsible.

**Nick Smith:** In Gwent, 1,401 cases of domestic abuse were put forward to the CPS in 2015-16, and charges were brought in 68% of them. The highest rate was in

Leicestershire where the CPS pursued 82% of cases. Will the Attorney General please explain why there are such stark regional differences?

**The Attorney General:** The differences are always explained by the merits of the cases themselves, and there will be some variation. I will look at the hon. Gentleman's particular statistics, but he will recognise that every case is different, every case must be considered on its merits, and the CPS must make the best judgment it can in each of those cases.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** We are well out of time, but I will take Mr Fysh.

**Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con):** The local police in Yeovil report good progress in dealing with domestic violence but would welcome a bit more flexibility from the CPS about the types and amounts of evidence required for prosecution, including evidence gathered by modern methods such as body cameras. Will my right hon. and learned Friend please work with the police and the CPS on those suggestions?

**The Attorney General:** I agree that flexibility is important, and I hope that my hon. Friend will be reassured to know that, with the roll-out of more and more body-worn cameras, we will see this evidence play a greater part in this kind of prosecution. That is welcome, because it means that we can have evidence of what was happening when the police arrived without the need to extract that evidence from complainants who may be reluctant for all sorts of reasons. That is a positive move, and I am sure that we will see more of it in Yeovil and elsewhere.

## Police Pay and Funding

10.37 am

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary if she will make a statement on the 2017-18 police pay settlement and police funding.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton)**: I am pleased to have the opportunity to answer the question today.

The pay award for England and Wales for 2017-18 was announced this Tuesday after the Government carefully considered the recommendations of the independent Police Remuneration Review Body and the Senior Salaries Review Body. The Government accepted in full the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body. The decision to award officers in the PRRB remit group a pay award worth a total of 2% to each officer in 2017-18, consisting of a 1% consolidated pay increase in addition to a one-off 1% non-consolidated payment to officers, represents a fair deal to the taxpayer and to our hard-working police officers.

Our public sector workers, including police officers, are some of the most extraordinarily talented and hard-working people in our society. I recognise the extraordinary contribution made by police officers in response to some of the most challenging situations that our country has faced for a very long time. I also fully respect the independent conclusions of the pay review bodies.

At the same time, we have committed to taking the difficult decisions to balance the books that have enabled us to repair the damage to the economy, while keeping employment up and taxes down. This will help us to strike the right balance between being fair to police officers and to taxpayers. We believe that the award is affordable within the current police funding settlement, noting that the PRRB has highlighted in its report the potential for further efficiencies.

Police reform is working. Crime, as traditionally measured by the independent crime survey for England and Wales, is down by a third since 2010. However, we know that the nature of crime is changing, and we are engaging with the police to better understand the changing demands on the police and how these can best be managed. That includes looking at what more can be done to improve productivity and efficiency, and to make prudent use of financial reserves.

**Louise Haigh**: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to you for granting this urgent question.

As the Minister said, the review body this week recommended a 2% consolidated pay rise for federated and superintending ranks. The Prime Minister stated during Prime Minister's questions yesterday that the Government had accepted that body's recommendations in full. But, as the Minister just confirmed, they have not. The Government's response to the recommendations was to offer a 1% pay rise and a 1% one-off non-consolidated payment that is non-pensionable. Will the Minister tell us why those recommendations were not accepted in full?

The Prime Minister then went on to suggest that police officers had received a real terms increase of 32%, which, of course, the Police Federation called a "downright lie". I would suggest that it was a cynical

attempt to create a false impression, divorced from the reality for officers on the ground. Does the Minister think that the Police Federation was lying or that the Prime Minister got it wrong?

The Prime Minister confirmed that the pay settlement would be unfunded. The Metropolitan police estimate that this will cost them £17.7 million this year. West Yorkshire police and West Midlands police both estimate that it will cost them around 80 frontline officers this year. Does the Minister accept what chief constables are telling her—that this will cost us more frontline officers? If she does not, how will she advise forces to pay for this unbudgeted increase?

The Government announcement mentioned police reserves, which they claim to have increased to £1.6 billion in 2016. Will the Minister confirm, however, that the vast majority of these reserves are earmarked for projected spending and that only £363 million remains in general reserves? As she knows, police and crime commissioners are under a legal duty to hold adequate reserves. The Audit Commission suggests that this level would be between 3% and 5%, yet some police forces have reserves at levels beneath 1%. Will the Minister therefore confirm whether the Government are actually requiring police forces to run down their general reserves to fund staffing costs? Does she consider that fiscally responsible? From my private sector experience, I gently advise her that it is not.

The Government have repeatedly claimed that they have protected police funding since 2015. We know this is not the case because crime has risen in recent years, despite what the Minister says. This week's announcement entails a further cut to forces' budgets. The Government have been on warning for some time that the police are near breaking point. This move may finally break them.

**Sarah Newton**: I am grateful for the opportunity actually to set out some facts before the House, which is hardly what we have heard from the hon. Lady. Before I address the substantive points she raised, I want to say that it really does our hard-working police officers the most horrendous disservice to portray them constantly at breaking point, as if they cannot serve communities. Confidence in the police has been rising and is much higher now than it was in 2010. Those hard-working police officers are doing an extremely good job—day in, day out—for the communities they serve.

We have accepted the independent recommendations. Police officers will receive a 2% pay increase. The hon. Lady's key point was about affordability. Let me address this head-on. On the latest audited figures, every single police force in this country has reserves of at least 6% of its general budget. The costs of delivering on the extra 1% are a very small fraction of all the police funding this year—less than 0.5%. This is absolutely affordable for forces. They were planning on a 1% increase; the extra 1% they are going to be finding—let me be absolutely clear—is less than 0.5% of the budget. Their reserves are increasing; they are running up to £1.8 billion.

If we look at the latest inspections by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, we see that Sir Tom Winsor has made it absolutely clear that there is room for more efficiencies in police services. The Government are supporting police officers on the frontline, as well as their leaders, to make those changes and to invest in technology, so that we can have the most efficient police force, which we can all be proud of.

[Sarah Newton]

To summarise, I believe that this proposal is affordable and that the money is there for the chief constables and the police and crime commissioners to fund it, and the Home Office is working with the leadership of the police to make sure that they can continue their really good progress on innovation, while keeping the nation safe.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Ever since I arrived in this House in 2001, it has been clear that the national funding formula does not treat Bedfordshire police fairly, and I have lost count of the number of Policing Ministers to whom I have made that point. My request to the Minister, whom I regard very highly, is that she go back to the Home Office and ask the Home Secretary and the Policing Minister to emulate what our colleagues have done in education, by providing a fair level of funding to every police force, so that we bring those at the bottom up to nearer the average.

**Sarah Newton:** I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words and his very good question. He is a marvellous champion for his constituency and his local police force. Like many colleagues, he has in the past made the case for changes to the funding formula, and the Policing Minister and the Home Secretary have that information and that consideration carefully under review.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Notwithstanding the unrecognisable response from the Labour Front Bench, the SNP welcomes the UK Government following the lead of the Scottish Government in lifting the pay cap for public services—recognising that pay is behind inflation and that pressure is increasing on household budgets. Given that Steve White, the chair of the Police Federation of England and Wales, has said that many of his members would be “angry and deflated” at their pay award, does the Minister recognise that the police force at the frontline of our services must be supported? Does she also agree with the First Minister of Scotland, who said that it is not just police officers but nurses, teachers, firefighters and workers right across the public service who deserve a fairer deal for the future?

**Sarah Newton:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming the Government’s decision. It is a pity, as he says, that the Labour party is not supporting the fact that the Government are recognising the extraordinary contribution that our police officers make every single day, in facing up to the even greater pressures they have been put under in the last 12 months, as they have responded so magnificently to the terrorist threats we have faced as a country. The Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear that the views of the independent pay review bodies for all parts of the public sector will be carefully considered and carefully listened to, and the Chancellor will respond to those at the appropriate time, which will be when those bodies report later this year.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): The first duty of the Government is to protect the public, but I have to say to the Minister that there is a very real and very worrying spike in crime right across my constituency, which the police are trying valiantly to deal with. West Yorkshire

police are increasing police numbers, and that is very welcome, but what can she do to make sure they can increase them much further and much faster, to help them reassure the public in my constituency, clear up these crimes, and do what we want to do, which is to protect the public and reassure them?

**Sarah Newton:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. I can absolutely assure him that everyone in the Home Office wakes up every morning thinking, “What more can we do to keep our nation safe?” That is our absolute first duty. In terms of the crime statistics, it is not fair to say that all crime is rising. There has been a worrying increase in violent crime, and we have been acting on that at pace, with determination, supporting frontline police officers. There are whole series of action plans related to knife crime, to acid attacks and to the spate of activity we have seen in London around moped-enabled crime. There is very strong partnership working across the criminal justice system to make sure that it has the powers and the resources it needs to go and prosecute these crimes as swiftly as possible so that my hon. Friend’s community and every community across our country feels safe.

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The Government clearly inhabit another planet. After a generation of progress on crime, 20,000 police officers have gone—2,000 in the west midlands—and crime is once again rising. Knife crime is up, gun crime is up, violent crime is up, crime across the board is up, and the public are increasingly at risk. Does the Minister not accept that she is now confronting the police service with a double whammy: on the one hand, for our brave police officers, a pay rise that is in real terms a pay cut; and on the other hand, asking beleaguered police forces to fund that pay rise? If the Government do not act, does the Minister not accept that they are betraying the first duty of any Government, which is the safety and security of the British public?

**Sarah Newton:** I yet again reiterate that, within the current budget, these pay increases are affordable. Of course it is our first duty to keep people safe. Again, the hon. Gentleman, like other Opposition Members, is talking down the police force and the huge strides they have made with falling crime. I have absolutely accepted in this House, not just today but in the past, that there has been, and there is, a rise in violent crime. We are acting with determination, at pace, to make sure that police officers in every community have the resources and the powers that they need to tackle that crime.

**Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I never cease to be amazed by the dedication and bravery of Cleveland police officers, who do a fantastic job protecting our community. Does my hon. Friend agree that this award is all about being fair to those officers for their dedicated record of service but also fair to the taxpayer and to the wider public services at a time when we are running a deficit of £52 billion this year, posing a real threat to the sustainability of public services?

**Sarah Newton:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course, those brave police officers are also taxpayers, and they will absolutely understand that we have to



strike the right balance, because without the strong and growing economy that this Government are delivering, we will not raise the taxes, so that we can have the world-class public services that we all want to see.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I have been a bit worried about the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) because she has been jumping up and down quite a bit and has not been heard yet—so she must be heard.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Figures obtained from West Yorkshire police show that they have dealt with 33,000 more 999 calls this year than last—an increase of nearly 10%—yet officer numbers are down by nearly a fifth due to Government cuts. It would cost the equivalent of another 80 officers to fully fund the Government pay settlement. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), I too used to work in the police, and I know that frontline staff feel that this Government treat them not as public servants but as public enemies. Can the Minister guarantee that we will not face any further cuts to police numbers?

**Sarah Newton:** That is a totally unacceptable thing to say. My sister was a police officer. My nephew, I am very proud to say, has just joined our local police force. I do not see members of my family—members of the community—as enemies, and neither does anybody in the Home Office or any Member on any one of these Benches. Unlike Opposition Members, we have to inhabit the real world and we have to make the tough choices of having a strong and growing economy, so that we can fund the first-class public services that we want to see.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** What a delicious choice. I call Mr Philip Hollobone.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I am sure that residents in Kettering will welcome this pay rise for the police, not least because every single police officer I have ever met always works more hours than their shift requires. But may I join calls for changes to the national police funding formula? Counties such as Northamptonshire are clearly underfunded relative to their peers.

**Sarah Newton:** I thank my hon. Friend for standing up passionately, over a long period, for his local police officers and insisting that they receive a fair allocation of resources. I am sure that when the Home Secretary is looking at police allocations, she will bear that very much in mind. I want to take the opportunity to say that the Policing Minister is engaging with chief constables and police and crime commissioners all over the country to understand the nature of policing and the way in which it is changing, so that remuneration can properly reflect modern policing in the 21st century.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): A police community support officer in my constituency would face a cut of more than £1,000 if they started as a police

constable just up the road in West Yorkshire. Does the Minister accept the impact that that has on police recruitment, and what will she do to tackle it?

**Sarah Newton:** I am pleased to let the hon. Lady know that police forces across the country, including Devon and Cornwall constabulary, are recruiting, and there are many more people wanting to join the police force than there are opportunities available. Clearly, pay and remuneration are not deterring people from coming forward and taking up the marvellous careers that being in the police force offers them.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I warmly welcome the decision to double the amount that was expected to be given to our brave police officers on the frontline. However, the Labour Mayor of London is consulting on widespread police station closures, the amalgamation of boroughs and a reduction in the number of police officers. Is any extra money going to be allocated to London to cover the costs of this pay increase, which I warmly welcome, or is it expected that there will have to be further closures of police stations and a further loss of police officers?

**Sarah Newton:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important matter. Local police forces—the Metropolitan police is no exception—have funding from the taxpayer via the Government, but they also have the ability to raise precepts in the local community. All police forces that use their precepting powers are seeing an increase in the amount of money that they have to spend. I strongly encourage all London Members, across the political divide, to ask the Mayor to use his precepting powers, so that cuts do not have to be made to services.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I have met both the police and crime commissioner and the chief constable of Gloucestershire over the last couple of weeks. They already faced a very difficult funding situation, but this announcement will only make it worse. They have made all the back-office savings that they can possibly make, and their worry is that restructuring is again on the Government's agenda. Will the Minister at least rule that out today, so that I can go back to them and give them the assurance that they are not expected to waste yet more time and money on a useless restructuring exercise?

**Sarah Newton:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me this opportunity to say that it is plain scaremongering to suggest that there is some hidden agenda of reorganisation. Operational decisions are made by police officers.

**Dr Drew:** What about Dorset?

**Sarah Newton:** As a Cornish MP, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that Devon and Cornwall police leaders have decided for themselves to work in partnership with Dorset. That has been a very successful partnership, which is saving back-office expenditure and enabling the force to be more efficient and keep our communities in Devon, Cornwall and Dorset safer. These are independent operational decisions made by the police themselves.

[Sarah Newton]

To answer the hon. Gentleman's question directly, the police in his constabulary area have reserves of more than 6% of their annual budget that they could prudently use—they would have to use only a very small percentage—to reward extremely brave and hard-working frontline officers. I am sure all his constituents would want them to do that.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Just last week, the chief constable of Northumbria said that his force was getting “very, very close” to not being able to deliver a professional service because of budget cuts. Does the Minister think that burdening him with extra expenditure without giving him any extra budget is going to make that situation better or worse?

**Sarah Newton:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question, but I do not consider that paying our brave and hard-working frontline officers, who have faced the most extraordinary year, extra pay is a burden. It is absolutely right that their extraordinary public service should be rewarded with this richly deserved extra 1%; that is absolutely the correct thing to do. Police forces will be sitting on reserves, and reserves are there for a reason: they are there, in part, for extraordinary circumstances. The police have faced extraordinary circumstances this year, and they richly deserve this pay rise.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): On Wednesday, the National Police Chiefs Council said that

“without better real terms funding protection from government, an award above one per cent will inevitably impact on our ability to deliver policing services and maintain staffing levels.”

Does the Minister think that the unfunded pay deal will lead to a reduction in the number of officers, or is she suggesting that the council is making this up?

**Sarah Newton:** I say to the hon. Gentleman, as I have said to a number of his colleagues, that if we take the police budget as a whole, the extra 1% is less than—I repeat, less than—0.5% of the budget. All police forces are sitting on reserves of at least 6% of their annual funding, so these pay rises are affordable. I think they are richly deserved by frontline officers, and I thoroughly support the independent pay review bodies that made these recommendations.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I hate to burst the Minister's bubble, but PC Joseph Torkington has just resigned from Greater Manchester police, citing, in addition to the pay freeze, cuts to frontline resources and attacks on terms and conditions. In his words:

“To the government I have nothing good to say whatsoever, they should hang their heads in shame.”

What effect does the Minister think that this below-inflation pay award, which is unfunded, will have on already plummeting staff morale?

**Sarah Newton:** We only have to look at the evidence for the fact that people want to join the police force, and more and more people are coming forward to do so. Police pay is not just made up of this annual increase; they have incremental increases, good terms and conditions,

and pensions that they absolutely richly deserve. I think the police force today offers a great career for men and women across our country, and, by the way, the public are really delighted with the work that is being done in the hon. Lady's community and across the country. Confidence in the police and in their ability to keep us safe is rising, and it is much higher than the level we inherited from the Labour Government back in 2010.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Minister says that we should look at the evidence. The evidence is that Greater Manchester police has lost 2,000 staff—officers—since 2010 as a result of Government cuts, and the strain is showing right across south Manchester. How can she claim that these unfunded rises are affordable for police forces such as Greater Manchester police when they are already desperately short of funds?

**Sarah Newton:** I will not repeat myself again, but I will say that I think the police have risen magnificently to the challenge of having to deal with the reductions in their funding. We only have to look at this in terms of the reduction in crime and the rising public confidence in the police. The nature of policing is changing, and the nature of policing needs to change because the nature of crime is changing. The Government are supporting the police in that transformational work. In addition to the annual budgets given to police forces, we also give significant funding for transformation—up to £175 million—and we are doing a huge amount of work on innovation to support crime prevention and crime reduction. The Government are standing four-square behind the excellent and determined work that our police officers are doing all across our country in facing up to and dealing with the new crimes and emerging threats.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Is not making half the pay award non-consolidated a sleight of hand, which officers will see right through? If they are worth a 2% pay increase, why can the Minister not make it a genuine consolidated 2% increase?

**Sarah Newton:** I do not think we can be accused of sleight of hand when we are standing here in Parliament being very clear about what we have done and why we have done it. In addition to all the support we are giving to frontline officers and their leadership through the transformation funding, we are doing a huge amount to enable police officers to be supported by the wider public sector. Every day, police officers have to deal with vulnerable people, who are often suffering a mental health crisis. The Government have supported the wonderful partnership work between the NHS and police officers so people—and police officers—are properly supported. This is about not just the amount of money that is going into police funding, but the transformation and partnership work, which is being enabled far better than it was in 2010.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will know that the police force that covers both our constituencies has lost 597 police officers since 2010. What estimate has she made of how many experienced police officers will leave Devon and

Cornwall police this year because they feel undervalued and devalued by a below-inflation pay rise, which is a real-terms pay cut?

**Sarah Newton:** I always welcome any opportunity to praise the work of our excellent Devon and Cornwall police. When I go about my business there, I see highly motivated police officers and lots of people who want to join the Devon and Cornwall constabulary. As we have discussed before, it is doing very innovative work, not least with the police force in Dorset. I do not accept the very negative picture that the hon. Gentleman is trying to paint. I encourage him to speak more positively and represent its extremely good work in the House. Crime is falling and it is keeping us safe in Devon and Cornwall.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Minister ended her response to the urgent question by talking about the prudent use of reserves, but why does she think she knows better than the National Audit Office, which demands that police forces keep adequate reserves and says that taking staffing costs out of reserves is financially irresponsible? My chief constable in Humberside explained to me last week how important reserves are when unexpected demands are made on the police service, such as multiple murders that have to be investigated. The money is not there to cover the increased pay costs.

**Sarah Newton:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I talked about the prudent use of reserves, but it is important to note that they have been growing year on year. They now stand at £1.8 billion, so there is clearly an opportunity for forces to use them to pay for the extra 1% pay rise. I refer her to the work that Sir Tom Winsor does with Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary reporting on police forces. He has said clearly and consistently that police officers can do much more to improve efficiency.

**Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): The Metropolitan police have warned of steep increases in gun and knife crime in London over the past year: gun and knife crime have risen 42% and 24% respectively, and recorded crime is up across virtually every category, which does not chime with what the Minister is saying. Police numbers fell for the seventh consecutive year in July, and many forces are at breaking point. I do not see how

asking the police to foot the £50 million bill for the Government's disingenuous pay deal will help to solve the crisis. To talk about the Mayor's precept in London is simply trying to pass on to hard-pressed Londoners the cost of the Government's failed policies.<sup>1</sup>

**Sarah Newton:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question, which gives me the opportunity to thank the Metropolitan police for its deep and consistent engagement with my colleagues in the Home Office working on action plans to tackle the spike in violent crime in London. We do a huge amount of joined-up work supporting our colleagues in the police force in London to tackle these issues. Taxpayers all over the country pay for policing through a combination of general taxation and local precepts. Given that the Metropolitan police consumes about a third of the police budget for England, I do not think it is too much to ask Londoners to pay their fair share of the precept, just as my constituents have to pay their fair share.

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): In Calderdale in the past 12 months, we have lost 50% of our neighbourhood policing officers. The picture being painted by the Minister could not be any further from the reality on the streets of Halifax. The pay bonus would cost West Yorkshire police an additional £4 million, which is the equivalent of 83 police officers. How does the Minister expect our forces to be able to deliver the pay bonus without it impacting on frontline services? And may I be very clear about this point, Mr Speaker? Those of us on the Labour Benches are speaking up for our police officers, not talking them down.

**Sarah Newton:** As I said, I believe the reserves held by police forces should be used to cover the cost. I do not see that they have to make frontline cuts to officer numbers. Operational decisions are totally down to chief constables and police and crime commissioners. I believe the costs are affordable. I encourage the hon. Lady to go back and speak to her police and crime commissioner about her concerns about local operational decisions. The decision that has been made will enable us to do the right thing for our brave and hardworking police officers, who have had the most extraordinary year facing up to some of the greatest challenges that our country has faced for a very long time. They richly deserve this extra pay rise.

1. [Official Report, 9 October 2017, Vol. 629, c. 2MC.]

## Business of the House

11.12 am

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

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** The business for week commencing 9 October will be:

MONDAY 9 OCTOBER—General debate on Gypsies and Travellers.

TUESDAY 10 OCTOBER—Consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the European Union (Approvals) Bill, followed by a general debate on Baby Loss Awareness Week.

WEDNESDAY 11 OCTOBER—Consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

THURSDAY 12 OCTOBER—General debate on exiting the European Union and data protection.

FRIDAY 13 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

In response to the many requests from Members right across the House, I am delighted we have been able to find Government time for a debate on Gypsy and Traveller encampments, a subject that I know is a concern to many colleagues and has been for some time. May I also pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), for Colchester (Will Quince) and for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), and the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), for their work in raising the tragic issue of baby loss? I am very pleased that we are able to announce a debate on this issue during Baby Loss Awareness Week.

Finally, I wish all Members a very successful conference season. I look forward to seeing them all when the House returns in October.

**Valerie Vaz:** I thank the Leader of the House. I share with her an understanding of the difficulties people face. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) lost a baby, so in our family we know exactly what that is like.

Yesterday was absolutely jaw-dropping. I heard the numerous points of order at the end of our first Opposition day, for which we had waited for so long. It became clear that the Government had cynically decided not to vote for or against the motion. Madam Deputy Speaker said that the matter should be raised at business questions, so I am raising it here. The House voted to lift the cap on nurses' pay and to revoke the rise in tuition fees, which means that students and nurses have a legitimate expectation that that is the intention of Parliament. We would like to know how that will be enacted.

It is clear, and has been said on social media, that this is what the Government are going to do with every Opposition day motion. I would like you, Mr Speaker, to have a meeting with the business managers to work out exactly how to take this forward, because it makes Parliament look ridiculous. On Tuesday, an hon. Member read from the confidence and supply agreement. Will the Leader of the House publish that document and schedule a debate on it, given that Government lawyers have said that it

“will have appropriate parliamentary authorisation”,

and that

“No timetable has been set for the making of such payments”?

On Tuesday, the House debated proposals relating to Standing Committees. If the Government truly believe in parliamentary democracy, all those Committees should have an equal number of places for the Government and Opposition, as the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) pointed out, so that we can all work together in the interests of this country. To support Parliament, will the Leader of the House please commit to equal numbers on all Public Bill Committees? Otherwise, it will look like the Government are afraid of debate, accountability and transparency. This has been a bad week for parliamentary democracy.

Moreover, week after week, the Leader of the House never responds to any of my questions. She did not respond to my question about how many statutory instruments would follow from the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. The White Paper says between 800 and 1,000. Has she had any discussions about timetabling, and what resources will be provided following the Procedure Committee report published on 2 May? She also said last week that the UN report on the disabled did not accurately reflect the evidence given. Will she please schedule a debate on the issue, following the point of order by the shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams)?

The Leader of the House said that the NHS was not privatised. Will she explain why NHS Professionals was being marketed for sale? Following the persistence of my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who asked the National Audit Office for a report and tabled 17 written parliamentary questions, the Government announced in a written statement that NHS Professionals would remain in public hands. Now we see that profit-driven hospitals are seeing a 15% to 25% increase in their profits year on year, at the same time as patients are being denied care as a result of long waiting times; the Government's abolition of the 18-week target means that people are having to pay £14,000 for hip and other operations.

Yesterday, the Back British Farming campaign came to the House. The farmers are asking for access to existing markets, in or out of the EU. When will the White Paper on trade be published? A recent survey has found that 66% of people believe that leaving the EU without a mutually agreed deal would be bad for Britain. Will the Government publish an impact statement, therefore, on what would happen to the country's economy if we left without a deal?

This week, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the vote that established the Scottish Parliament. As leader of the Labour party, John Smith committed a future Labour Government to establishing that Parliament. Robin Cook and Robert Maclennan looked at the constitutional issues and put flesh on that policy. Donald Dewar was the first First Minister of the Scottish Parliament. All were great exponents of parliamentary democracy, as is the Father of the House, so there are many good role models to show what Parliament can do.

Finally, I congratulate all the new Members who made their first speeches in the House this week: my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden), the hon.

Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) and my hon. Friends the Members for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) and for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill). We look forward to their expertise in Parliament. I also join the Leader of the House in thanking all the staff. It seems amazing that after the break they managed to get us running in smooth order for these two weeks. I wish everyone a very happy conference recess.

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, I join the hon. Lady in congratulating the Scottish Parliament on its first 20 years. It seems like that was only yesterday. It was obviously a while ago, but doesn't time fly when you're having fun? I wish the Parliament much further success. I also congratulate all the new Members who made their maiden speeches this week. We heard some excellent contributions, and I wish them every success.

The hon. Lady talked about yesterday's Opposition day debates. Let me say to all Members that we take incredibly seriously the issues underlying tuition fees and pay for public sector workers. As Members will know, there have been many statements, many briefings to the House—both written and oral—and many discussions about those subjects in recent months, during, for instance, urgent debates initiated by the Opposition and business questions.

Yesterday there was an equal number of speakers on both sides of the House, and some excellent contributions were made. There is no doubt that we have engaged at every level. I should point out, however, that the Opposition's intention yesterday was purely political. They will be well aware that the vote on their tuition fees proposal has no statutory effect. The regulations concerned are determined under the negative procedure. There is a 40-day period in which such a statutory instrument can be annulled, and that period expired. As the Opposition know, a debate was scheduled for 18 April, but the general election interrupted that, so for the hon. Lady to suggest that yesterday's vote would have had a statutory effect is simply not correct.

The hon. Lady asked about Committees. On Tuesday evening, the House voted for Committees to reflect the majority on the Floor of the House. Let me make clear to the hon. Lady, who did not seem to understand this point on Tuesday, that it is proposed that in an even-numbered Committee there will be parity. I think she was asking me to confirm that. That was set out clearly on the Order Paper, but unfortunately she does not seem to have noticed.

The hon. Lady asked how many statutory instruments would arise from the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. It is not possible to give a definitive number, because the volume of legislation will depend, for instance, on the outcome of negotiations, on policy decisions still to be made and agreed by the House and on further work connected with how we introduce secondary legislation. However, as my right hon. Friends have said from the Front Bench, we are listening very carefully. We are hearing submissions from Members in all parts of the House about how we can ensure that secondary legislation is covered in an efficient and effective way. I can assure all Members that the Parliamentary Business and Legislation Committee, which I chair and which looks at all legislation, has been assiduous in ensuring that statutory instruments are properly timetabled, properly ready for introduction and prioritised. There will be more information about that in due course.

The hon. Lady asked about the United Nations report on disability. She will be aware that this country is spending £214 billion a year on welfare matters, including disability. It is spending more each year than at any time since 2010. We are absolutely committed to improving the situation for people with disabilities: more disabled people are getting into work than ever before, and we are doing all that we can to give them more rewarding opportunities.

The hon. Lady asked about the NHS. The Government, and all parties in the House, are fully committed to an NHS that is free at the point of delivery. No party takes a different approach. The Government are determined to ensure good value for taxpayers' money, good improvements in NHS productivity, and fair pay and terms for our excellent public sector workers, but at the same time we are committed to an NHS that is free at the point of delivery, supporting all of us when we need it.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of farmers' access to the single market. She will be aware that there is to be an agriculture Bill. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is working very hard in his Department—as I did when I performed the role before him—to bring about positive outcomes for food and farming, a critical sector for which enormous opportunities are arising from Britain's departure from the European Union.

The hon. Lady asked about the UK's leaving the EU without a deal. As all Members would expect, the Government are looking at all eventualities. We fully intend to reach a fair, clear, broad-ranging free trade agreement with the EU, with collaboration across a number of areas to ensure that the clear and close special partnership of which the Prime Minister has spoken is our aspiration and, indeed, is achieved at the end of this negotiation.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Given the suggestion that Nelson's column be taken down, will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the criteria for erecting statues? It took a long while for the monument to Raoul Wallenberg to be erected outside the West End great synagogue. I hope it will not take so long for statues to be erected in London to Princess Diana, the first woman Prime Minister and Sir Bruce Forsyth.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I love my hon. Friend's ideas; he always surprises and pleases us in this House. Following the passing of the Deregulation Act 2015, consent from the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is no longer required to erect statues; the process is now determined through the planning system only. But since I am sure all Members will agree that it feels as though my hon. Friend has represented his seat of Southend West for at least a century, perhaps his constituents would like to consider erecting a statue of him on Southend pier.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for when we return.

This has been an absolute stinker of a week for the democratic arrangements of this House. First, there was the repeal Bill with its grotesque Henry VIII powers, then the manipulation of the Standing Committees of

[Pete Wishart]

the House in the Government's favour, and now the downgrading of Opposition day debates to little more than Adjournment debates. Next, Mr Speaker, they will be coming for your Chair.

The Leader of the House said when she assumed the role that she wanted to reach out to the parties of the House, to seek consensus and work across this Chamber, but this Government are now behaving little better than a dysfunctional tinpot dictatorship, although they are doing that so ineptly that they will probably end up oppressing themselves. This is a Government who singularly fail to accept their minority status, and delusionally assert they have a majority even when their billion-pound friends desert them.

Turning to that, apparently the Government's Democratic Unionist party deal requires parliamentary approval—something they were pretty keen to keep from this House when it was first announced. So what are they going to do to bring a debate to this House? Apparently, that has to be done through the estimates process, but debates on estimates are purely in the gift of the Liaison Committee, so what plans does the Leader of the House have to bring this grubby deal on to the Floor of the House, so that all the issues can be considered?

And what are we doing about the time for Committee stage of the repeal Bill? The equivalent of seven eight-hour days have been set aside for it, but there will be hundreds of amendments, and we know that there will be real interest from Members, as we saw on Second Reading. What is the Leader of the House doing to ensure we get sufficient time?

Lastly, we have just got back from a long summer recess, but apparently we are taking a break again so that three voluntary organisations can have the equivalent of their annual general meetings. The public will be baffled that we can find only seven days for that Committee stage in the House, yet can find a week to let our 12 Liberal Democrats go to their conference.

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, may I advise you strongly, Mr Speaker, to nail down your Chair, just in case? The hon. Gentleman is clearly concerned that someone might run off with it.

I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman shows his usual contempt for this place, which is actually a bastion of democracy. [Interruption.] He calls it a tinpot dictatorship, which is pretty contemptuous. It is a great shame, but it comes as no surprise; that attitude pervades his approach to this place.

The hon. Gentleman raises the question of, as he calls it, the "grubby deal". The confidence and supply arrangement with the DUP provides funding to the Northern Ireland Executive, once reconstituted, and frankly I am sick of Opposition Members putting it forward that this is somehow finding its way to a political party. They know full well that that is not the case. They also know full well that there have been many support packages for different parts of the United Kingdom. The money being provided for Northern Ireland will go towards tackling incredibly important problems and challenges in Northern Ireland, such as mental ill health, the consequences of the troubles, and infrastructure.

In response to the hon. Gentleman's question on the hours allocated for the eight-day Committee of the whole House on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, we have provided eight hours a day of protected time. In fact, that compares rather favourably with the 39 hours and 17 minutes provided for discussion of the Lisbon treaty. As we showed when we extended the time for debate on Second Reading of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill following a request from Members, we will of course look carefully at this matter. Finally, it is a bit rich of the hon. Gentleman to say that the conference recess is held at the behest of the Liberal Democrats when he himself came to me to ask whether we could consider changing the dates to suit the Scottish National party conference—[Laughter.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. In thanking the Leader of the House for her kind invitation, I can confirm to the House that my Chair is not going anywhere. Neither am I, for that matter. I call Mr Peter Bone.

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Speaker. This is none the less a serious point that you bring up. Parliament clearly voted for two motions yesterday, so it seems to me that the Government are going to have to listen carefully to what the House says, or at least, as a minimum, if they lose a vote in the House—

**Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** When?

**Mr Bone:** Someone has shouted "When?" It is probably likely to happen again. Could we have an undertaking from the Leader of the House that in those circumstances the Government would subsequently make a statement in reaction to any such vote? This also applies to debates arranged by the Backbench Business Committee. If the House passes something, the Government need to respond to it. It would therefore help the House if the Leader of the House were able to give such an undertaking.

**Andrea Leadsom:** As usual, my Northamptonshire neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) makes a good and constructive suggestion. As I tried to indicate to the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), the Government have taken very seriously and considered in great detail the issues of public sector pay and tuition fees, both in the Chamber and outside it. However, my hon. Friend makes a good point about areas that have not been so thoroughly discussed in this place, and I will certainly take that away and look into it.

**Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab):** May I crave your indulgence for a moment, Mr Speaker? Members across the House might be aware that a light aircraft crashed on the Sandringham estate in the North West Norfolk constituency on Monday evening. Two people were killed, and it was subsequently discovered that they were both from Gateshead. They were the pilot, Nigel Dodds, who was from Gateshead but lived in Menorca, and a friend of mine, a lady called Val Barnes, who lived in Whickham, in the adjoining constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist). Val used to be the school administrator at Kelvin Grove Primary School, where I am the chair of the governors. She was a volunteer with the breakfast club and worked with the

parent-teacher association. She was a long-standing governor and a genuine friend of the school, with her energetic enthusiasm, her vibrant personality and her real passion for the school and its children. She will be very sadly missed.

The Backbench Business Committee is open for business, and I would be grateful if the Leader of the House could let us know as soon as possible about the allocation of time for Backbench Business Committee debates from the week beginning 16 October. Back-Bench Members on both sides of the House, this is your time. This is your opportunity to raise issues about the interests of your constituents. Applications are very welcome, and we already have a number on the stocks. All Members will want to be reassured that the Backbench Business Committee will be given a fair allocation of time in the Chamber in this untypical two-year parliamentary Session. The Standing Orders state that in a typical parliamentary Session, we will get 35 days, 27 of which will be in this Chamber, but this two-year Session is untypical. We would therefore welcome an assurance that we will be given a pro rata time allocation.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sure that I can speak for all Members in expressing our enormous condolences and sympathies regarding the loss of those two individuals—such wonderful people, by the sounds of things. The hon. Gentleman makes an impassioned case.

As for the Backbench Business Committee, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be delighted that his request from last week was heard and acted upon, and that the Committee is now up and running. I have also heard his request for a decent number of days for the Committee. I assure him that that is fully my intention, and that I am always happy to discuss any particular requests with him.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Will the Leader of the House make a statement about Ministers being stopped during their winding-up speeches? It happened yesterday when the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation was discussing an important topic and that cannot become a precedent.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is right to raise that. When Ministers are speaking about important topics, it cannot be allowed for them to be stopped mid-flow through unreasonable interventions and deliberate blocking practices.

**Ms Harriet Harman** (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I ask the Leader of the House to look at yesterday's Westminster Hall debate on the representation of women. It was led by a truly excellent speech from the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), which elicited a wide consensus across the parties. There are more women in the House than ever before, and that is not just welcome; it is a democratic imperative. There are more babies being born to women MPs, which is a fact of life. Since 2010, 17 babies have been born to women Members of this House, and there is no maternity leave or paternity leave.

At the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill debate on Monday, the only way for my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) to record her vote was to bring her lovely new baby—just a few weeks

old—to the House, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Frith) had to leave his baby, who is just a few hours old. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking Mr Speaker for setting up a reference group to consider the matter and in supporting his work? We can square the circle to ensure that we can be good parents and excellent MPs and that constituents can be properly represented, but we need change. Mr Speaker, although you arrived in this House as a man and as a Tory, since you have been in the Chair you have really proven yourself to be nothing less than an honorary sister.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for her point. I absolutely share her passion for resolving such issues. There are many barriers to women entering Parliament and, in the centenary year of women's suffrage, it is important that we do all we can to help resolve the matter. Many colleagues across the House, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, are also working hard on these issues. I am sure that "Mr Sister"—otherwise known as Mr Speaker—will be keen to make some progress.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am bound to say to the Leader of the House, to the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and to the House as a whole that, as Members can probably tell, my cup runneth over. I am in a state of overwhelming excitement. On a formal level, I should just tell the House that as chair of the Commons reference group on representation and inclusion, of which mention has been made, I can say that we are fully seized of the right hon. and learned Lady's proposals relating to baby leave. Indeed, we discussed them fully on Tuesday afternoon. We are committed to vigorously pursuing them with a view to an effective motion being brought before the House for its decision.

I call Mr Philip Davies.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I should just say, and I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be very relieved to hear this, that nobody has ever suggested he should be granted the status of an honorary sister.

**Philip Davies:** I was just about to commend you, Mr Speaker, for identifying the other honorary sister on the Conservative Benches, for I presumed that was why I had been called.

It is bad enough that we have a bloated, wasteful and unaffordable overseas aid budget, but it is even more ridiculous that we now learn we cannot spend our overseas aid budget on our overseas territories. As we are getting back control from the unelected and unaccountable European Union, may I suggest that we now get back control over our overseas aid spending from the unelected, unaccountable, out-of-touch morons at the OECD, so that we can spend our overseas aid budget on the things that we want to spend it on, rather than on the things that they tell us to?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising what is a very important point in his usual way. Hurricane Irma, which sparks his question, is an unprecedented disaster, and it was absolutely right that the UK responded immediately to the needs of people affected. That was our primary focus, and it continues to be our priority. We are now looking at how the current overseas aid rules apply to such disasters.

So that all hon. Members are aware, the Prime Minister announced yesterday that a further £15 million of assistance for the overseas territories has been committed, on top of the £32 million already committed last week. We have already deployed more than 1,000 military personnel to the area and we have sent more than 40 tonnes of aid. There is no lack in the UK's assistance for these people who have been devastated by this awful natural disaster.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): On Tuesday evening, the Leader of the House justified the changes to Standing Orders on the basis of the Government having, in her words, a "working majority." That working majority was not much in evidence yesterday afternoon, when the Government sat on their hands on two motions. We now read that that is to be the Government's approach to all Opposition day debates. Can she tell us whether that is the case? I remind her that, without Opposition day debates and the insistence of her party, the situation on Gurkha immigration status would never have been resolved. Does she really understand the danger of what she is doing to our parliamentary procedures?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The right hon. Gentleman should not believe everything he reads in the press. As I said to the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), the subjects of yesterday's two debates, public sector pay and tuition fees, are very serious issues that the Government have been looking at. We have provided information to the House, and we have had debates and comprehensive statements in this Chamber. The policies are very clear. These are very serious issues, and Government Members participated fully, matching the number of Opposition speakers—there were as many speakers as were permitted. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) was not even called because there was not enough time for his contribution to be heard. There is no question but that this Government continue to fully engage in Opposition day debates.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I know the Leader of the House is fully aware of the importance of ring-fencing local housing revenue, which is vital to all our constituents, but I have evidence here showing that Taunton Deane Borough Council has been siphoning off huge sums to spend on new computer equipment. May we please have a debate on propriety in local government?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend has raised that point in the Chamber a number of times, and I know he continues to raise it with the appropriate Ministers. I encourage him to keep doing that.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): As someone who has served in this House for some years, I add my voice to those who are saying that some of the decisions of the past week will usher in a very unpleasant atmosphere in the House.

On a lighter note, I highlight a new report, "Women unbound. Unleashing female entrepreneurial potential," which I helped to launch in the House this week with PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Crowdfunding Centre, which is based in Yorkshire. Women in this country have huge potential. They are starting new businesses and creating wealth. Will the Leader of the House and Mr Speaker read the report? Let us get on with unleashing that potential and get this country moving again.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am happy to endorse completely what the hon. Gentleman is saying. The female employment rate is at a record high and there is a higher percentage of women on FTSE boards than ever before. There are now about 1.2 million businesses led by women, which is more than ever before, and the gender pay gap has fallen to a record low. However, as the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) was saying, we need to address issues in terms of getting more women into Parliament—getting more people representing those who share some of their particular interests. I am happy to read the report he mentions and I congratulate him on doing it.

**Rishi Sunak** (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): The Government are funding the installation of almost 600 mobile phone masts in remote areas as part of their emergency services network roll-out. It would be hugely helpful for rural constituents in areas such as mine if the Government were to allow mobile phone operators to freely locate on these towers and strongly encourage them to do so, to broaden mobile phone coverage in rural areas. Will the Government make a statement about their plans in this area?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises an issue that matters a great deal to lots of our constituents, including mine in rural areas. The mobile network operator EE is delivering about 500 new sites, of which just under 300 will be part of those Government-funded sites. He will be pleased to know that EE is making sure that those new Government-funded sites will be open to site applications from other operators.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House bring forward an urgent statement on integrated data services? Last week, we saw one of the biggest data breaches in the world at Equifax, a company with which the British Government set up a joint venture to provide debt recovery services in 2014. People in this country have a right to know whether a British Government company was involved in one of the biggest data breaches we have ever seen.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point and if he would like to write to me, I shall be happy to take it up with the relevant Department separately. However, he may well want to raise it at the next oral questions opportunity.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am pleased that the Leader of the House is in her place today, because she will understand better than almost anybody here the importance of buses for children to get to schools in Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, having been educated in the wonderful town of Tonbridge herself. Sadly, the buses in my community and that of



my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) are struggling to get children to school on time and to get them home safely. Will the Leader of the House make time available so that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells and I could hear views from other Members and put pressure on those running the buses to serve our children better?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is right to say that so many communities—schoolchildren and many others—rely on bus services. When I was at Tonbridge girls grammar I used to cycle to school, so I can thoroughly recommend cycling. I occasionally used to take the train, but as I always managed to get the wrong one and end up in London instead of Tonbridge, it was not always a success—[*Interruption.*] Yes, possibly by design. I probably should have stuck with the bus service. My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. He will have heard what the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee had to say—it is open for business—and I am sure that would provide a perfect opportunity for my hon. Friend to raise the issue of local bus services.

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for allowing me to raise an important issue, one that might require parliamentary privilege, Mr Speaker. TTX Express in my constituency has been in business for 40 years. It employs 90 people and is Tesco's haulage company of the year. It has an outstanding complaint with Clydesdale bank, whose chief executive we met in this place, when a commitment was given to review the complaint and to hold a meeting before action was taken to sell the land from which this company trades from under its feet. The bank carried out a thin internal review and then refused to meet in the way it had agreed to.

The business is due to go into administration tomorrow, and I understand that the bank has agreed the sale of the land to a third party. That puts at risk 90 jobs and a long-standing business in my constituency. When it has gone to the Financial Conduct Authority for support, the FCA has concluded that it cannot review the complaint because it is outside its scope. Having seen the evidence, it is my belief that potentially criminal activity has been taking place, so my question is this: will the Leader of the House support my call for the bank to hold off on the sale and the administration? In addition, will she use parliamentary business to look at the support available to businesses with complaints of this type?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman was quite fortunate that I was immersed in conversation with the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies); I think he probably owes him a cup of tea.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) raises a serious issue. A number of businesses feel that they have significant complaints about how banks have treated them in recent years. He has put that issue on the record and I am sure he is taking it up with the Treasury. I encourage him to continue to try to address the matter with the FCA.

**Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): The defence industry employs a great number of people in this country, not least in my constituency, where we make helicopters. I notice that the Government are blithely entering into various agreements on joint procurement and possible

joint defence arrangements with the EU. May we have a debate in Government time on the relationship between defence businesses and Government procurement in the UK and the EU? I am not yet confident that the House has really decided what our strategy should be or that we have had adequate time to consider it.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend will be aware that the position paper on defence co-operation came out in the past two weeks; I urge him to take a look at it. The UK Government clearly intend to achieve a close relationship, as we have had in the past, with the EU and other allies in terms of both procurement and defence collaboration. Nevertheless, all these things are not yet decided. They will be subject to many debates in the House and, potentially, legislation, so there will be many opportunities for my hon. Friend to raise such matters.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): The Leader of the House is no doubt aware that the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has announced that while foreign direct investment was £1.66 billion in 2016, it collapsed in the first half of 2017 to £313 million. Will she find time for a debate, linked to the Brexit debate she announced in the business statement, on Brexit's impact on manufacturing and the motor industry?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am quite sure—I hope you can confirm this, Mr Speaker—that the hon. Gentleman would find that such a discussion would be in order during the general debate in the first week back after the recess.

**James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): The number of people claiming out-of-work benefits in my constituency is now 67% lower than it was in 2010, but that brings a different challenge: several employers, particularly high-tech manufacturing employers, are struggling to fill vacancies. May we have a debate on the availability of technical training to enable the workforce to fill successfully the technical jobs gaps in my constituency?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend points to the amazing employment performance in this country. We now have some of the highest employment numbers in the western world, with employment up by almost 3 million and at its highest rate since the early 1970s. That does bring its own challenges, though. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be delighted, as I am, by the Department for Education's extreme efforts to improve skills. He will no doubt wish to raise his particular issues at Education questions after the recess.

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): I am a member of the Work and Pensions Committee, and yesterday we heard from eight organisations that all agreed that the UK is not yet ready for the roll-out of universal credit. As it is due to be rolled out to almost half a million households in the next month, will the Leader of the House please prevail upon her colleague the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to halt or at least delay the roll-out so that all those people do not suffer?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady will be aware that the point of universal credit is to address the plight of people out of work and to improve their opportunities

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

to get back into work. Even if someone is working for only a few hours a week, they still qualify, which improves the incentives for working. She raises a very important point about the readiness of the complete roll-out. I shall certainly take that up with the Department on her behalf, and she may also wish to raise it herself with the Minister concerned.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): In the wake of Hurricane Irma, Britain is rightly providing aid and assistance to the thousands of people who have had their homes destroyed and their lives ruined. Ministers have kept this House up to date with what is going on. However, at the same time, on the Indian subcontinent, hundreds of people have lost their lives and thousands have lost their homes and their livelihoods, yet we have had no statement about that from the Government. Given that this is part and parcel of our Commonwealth responsibilities, as well as our wider responsibilities on international development, will my right hon. Friend make sure that, on our return, we have a statement to the House on the work that we are doing as the United Kingdom to support our Commonwealth partners?

**Andrea Leadsom:** That issue has been raised in business questions a number of times. I know that our colleagues in the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development are following very closely what is going on with the appalling floods in south-east Asia. Our pre-positioned relief supplies ensured that thousands of people in Bangladesh and Nepal did receive immediate support following the terrible floods. We have allocated a further £400,000 to the Nepal Red Cross Society for monsoon flood response that will provide clean water, and help with food, financial support and so on. India has not requested international assistance, but we continue to monitor the situation very closely, and I will take up that point with Departments.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): I just wish to follow on from the question about universal credit asked by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George). The Leader of the House stated why the credit has been introduced. However, we are currently taking evidence on the matter—we have heard from several organisations including the Local Government Association and Citizens Advice—and it seems that the system is not working and that the Government need to pause any further roll-out of universal credit.

**Andrea Leadsom:** As I said to the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George), we are absolutely committed to universal credit as a means of supporting more people to get into work. That must be a good thing for those individuals, for our economy and for our society. However, the hon. Members for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) and for High Peak have raised an important point. Ministers are very aware of the issue, and we will be listening carefully to what people have to say.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): Can the Leader of the House tell us how many Members contributed to the two Opposition day debates yesterday? Is she satisfied that both sides of the House fully engaged with those debates?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend will be aware that we on this side of the House engaged very fully with those debates. In fact, there were equal numbers of Opposition and Government contributors—unlike on Tuesday, when there were only two or three Members from Her Majesty's loyal Opposition present to debate the incredibly important Finance Bill. Opposition Members need to be a bit careful. We are fully engaged with all matters in this House, but they seem to be cherry-picking the things that they feel give them political advantage.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): Peel Ports has announced a massive investment of £750 million in rail freight at the Port of Liverpool. Will the Leader of the House ask Transport Ministers when the Government will match that investment in much-needed rail freight across the whole of the north of England? The private sector is playing its part; it is time for the Government to do the same.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government have committed more to infrastructure than at any time in recent history—£49 billion since 2010, which is 17% up on the comparable period under the last Labour Government. We are investing more than £13 billion in the north of England's transport infrastructure. From major new infrastructure schemes to local transport improvements, we are trying to transform journeys for passengers and drivers and to create the capacity that the north really does need.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): Opposition days and general debates are vital to the relevance of this House, as is the opportunity to discuss community, family and constituency matters in Westminster Hall, so I roundly welcome the forthcoming debate on baby loss. Will the Leader of the House make a statement on the impact of the Opposition's determination yesterday to squeeze in together the two large issues of the NHS and education? Doing so diminished speaking time for Members on both sides of the House, including the time for the relevant Ministers to respond.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The subjects of Opposition day debates are obviously a matter for the Opposition. Nevertheless, it is the case with these very important issues that they squeeze in two for the price of one. My hon. Friend makes the good point that some of these matters are worthy of more debate. There were certainly many Government Members who would have liked to have made their case, but were unable to do so.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): When the former Chancellor, Mr George Osborne, left office, he took on a job with BlackRock finance, working four days a month for a remuneration of £650,000 a year. In pursuit of the investigations of the Select Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs into possible abuses of the revolving door by which former Ministers might be using their inside knowledge for financial gain, the Committee invited Mr Osborne to come to this House to explain allegations that he had had dealings with BlackRock finance when he was Chancellor, as a result of which the laws were changed in favour of BlackRock. Should we not insist that we debate this issue and renew the invitation to Mr Osborne to explain his position to the House to guard our reputation?

**Andrea Leadsom:** There are very tightly enforced, clear rules regarding what ex-Ministers are able to do both when they have left office and while they are still in office. The hon. Gentleman is merely putting forward a hypothesis in which I see no merit. He is taking the opportunity to criticise something when he has no evidence to support his case—that is extremely unfair.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): The clock is ticking in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where elections are still nowhere on the horizon, despite the agreement at the end of last year that they should be held within one year. The United Kingdom has been highly engaged in the process. Could we have a statement from the Minister responsible—perhaps a written statement, or some kind of indication during the recess—about what we can do to ensure that the Democratic Republic of the Congo does not fall into a period of great uncertainty, but holds the promised elections?

**Andrea Leadsom:** We remain deeply concerned about the political crisis in Burundi and continuing human rights abuses. The current crisis can only be resolved by inclusive dialogue that preserves the Arusha agreement. We still believe that the east African community dialogue led by former Tanzanian President Mkapa offers the best prospect for a mediated solution. We call on all parties to engage without preconditions. On my hon. Friend's request for a ministerial statement, I will ask the Department concerned whether it can provide more of an update.

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): I am sure the Leader of the House is aware that the Department for Transport's annual publication "Reported Road Casualties" is being substantially delayed and is now scheduled for 28 September—three months late. During my time in this House, I have campaigned for improved road safety in my constituency and for tougher sentences for dangerous driving. If, as expected, this year's figures reveal an increase in road deaths and serious injuries, that would represent a shocking reversal in the decade-long trend towards safer roads. Given that delay, and given that publication now falls in the recess, will the Leader of the House arrange for time to be made available to discuss this important issue when the House returns?

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, I congratulate the hon. Lady on her work to raise this important issue and on being a champion for safer roads—she is absolutely right to do that. I will look into the point she raises about the delay to the report, and I will get back to her to let her know what we can do.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Last week in Westminster, there was the launch of the manifesto on strengthening families. The Leader of the House found time to attend, and I commend her for the work she has done in this area. Can she find time for a debate on strengthening families, particularly with an angle on the important link between prisoners and families? The odds of reoffending are 39% lower if people retain contact with their family while in prison. Perhaps she could also find time to commend Lord Farmer for his work in this area.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am delighted to commend Lord Farmer for his work on the relationship between prisoners and strengthening families. I was delighted to attend the

launch of the families manifesto last week and to see the extensive number of Back-Bench Members who had put their names to it. I know my hon. Friend shares my passion for all children to have the best start in life, and he will be pleased to know that all Departments are committed to making progress, including the Department of Health, which has committed an additional £1.4 billion for mental health services for children and young people over this Parliament. I am proud to say that £365 million has been made available to provide specialist mental health services to mums before and after having their babies, and that is being led by NHS England. That will make a huge difference to families.

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I hope that the House will join me in praising the efforts of Epilepsy Connections in working with people who face this condition, such as my constituent Carol McNeil, and supporting them with the challenges and difficulties they face. Perhaps we could have a debate in Government time about the organisation's concerns about access to face-to-face support for epileptics at all stages of the personal independence payment process—from initial application to appeals against negative decisions.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a really important point, and I completely share his enthusiasm for highlighting the importance of understanding what to do when faced with somebody who is suffering an epileptic fit. He should use the opportunities that are open to him—perhaps by securing an Adjournment debate or a Backbench Business Committee debate—to try to raise this issue more widely.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I am sure that the Leader of the House will be reflecting, like me, on the fact that it is truly bizarre when the biggest complaint of someone who comes to this Chamber is that no one turned up to object to their proposal the day before. May we therefore have a debate on what it means to put proposals forward and how to act positively in this Chamber, rather than just looking for opportunities to score cheap political points?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am very sympathetic to what my hon. Friend has to say. We have discussed this issue during today's business questions. The important point is that we engage in clear and coherent debate, although it can be as feisty as we like. The point is also that the choice of subject for Opposition day debates is a matter for the Opposition. The Government will always engage with debates, but we will not always take part in the political point scoring that was the objective behind the Opposition's particular subjects yesterday, and that point is backed up by the fact that they chose to hold two debates on very serious subjects on which Conservative Members would very much have liked to contribute, and at greater length than was permitted by an Opposition who just wanted to get in as much political point scoring as they could.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I really do not know how the Leader of the House is keeping a straight face when she makes those comments to the heart of democracy in this country.

I am sure the Leader of the House will be aware of the landmark news this week that offshore wind energy is now cheaper than new nuclear energy, so can we

[Diana Johnson]

please have a debate on this new industry and on what more the Government can do to support it—particularly to meet our carbon targets—and to ensure we have continued access to the EU export market after Brexit?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises a point that I am sure all Members will be delighted by, which is the extraordinary rate at which the cost of offshore wind has come down. As an ex-Energy Minister, I remember having whole stakeholder meetings with offshore wind developers urging them to compete more for the contracts for difference paid for by bill payers, so that we could get these costs down as quickly as possible. We should be very proud in the United Kingdom that we have led the world in the development of this technology. We are the third best country in the world, according to the independent Climate Action Network, for tackling climate change. We have outperformed our closest EU counterparts, with the largest cut in greenhouse gas emissions since 1990. There is more to do, but we are absolutely committed to doing it. If the hon. Lady wanted to generate a debate in this Chamber, I am sure that many Members would be delighted to take part in it.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The weakness of the House's scrutiny of delegated legislation was illustrated yesterday afternoon by the fact that the House passed a motion calling for the regulations on tuition fees not to go forward that the Government propose to ignore. The Leader of the House knows that amendments have been tabled by Members in all parts of the House looking for changes to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, but amendments to the Bill alone will not solve the problem. We may need a new Select Committee, changes to Standing Orders and extra resources, and we will need to consider these in parallel with the Committee stage of the Bill. Will she commit today to bringing forward proposals and making time to do that in parallel with the Committee stage of the Bill?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady is conflating two separate issues. Let me be very clear with her on yesterday's debate that she says, had the Opposition won, would have revoked the tuition fees rise. The 40-day annulment period is set out in the Statutory Instruments Act 1946, not in Standing Orders, so it is an entirely separate point. [Interruption.] Yes, it is an entirely separate point.

On the hon. Lady's question about scrutinising secondary legislation under Brexit legislation during the course of this Parliament, Ministers are listening very carefully. As my right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary said on Monday night in response to questions from this House, we are looking very carefully at what more can be done to reassure Members that secondary legislation that has a more significant impact than merely to change little bits of wording here and there can be properly scrutinised by all Members. We are looking very carefully at what we can do.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): During the summer, I met Renfrewshire charity No Strings Attached, which supports young asthma sufferers to self-manage their condition by improving

their knowledge of asthma and by teaching them a wind instrument. May we have a debate on how we better support organisations such as No Strings Attached?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising such an important issue. Asthma is often taken very lightly by people, but it is a very serious condition with very serious implications if it is not properly taken care of, so anything that can be done to highlight its importance is welcome. I myself have a son who has suffered from asthma, and it something that we worry about quite considerably. I urge the hon. Gentleman to use the opportunities that he has for an Adjournment debate or a proposal to the Backbench Business Committee to raise this important issue.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Is it true, as quoted on Twitter by Paul Waugh and briefed elsewhere, that Government MPs are no longer expected to vote in the—very, very rare—Opposition day debates? I think the last one was in January. I know that the Leader of the House has been asked this several times, so she might want to consider answering with a yes or a no.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I certainly think we should consider changing Standing Orders to suggest to hon. Members that they do not take their facts from Twitter. The hon. Lady's information is from Twitter, so it is, by definition, not Government policy and not therefore to be relied on.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): Reinforcing the points made by my hon. Friends the Member for High Peak (Ruth George) and for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova), may we have an urgent debate in Government time about the confidence of DWP decision makers in the rules they work under? The Leader of the House may recall that I raised a case last week. I have had another case in my constituency where the DWP rejected a request from a constituent to do a paper assessment, even though this constituent has severe mental health and learning difficulties, placing her in the lowest 1%. I sometimes wonder whether those in the DWP are intent on inflicting pain and misery when their time could be better spent helping others. May we have a debate or a statement about their qualities?

**Andrea Leadsom:** It is important to set out that this Government are absolutely committed to supporting disabled people. That is why we are spending over £50 billion a year in 2017-18 on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions—up by more than £7 billion since 2010. We are trying to focus the support on those with the most severe conditions. I absolutely recall that the hon. Gentleman raised a particular issue with me. We all know that unfortunately we sometimes have to put an extra case for a particular constituency case that we feel has gone wrong. I will always help hon. Members if they feel they are not being listened to on individual cases, but the overarching policy of trying to help people with disabilities more is the right one.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): Infertility is a disease, never a lifestyle choice, and access to treatment should not be a postcode lottery—yet it is. A number of clinical commissioning groups across the country are deciding

no longer to offer free cycles of IVF, and the Government do not appear to be interested in enforcing the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance. Could we have a debate or a statement from the Government on this very important issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I certainly agree with the hon. Lady that infertility is heart-breaking for so many people. I have had constituency cases myself where people have tried to get infertility treatment and not been able to do so. I absolutely sympathise with the point that she makes. I urge her to use all the opportunities she has to raise this very significant issue.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): During the summer recess, I was informed that the hours for the phone lines for the Scotland and Northern Ireland inquiry team at UK Visas and Immigration were temporarily reduced to 11 am to 4 pm. On 31 August, this was further reduced by half an hour. Thirty per cent. of my caseload is immigration cases, and this restriction is making it very difficult for me and my staff to support constituents with complex cases, including asylum issues, removals and visas. How long will this unacceptable situation continue? Four and a half hours to serve 77 MPs is just not enough. May we have a debate on staffing levels and capacity in UKVI?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady did not give me prior notice of her question, which I am interested to hear. I also heavily use the MPs' hotline she mentions to try to make progress with cases. I have always found it to be very efficient, and we are able to make progress quite quickly. If she would like to write to me, I am happy to take it up, but she might find it quicker to put in a notification to the Home Office that she intends to ask a question at Home Office questions.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Last week, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs published a report noting that addiction services are facing disproportionate and severe cuts in funding, hitting the amount and quality of treatment across England. May we have a statement or a debate on how the Government are going to respond to the report and address the problem?

**Andrea Leadsom:** This is a very important subject that we try to address as a Government to do all we can to help people to end their addictions. It is absolutely vital that we do that. The Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 was designed to ensure that we can get on top of new addictive substances as they emerge. The hon. Gentleman is right to raise this point. I am sure that the Government will respond to the report as soon as we can.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): This morning, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), informed me that my constituents were very satisfied with the service they were receiving from Greater Manchester police. Sadly, nothing could be further from the truth. My constituents regularly contact me about their fears and concerns for their safety, from the lack of visible policing to difficulties with the 101 system. May we have an urgent debate on funding and resources for Greater Manchester police?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises an issue that affects MPs right across the country. Members of the public always feel nervous about crime, quite understandably, regardless of the facts of the case. Their concern can be sometimes with good cause, and sometimes without. As the hon. Lady knows, she can speak to her police and crime commissioner and take the matter up locally, or she can do so directly with the Department if she feels as though she is not getting proper answers.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): My constituent Mr John Foley is asking, as are many others, for a general debate or a statement from the Government on sepsis awareness. Does the Leader of the House agree that the Government must expand and promote awareness of this potentially deadly condition?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and he will be aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) almost died of sepsis. This subject is live in the Government, and we are looking at it carefully. An estimated 37,000 people die every year as a result of sepsis, and every death is a tragedy. We need to get much better at spotting sepsis right across the NHS, and the NHS England commissioning for quality and innovation scheme for sepsis incentivises providers to improve identification and timely treatment. As the Prime Minister said in Prime Minister's questions yesterday, we will be doing all we can to encourage better identification and early diagnosis.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): This week, the Government announced a badger cull in Cheshire. The scientific evidence shows that a vaccination programme would be far more effective, but the Government insist on carrying out this cruel and barbaric practice contrary to the science. Can we have a debate, please, on why the Government insist on operating in this way?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I know from my time as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the science is not entirely clear. There is very clear qualitative evidence that culling badgers reduces the incidence of bovine tuberculosis. We know that badgers carry bovine TB, and that there is a worldwide shortage of the vaccine that could be used for badgers. World guidelines state that we should not be using that vaccine—it is a human vaccine—on badgers for the time being.

There is a lot of work going on in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to make sure that the culling is humanely carried out under very strict conditions and supervision. I think that we must allow the best science to prevail, because bovine TB is destroying farmers' livelihoods and their lives. It is heartbreaking to see the stories of farmers who are trying to deal with having to have their whole herd culled as a result of one breakout of bovine TB. It is not something that we can just ignore.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Can we have a statement on tax evasion by websites such as Amazon? Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs believes that Amazon is being obstructive about providing data that would

[Nick Smith]

make it possible to crack down on fraud. When are the Government going to stop this digital giant helping to rip off the taxpayer?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that HMRC has been enormously successful in its compliance measures against avoidance and evasion, and that since 2010 it has achieved more than £150 billion of revenue from its work in this area. The Government are working hard to tackle online VAT fraud, and we have announced joint and several liability from September 2016 as part of a package of Budget measures to tackle VAT fraud in online sales. The problem is a complex international one, but the UK is the first country to introduce a power making online marketplaces jointly and severally liable for the unpaid VAT of overseas sellers. We are leading the world in this work, but there is more to do. I share the hon. Gentleman's disgust at any company that seeks to avoid taxes in such a way.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Devonport-based HMS Ocean is doing a superb job as part of the response to Hurricane Irma, but despite having proven its worth, the ship is due to be scrapped. The new carriers cannot replicate the unique role of HMS Ocean in littoral waters. Can the Government bring forward a debate about the risk of losing littoral helicopter carrier capabilities when HMS Ocean is scrapped or sold?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman will have heard the statement in the last two weeks by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on shipbuilding in the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman will therefore be aware that this is an expanding area and a great UK story. In Scotland, and in the south-west and the north of England, we are expanding our shipbuilding to become a great naval force again, and there are big opportunities. He may well wish to take up his specific point at Ministry of Defence orals.

## Local Housing Need

12.25 pm

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the latest stage of our work to fix this country's broken housing market.

As I told the House in February when I published our housing White Paper, successive Governments all the way back to the Wilson era have failed to get enough new homes built. We are making some progress on tackling that: 189,000 homes were delivered last year and a record number of planning permissions granted, but if we are to make a lasting change and build the homes we need to meet both current and future demand, we need a proper understanding of exactly how many homes are required, and where.

The existing system for determining the number of new homes needed in each area is simply not good enough. It relies on assessments commissioned by individual authorities according to their own requirements and carried out by expensive consultants using their own methodologies. The result is an opaque mishmash of figures that are consistent only in their complexity. Such a piecemeal approach simply does not give an accurate picture of housing need across the country. Nor does it impress local people who see their area taking on a huge number of new homes, while a town on the other side of a local authority boundary barely expands at all.

If we are to get the right number of homes built in the right places, we need an honest, open and consistent approach to assessing local housing need, and that is exactly what we are publishing today. The approach that we are putting out for consultation follows three steps. The first step is to use household growth projections published by the Office for National Statistics to establish how many new homes will be needed to meet rising need. I should point out that those projections already take account of a substantial fall in net migration after March 2019, but that number simply shows the bare minimum that will be required in order to stand still. If we only meet rising demand, we will do nothing to fix the broken housing market, a situation caused by the long-term failure to match supply with demand.

The second step, therefore, is to increase the required number of homes in less affordable areas. In any area where average house prices are more than four times average earnings, we will increase the number of homes planned. The assessment goes up by 0.25% for every 1% that the affordability ratio rises above four. Of course, the state of the housing market means that in some areas, doing so would deliver large numbers of homes that go well beyond what communities have previously agreed to as part of their local plans.

That is why we have added a third stage of the assessment, which is to set a cap on the level of increase that local authorities should plan for. If a local authority has an adopted local plan that is less than five years old, the increase will be capped at 40% above the figure in the local plan. If the plan is not up to date, the cap will be 40% above either the level in the plan or the ONS projected household growth for the area, whichever is higher.

Those three steps will provide a starting point for an honest appraisal of how many homes an area needs, but it should not be mistaken for a hard and fast target. There will be places where constraints, such as areas of outstanding natural beauty or national parks, mean that there is not enough space to meet local need. Other areas may find that they have more than enough room, and they may be willing and able to take on unmet need from neighbouring authorities.

Such co-operation between authorities is something that I want to see a lot more of. To the frustration of town planners, local communities are much more fluid than local authority boundaries. People who live on one side of a line may well work on the other, communities at the edge of a county may share closer ties and more infrastructure with a community in the neighbouring county than they do with another town that is served by their own council, and so on.

From talking to the people who live in these kinds of communities, it is clear that they get frustrated by plans based on lines on a map, rather than on their day-to-day, real-life experience. Planning authorities are already under a duty to co-operate with their neighbours, but that duty is not being met consistently. Today, therefore, we are also publishing a statement of common ground, a new framework that will make cross-boundary co-operation more transparent and more straightforward. Under our proposals, planning authorities will have 12 months to set out exactly how they are working with their counterparts across their housing market area to meet local need and to make up any shortfalls.

The methodology that we are publishing today shows that the starting point for local plans across England should be 266,000 homes per year. Nationwide, this represents a 5% increase on the upper end of local authority estimates, showing that the local planning system is broadly on target. For almost half of the authorities for which we have data, the new assessment of need is within 20% either way of their original estimate. Nearly half—148—will actually see a fall in their assessments, which are going down by an average of 28%. In the other 156 areas, where the assessed need will increase, the average rise is 35%, but in most cases the increase will be more modest: 77 authorities see an increase of more than 20%.

We are not attempting to micromanage local development. This is not a return to Labour's ineffective and unpopular top-down regional strategies, which we abolished in 2010. It will be up to local authorities to apply these estimates in their own areas; we are not dictating targets from on high. All we are doing is setting out a clear, consistent process for assessing what may be needed in the years to come. How to meet the demand, whether it is possible to meet the demand, where to develop, where not to develop, what to develop, how to work with neighbouring authorities and so on remain decisions for local authorities and local communities.

New homes do not exist in a bubble. New households need new school places, new GP surgeries, greater road capacity and so on. That is why earlier this year we launched our new housing infrastructure fund. Worth a total of £2.3 billion, it ensures that essential infrastructure is built alongside the new homes that we need so badly. We will explore bespoke housing deals with authorities that serve high-demand areas and have a genuine ambition

to build, and we are providing further support to local authority planning departments with a £15 million capacity fund.

Those are our proposals, but experience tells me that as soon as I sit down, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) will leap to his feet, bang his fist on the Dispatch Box and tell us that today's announcement is not enough and that it will not get homes built—and you know what, Madam Deputy Speaker, he will be absolutely right. These measures alone will not fix our broken housing market. I make no claim that they will. As the White Paper made clear, we need action on many fronts, and this new approach is one of them. On its own, it will simply provide us with numbers, but taken with the other measures outlined in the White Paper, it marks a significant step in helping to meet our commitment to deliver 1 million new homes by 2020 and a further 500,000 by 2022.

It is so important that we fulfil such a commitment because the young people of 21st-century Britain are reaching out, in increasing desperation, for the bottom rung of the housing ladder. For the comfortably housed children of the '50s, '60s and '70s to pull up that ladder behind them would be nothing less than an act of intergenerational betrayal that our children and grandchildren will never forget or forgive. If we are to avoid that and if we are to fix the broken market and build the homes that the people of this country need and deserve, we—all of us together—must start with an honest, open, objective assessment of what is needed and where. Today's publication provides the means for making that assessment, and I commend it to the House.

12.34 pm

**John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): The country has a housing crisis, and Ministers are tinkering with the technicalities of the planning system. I thank the Secretary of State for the early copy of his statement, but 70% of people now see that the country has a housing crisis, and they are right: everyone knows someone who cannot get the home they need or aspire to. Home ownership has hit a 30-year low, homelessness is soaring and just 1,000 new homes for social rent were started last year under this Government, directly as a result of policy decisions taken by Conservative Ministers since 2010. There have been seven years of failure on all fronts. Not just the public but his own party expect more of the Secretary of State. Even the Prime Minister knows that housing was a big reason why Conservatives did so badly in the election.

Some of what the Secretary of State has announced today will be useful to help to underpin the national planning policy framework, albeit five years after it was adopted, but we cannot meet local housing needs without new homes of all types—from new homes to buy to new homes for affordable social rent—and securing planning permissions is only a small part of the answer. There were 300,000 planning permissions granted last year, yet the level of new affordable house building has hit a 24-year low.

The Secretary of State is right that the duty to co-operate is not working in a system in which there has been no strategic planning since 2010, so how is another plan going to help, even if it is called a statement of common ground? What will he do after 12 months if

[John Healey]

local authorities do not meet his deadline? It is sensible to have a standard method of assessing housing need, and the national housing and planning advice unit had one until 2010, when it was abolished. Will the new method apply from April 2018, as the White Paper promised, and if not, when will it apply? Lack of a standard method causes delay in producing local plans, and that is part of the reason why it now takes months longer to adopt a local plan than it did in 2010. How much quicker will these changes make the plan-making process?

At the heart of this is a new national formula that fixes housing numbers for local areas. The Secretary of State tells us that it is not a hard and fast target, yet local plans must meet the new numbers, and in more than half the country the numbers will go up by at least a third. What is it—tough action or warm words, a big stick or small beer? What action will follow a local authority's failure to use the numbers in delivering the local plan? How many local authorities will at present meet and how many will fail to meet the new housing delivering test that he set out in the White Paper, and how many Conservative councils will fail his housing delivery test? Why did he make no mention of it at all in his statement?

One advantage of having the statement in advance was that I noticed the Secretary of State failed to mention one of the constraints that may mean these numbers do not need to be adopted. The green belt is in his script, but he failed to mention it in the House. Will he make it clear whether he meant to leave out any mention of the green belt?

Finally, people are looking for big action from the Government to fix the broken housing market and housing policy failures. They are looking for leadership to tackle the housing crisis. After seven years of failure, simply fine-tuning the detailed workings of the planning system falls dismally short of what the country needs.

**Sajid Javid:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his entirely predictable remarks. If I heard him correctly, he talked about tinkering with our broken housing market and about failure in the housing policy changes. I think he was referring to the 13 years of the Labour Government, in which he served as Housing Minister, and under which Britain reached the lowest level of housing starts since the 1920s. During those 13 years, housing starts declined by 45%, waiting lists increased by more than 1 million and the number of units available for social rent was cut by 420,000. This House will not take any lectures from him; that is his legacy. I readily admit that there is much more to do, but we have made serious progress over the past seven years—more than 893,000 new homes, including 333,000 new affordable homes, and planning permissions last year were at a record high. Of course, there is much more to do, and that is what today's statement is about.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the statement of common ground. The requirement is to build on the duty to co-operate. We want to ensure that every local authority is doing just that—working with its neighbours, but in a much more transparent and open way. They must show their communities exactly how they are going to work with all their neighbours. He will see that

the consultation sets out in detail exactly how that will work, but one of the first requirements will be that, within 12 months of the planning changes being made, all local authorities will be required to publish a statement of common ground.

The right hon. Gentleman asked when the new way to assess housing need will apply. We hope to make the changes by April 2018, but the earliest they will apply will be April 2018. To be clear, if any local authority is close to finishing a plan based on its current methodology, and if that plan is submitted for inspection by April 2018, that will be the basis on which the inspector will consider the plan.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about the numbers—he referred to them as targets. I have been very clear that the numbers—the new way to assess housing need, which ensures that it is done properly and is more open, honest and transparent, and that there are more homes in the right places—will be the starting point for adopting new plans. When local authorities set out their plans and submit them to the independent planning inspector, they will be expected to have started with these numbers. If there is any difference from these numbers, they will have to explain that. For example, green belt, which the right hon. Gentleman asked about, is a perfectly valid reason, because protections are provided for the green belt, areas of outstanding natural beauty and national parks. Local authorities can say, “These are some natural constraints that I have. How can you help me work with them?”

The right hon. Gentleman also asked me about the delivery tests. I did not mention them because they are not part of the consultation. They were consulted on for the White Paper. The White Paper was the consultation for the delivery tests, and it will be introduced, as planned, in 2018.

The right hon. Gentleman has a choice. He knows that his party failed the British people abysmally on housing for 13 years; it took us backwards, not forwards. Now he has the chance to put that right. He can either play party politics with this issue or he can listen to the British people and help us to fix this broken housing market.

**Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con):** I strongly welcome my right hon. Friend's introduction of a long overdue market affordability test. Does he agree that the answer to the shadow Secretary of State's question about the enforceability of these measures is that developers themselves, through the principle of sustainable development, will appeal and thereby enforce them if local authorities do not adapt their local plans to the new target?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments and his support for these measures. He is right in his assessment. As I said, the new numbers will be the starting point and, once determined, will be a material consideration in making planning decisions.

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. In his analysis of the housing problem that England faces, he referred to the housing market and rungs of the ladder, but that reference to a market strikes me as the problem. As we move through life, our housing needs



change, so there is a spectrum of housing needs, rather than one ladder that people go up and down, and which is entirely based on the purchase of property. We need to look at the whole mix of housing available to people right across the UK.

The Secretary of State mentioned the changes to local plans. I ask that he speak to the Minister with responsibility for housing in the Scottish Government, Kevin Stewart. We have a system called strategic housing investment plans, in which local authorities set out investment priorities for affordable housing, demonstrate how they will be delivered, identify resources and enable the involvement of key partners. That co-operation with a range of key partners makes the system something that Secretary of State might want to look at in more depth.

The Secretary of State failed to mention the right to buy, which has driven this crisis in England by reducing the housing stock. Those houses have not been replaced. Since the Scottish Government brought in right to buy, we have kept 15,000 homes in the social rented sector and have protected that stock for the use of future generations, which is absolutely vital.

The Government are making house building in the social rented sector more difficult; in particular, the 1% rent cap at a stroke reduced the ability of social rented housing providers to carry on with their investment plans. They may have had things that they wanted to do in the pipeline, but cuts to their resources may have significantly reduced their ability to carry them out. I urge the Secretary of State to reconsider the 1% cap.

It is important that the Secretary of State looks at the full spectrum of housing, not just at the market—that is, houses to purchase. If he does not, the UK Government will continue to fail so many people who are in vital housing need.

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady makes a number of points, many of which were covered in the housing White Paper published in February. If she has not found the time to read it yet, she might want to do so, and if she has, she might want to re-familiarise herself with it. She talked about having the right mix of homes, and of course she is absolutely right. We must make sure that as local plans are developed, they take account of the needs of older people, young families and others. That set of changes was articulated through the White Paper.

The hon. Lady also mentioned right to buy and the Scottish National party's opposition to people having the right to buy their own home—I am sure that her constituents heard that. One big difference between her and the Scottish Government's approach on the one hand, and that of the Conservative party on the other, is that we believe that everyone should have the right to own their own home.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, but can he elucidate the rather confused position in London regarding the Mayor of London, the London boroughs and the surrounding boroughs? There seems to be a complete lack of co-operation in determining the number of affordable properties for sale and rent, although there is desperate need. In particular, can he look at central London, where property prices are beyond the capacity of anyone on a reasonable salary or wage?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight London. He will know from his experience and will have heard from his constituents that some of the greatest need in our country is in our great capital city. There is a need for greater co-operation, but the statement of common ground will help significantly by bringing greater transparency and more certainty, and it will force councils to co-operate much earlier in the process. One of the issues with the current duty to co-operate is that it tends to happen at the end of the process. This will ensure that that important dialogue begins right at the start.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): Following that answer, we are talking not just about the number of housing units, but about who needs them. If the Secretary of State relies only on private developers to build houses in areas of high land values, such as London, we will not build houses at affordable rents in which people can live while they save to become house buyers. The Government have to step in and start building social housing again at rents that people can afford in areas of high land values, so that we can really mend the broken housing ladder.

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Gentleman might like to reflect on what I said earlier. When his party was last in power, social units declined by 420,000; I do not think many Members can remember him saying similar things then. If he really means what he says this time, he should agree with what he has heard today and what he has read in the housing White Paper published in February—I hope he has read it. We very much agree that there needs to be diversified supply in the market. It is not just about the private sector, although it has a hugely important role to play; we need more small and medium-sized builders in the market. We need to help housing associations, which currently account for almost a third of housing starts, to do even more. Where ambitious councils want to build more homes, we are ready to work with them.

**Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): The written statement says that there will be places, such as areas of outstanding natural beauty or green belt, where constraints mean that there is not enough space to meet local need. As the Opposition spokesman pointed out, my right hon. Friend omitted a reference to green belt in the written statement; was that a slip of the tongue or intentional? He instead inserted the phrase “national parks”. If it was a slip of the tongue, will he issue a ministerial correction?

**Sajid Javid:** I can assure my hon. Friend that we have been absolutely clear, and I am happy to be clear again: green belt rightly has a significant amount of protection in planning policy. What we have said today, and what we have put in the White Paper, changes absolutely none of that. We are committed to maintaining those protections; existing protections will in no way change. As I made clear in the statement and in my response to the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), when the new housing assessment is done, one constraint for local authorities could well be green belt. For others, it could be national parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty. It could be a combination of them. Some might apply to a single

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local authority. One of our building priorities has always been to prioritise brownfield land, and that does not change.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The Secretary of State has made a statement today that acknowledges the depth of the housing crisis and the broken nature of housing supply in the UK. Throughout the passage of the Homelessness Reduction Bill last year, Ministers consistently claimed that they would need to fund the implementation of the Act for only two years, because the Act would solve homelessness within that time. A National Audit Office report this year makes it clear that the homelessness crisis is deepening and that the Government's light-touch approach is simply inadequate to the task. Will the Secretary of State now commit to proper and continuing funding for the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, so that councils have the resources that they need now to support everyone who requires help with their housing?

**Sajid Javid:** I am proud of the Government's support for the Homelessness Reduction Act. When it comes into force, it will help in many ways and make a big difference, but it will do so alongside all the other measures the Government are rightly taking to tackle homelessness. We are committed to spending £550 million for the five years to 2020. That commitment stays, but we are always looking to see what more we can do. That is why, in our recent election manifesto, we committed to Housing First pilots.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome today's announcement. I believe it will help to fix not only the national housing market but an issue in my area. Will the Secretary of State confirm that where two local authorities—in this case, Ryedale and Hambleton—have local plans in place to deliver on need, but one local authority that borders them has no local plan, the Government will step in and write that local plan for it?

**Sajid Javid:** The new statement of common ground will require all local authorities, including those that do not have plans in place, to set out within 12 months exactly how they will co-operate and work with their neighbours. My hon. Friend highlights powers that we have taken in this House that would allow the Government to direct a local authority—for example, a county council—to do a plan for them if it will not do it. We will not hesitate to use those powers where necessary.

**Graham P. Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): I just think the Government's policy is a shambles. In the Rossendale part of my constituency, the Government have imposed a target of some 5,000 properties, and I presume they will propose another target, yet in the other half of my constituency there are 2,000 empty properties. There are 750,000 empty properties in the country. Nothing has been said about that. We have had no regeneration of empty properties. We have shops lying empty that could be used for the housing crisis, but we have heard nothing about that either. The Government have an incoherent programme. When are they going to do something about empty housing, and when are they going to have a coherent housing policy?

**Sajid Javid:** There is a huge role for the hon. Gentleman's local authority to play, so he should be putting those questions to it about what it intends to do. On vacant homes, the number of long-term vacant homes in England is approximately 600,000. That is the lowest number recorded in a decade, so we have already made substantial progress. There is, of course, a lot more to do, but he should give the Government some credit for doing work that should have been done by a previous Government.

**Mr Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk) (Con): Since the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 was passed by Parliament, some 25,000 people have registered their interest in getting a serviced plot of land to build their own house. Is the Secretary of State aware of how much further this could go, including as regards affordable social rent through group self-build, as I have seen personally in the Netherlands and in Germany? Will he work with the Right to Build Task Force to ensure that this sector plays the fullest possible role in helping people to achieve their dreams?

**Sajid Javid:** I very much look forward to working with the taskforce. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his work over a number of years in promoting self-build. He has made considerable progress. He will know that in the housing White Paper we wanted to reflect the need to make sure that local authorities consider self-build as we diversify the housing market. I look forward to working with him and to helping to enable that.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): I acknowledge that assessing housing need properly is an important first step, but it does not deliver the houses that need to be built. A blame game over which Government failed to build those houses is not helpful; we are where we are. Is it not now important to lift the borrowing cap for local authorities, so that the houses can actually be built? That would rectify the ludicrous situation whereby local authorities can invest in properties in other areas for income purposes, but cannot invest in their own area.

**Sajid Javid:** I agree that having a new, proper way to assess housing need will not in itself solve our housing problems, but it is an essential step. Alongside it, many others are required. For example, one hon. Member mentioned a delivery test. A number of such steps are set out in the housing White Paper. The hon. Lady asked specifically about the borrowing cap on housing revenue accounts. There is currently over £4 billion of headroom for borrowing, so local councils collectively can borrow more if they wish and if they have prudent, sensible plans. I have been clear that where local authorities believe that the borrowing cap is in the way of their ambitions to build more, they should come and talk to us because we want to do deals with them.

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Secretary of State is right to recognise the importance of infrastructure in underpinning the delivery of housing—not just local infrastructure, which is referred to in the statement, but major transport infrastructure unlocking brownfield housing land. The classic case is Crossrail 2 in London, which has the ability to deliver some 200,000 homes, overwhelmingly on brownfield land, in London and the wider south-east. Will he stress the importance to his colleagues the Transport Secretary

and the Chancellor of an early commitment to pressing ahead with that infrastructure project to deliver homes, in accordance with these proposals?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend speaks with considerable experience, and I thank him for all the work he did when he was Minister with responsibility for planning to enable more homes to be built. He rightly points out another major issue. He is absolutely right that this relates to all kinds of infrastructure—not just the local GP surgery or a new school, but major types of infrastructure such as transport. I reassure him that I am working very closely with my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary. We are considering how every major decision we make can be used to enable us to build more homes.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): A growing number of people in the private rented sector are, for a variety of reasons, unable to buy a home of their own. Local authorities consider them to be adequately housed, which means they cannot access affordable housing either, so they are effectively trapped in the private rented sector. What will the Government do to help them?

**Sajid Javid:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman that many people feel trapped in private rented accommodation. The amount of rent they are paying—in London, rents are more than 50% of average earnings after tax—means that many feel unable even to save for a deposit. I therefore hope that he can support today's announcement because it takes into account affordability in local areas, with an adjustment for areas where more homes need to be built. In the longer term, that will help to improve affordability.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): The South Hams has one of the highest house prices to earnings ratios in the country. I know that the Secretary of State wants to help young people to get on the housing ladder by introducing the earnings ratio, but that will be of no help to young people in my constituency if all the homes become second homes. Will he set out his plans to deal with areas of exceptionally high second home ownership?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. She will know that schemes are already in place to help people to get on the housing ladder, such as the Help to Buy scheme, which has helped more than 400,000 people. On her specific point about second homes, measures have already been introduced but, as she highlights, this issue needs to be considered carefully and kept under review to see what more we can do.

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): First, can my local authority of Gateshead be first in line to talk to the Secretary of State about lifting the debt cap? We are at the top of it, but the council has realistic plans for further development. Secondly, what proposals does he have for regeneration? In my constituency, and in Gateshead generally, there are large areas of brownfield land—he mentioned those—that we are keen to develop, but there are constraints owing to the value of the land and the cost of builders. What can he do about that?

**Sajid Javid:** Gateshead had a fantastic opportunity last year to be part of the first wave of devolution deals. That would have led to a housing deal and more funds for investment in infrastructure, which would have unlocked housing, but the local council decided that it did not want to do that deal. The hon. Lady therefore should ask her local authority why it turned down an opportunity that would have helped to bring homes to her area. On what more can be done since that opportunity was passed up, the local government Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), will be more than happy to meet her and the authority to discuss the matter further.

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): Much of the objection to new development in East Devon and elsewhere in the country is based on the inappropriateness of design and the fact that new developments often pay no attention to the local vernacular. What can my right hon. Friend do, particularly with the large house builders, to make sure that designs take into account the local vernacular, to make sure we have good design and to unleash the potential of small house builders, which often build better and more cheaply?

**Sajid Javid:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is not just about the quantity of homes; their quality and design are hugely important too, because if that is right, local communities can understandably be more accepting of development. He asks what I can do. We set out a number of things in the White Paper, including a requirement when local plans are developed to reserve land only for small builders, to make sure they have a fairer crack at getting land parcels for development. We have also announced a measure today, however, which I hope he will welcome. We will allow local authorities to increase their planning fees by 20% after regulations have been laid in the autumn, which will mean up to £75 million of extra resources for planning authorities. That is essential, too, because if local authorities have more resources, they can look at designs more seriously when they get planning applications.

**Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): Given that the number of homeowners under 45 has fallen by 900,000 since 2010, what is the Secretary of State doing to increase the supply of homes for low-cost ownership?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady is right to talk about the need to make it easier for people to own their own homes. In the long term, we will help with that through measures such as those announced today and an honest assessment of housing need. In the shorter and medium term, measures that are already in place, such as the Help to Buy scheme, are helping millions of people, particularly younger people, to own their own homes.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): I strongly welcome the measures that have been set out today, particularly the statement of common ground, given the development of Harlow North by Places for People. My right hon. Friend recognises the need for more social housing. Will he consider tax incentives for housing associations so that more can be built?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his support. He is right to point out the need for more co-operation between local authorities. He asks about

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social housing. The Budget included a significant increase in support to housing associations for the excellent work they do, and we want to see what more we can do to support them. I will certainly look carefully at his suggestion.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I warmly commend the seriousness with which the Secretary of State is taking housing need, but may I ask him about quality and particularly the issue of zero-bills homes? These can be built affordably and attractively, as I have seen for myself at the Building Research Establishment in Watford, and for much less than I think some of the big developers might have told him.

**Sajid Javid:** Like my hon. Friend, I have seen some excellent examples of innovative design and build, and it is certainly something we want to encourage. We have consulted in the White Paper on how to take that further, but I will be happy to talk to him if he has specific ideas about what more can be done.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): The excellent Secretary of State will know that both councils in my constituency have taken on board the need to build more houses, but there is one problem: the Isham bypass. For the Wellingborough North development, the bypass needs to be completed. I know this is not the responsibility of his Department, but he did say that he worked closely with the Transport Secretary, so could he arrange for a letter to be sent—if he does not have the answer now—confirming when the bypass is to be completed, so that we can carry on with the expansion of housing?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend highlights the importance of infrastructure to building the right number of homes. He asks me specifically about the Isham bypass. I will happily speak to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and get back to him.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): The rate of house building in Stafford is more than double the national average, in accordance with a robust local plan, but the local council often has to waste time challenging speculative developments. I would like to hear what the Secretary of State has to say about that. Just as importantly, what are his views on modern methods of construction, which have been referred to already, and in particular on the kind of financing available? I understand from the Building Societies Association that there are sometimes difficulties in financing these new, modern, cost-effective and energy-efficient buildings.

**Sajid Javid:** I have discussed this previously with my hon. Friend, who rightly takes an interest in the matter. He will know from the housing White Paper that if we are truly to solve our housing problems, we need to be much more serious about innovative methods of construction—more modular and factory-build content, for example. Many developers are taking that more seriously, but we are setting out ways of making it more pervasive throughout the country.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's assurance that councils that have submitted their local plans for approval will not be

affected by what he has announced. Cheshire East Council has worked extremely hard to submit its plan, so I do not want that work to be undone.

May I also invite the Secretary of State to look at Weaver Vale housing trust, which set aside £9.6 million for final salary pension provision but delivered only 16 affordable houses in my area? Affordable housing and the conduct of housing associations need to be considered if we are to deliver affordable homes as well as homes to buy.

**Sajid Javid:** I assure my hon. Friend that the changes will not apply when local authorities have already submitted their plans for inspection, or will do so before next March. As for Weaver Vale housing trust, I will take a closer look at it.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): The Secretary of State mentioned immigration assumptions in his statement. Even if we reduced net immigration to zero today, it would not alter the fact that our population is heading for a total of 70 million by 2030, so more and more of our open countryside will be built on. One of the Secretary of State's predecessors told the House that immigration was responsible for 42% of all new housing needs. What is that percentage today, and what immigration assumptions has the Secretary of State made?

**Sajid Javid:** I am not able to give my hon. Friend the percentage for which he asks, but I will happily get back to him. It would be inappropriate for me to try to guess the figure, but I know that it is still a substantial proportion of our housing demand. My hon. Friend also asked me what account had been taken of the numbers that he gave. The new assessment method starts with the annual household growth figures published by the Office for National Statistics, and its latest figures assume a 39% reduction in net migration from 2016 levels over the next five years.

**Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): I welcome the statement and the consistency that is being sought, because getting those housing need numbers produced has imposed a real burden on communities and local authorities in the past. I welcome the effort that the Government are making to put the right amount of housing in the right place. Will my right hon. Friend be giving any guidance to the Planning Inspectorate in respect of the assessment of five-year housing land supplies for authorities that have already put their local plans in place, given that, according to his announced formula for housing need, it might be suggested that the numbers in those plans were too high? May I also ask how my right hon. Friend can persuade builders to utilise the permissions that they might have secured? Quite often it is their slowness rather than local authorities' unwillingness that is holding up delivery in the system.

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend asked about instances in which a local plan features a number that is higher than the number that the new assessment method would show. In all cases in which a plan is already in place and has been properly adopted, that will be the starting point, but once the changes have gone into the national planning policy framework, they can be used as a material consideration in planning decisions. I hope that that helps my hon. Friend.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his comments about the green belt and areas of outstanding natural beauty, both of which are reasons why Dorset is such a special place in which to live and work and to visit. Will he reaffirm the Government's position on the green belt, and reassure my constituents and the three local planning authorities that cover my constituency that protections are still in place?

**Sajid Javid:** I will happily reaffirm the Government's position. We remain absolutely committed to the protections that are already in the planning code. Nothing that I have announced today will change the protections that are rightly afforded to the green belt, or our demand that when it comes to development, the priority should always be brownfield.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I fully appreciate the problem of the unaffordability of housing, not least on the basis of my own casework, but the main concern in my area about development relates to the lack of infrastructure and, in particular, the failure to invest in the road network. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that councils plan for and seek investment in infrastructure in line with development? Does he recognise that there may be some need for investment from the infrastructure funds that he mentioned so that the infrastructure can catch up with housing that has already been built, as well as that which is planned?

**Sajid Javid:** I share my hon. Friend's concern. She is right to emphasise the need for the right infrastructure, and more infrastructure, if we are to have more homes. That is one of the reasons why we launched the £2.3 billion housing infrastructure fund earlier this year. I encourage my hon. Friend's council and others to apply to the fund, if they have not already done so.

The statement of common ground to which I have referred requires co-operation at the start of the process because much of the infrastructure, especially the major infrastructure, is naturally shared between local authorities. I think that that will also help to meet some of my hon. Friend's concerns.

## Schools: National Funding Formula

1.16 pm

**The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):** In my statement to the House on 17 July, I set out my Department's plans to increase spending on schools by £1.3 billion over the next two years, on top of our existing plans. I said that that would mean that we could press ahead with introducing a national funding formula for schools and high needs from April 2018 that would provide a per-pupil cash increase in respect of every school and every local area, and would also maintain the overall budget in real terms, per pupil. I promised to return to the House in September to set out the Government's final decisions on introducing fairer funding in full, and today I am doing just that.

This is an historic reform. It means that, for the first time, the resources that the Government are investing in our schools will be distributed according to a formula based on the individual needs and characteristics of every school in the country. Not only will the national funding formula direct resources where they are most needed, helping to ensure that all children can receive the high quality education that they deserve, wherever they live; it will also provide that money through a transparent formula, which will mean greater predictability. By clearly setting out the sums that we are directing to different aspects of the formula—to the basic amount per pupil, or to children with additional needs—it allows for properly informed debate on this vital topic, something that the existing opaque system has held back.

The need for reform has been widely recognised across the House and beyond. The National Association of Head Teachers has said:

"A revised funding formula for schools is essential".

The Association of School and College Leaders believes:

"The way in which funding has been distributed to schools has been flawed for many years... Reform of the school funding system is vital".

The case is so strong because there is manifest unfairness when Coventry receives £510 more per pupil than Plymouth, despite their having equal proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, and Nottingham attracts £555 more than Halton, near Liverpool in Cheshire. Addressing those simple but damaging inequalities will represent the biggest improvement in the school funding system for decades. It is a step that previous Governments have failed to take for far too long.

It has been vital for us to take account of a broad range of views when making such a significant reform. Our wide-ranging consultations, both in 2016 and earlier this year, allowed us to hear from more than 26,000 individual respondents and representative organisations. I am grateful to everyone who took the time to share their views and respond to the consultations, including many Members on both sides of the House. We have considered all those responses carefully.

As I said to the House in July, I am putting an additional £1.3 billion into core funding for schools and high needs, so that the overall budget will now rise by about £2.6 billion in total, from almost £41 billion in 2017-18 to about £42.4 billion in 2018-19 and £43.5 billion in 2019-20. Building on this firm foundation, I can today set out the final funding formulae we will introduce, which, over the next two years will mean we will deliver

*[Justine Greening]*

on our manifesto pledge to make school funding fairer and ensure that we deliver higher funding as well in respect of every area and school.

Building on our consultation proposals, as I set out in the House prior to the summer recess, I am increasing the basic amount of funding that every pupil will attract. We recognise the challenges of the very lowest funded schools so will introduce a minimum per pupil funding level. Under the national funding formula, in 2019-20 all secondary schools will attract at least £4,800 per pupil. Today I can announce that all primary schools will attract at least £3,500 per pupil through the formula in 2019-20. And the formula will provide these levels of funding quickly: secondary schools will attract at least £4,600, and primary schools £3,300, in 2018-19, and then the full amounts the following year.

I will also provide a cash increase in respect of every school. Final decisions on local distribution will be taken by local authorities, but under the national funding formula every school will attract at least 0.5% more per pupil in 2018-19, and 1% more in 2019-20, compared with its baseline. Many schools will, of course, attract significantly larger increases under the formula: up to 3% per pupil in 2018-19, and a further 3% per pupil in 2019-20. And the minimum per pupil funding level will not be subject to this gains cap, delivering particularly fast gains in respect of the very lowest funded schools.

Our consultation confirmed the importance of funding for additional needs—deprivation and low prior attainment. We know that these factors are our best way to identify the children who are most likely to fall behind, and to remain behind, their peers, and it is only right that we provide the greatest resources to the schools that face the greatest challenges. As I said in July, we will protect the funding the formula will direct towards additional needs at the level proposed in our consultation, and I can therefore confirm today that total spending on additional needs will be £5.9 billion.

As we proposed in December, we will distribute that funding more fairly and in line with the best available evidence. We will use a broad measure of deprivation to include all those who are likely to need extra help, and we will increase the proportion of additional needs spending allocated on the basis of low prior attainment, to give additional support to those who might not be economically deprived but still need help to catch up.

I can also confirm today that, as we proposed in December, the national funding formula will allocate a lump sum of £110,000 for every school. For the smallest, most remote schools, we will distribute a further £26 million in dedicated sparsity funding. Only 47% of eligible schools received sparsity funding in 2017-18 because some local authorities chose not to use this factor. Our national funding formula will recognise all eligible schools.

Our formula will rightly result in a significant boost directed towards the schools that are currently least well funded. Secondary schools, which would have been the lowest funded under our December proposals, will now gain on average 4.7%. Rural schools will gain on average 3.9%, with those schools in the most remote locations gaining 5%. Those schools with high numbers of pupils starting with low attainment will gain on average 3.8%.

As I set out in my statement in July, to provide stability for schools through the transition to the national funding formula, each local authority will continue to set a local formula, which will determine individual schools' budgets in their areas in 2018-19 and 2019-20, in consultation with local schools. This means that the school-level allocations from Government I am publishing today, alongside this announcement, are notional allocations which we will use to set the total funding available for schools in each area. As I set out in the House, schools' final actual funding allocations for 2018-19 and 2019-20 will be based on that local formula agreed in their area by the local authority, and schools will receive that allocation ahead of the new financial year, as normal. I will put copies of both documents in the House of Commons Library, and the Lords.

Our objective to provide the best education for every child places a particular focus on the support we offer to the children who face the greatest barriers to success, and on the high-needs budget that provides that support. The case for reform of high-needs funding is every bit as strong as the case for school funding reform, and therefore the move to a national funding formula is every bit as important. We set out full proposals for the introduction of a high-needs national funding formula last December, alongside our schools formula, and I am today confirming that we will proceed with those proposals.

Thanks to the additional £1.3 billion investment I announced in July, I can increase funding for high needs so that I will also be able to raise the funding floor to provide a minimum increase of 0.5% per head in 2018-19 and 1% per head in 2019-20 for every local authority. Underfunded local authorities will receive up to 3% per head gains a year for the next two years, to help them catch up. That is a more generous protection than we proposed in December, to help every single local authority maintain and improve the support it offers to some of our most vulnerable children. It means that local authorities will see a 4.6% increase on average in their high-needs budgets.

The additional £1.3 billion we are investing in schools and high needs means that all local authorities will receive an increase in 2018-19 over the amount they plan to spend in 2017-18. Local authorities will take the final decisions on distributing funding to schools within local areas, but the formula will provide for all schools to see an increase in funding compared with their baseline.

In conclusion, the new national funding formulae will redress historical inequities in funding that have existed for far too long, while also maintaining stability so that schools and local areas are not disadvantaged in the process. After too many years in which the funding system has placed our schools on an unfair playing field, we are finally making the decisive and historic move towards fair funding.

The national funding formulae for schools and high needs and the increased investment we are making in schools will help us continue to improve standards and create a world-class education system. No one in this House should accept the system as it has been; it has perpetuated inequality and that is unacceptable. I am proud that it is a Conservative Government who are now putting that right. On this firm foundation, we will all—Government and schools, teachers and parents—be

able to build a system that finally allows every child to achieve their potential, no matter what their background, or where they are growing up.

1.29 pm

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Once again on the last day before a recess we see the Secretary of State sneak out new policy. *[Interruption.]* I would hardly call that once in a national debate, but I wonder whether this statement has been put out today to try and hide and to distract from the fact that the Government are ripping up the rulebook on democracy, as they did yesterday in the debate on tuition fees. But of course, if this is a genuine change of heart, it is welcome. After all, the Secretary of State will be taking her policy directly from the pledges in the Labour party manifesto. Ever since she took office, we have been urging her to keep the promise her party made in 2015 to protect funding in real terms for every pupil.

Will the Secretary of State guarantee to the House that no school will be even a penny worse off in real terms—not cash terms—as a result of this funding formula? Will the proposal apply from this year or from 2015? The National Audit Office has found that schools have already lost nearly £2.7 billion since her party made that pledge. Members across the House have heard from schools that are already facing those cuts and that have had to beg parents to help them to find money and resources. Will she admit to the House that her announcement today does nothing to reverse those cuts and keep that promise?

The Secretary of State has said that her funding formula will increase per pupil funding by 0.5% a year until 2020, but the Education Policy Institute has found that in that period, inflationary pressures are over 2%, so will she admit that her funding formula will in fact mean a real-terms cut in school budgets? In today's statement she says that the formula provides “a per pupil cash increase in respect of every school and every local area”, so will she admit that there will be pupils, schools and local authorities that see a real-terms cut in funding by 2020? She has referred to transitional protections offered to schools. How long will the transition period last? Will it include protections against losses during that transition, and for how long will those protections last?

The Secretary of State said that the basic amount allocated to each secondary school pupil will be “at least £4,800 per pupil”, but the Education and Skills Funding Agency guidance describes this an “optional” part of the funding formula. Will she guarantee that all secondary schools will now receive £4,800 per pupil? Can she tell us how much this increase in the basic per pupil funding rate will cost each year, and how she will fund it? Today's announcement says that the minimum funding per primary school pupil will be £3,500. In December, the proposed basic per pupil funding in primary schools was £2,712, so again I ask: how much will the increase in basic per pupil funding cost, and how will it be funded?

None of the money announced so far is actually new money for education. Instead, the Secretary of State is simply cutting elsewhere to fill the black hole that the Government have created. Can she confirm that over £300 million of the supposedly new funding for schools

has actually come from cutting the healthy pupils fund by over 75%? That money was meant to be ring-fenced for school sports, healthier meals, facilities for disabled pupils and mental health provision, and it is only days since the Prime Minister claimed that this would be her new priority. Only in February this year, the Secretary of State promised in a statement that the fund would not fall below £415 million. Will she now apologise for breaking yet another promise?

This leaves another £100 million that must come from her main capital budget. Where will that come from? She has said that she will “reprioritise” £250 million in 2018-19 and £350 million in 2019-20. Where will those cuts fall? She has also said that she will “redirect” £200 million from “central programmes that support schools on relatively narrow areas of their work”. Will she tell us what those programmes and those narrow areas are? Or is the truth that she simply made up that number, hoping that her civil servants can find more cuts?

The July announcement went no further than 2020. What happens then? I will be glad if the Secretary of State has listened to us, and to parents and teachers across the country, and looked again at the funding formula, but the fact is that this does not meet the promises that she has made. When will she return to this House with the funding that her party promised the electorate?

**Justine Greening:** I want to start by adding a massive thank you to the Department for Education officials who have worked on this for many years. It has been a complex piece of work, and it has been looked at under many Governments. I want to put on record my thanks to the team.

On the points raised by the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), I had hoped, given the cross-party recognition of the need for school funding reform, that there might be a warmer welcome for this announcement. It is not just schools represented by Government Members that will gain from it; many in Opposition Members' constituencies have been equally underfunded. This is not a political issue; it is a question of ensuring that we fund children, wherever they are growing up in our country, in a consistent, transparent and fair fashion. That is what we are shifting towards today. This is not an uncomplicated thing, and we have worked really hard to make sure that schools that were already well funded will continue to remain well funded. However, this is also about making sure that schools that have traditionally been underfunded for a very long time can now start to catch up.

The hon. Lady asked a few questions. I think she misunderstood my point about ensuring that there is a minimum per pupil funding rate of £4,800 for secondary schools and £3,500 for primary schools. There are not many schools that are not at that minimum funding rate, but it is important for those that are below it that we address those issues through the consultation response. That is what we are doing today—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady asks what the guidance says. That guidance is for local authorities, as I have explained and as I hope she will understand. Local authorities currently set local formulae. We had already said, and I had hoped she might have recalled, that that will continue for 2018-19. When I came back to the House in July this

[*Justine Greening*]

year, I set out that that would also continue for 2019-20 because we believe that the right way to bring in a significant change in school funding is to work with local authorities. As part of the setting out of the final funding formula, we also set out a small but important element of flexibility for local authorities to respond to the changes as they come through and to nuance them to take account of local issues. That is where the optional element comes in. We are simply saying that it is right to give local authorities a modicum of flexibility to ensure that they can use the funding effectively on the ground.

We are being clear-cut about what the funding formula allocates to every single school in this country, and Members will be able to see those allocations. They will be able to sit down with their local authorities, and if they want the funding to go to those schools they will be able to ensure that it does. I expect that some local authorities will feel that the right thing to do is to get on with putting the funding formula in place at local level and that they will simply pass the money straight through to the schools. That is something that I would support, but it is important to have a small amount of flexibility while the formula comes in.

The hon. Lady asked about the fact that we are putting an extra £1.3 billion of additional funding into the core schools formula and budget. I felt it was important to do this. Over the past few years, we have challenged schools to try to find efficiencies, because we want to get the most out of every pound we put in. However, it is also important that I challenge the rest of my Department to do the same kind of exercise that we are asking schools and headteachers to do. I believe that doing that has enabled us to free up some additional resourcing that we can now push directly to headteachers in the frontline. Frankly, I am staggered that the hon. Lady thinks that that is a bad thing to do. Anyone in my role should be challenging their civil servants to try to work smarter and more efficiently to get money directly through to the frontline. That is yet another example of the hon. Lady doing nothing other than rant and produce rhetoric, and there is not a lot of thought behind that rhetoric about what is the right thing to do.

With that, I will sit down. I look forward to the contributions from hon. Members.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): I strongly welcome this announcement, particularly the help for the disadvantaged. This is social justice in action, and I look forward to discussing the measures with my right hon. Friend when she comes to the Education Committee on 25 October. Has an assessment been made of how much the pupil premium helps disadvantaged pupils in particular? How will the pupil premium sit alongside the national funding formula?

**Justine Greening:** We have been clear about protecting the funding that is going to the children we want to be able to catch up. Both the Education Endowment Foundation and Ofsted have done important, insightful work on the use of the pupil premium. It is important that we get the most out of that investment, and I think we are steadily understanding what works to help children who are falling behind to catch up. The transparency in the new formula means that we can now take a similar

approach on helping children catch up with the other money flowing through the core schools formula. In time, we can have a common strategy across the two budget elements. One of the most important things that we did in education in the previous Parliament, other than our general push to raise standards, was to identify that we needed to put funding against children who are at risk of falling behind, because that is how we will drive social mobility through education.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): In the Secretary of State's original funding formula proposals, schools in Durham were projected to lose out to £1,000 per pupil. Even with the additional resources, which are welcome, many school budgets in Durham will, at best, flatline. Will the Secretary of State guarantee today that no school in Durham will face a real-terms cut? In addition, when will she address the urgent need to rebuild many of our schools?

**Justine Greening:** First, as I set out today, there will be a minimum 0.5% cash increase per pupil for all schools in 2018-19, increasing to 1% by 2019-20, and that settlement is actually more generous than the Opposition manifesto commitment. Those schools are now doing better under our funding formula.

Secondly, we are investing huge amounts in our schools estate, not least through the condition improvement fund. We have managed to get ahead of the school places crisis that was left to us by the previous Labour Government. Ensuring that we have the school places in our system that children need is a major thing that we have done.

**Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): I welcome the changes to a system that was unfair, opaque and out of date. I am glad that the Secretary of State has listened to the headteachers, the governors, the MPs and the parents, who have asked that no school should be left behind and that those that have been dramatically underfunded should be able to catch up within two years, and I am glad that she has lifted the cap on the transition. Lastly, I recognise that quality of teaching is also important in addition to the funds, and I hope that teachers will recognise that this increase in funding acknowledges their contribution to the education of all our children.

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend is right that it is important that schools that have been underfunded for years while being held to account on exactly the same standards as every other school can catch up properly. As for the quality of teaching, the continued professional development of teachers and the teaching profession is an intrinsic part of school improvement and the two are inextricably linked. Today, we have announced the first successful bids to our teaching and leadership innovation fund, which is about ensuring that we lift up our teaching profession and is particularly directed towards schools in parts of the country where we know we can do better.

**Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State guarantee that no Liverpool school will receive a real-terms cut? Although the discretion given to local authorities is welcome, will she also



guarantee that that will not lead to Liverpool City Council being blamed for a cut coming from central Government?

**Justine Greening:** The Institute for Fiscal Studies has been clear that our £1.3 billion additional investment will lead to the per pupil core schools budget being protected in real terms, which is good news. As for the schools the hon. Lady mentions specifically, we will ensure that all Members get the breakdown of the notional allocations. I expect some local authorities to choose simply to reflect the national funding formula at a local level, but that will be a matter for them. I am sure that Members from across the House will want to have those discussions at a local level.

**Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con):** I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and look forward to additional financial resources for Stockport's schools. Much of the previous concern about school funding centred on the proportion of the basic amount per pupil, so will she comment further on that aspect of the new national funding formula?

**Justine Greening:** The basic amount will be going up and the proportion is broadly stable, but the bottom line is that the £1.3 billion extra in the core schools budget is principally going through that per-pupil amount, which is why it has been raised overall, and why I have chosen to protect the amount for additional needs.

**Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab):** At a meeting with the National Association of Head Teachers this week, headteachers told me that they face a teacher recruitment crisis, a school budget crisis and endless tinkering with assessment and the curriculum. Will the Secretary of State tell the House which of those she would like them to deal with first?

**Justine Greening:** As I said at the beginning of my statement, the NAHT welcomed the move to fair funding. As for teacher recruitment, part of the answer is to ensure that we are investing in teachers, and the NAO was clear that the Department is taking steps to ensure that we do just that.

**Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con):** I thank Ministers for meeting senior headteachers from my constituency, and for responding to their principal request, which is that to be truly fair to pupils across the country, and to cover school costs properly, school funding should include a minimum amount per pupil, wherever they live. I also thank Ministers for allocating £4,800 per pupil from 2019, which is exactly the amount that my headteachers recommended. Does that not show that this Government are not only listening, but acting?

**Justine Greening:** We have listened carefully and have had meetings with many Members from across the House. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards for holding many of those meetings alongside me. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and other Cheshire MPs have been tireless campaigners on behalf of their local communities and schools, and I have appreciated the comments, suggestions

and proposals. They carried weight, which is why they have been reflected in the final funding formula that I have set out today.

**Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab):** The shadow Secretary of State is absolutely right, because she listens to the voice of headteachers; 100 headteachers came to Parliament earlier this week and told heartbreaking stories of having to sack teachers and teaching assistants. One headteacher had had to sack the caretaker and, because he could not afford to replace them, was having to do some of the caretaker's duties himself.

I want to correct the Secretary of State. The NAHT said today that, while progress on the funding formula is welcome, "at least" £2 billion in additional resources is necessary, without which they will have to "cut staff, narrow the curriculum, remove pastoral support", and many will have to close down after-school clubs. Despite the progress on the funding formula, the simple truth is that the Government are still letting down this country's children.

**Justine Greening:** I strongly disagree with the hon. Gentleman. We are putting additional money into our schools. Over the next few years, as I have said, the schools budget will rise by £2.6 billion. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has made it clear that, over the remaining years of the spending review, we are now protecting per-pupil funding in real terms. It is easy to focus on spending, which is of course important, but we are more interested in results, and the results in English schools are that standards are going up, not least due to the hard work of our teachers, results are getting better and outcomes for young people and children are getting better. That is something we should all talk up, rather than talk down.

Of course over in Wales, where Labour is in charge, it is a very different situation, with that country slipping down the international league tables on education.

**Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con):** I welcome the engagement of the Secretary of State and the Minister with responsibility for schools in this process over many years. Lincolnshire, as the Secretary of State knows, is one of the most challenged areas when it comes to school funding, but will she confirm that this new funding formula pays particular attention to the kind of challenges that we see in coastal communities? As she knows, coastal communities face unique challenges in recruiting teachers because half the catchment area is the sea.

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That very point was made to me in Scarborough, which is one of our opportunity areas. The situation is exacerbated by the very different funding levels of different schools, which of course has knock-on effects on the amount of staffing that schools are able to provide. The formula's consistency will put us on a much firmer footing.

**Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD):** Sutton has excellent schools and teachers, but it is a London borough with a very high cost of living—higher as a result of Brexit-driven inflation. Now that the Government have breached the pay cap for police and prison officers, and as they could not defend NHS pay levels yesterday,

[Tom Brake]

do they agree it is time to fund a proper pay rise for teachers, to reward them for their professionalism and to help them address the pressures of cost of living increases?

**Justine Greening:** The right hon. Gentleman may be aware that we accepted the recommendation of the School Teachers Review Body, an independent review board that considers all the evidence provided not only by the Government but by the unions, labour economists and all sorts of interested stakeholders. The review body made its proposal to me earlier in the summer, and I accepted it. I have no doubt that, when the review body next assesses teachers' pay, it will continue to consider recruitment and retention alongside affordability, which is quite right.

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement of the retention of local authority discretion for the next two years, which will assist my village schools, many of which are sparse but not quite sparse enough. Can she reassure me that, at the end of that two years, the level of funding that those village schools receive will effectively become baked in as the baseline for future funding and that they will not face some kind of cliff edge in the funding formula?

**Justine Greening:** Today I have set out the new funding formula for schools. We will have a transition period, during which local authorities continue to have the ability to allocate at local level, but we have made it clear that we are setting out the amounts that we think schools should get. That is the whole point of this process, which does reflect sparsity. We have more work to do to ensure that we reflect sparsity more accurately over the coming years, as I have set out in the funding formula document, but this is a step in the right direction. I fully expect that, over time, we will continue to get better and that we will move to an even more accurate approach to sparsity.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Seven years ago there were two secondary schools in Spennymoor. Now there is only one, and no children went into the sixth form this September, which obviously puts its future into question. Surely the truth is that because the Secretary of State has been able to win only £1.3 billion and not £2.7 billion, she will not be able to give those children in Spennymoor the future they should have.

**Justine Greening:** That is not correct. As the hon. Lady admits, we are putting additional funding into the core formula, which is part of this Government's strategy to raise standards. Alongside that, of course, we have improved the curriculum, and the new GCSEs are successfully starting to roll out this year. As we debated yesterday, importantly, more and more of our young people are going to university. Record rates of disadvantaged young people are going on to higher education. We are moving in the right direction, but there are still parts of the country that have not reached the level and achieved the standards we want for our young people. That is why I have committed to having opportunity areas to lift up places that have perhaps faced the most difficult challenges. That is part of a

broader push from the Government, and from me as Secretary of State, to ensure that we truly lift all parts of our country to reach the best standards of education for children.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I very much welcome what the Secretary of State has said today. Northamptonshire has been underfunded in the past. What particular consideration will be given to areas that receive significant housing growth in the years ahead?

**Justine Greening:** We built a growth factor into the formula. We believe the formula will address growth better than the current system, which simply considers historical data. We will make projections and seek to compensate local authorities on the basis of accurate data, rather than just pure long-term historical projections, and that is important. It is one of the many reasons why this is a good step forward.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has to accept that taking £2.7 billion out of education since 2015 and putting £1.3 billion back in leaves a £1.4 billion hole. That means schools are missing out. Will she undertake to write to every Member of the House with the per-pupil funding for each school, comparing the 2015 funding with the outcome of today's announcement?

**Justine Greening:** We will be publishing a lot of data following this statement; the hon. Gentleman will have more than enough to look at. The point of introducing a funding formula is to make sure that schools that have been underfunded can start to catch up and to provide stability for better-funded schools. That is precisely what we are doing, and I am proud that we are able to achieve it.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and the Minister with responsibility for schools for sending officials to Cheshire to understand some of the problems faced by my schools, which were some of the worst funded in the country and are members of the f40. Will the Secretary of State praise the work of Edward Timpson, my former colleague, who worked incredibly hard to ensure that deprivation funding is reflected in the formula, and who fought valiantly on behalf of his constituents in Crewe and Nantwich?

**Justine Greening:** I will pay tribute to Edward Timpson. He was a fantastic Minister and is much missed in the House.

We work extremely hard, as a Department and as a group of Ministers, to listen to the very different views of colleagues in trying to achieve a national formula that works for very different schools and communities across the country. We have taken a big step in launching the formula today, and I am grateful for the contributions of all Members.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): One headteacher in my constituency told me, "The current funding situation means that sixth forms and colleges across the country will find it increasingly difficult to offer the range of subjects they used to and provide the number of teaching hours recommended to deliver courses over the two years." A situation that leaves sixth forms unable to

offer students what they need does not sound very fair because it is not fair. How is such an inadequate funding system in the interests of young people, employers or the economy?

**Justine Greening:** The formula I set out today covers primary and secondary—up to 16. We are making sure that we continue funding post-16 colleges and A-levels, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have gone beyond that. We announced an additional £500 million in the last Budget to help boost technical education, which will be of benefit not just to further education colleges, but to sixth forms and sixth-form colleges.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House to sneak out an oral statement. She must have got the formula right, as so few Opposition Members are in the Chamber. She is also right to say that this is about not only funding, but the quality of education. She will know that my area has a number of inadequate schools and that the Education Fellowship Trust is a failing academy chain and is being replaced. The excellent Schools Minister is working hard on this issue, but it would help me enormously if I could be given an update, in due course, about progress on replacing that academy chain.

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend raises an important issue for his local community. A lot of work has been done to make sure that those schools are put under the control of a trust that can make sure it gives the best to local children. I know the Schools Minister will be happy to meet my hon. Friend to update him on the latest situation.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Let me give one cheer to the Secretary of State for at long last addressing the national formula. Will she give due credit to the f40 group, which has for a generation been arguing for this very change? I welcome the emphasis on sparsity, but will she re-examine the issue of using free school meals as a denominator of deprivation in rural areas? It has never been a good measure, and it never can be one because of the stigma associated with free school meals. Will she consider other formulae that are now available to make sure that we get proper representation in rural areas when the budget is settled?

**Justine Greening:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman's welcome for the introduction of the funding formula. He is right to say that identifying deprivation is more complex than just looking at free school meals. That is why this formula includes the additional element of an index that looks at child deprivation in particular: the IDACI—income deprivation affecting children index. That index is already used by many local authorities, and it is an aspect of how we are assessing the deprivation factors that are built into this formula. I hope he will welcome that.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Let me congratulate the Secretary of State on her statement and say how much it will be welcomed in Torbay, where schools have been underfunded for some years. When the last set of figures was published, I found that a number of people felt that the formula would not be of benefit because of some things that they had been told by unofficial groups.

What efforts will be made to ensure that schools, particularly in places such as Torbay, hear about the real impact of this new formula?

**Justine Greening:** We will be writing to every MP in this House with details about their local schools. I hope that they will be able to share those with local headteachers, and of course the local authority will consult on how then to spread that funding. It is vital that schools, and indeed parents, have the facts and are not given misleading information. It is important that we recognise that more funding—record funding—is now going into our schools system and that we focus equally on the standards we are getting in relation to that investment.

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), on the sterling work she is doing to really shine a light on some of the problems in education today. I do not think it does the Secretary of State any justice to come to the Dispatch Box and be so condescending to a colleague on the other side of the House. Would it not make sense for the Government to look at where money is being lost from the system? In my constituency, a university technical college has closed its doors at a cost of £14 million to the taxpayer while a free school has closed at a cost of £4 million. The two closures have resulted in 300 pupils being displaced. Should that not be the focus of the Government's attention?

**Justine Greening:** We do take action when we see schools that are not delivering for their pupils. Overall, that has borne fruit over the past few years, which is why Ofsted now grades nine out of 10 schools in our country as good or outstanding—that is significantly more than was the case in 2010. I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman welcomed that, but I can assure him that where we see schools failing, we are taking action.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Mums and Dads in Barton Seagrave in Kettering have been alarmed by a recent Lib Dem newsletter which, under the title "Education Meltdown", says that

"the Tory Government still plans to go ahead with its new school funding formula which could mean that by 2019 our local schools will face cuts of up to £543 per pupil".

It goes on to state that

"the threatened loss to each school"

is as follows: Barton Seagrave Primary, £185,000; Latimer Arts, £485,000; and Southfield Girls, £416,000. Is it not simply outrageous to circulate such misleading and inaccurate information? Is it not clear that the Lib Dems have been caught red-handed peddling untruths?

**Justine Greening:** The Lib Dems have been caught red-handed and frankly it is a disgrace for them to put out such misleading "facts" to parents. Indeed, only one party of the two is against extra funding for schools, and that is the Lib Dems, because clearly they are against the national funding formula, which is directing additional funding to my hon. Friend's community.

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's announcement and share her dismay and disappointment that Labour Members seem incapable of saying anything positive about it.

[*Peter Heaton-Jones*]

Perhaps that is because they utterly failed to tackle this issue when they were in government. It is the Conservatives who have done this, and I want to thank her for listening to me and to other Devon MPs who have made representations. I also thank the hard-working teachers and staff of schools in my constituency. Will she confirm that the historical unfairness that has seen Devon schools underfunded will be tackled as a result of this announcement?

**Justine Greening:** This formula makes a big difference to schools in Devon. My hon. Friend has been a tireless campaigner for his local community in setting out the views of teachers and parents in Devon. This formula will mean that Devon schools gain, and I am proud that we are finally rectifying the unfair funding that so many schools have had to put up with for so long.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on delivering yet another of our election manifesto commitments. As a fellow London MP, she will know that we are affected by twin aspects in London. The first is rising rolls and young people needing a school place. Despite expanding a number of schools and delivering more new schools, that is ever a pressure. The second relates to those children who come in with English as an additional language—this situation is widespread. In the schools in my constituency, at least 161 different languages are spoken. Will she commit to keeping the funding position under review to make sure that additional resources are provided to deal with the expansion in the number of children in schools, so that per-pupil funding is not diluted?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend will welcome the fact that the Institute for Fiscal Studies has made it clear that the amount of funding we are now putting into our schools does protect per-pupil funding in real terms. He is right to mention school places, as the estimate is that between 2015 and 2020 we will need an additional 600,000 extra school places, which is why we are investing so much in building new schools and expanding existing schools. I can assure him that we are very clear about where those pressures are, and we will seek to work with communities, MPs and local authorities to make sure that good school places are available for every child in our country.

**Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): This package of changes without doubt represents an improvement for West Sussex schools and I welcome it. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that she has been able to fund this improvement while still supporting the creation of new schools where they have been announced?

**Justine Greening:** Indeed, we have a very strong pipeline of schools under construction as well as ones that have been agreed, which will go ahead. As I have set out, we need to make sure that we keep ahead of the need for more places in the coming years, which is why we will be having more free schools and working with existing schools to see them expand, too.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on delivering yet another manifesto pledge, and I commend both her

and the Schools Minister for their hard work in this area. Was she as disappointed as I was with the tone of Labour Front Benchers in response to this statement. Not only does this formula help historically underfunded areas such as mine, but it will help across the whole country, importantly, by dealing with additional needs and looking at deprivation, too.

**Justine Greening:** Absolutely. In some areas we should be able to set politics aside and work broadly on what we think is the right solution for our country as a whole. That is exactly how I have tried to approach this issue. I have welcomed the engagement we have had from all parties, including some Labour MPs—I just hope that that can transfer steadily to the Labour Front-Bench team. Perhaps it would be helpful just to have some transparency with a simple confirmation from the Labour Front-Bench team on whether they think this is a good funding formula. If they think it is not, they should be clear about whether they would rescind it should they get into power.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend and her team for grappling with a formula of labyrinthine complexity that penalised my constituents in Cheltenham and for listening to me and others and then revisiting the original iteration, which many of us thought needed further attention. The new formula means that per-pupil average funding for secondary schools in my constituency will rise from around £4,200 to £4,800, and that will change lives in Cheltenham. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important to recognise that the average in many Labour seats will continue to be higher than £4,800? In those circumstances, it seems somewhat churlish for Labour Members to have responded as they have.

**Justine Greening:** I do agree with my hon. Friend. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to him for all he has done in his local community and, of course, with the f40 group to help to improve the formula and to make sure that what was, as he says, an incredibly complex piece of work ended up in the right place. We have today a strong national funding formula that can work for some very different schools and communities throughout the country, and I am proud that we are finally able to launch it.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): So often in this place one campaigns about historical underfunding but nothing happens, because it is all too difficult, so I have hung around this afternoon to thank my right hon. Friend. We have campaigned for rural schools for years, and she is now giving them 3.9% more. In Lincolnshire, we have many very small schools with under 100 pupils, and even some that traditionally have fewer than 50. My right hon. Friend has announced another 5% for schools in the most remote locations. Will that help counties such as Lincolnshire that have a sparse but evenly distributed population?

**Justine Greening:** The new formula will help those sorts of schools. We made a minor but important adjustment in the formula to make sure that it works for the very, very smallest schools, which otherwise might not have gained in the way we wanted them to. I hope that that is good news for my hon. Friend.

## Points of Order

2.12 pm

**Hon. Members:** On a point of order—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. The loudest voice I heard was Tom Brake's, so we will start with him.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): That was a wise choice.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I will be the judge of that.

**Tom Brake:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. You may be aware that while the Government commissioned a report on the funding of extremism, they have subsequently have said they are not willing to publish it. However, they are on record as saying that Privy Counsellors who want to access the report can do so and consider it in what I guess would be a confidential environment. I have made multiple attempts to get such access to the report, but the Home Office has so far seemed incredibly reluctant to make it available. I hope you are able to assist me in ensuring that the Home Office delivers on its promise.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That really is not a point of order for the Chair, but it is quite rightly now on the record. I know that the Government are listening. I hope that that will be taken on board and that the right hon. Gentleman will be given the access that he was promised.

**Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Following on from the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) during the statement on school funding, would it be appropriate or possible to put on record the names of the four Labour Back Benchers who were kindly present at the end of the statement? We have to assume that all the rest were happy.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** If I started to do that for both sides, the book would be very full, so perhaps those in glass houses ought not to throw stones quite as quickly.

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sure you will be aware of the numerous answers to parliamentary written questions concerning the publication of the clean growth plan that is required to be brought to the House under the Climate Change Act 2008. On several occasions, in response to questions both written and oral, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has stated that he intends

“to publish the plan when Parliament sits again after the summer recess.”—[*Official Report*, 27 June 2017; Vol. 626, c. 453.]

I am sure that you will observe, Mr Deputy Speaker, that we have already sat after the summer recess and are about not to sit anymore. Have you received any communication from the Secretary of State informing you that he intends to come to the House this afternoon to make a statement about the publication of the plan?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** There has been no communication to me, as the hon. Gentleman could well have guessed, but he has made people aware that the plan is being awaited by Members of this House. He has put that on the record, and hopefully people will respond accordingly, but there has been absolutely no communication to me.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I had hoped to present a petition this week about a huge, intensive poultry factory farm that is proposed in Rushden. More than 6,000 people had objected, the format of the petition had been agreed by the Table Office, and it had been signed by Mr David Jenney, Mr Roger Barnes, the chairman of the Stop Higham and Rushden intensive poultry farm group, and Mr Peter Tomas, mayor of Higham Ferrers. Unfortunately, the petition has got lost somewhere in the House's postal system, or has not yet been delivered, so we have not been able to register it so that I can present it. How can I put that fact on the record? Is there a procedure whereby I can present a petition when the House is in recess?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** It is certainly now on the record and we know about the petition. There is nothing I can do to assist between now and October, but it is not often that a Member gets two bites of the cherry: you have the petition and the names on the record, and I am sure that the moment we get back after recess the House will accommodate your making that presentation.

## General Election Campaign: Abuse and Intimidation

2.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the abuse and intimidation of candidates and the public during the General Election campaign.

I am sure that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and—I hope—Members from all parties will agree that it is essential for our democracy that people are able to stand for office and to become a Member of Parliament without fearing that they will experience abuse. It is equally essential that MPs are able to represent their constituents without being abused or intimidated. Indeed, that applies to anyone serving in public office, whether a democratically elected candidate or the people serving in our vital public services. We should all be able to go about our work and live our lives without fear of abuse or intimidation. The Government absolutely recognise that this is a very serious issue that affects not only MPs and parliamentary candidates from all parties, but the wider public. I know that many Members will talk this afternoon about how they, their families and their communities have been personally affected.

Fear of abuse or intimidation can have far-reaching consequences. It has the potential to affect people's desire to stand for office or public service in the first place. In turn, that can have a negative impact for us all and for our democracy. That is why in July the Prime Minister asked the Committee on Standards in Public Life to carry out a review of the intimidation experienced by parliamentary candidates. The review sought to gather evidence of harassment and to consider what action is needed to ensure the integrity of the democratic process. The consultation closed last week and the findings are now being analysed. I am sure that the committee will make good progress with its work and act as quickly as possible. The Government look forward to reading its recommendations.

Although it is really important that we look at what more we can do, I want to reassure all Members that arrangements are in place to ensure their safety. The police and the Parliamentary Security Department continue to work to ensure that appropriate security measures are in place. Personal security advice and guidance has been provided to all Members, and a package of security measures is available for homes and constituency offices. Support and advice regarding security and any concerns around personal safety are available from the Members' security support service and the Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team, and all measures are kept under review.

**Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP):** The Minister may not be aware of this but when we were leaving the House in the wee small hours of Tuesday morning, a television camera was outside the gates of the House of Commons filming MPs as they were leaving. That means that people watching television would know who leaves at what time, who leaves together and in which direction they are heading. Can she raise those kinds of things with broadcasters?

**Sarah Newton:** The hon. Lady raises a very serious issue. I encourage her to contact the House security team, but, as she has raised those issues today, they will

be looked at by the police and the House security service to see what more can be done. That may include having conversations with the media if it is felt that their actions are increasing the risk to ourselves and our staff. There would have been many staff working in Parliament that evening, supporting our democratic process, and they, too, might have been under threat.

I think that we can all agree that freedom of speech and expression are fundamental human rights. However, there is a responsibility that comes with those rights. When a person's views cross a boundary into criminal acts, action must be taken. The Public Order Act 1986 includes a number of offences that tackle such behaviour, including offences of fear, provocation of violence, intentional harassment, alarm or distress. I know that there have been some shocking instances of abuse directed towards MPs, and equally shocking examples of hate crime. We wholly condemn any personal attacks or abuse towards MPs. When MPs receive racial abuse, or abuse on the grounds of religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender identity, they should report it to the police, so that it is treated as a hate crime.

**Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con):** Can my hon. Friend tell the House how many successful prosecutions there have been for any of these crimes?

**Sarah Newton:** I do not have the latest figures on hate crime prosecutions to hand, but I can absolutely assure my right hon. Friend that the number of people reporting hate crime has significantly increased, as have the prosecutions and convictions. Thanks to the bravery of two of our female colleagues from these Benches who were subjected to appalling hate crime and stalking, prosecutions were secured and the perpetrators are now in prison, where they so richly deserve to be. I hope that that sends out a very strong message that this type of intimidation will simply not be tolerated.

The Prime Minister made her views very clear when she said that

"hate crime of any kind is completely unacceptable. It divides communities, destroys lives and makes us weaker. Britain is thriving precisely because we welcome people from all backgrounds, faiths and ethnicities, and that is something we must strive to protect."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2017; Vol. 627, c. 168WH.]

One of the first actions of the Home Secretary was to launch the hate crime action plan, which sets out steps that we are taking to prevent these crimes, boost the reporting of offences and support victims. It focuses on five key areas: preventing hate crime by challenging beliefs and behaviours; responding to hate crime in our communities with the aim of reducing the number of incidents; increasing reporting; improving support for victims; and building up our understanding of the motivation of hate crime.

We already have a strong legislative framework in place to tackle these crimes. The action plan lists new actions to ensure that the legislation is used effectively to support victims and deal with perpetrators. We recognise the importance of ensuring that the police response to hate crime is as good as it can possibly be, which is why the Home Secretary has asked Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to carry out an inspection into how the police deal with all five strands of hate crimes, including online abuse. That inspection will take place during this financial year. We are very keen to see what HMIC finds and how the issues are addressed.

I know that, for many Members, the issue of online abuse is one of particular concern. The Government are absolutely clear that abusive and threatening behaviour online is totally unacceptable—whatever the target.

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I read in today's paper that even Laura Kuenssberg was verbally attacked during the election campaign and had to be accompanied by security officers. Surely even the press—I do not like everything that the BBC says or do—should be protected and able to have free speech.

**Sarah Newton:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. Hate crime is totally unacceptable. No one—whether they are a journalist, police officer, nurse, or anyone else in our country—should be subjected to hate crime.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): It gets worse than that—it goes to children. All my four children have been hassled by other kids in their local schools because of the job of their father. There is little that can be done about that, because they are children. My kids are robust enough to withstand it, but such behaviour is taken to a new level when, during the last general election, a teacher tells the class of my 13-year-old boy that nobody should talk to him because he is the son of a Conservative MP.

**Hon. Members:** “Shame!”

**Sarah Newton:** I am grateful to my hon. and gallant Friend for sharing with the House such a personal and deeply upsetting and troubling incident that has happened to his son. That is simply unacceptable. It is a noble thing to stand for election; and it is a noble thing to want to represent your community, whether as a councillor or as an MP in this place. People such as teachers who are in a position of authority and influence should be supporting and upholding the shared values of our country. It is most disappointing to hear of somebody in such a powerful and influential position letting themselves and their profession down.

The Government are absolutely clear that this abusive and threatening behaviour that we are increasingly seeing online is totally unacceptable—whatever the target.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that we should be particularly concerned about those who are vulnerable? I have in mind the case of one of my Conservative colleagues who stood in the east of England. She was threatened with rape online. Then the threat was, “Shoot her, then pull her teeth out of her jaw while she fades away.” The said candidate is partially sighted and was going around the constituency every day with her dog. It is exactly those sorts of people whom we should encourage to be in this House, which is why those of us who are here must stand up and defend them.

**Sarah Newton:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for sharing that experience. She is absolutely right: it is essential that people from every sort of background and from every part of our country feel that they can represent their communities. The Conservative party has put in a lot of effort over a number of years to break down the barriers so that people with disabilities can serve their communities locally or nationally. I was very proud of our party for setting up a new fund in the Cabinet Office, which provides funding to people who

need to make reasonable adjustments to stand for office and to serve their community. I hope that my hon. Friend will pass on to that candidate our sincere gratitude for her perseverance—not being bullied or intimidated, but carrying on and taking a message of hope to her community. I encourage her to report that incident to the police. She has clear online evidence of hate crime perpetrated against her, and I would fully expect her local constabulary to take that seriously and go after the appalling person who wrote such things.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the social media platforms have a role to play? So many people get fed up with reporting abuse and nothing seems to happen to the individual who perpetrates it. If social media companies are serious about upholding their house rules, is it not vital that they issue a system of yellow cards and, if necessary, red cards to stop people having the platform they need to perpetrate this vile abuse?

**Sarah Newton:** My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. When social media companies are notified of this type of abuse, harassment and bullying, we expect them to take that material down. The police have the power to request that such material is taken down. It is important that people report instances of hate crime, and that those reports are followed up and prosecuted.

The law does not differentiate criminal offences committed on social media from those committed anywhere else. It is the action that is illegal. Robust legislation is in place to deal with internet trolls, cyber-stalking, harassment, and perpetrators of grossly offensive, obscene or menacing behaviour. A number of criminal offences may be committed by those abusing others on social media. These include credible threats of violence; damage to property; sending grossly offensive, indecent, obscene or menacing messages; harassment; and stalking.

The Crown Prosecution Service recently revised its guidelines on social media to help to ensure a robust criminal justice system response. The updated guidelines incorporate new and emerging crimes that are being committed online and provide clear advice to help with the prosecution of cyber-enabled crime. On 21 August, the CPS published new public statements on how it will prosecute hate crime. The Director of Public Prosecutions committed the CPS to treating online hate crimes as seriously as those committed face to face. The CPS also launched revised legal guidance that sets out how prosecutors should make the charging decisions and handle these cases in court.

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): My hon. Friend is aware that the law moves encouragingly slowly on occasion. Would it be possible to encourage Facebook and other social media platforms themselves to have a system—not a criminal system, but perhaps a red-card one, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) suggested—to enable accounts to be taken down when abuse routinely appears on the accounts of armchair warriors?

**Sarah Newton:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. We absolutely recognise that this is not just about the law, although the CPS has moved swiftly and done a

[Sarah Newton]

thoroughly good job in this instance. The number of prosecutions is increasing. As if by magic, I now have the figure for successful prosecutions; it is now running at more than 15,000 a year. That is significant progress with the tools and guidance available.

Social media companies have a vital role to play. The recently enacted Digital Economy Act 2017 requires the establishment of a code of practice for social media providers. The code will set out guidance about what social media providers should do in relation to conduct on their platforms, including bullying or insulting an individual or other behaviour likely to intimidate or humiliate them. The Government are considering how to take forward the social media code of practice as part of the digital charter. We will shortly provide more details about the consultation and what should happen.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): The social media platforms seem to achieve the red, amber and green cards when it comes to copyright and they are at risk of financial consequences. But they do not seem to be able to achieve that with bullying and harassment.

**Sarah Newton:** I absolutely agree that these companies need to do a lot more. They need to act with vigour, determination and speed in addressing the abuse that their platforms are enabling. I am sure that they will listen to the contributions made today by colleagues across the House, and we hope that they will respond, just as we very much hope that they will respond swiftly and thoroughly to any recommendations that come out of the review.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): I have just returned from a tour of the BBC studios, where I was delighted to see the emphasis placed on fact-checking, which plays a vital part in our democracy. I fear that social media has a reach above and beyond any form of impartiality. I am sure that I speak for colleagues on both sides of the House when I say that, as an individual parliamentary candidate—even with the resources of a political party—it is impossible to rebut fake news, wherever it comes from. The vast reach of some of these platforms, with no respect whatever of the truth or any kind of facts, completely overwhelms us all.

**Sarah Newton:** I am pleased to hear that my hon. Friend has recently visited the BBC. Its fact-checking work is invaluable during elections and all year round. A number of extremely good programmes on the radio and television look at statistics and provide really good rebuttals to some of the myths we hear peddled. Social media companies need to do more. They have a responsibility to act when there is clear evidence of information being put out and leading to the sort of harm we are seeing.

**Alex Chalk** *rose*—

**Sarah Newton:** I will just finish my point, but then I will definitely take more interventions.

The work we are doing in schools is incredibly important, so that young people are taught to be critical thinkers, are robust and are able to ask themselves some straightforward questions about the motivation of the person putting information before them. They will then

become more resilient and questioning, coming to their own conclusions and accessing the very good resources that give the facts of the matter.

**Alex Chalk:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the duties of social media companies have to go beyond simply deleting an offensive post? They have to ensure that there are consequences for the perpetrator by suspending or even deleting their account. The companies show themselves to be incredibly reluctant to do so, no doubt for financial reasons, and they need to reassess. Does she agree?

**Sarah Newton:** There must be consequences for perpetrators of hate crime and the list of crimes that I have outlined. It is essential that people report, so that the police can take the appropriate action and people feel that there are consequences for the crimes they commit.

**Vicky Ford:** I just want to go back to the case I mentioned earlier of the partially sighted candidate who was threatened with rape, among other threats. My hon. Friend suggested that the candidate should ensure that the police were aware of the situation. One of the advantages of today's media is that I have since been in contact with her. She said that the police were notified but, when asked again, they said that they had not received a notification of the crime being reported. I understand that it was an intense period for the police, but does my hon. Friend think we may need better guidelines for how they should react?

**Sarah Newton:** I thank my hon. Friend for that further intervention, and I am disappointed to hear that that was her constituent's experience. As part of the hate crime action plan, further guidance was given. My colleagues in the Home Office work closely with law enforcement and the College of Policing to make sure frontline police officers have the tools and skills necessary. We hope that the HMIC inspection of the police response to hate crime will highlight good practice, which I am sure does exist around the country, but if there are areas for improvement, that will also be highlighted, and we will review the findings of that inspection with our colleagues in law enforcement to see whether there is anything further we need to do.

Sadly, it is not only MPs and candidates who are experiencing intimidation. The intimidation of voters during election campaigns is unacceptable and must also be addressed. Sir Eric Pickles's review of electoral fraud made a range of recommendations for tightening up on the integrity of our electoral system, including by addressing the intimidation of voters. The review identified a number of areas in which the existing rules at elections could be tightened. In particular, it recommended that greater powers should be given to returning officers and the police to take action to address unwanted and inappropriate behaviour in and around polling stations—for example, by setting up cordons sanitaires.

In the Government's response to Sir Eric's report, we indicated that we are supportive of those proposed changes. Some will require primary legislation, and we look forward to bringing the provisions forward as soon as the opportunity arises. We will also consider with the Electoral Commission how existing guidance to returning officers and their staff must be strengthened.



In conclusion, I want to make it absolutely clear that the targeting of abusive, intimidating or harassing behaviours at any individual—whether an MP, a candidate, a member of their staff or family, or a member of the public—is utterly unacceptable. There is simply no place in our democracy for these behaviours.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I have listened with keen interest to all that the Minister has said, and I cannot disagree with it, but I do want to make the point that a lot of female MPs on both sides of the House have been treated abominably in hundreds of thousands of texts and on that Facebook thing—I do not do it myself, but the Minister knows what I mean. It is just not acceptable to say that an MP can get thousands of these texts—whether from political opponents or, God help us, political friends. We need to take stronger action. We cannot have MPs feeling threatened when they have children and families. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), the former colonel, about what happened in his son's school. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Action has to be required in law; it cannot be voluntary. Does the Minister not agree?

**Sarah Newton:** I absolutely agree. We take this issue very seriously, and that is why the independent review was set up. I am sure Members on both sides of the House will contribute evidence to it. The Select Committees have also done some good work on this issue, and they have submitted reviews. I hope that no Members of Parliament feel intimidated or pressured not to come forward. It is essential that they share their personal experiences, which are often harrowing, as we have already heard, and, sadly, as I am sure we will hear further in the debate.

We cannot tolerate this behaviour. There should be no fear in this House. There should be no fear in our democracy. We will do absolutely everything we can to ensure that anybody who wants to serve their community and their country can stand for office without fear.

2.44 pm

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Today's timely debate focuses on the important issue of the abuse and intimidation of candidates and the public in UK elections, but I would like to begin with a note of thanks to Mr Deputy Speaker for his support in ensuring my personal safety and that on colleagues on both sides of the House as we go about our business. I know that many of my colleagues will share my thanks and put them on record.

Let me clear: abusive behaviour has no place in our democracy. I must stress that Opposition Members condemn any action that seeks to undermine our tradition of free and fair elections. We welcome the Government's decision to conduct an independent inquiry, and we look forward to working with them to tackle this issue, which affects candidates from all political parties. In that spirit, my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) is giving evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life this afternoon on behalf of the Labour party.

Sadly, many colleagues on both sides of the House have experienced some form of abuse and intimidation as candidates or MPs, and many can talk about the

experiences their party campaigners and volunteers have also had. Unfortunately, candidates and public office holders are vulnerable to abuse. The tragic murder of our parliamentary colleague and friend Jo Cox last year and the stabbing of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) in 2010 remind us of the serious threats we face and of the longevity of this issue.

We would be doing a disservice to the democracy we all believe in if we did not recognise that this is an issue for all political parties. If we are going to have the honest and constructive debate we need to have on this subject, we must recognise that individuals claiming to be supporters of every political party represented in this Chamber have, either online or offline, abused candidates from other political parties. That is wrong and it will always be wrong, no matter which party the abuser claims to support.

Unfortunately, abuse and intimidation have taken place during previous elections too. Those who claim that this is a recent development are perhaps inadvertently covering up the real issue. This topic is not new to scrutiny. In 2013, the all-party parliamentary group against anti-Semitism, of which I am a member, published the findings of its inquiry into electoral conduct. The inquiry had a particular focus on racism and discrimination in campaigning, and it marked the first time that such matters had been analysed in a systematic way by Members of the House. The APPG published its final update in July, which showed that electoral misconduct was a challenge for all parties during elections.

**Alex Chalk:** The hon. Lady is making an important speech, but does she not acknowledge that the tempo and tone of what happened in the 2017 election was of a different order of magnitude from what had gone before? I am quite prepared to accept that what happened was cross-party and affected people on both sides of the House, but it was at a level that was particularly concerning.

**Cat Smith:** I will answer some of those points in my speech. I suspect that what happened was partly due to the increased use of social media sites, which have more users than at previous elections, but I will come to that.

The same inquiry and the Law Commission argue that the current legal system is not fit for purpose. They urged the Government to redraft electoral offences in a more simple and modern way, so that they can be readily understood and enforced by campaigners, the public and the police, and the Opposition would support that.

We must see some action on this issue. The Government's domestic policy agenda cannot stop because of the Brexit negotiations. In response to a written parliamentary question last week, the Minister stated that the Government will respond to the Law Commission's 2016 interim report in due course. Can he be a little more specific on the timeframe? The Institute for Jewish Policy Research findings published this week showed that one quarter of British people hold an anti-Semitic belief. Those findings make for sobering reading.

Given the high prevalence of this, it would be foolish and wrong for any party in this House to assume that it did not have members or activists who hold such beliefs. Labour Members recognise that political parties have a responsibility to stamp out any form of abusive behaviour.

[Cat Smith]

To ensure that Labour Members comply with the high standards expected by our party, our internal procedures for dealing with abuse and intimidation were reviewed and improved following the Chakrabarti report on anti-Semitism. We have a detailed and publicly available social media policy, and we have employed more staff in our governance and legal unit to make sure that our members' conduct is up to scratch.

However, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook must take their share of the responsibility for this issue and act faster to prevent and remove abusive behaviour online. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) pointed out in the Westminster Hall debate on this topic before the summer recess, Facebook was very quick to remove pictures of a woman breastfeeding, but when my hon. Friend reported a fake account that was set up in her name sending out intimidating messages, it took Facebook two weeks to respond.

**Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing up such an important and relevant topic as the racism and anti-Semitism that are going on. I would like to highlight the unacceptable level of vitriol and aggression directed towards female candidates, in particular, during the election. Does she agree that the Government need to do more to ensure that women are not unjustly dissuaded from campaigning, joining in and putting themselves forward as candidates?

**Cat Smith:** My hon. Friend raises a very important point. Only this week, there were reports in the press regarding some rape threats I reported to Facebook that I was told at first did not breach its community standards. It does appear that women MPs face a particular kind of intimidation—threats of rape. Those comments have now been taken down, but I sometimes wonder whether that would have been the case had I not been a Member of Parliament and received some of the press coverage that I did, which has now seen this issue resolved.

Women MPs have been speaking out about these problems with social media for years. MPs and campaigners involved with the women on banknotes campaign were subject to sustained campaigns of harassment in which some members of the public were arrested and charged. Can the Minister assure us that he is working with social media platforms to combat this issue?

There is also a need for better collection and analysis of election-related racism and discrimination data. In March, the Home Office confirmed in an answer to a question that the Government do not hold specific data relating to hate crimes during election campaigns. If the Government are committed to tackling this very important issue, when will they recognise that data on it must be collected and scrutinised? As a consequence of this failing, the monitoring and reporting of racism during elections has fallen to the third sector. New research by Amnesty International found that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who joins me on the Front Bench this afternoon, and who was the first black woman MP in this House, received half of all the threatening tweets sent to women MPs between January and June this year. In fact, black and Asian women MPs received 35% more

abusive tweets than white women MPs. As evidenced by the recent report, unacceptable behaviour towards candidates from all parties is disproportionately faced by women and those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

**Vicky Ford:** It is not just online that abuse is happening, and not just on the Labour side. The Conservative candidate in Ealing reported that two Asian activists on her side received much abuse to their faces. They were spat at, told that they should have their throats slit, threatened by being told they should die and told that their mothers should never have given birth to them. Their cars were also targeted. It is not just online and on social media—there are many face-to-face examples as well.

**Cat Smith:** The hon. Lady makes an important and correct point. This abuse is indeed faced by activists and volunteers from all political parties, and candidates and activists from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are indeed disproportionately more likely to face it, both online and offline. I will come to some of the offline comments in a moment.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I heard the point that was made about Ealing. I am not sure whether it concerned the election in Ealing Central and Acton, where I was the winner, but I want to dissociate myself from those stories because they were nothing to do with the Labour party.

I was a candidate in Ealing Central and Acton in the 2015 general election, and there are pictures and footage of the fracas that ensued when I crossed paths with the Conservative canvass team, which included the former Mayor of London, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). It was reported on “Newsnight”, and the newspapers called what happened to me “manhandling”; I think a lawyer would call it assault. There are documented examples of such things, and I reject the accusation that this is anything to do with the Labour party.

**Cat Smith:** My hon. Friend raises an alarming example to add to the debate, and I thank her for her contribution.

We cannot allow abuse to act as a barrier to participation in public life. A recent survey revealed that the majority of women MPs have received online and verbal abuse from the public and a third have considered quitting as a result. The 2017 general election delivered the most diverse House of Commons in history, but a failure to tackle abuse and intimidation risks reversing that and rolling back the progress we have made in making our politics more representative.

**Vicky Ford:** I want to clarify that in my earlier intervention I did not accuse Labour activists of being responsible for actions against Conservative activists. My point was that Conservative activists, especially women and those from ethnic minorities, were also seriously targeted, face to face, on the streets of London in the 2017 general election.

**Cat Smith:** The point has been made again that activists and campaigners from all political parties receive abuse. I think that there is consensus on that in the House.

Although the debate is about the general election that has just passed, stalkers and trolls continue to blight the lives of candidates in local elections. Unlike parliamentary candidates, those who stand for local elections are required to have their home address printed on the ballot papers, some of which are sent to the homes of postal voters way ahead of the election. My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Jo Platt) is unable to take part in today's debate, but she particularly wanted to raise this issue. When she was a councillor, she had her home address published on ballot papers and she was forced, in the end, to get CCTV there after receiving abuse and harassment. That is not an isolated case: I am aware of a councillor in Lancashire who, having previously been a victim of stalking, is incredibly uncomfortable with putting her address on the ballot paper. When will the Government review the inconsistency in the publishing of home addresses on ballot papers for candidates in local elections?

**Alison Thewliss:** I fully support the point that the hon. Lady is making. One of my colleagues found it quite frustrating that although they, as a parliamentary candidate, were able to exempt their address from publication, their partner, who happens to be a local government councillor, had to publish their address—thereby negating the whole point.

**Cat Smith:** The hon. Lady raises an alarming and pertinent point. It may leave many of us considering whether to encourage our partners to take part in democratic life, given the threats of abuse that we sometimes face.

We cannot ignore the funding pressures that local authorities are under, because they have an impact on the matter. According to a study by the University of East Anglia, electoral services were running 129% over budget in 2015-16. The Association of Electoral Administrators described the industry as

“Pushed to the absolute limit”

and highlighted significant challenges that electoral officials face, as well as the rising number of administrators leaving the profession. How can we expect electoral officials to identify and deal with abusive behaviour during elections without the necessary resources?

I have been approached by Members of the House who reported online abuse to their local police but found that investigations were cut short because of a lack of police resources. We cannot ignore the growing crisis, which has been alluded to, in police resources for the investigation of these crimes. The Government have cut more than 20,000 police officers, and we have to say that cuts have consequences. The police forces are overstretched, and that leads to pressure to downgrade crimes or to investigate them less than fully. If we really want to tackle this abuse, we need to resource our police budgets properly and give the police the resources that they need to investigate this serious issue.

The bullying and intimidation that we see on social media and on the streets of this country do not happen in a vacuum. The decisions taken by the press and media outlets, and even by political parties, to target some politicians over others can lead trolls to see that as permission to take their racist and sexist abuse offline and, sadly, in some cases to act it out. Only this week, the former Chancellor told colleagues at the *Evening Standard* that he would not rest until the Prime Minister is “chopped up in bags in my freezer”.

**Sir Hugo Swire:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Cat Smith:** I will give way in a moment.

The former Chancellor has previously described the Prime Minister as a

“dead woman walking...on death row”,

and compared her with

“the living dead in a second-rate horror film”.

I raise that because—

**Sir Hugo Swire:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Opposition spokesman to make unfounded allegations against a former Member of this House, who is not here, without any warning and—to underscore what we are debating—to repeat unfounded allegations that she may or may not have read online or as reported in another paper?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I think the hon. Lady was referring to reports, but I also think she was just about to give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

**Cat Smith:** I clarify that I am referring to the press reports that I read in *The Times* this morning.

I raise that issue because violence against women is a huge problem in this country. Two women a week are killed by their partner or former partner, and rape continues to be a crime that is under-reported and for which it is very hard to achieve a successful prosecution. We as a House need to acknowledge that the problem we have in this country with violence against women is not helped when senior journalists, commentators or politicians use language such as that I have mentioned when referring to female Members of this House.

As well as the press, political parties and politicians have a responsibility to set an example by treating others with dignity and respect, including those with whom we strongly disagree. If we are to have a useful debate, we must be very honest in looking at the campaigns that our national parties run. I am referring to some of the social media advertising that ends up on voters' Facebook timelines, often without their permission, highlighting and singling out particular Members of the House. I am referring specifically to the advertisements by the Conservative party that singled out my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington.

**Mrs Latham:** Will the hon. Lady distance herself from the “ditch the bitch” remarks made by the shadow Chancellor about one of our candidates, not at the last election but at the previous one?

**Cat Smith:** I associate myself with the remarks of my party leader, who has been very clear—indeed, he sent out such advice to Labour party candidates during the last election—that we should fight elections on the basis of policies, politics and the record of the Government, not play it personal. With that approach, we can have a debate in public that may influence the debate taking place on social media, and we may see a downturn in the levels of abuse highlighted by Members on both sides of the House.

[Cat Smith]

This abuse does not take place in a vacuum. We must look at the campaign spearheaded by Lynton Crosby in the London mayoral election, which was even described by Baroness Warsi as “appalling”. That was because of the attacks on Sadiq Khan, which are widely understood to have been racist in nature.

**Alex Chalk:** I do not want to inflame this discussion, because the hon. Lady is making some fair points, but does she not agree that there is a duty on all of us to moderate our language in the public sphere? For example, it does not help to use language like the word “murderers” in the context of the Grenfell Tower atrocity, because it revs people up. Is there not a duty on all of us to be careful about what we say in the public domain?

**Cat Smith:** I agree that there is a duty on all Members of this House to be very considered in the language they use in all matters and to talk about policies and politics rather than personalities. Politics has been drifting towards a focus on personalities, and I think that is damaging.

The politics of hope will always win out over the politics of fear, and it played a role in the general election. It was positive that 2.5 million people voted who did not cast a vote in the previous general election, and that gives us a great sense of hope. If we want politics to be more representative, and if we want to encourage a diverse selection of candidates from all political parties to stand, we need to conduct our politics in the spirit of hope.

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Cat Smith:** I will in a moment.

The Leader of the Labour party has always said that he does not do personal, and he insisted that all Labour candidates ran positive campaigns based on our policies and the Government’s record, rather than peddling attacks on individuals. He tweeted about that in 2016 and reiterated it in the “Question Time” debate during the general election.

As I said earlier, the Committee on Standards in Public Life is taking evidence this afternoon from three of the major political parties. As part of that inquiry, the Labour party submitted written evidence in which we outlined our support for the idea that political parties and their leaders should agree to a joint code of conduct with a framework for reporting, assessing and disciplining discrimination, racism and any other form of abuse. I hope the Conservative party will work with us to ensure election campaigns are run with dignity and respect for all candidates, and do not depend on highly personal attacks on opponents.

We must see some action on this issue. Abuse and the intimidation of candidates and the public have no place in our elections. I look forward to working with all parties to build a democracy that works for the many, not the few.

3.6 pm

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): That was an interesting contribution by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith); I will refer to it during my remarks. I recently came back from Rwanda, where there was a presidential election. There was less intimidation, abuse and violence there than we had in

this country, which is pretty shocking, because many African countries—not Rwanda, I have to say—suffer from a lot of abuse.

I want raise the issue of intimidation and abuse during the election on behalf of someone who no longer has a voice in this place because she was defeated in that election. I have followed parliamentary protocol and notified the hon. Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) yesterday that I would mention him today in the Chamber. The Opposition spokesman should listen very carefully to what I have to say about him. It is pretty ironic that only last month the new Member for Derby North spoke out against such smears in an article in *The Guardian*:

“But I feel people have stopped listening to the smears and lies and dirty tricks...Jeremy’s overwhelming landslide victories in the leadership elections and the general election”—

I am not sure where the landslide victory comes in as regards the general election—

“mean people have stopped listening to the smears”.

Well, no, they have not.

Some weeks before the election, a Facebook page calling itself “Unauthorised Amanda Solloway” appeared, giving all sorts of misinformation about her. The previous year, her husband’s business went bankrupt. He was one of, I think, three directors. As the wife of one of the directors, our former colleague was singled out for abuse on Facebook. The wives of the other directors were never mentioned, and neither were the other directors. She had no connection to her husband’s business, and bringing up her name in association was just a way to tarnish her reputation for no reason. Nobody in this House would expect to be deemed responsible for a relative’s business, but Amanda Solloway was—just because she ruffled feathers by winning a parliamentary seat two years earlier. We are all entitled to a family life outside this place and politics in general. Bringing family into any political debate is unreasonable, and the hon. Member for Derby North would not like it if I were to refer to his private life in this Chamber or anywhere else.

Of course, the Facebook page has now been removed, but we have screenshots of it. It included video statements made by Amanda Solloway’s opponent, the new Member for Derby North, about the unfair link to her husband’s business. That would suggest that the hon. Gentleman had direct involvement in the page’s overall strategy. If he did not, how were the videos made available?

This Facebook page not only said that Amanda Solloway must have been involved in her husband’s business and so was culpable for the number of people who lost money as a result of the bankruptcy, but showed pictures of her with her husband on a social occasion a long time ago, wearing evening dress to go to a dinner, implying they were wealthy. They are not. It also showed a photo of one of her daughters’ wedding day. That year, both their daughters were married; the page suggested that this was done on the proceeds gained from the unfortunate people who lost their money when the company went bankrupt. That was totally false. This was a targeted, personal and unfair campaign against our former colleague. In fact, I would say it was bullying.

**Dr Huq:** I remember the hon. Lady’s former colleague. We did an interview together when the election was announced, and I am sorry to hear of these tragic

things. Before I was elected in 2015, a fake Twitter account called “Dr Huq” was set up, which said I lied about the NHS and put out all sorts of vile messages. It was shut down only after I was elected. I wonder if the hon. Lady has had the same experience as me, in that social media platforms take these matters seriously from MPs, but the general public, former MPs or unsuccessful candidates are unable to do anything. There are double standards.

**Mrs Latham:** It is a very difficult situation. The Facebook page received many hits, because many people were searching for Amanda Solloway. Many people could have been influenced by this vile abuse on social media.

The final straw was when the current Member of Parliament asked people who had been affected by the bankruptcy to join him at a meeting to discuss how he would return their money. He said he would pay their expenses to attend the meeting, and the money was raised from donations through a YouCaring compassionate crowdfunding page. All this was done on the page by video. The new Member for Derby North asked for donations, so that he could meet at a venue in Derby those who had lost money—most of them were not from Derby—and presumably promise that he, and he alone, would stand up for them, and probably ask them to help his campaign. In fact, at the first business questions following the election, he tried to trick the Leader of the House into condemning Amanda and her husband’s company. He knows the ropes, because of course he had been an MP before Amanda Solloway won in 2015—something he has never come to terms with.

Amanda faced other problems. She was campaigning outside a very large mosque in Derby on a Friday following prayers; in the area, leaflets with the title “Operation Muslim Vote” had been delivered by the Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK. Amanda’s photo was on the leaflet. Next to a headline saying, “Their voting record” it stated:

“Voted against ending rough sleeping and causes of rising homelessness. Voted against accepting 3,000 unaccompanied refugee children. Visited Israel with Conservative Friends of Israel as a Tory candidate”.

Finally, in large capitals, it read:

“Voted for UK to support Saudis’ bombing of Yemen. Do you want this Tory MP to represent you...? You decide on June 8th”.

Obviously, this group is entitled to try to influence the election, but the leaflet in my view was bullying and intimidatory, and it was not even truthful. Amanda Solloway is a respected figure among Derby’s immigrant communities. Since leaving Parliament, she has been setting up a charity for those with mental health issues, and is involved in projects for the homeless. The swastika and abuse drawn on my posters, and the theft of dozens of them, are not in the same league as the campaign against Amanda. In my case, the police caught on camera a person who looked at the poster during the evening and returned at 3 am to deface it. He now has a caution, which will affect his ability to change jobs. I hope he has learned a lesson.

I fully expect, after I have exposed what happened to Amanda, to receive threats for speaking out on these issues, but they must be aired so that the public understand what we have to put up with. The behaviour of the Member for Derby North was the worst I have ever

seen. I hope the sensible wing of the Labour party, not the extreme left-wingers who are clearly just like Militant used to be, will win the day and stop this kind of personalised campaigning. As the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood said, politics should be about the policies, not the people.

A political campaign should never be personal—as I have said, it should be about policies—but the Member for Derby North clearly overstepped the boundaries. Neil Kinnock, a former Member and leader of the Labour party, tried to remove this sort of extremism when he was party leader, and was successful for a time, but unfortunately we seem to have gone backwards. I appeal to the sensible Labour Members to show their colleague that his behaviour is totally unacceptable and will not be tolerated by them or anyone in the future.

3.14 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I warmly welcome the opportunity for this debate, which builds on the heavily subscribed debate in Westminster Hall on 12 July and makes up for the Chamber debate that was cancelled as a result of the general election and Dissolution.

Like Members and parties across the House, the Scottish National party is clear that abuse faced by political candidates, particularly women and those from black and minority ethnic and other minority groups, is intolerable, and that serious action must be taken to ensure that democratic participation is widened, not narrowed. Many candidates and aspiring candidates also face significant barriers to entering politics. Some of that was covered in yesterday’s Westminster Hall debate on women’s participation in politics. We have to take action now to stamp out hate and abuse, otherwise we risk dissuading or further disfranchising many who have been historically under-represented.

I pay tribute to Members who have already spoken out or will speak out about their experiences and to unsuccessful candidates and non-returning Members who have had to endure unacceptable abuse. The first and perhaps most important lesson for us all is that abuse must be identified and called out as such. I want to look at some of the recent challenges, some of which we have heard about before, make some reflections on behalf of the SNP in Scotland and set out some of the steps that we can take to remedy and improve the situation.

We live in turbulent times. Across the world, we are seeing a rise in extremism—particularly on the right, with the emergence of the so-called alt right—and indeed outright fascism. We have seen rising electoral support for the National Front in France, for Golden Dawn in Greece and for Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, and there is a risk that hate language and a policy of division are becoming normalised. That must be countered, not encouraged, by strong and determined political leadership. We must work together to build a better public discourse that allows robust debate, while remaining respectful.

**Alison Thewliss:** Does my hon. Friend agree that not only do politicians need to take responsibility in this area, but the tabloid and other forms of media, which call people traitors and use other inflammatory language, need to be challenged?

**Patrick Grady:** Yes, absolutely. We might even say that what is happening online is being replicated in some offline publications, or perhaps vice versa. The whole thing has to be toned down. As politicians, we have a role to play.

The sad reality is that the President of the United States won his election after a campaign built on playing to the worst side of people, playing up to Islamophobia, insulting the nation's ethnic minorities and making totally unacceptable misogynistic comments, starting with but not limited to his opponent, the first woman ever to stand for President on a major-party ticket. Our first duty has to be to set an example for others, and that challenge is undoubtedly all the harder when the man supposed to be at the pinnacle of western democracy is acting as if he is at the nadir.

We have our own particular experiences in Scotland. In the 20 years since the devolution referendum, many of us have prided ourselves on being ahead of the curve, in terms of what the Scottish Parliament has achieved. It was a new Parliament with family-friendly hours, procedures far less impenetrable than we have in this place, innovations—at the time anyway—such as the public petitions committee, and of course election by proportional representation. All that helped to reinvigorate democracy and take it back to the people. The Scottish independence referendum, too, was an incredible exercise in popular political engagement. There were packed meeting halls, outdoor rallies and, yes, online debate. Some of that has been seen all over the world in recent years, and perhaps Scotland was part of it and helped to catalyse and inspire engagement elsewhere.

We have to accept, however, that there has been a downside. There has been abuse and harassment—particularly, but not limited to, online—of spokespeople, party leaders and high-profile campaigners. Many of the campaigners in the independence referendum were not traditional politicians, but were becoming politically active for the first time, and some of them have ended up Members of this House—and as of June, not all of them are on the SNP Benches. Many of them found the abuse and intimidation hurtful and difficult to deal with. Those who made it here are the ones who persevered, but undoubtedly many other campaigners did not, and that is a loss to our democracy.

While the debate that precedes a referendum is to a certain extent generalised, the debate that takes place during an election campaign focuses much more on individuals, leaders and candidates. It involves a level of personalisation, which means that policies and issues are sometimes obscured by the people and the personalities involved. It is a case of playing the man and not the ball, as the saying goes, although, of course, it is far too often a case of playing the woman and not the ball. The evidence we have heard so far today makes that very clear. During the general election campaign, I noticed snarky anonymous comments about me online, based largely on my political affiliation but occasionally on my lack of hair follicles, but that was nothing by comparison with what female candidates have had to go through; some have not been anywhere near as fortunate as me.

I pay particular tribute to my former colleague Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, who was my predecessor as the SNP board member of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. She is a significant loss to the House, although I have no doubt that we shall see her again in

some shape or form. Amnesty International produced a briefing for the debate containing testimonies that are incredibly powerful; I recommend it to all Members and, indeed, anyone who is watching the debate. In a contribution to that briefing, Tasmina spoke of her experiences. She said:

“When I was elected in 2015 and even during my election campaign, I found myself at the other end of horrific levels of abuse. And the question is: why might that be? Is everyone receiving the same levels of abuse? Is it women? Is it because I'm Black Asian Minority Ethnic?”

She cited examples of people tweeting her home address and postcode—we heard about home addresses earlier—which led to the police having to patrol outside her house. She was advised to set up a safe room in her house. Surely all our houses should be safe from abuse and intimidation.

**Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I echo the hon. Gentleman's comments about Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, what she did about this issue, and the horrific abuse that she had to put up with. I have experienced it myself, as a candidate and as a woman in the House of Commons. I also vividly recall going on television at the time of the EU referendum and disagreeing with Nigel Farage's comments about whether voting for Brexit would mean women were more likely to be raped. Suddenly, on my Twitter timeline, I gained a horrifying insight into the Islamophobic abuse that other people receive. I sometimes thank my lucky stars that I receive the misogyny but am generally spared the racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism that I know other Members have to deal with. Is not part of the difficulty the fact that abuse is so often targeted and therefore invisible to the groups who are not receiving it?

**Patrick Grady:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. That is why it is important to call out abuse in such circumstances, and to have debates of this kind. I congratulate the Government again on making available the time for it.

**Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the targeting of the homes of Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh and others. I think I am right in saying that the addresses of candidates in elections to the Scottish Parliament do not appear on postal votes or on the ballot paper, and I wonder whether we should consider introducing the same arrangement for elections to this place.

**Patrick Grady:** I think a consensus is emerging on that. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) drew attention to the anomaly whereby, although one of our colleagues was able to anonymise their address on the ballot, their partner was standing for the council and therefore had to publish the address, which completely negated the arrangement.

**Vicky Ford:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Patrick Grady:** I am a little bit conscious of others wishing to speak, but I will.

**Vicky Ford:** I just wanted to say something about anonymising addresses, or not making them public. When I stood for election, I did not make my address public, partly because of threats that I had received during my time working on international gun laws—threats

from people who have guns. The difficulty was, however, that those who make themselves anonymous can be accused, politically, of trying to be anonymous when others are not. I suggest to the Minister that there should be one rule for all, so that the council and the election officers know where people are, but need not make the information public.

**Patrick Grady:** As I have said, I think a degree of consensus is emerging on that point. Perhaps the Minister will address it when he sums up the debate.

I want to stress what Tasmina had to go through. She was subjected to language that I will not repeat in the Chamber because it would be unparliamentary, although it is not unparliamentary when it comes from the President of the United States; let us put it like that. It is simply unacceptable. Tasmina and others in this House have stood their ground and called out the abuse, and continue to fight for what they believe in. That is an example of courageous leadership for others to follow, but it still takes that leap of faith—that act of courage. For someone in the early stages of considering a political career, who is unsure, the possibility of that abuse and intimidation might prove one hurdle too high.

What can be done? We welcome the review being conducted by the Committee on Standards in Public Life; I am pretty certain we are making a contribution to it, and we look forward to its report. We have to, as others have said, make sure that the police and the regulatory bodies have the powers and resources they need properly to investigate abuse and bring those responsible for criminal wrongdoing to justice. I echo the calls for the social media companies to up their game; they must get better at monitoring and acting on reports, and weeding out abusers early on, as several Members have pointed out. I also echo the Minister's points about education, especially in schools, and making sure that good habits are formed early, and that there is an understanding of active citizenship and positive engagement with democracy, so that a new generation can come forward.

We have touched on some of the practical issues to do with keeping people's personal circumstances secure, and addresses on the ballot paper. Finally, I want to emphasise that we have to lead by example. We have to win the debate. We have to make sure that our conduct—in this place, in our constituencies, and especially online—is exemplary. Of course we should engage in robust debate, but we should do so with good humour and with respect for the opinions held by our opponents, no matter how much we might disagree with them.

That any of us are standing here today, no matter what party we are from, is in some way a victory for democratic values and the principles of freedom of speech, but we must use that victory, whatever side we are from, carefully and responsibly. We are all passing through this Chamber; one day, all of us will lose or retire, and someone else will take our place. If we want to make sure we are replaced by the brightest and the best—by people who truly represent the full spectrum of diversity in our society, and who will continue to champion democracy and freedom of speech—we must live up to the highest standards ourselves. Hopefully, by these actions, we can ensure that democracy endures, and that the haters and abusers are not allowed to win.

3.27 pm

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I am delighted that we have secured this important debate in this House. I pay tribute to both Front Benchers. The hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) made a very interesting comment about local councillors, but did not elaborate on it. We are able to have some recourse against the people we are talking about, but our local councillors have no recourse at all, regardless of whether they represent a unitary or district authority, or whatever—there is no recourse for them. I know it is right at the cusp of what our debate is about, but I want to discuss intimidation of our councillors and what they put up with in our name. They have no staff and no ability to come back at anybody, other than perhaps through their local newspapers. It is important that we cover this, so I am grateful to the hon. Lady for bringing it up.

It is important to say that this is all about how people are dealt with. I understand why people get very cross when they are put upon by others who know little about what is going on.

My focus today is not personal. I am not going to express any views about MPs or anyone else. I am old enough—and, I would say, probably ugly enough—to look after myself. Instead I want to concentrate on the intimidation that is being directed at voters and, in particular, councillors.

Intimidation is not always the work of musclebound thugs or brutal bigots, nor does it always mean threats and violence. There is another, much more subtle, way of spreading fear. The perpetrators might look like respectable people, but they deliver demands in a sinister style. They say their way is the only way. They smile coldly and promise the impossible. They want people to do exactly what they are told.

This has been happening in West Somerset ever since my neighbouring borough of Taunton Deane dreamed up a greedy plan to merge my little district council into a new municipal area. This is, in fact, nothing less than an intimidatory land grab. Taunton wants to reap the benefits of the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, which is being built in the West Somerset area. There will understandably be rich rewards when the reactors eventually start running, and Taunton will stop at nothing to twist the electorate and badger the Government, along with my councillors, on this.

I will say openly that Taunton has been telling monstrous lies about its motives, its methods and its money. If we listen to the Taunton Deane team, it is all going to be absolutely fabulous, but it never tells us about the debts and the huge borrowing. It never points out that my constituents would end up with a tiny handful of councillors—only about 10 or 12 of them—who would be vastly outnumbered by those representing Taunton Deane. The people I am talking about in Taunton Deane are loan sharks. They never talk about the fact that their predictions on efficiencies and savings are based on sloppy arithmetic and pathetic guesswork. The plan is the stuff of bad dreams, and nightmares can sometimes be as intimidating as a mindless brute with an iron bar. Democracy is in real danger from a smooth-talking rotten borough.

Members might think that we have got rid of rotten boroughs. We should have got rid of them in 1832—perhaps only Sir Peter Tapsell would remember that time. I shall

[Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger]

give the House an example. In those days, Minehead had two MPs, both well-heeled aristocrats. Neither had to undergo the indignity of elections—perish the thought! John Luttrell lived in a beautiful place called Dunster Castle and his forebears represented Minehead for 200 years. That is intimidation if ever there was any. The other MP was George Augustus Frederick Child Villiers, the sixth Earl of Jersey. He was given the job purely because of family connections. Students of politics will know that the Villiers family produced no fewer than 16 British Prime Ministers down the years, including the last one, a Mr D. Cameron Esq. You cannot get much more rotten than that, I guess—or can you?

Today, Taunton is rotten to the core. The council is led by a megalomaniac who believes that getting his own way is an absolute birthright. The man is a bully, a builder and a brigand. His friends in the bricks and mortar trade have done very nicely under his leadership, and I say that openly.

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's opening comments about the effect on local councillors of having their address published. Does he agree that this is a really important issue for them, as it is for national politicians, and that it could have the effect of putting off women, in particular, from standing for local councils? I know of excellent would-be candidates who are afraid to put their names forward for fear of attack, of criticism and of people calling at their house. Does he agree that it is important for us to address that problem in the debate today and to bring forward proposals on it?

**Mr Liddell-Grainger:** I thank the hon. Lady for her thoughtful intervention. The Front Benchers made the views of the two main parties clear, and I am sure that the Scottish National party agrees that the intimidation of councillors on any level absolutely cannot be right. I agree with what she says. One problem in rural areas—possibly not so much in urban ones—is that a lot of the people who want to stand for local councils are retired. I think that that puts an added pressure on women in rural areas. I am desperately trying to think of the breakdown of my two district councils, but I suspect that we are under-represented. She is absolutely right that her very good point needs to be considered in this debate, and the Front Benchers have done us proud in that regard. I am sure that the Minister who winds up for the Government will also deal with this point clearly. I would, however, like to continue to talk about rotten boroughs, because this is quite exciting.

The rotten borough that I have been talking about is already packed with new estates and urban extensions, with many more to follow. Most of them are pushed through with reckless disregard for local people. Let us take as an example the plans for a lovely area called Staplegrove, a comfortable, leafy corner of the rotten borough that is soon to be bulldozed to make way for 1,700 brand new brick boxes. The residents are rightly furious, and I am not surprised—that is the way it is. When the planning committee meets next week, it will hear directly from the developers, but anyone with an objection will be locked out. That is intimidation. As Mr Spock would probably have said, “It’s democracy, Jim, but not as we know it!”

Left to his own devices, the leader—let us call him Mr Rotten—would much prefer to concrete over most of the wide-open spaces and watch his pals get rich quick. Come to think of it, his own building firm seems to be thriving. I have alarming evidence of highly profitable land deals and the relaxation of planning rules—shoddy! Some senior officials were so concerned about the leader's direct involvement in one application that they took legal advice to cover their own backs. I have said it before and I will say it again: this is a rotten borough.

The council has secretly squirrelled away large sums of money from the housing revenue account, which is meant to be ring-fenced for vital maintenance, in order to buy new computer equipment. That is immoral and, I suspect, illegal. It has been reported to the fraud squad by one of its own for miscalculating council tax. It is squandering £11 million to do up its HQ, and I am sure that Mr Summerfield and Mr Haldon, the tame stool pigeons, are getting excited. I wonder where the sub-contracts will go—a local building company, no doubt. It is a mad, vain project, with money meant for the electorate that the town, district and county councils should be looking after going down the drain. The building will never be worth more than what has been spent to tart it up. It is the action of a council that has totally lost the plot.

I fear that there is worse to come. The plan to annex West Somerset Council should have been properly placed before the people—35,000 people. All they actually got was a cheap skate online survey organised by the rotten borough. People saw it for what it was: a pathetic excuse for a public consultation. Most of those who took part disagreed with the idea anyway, but the subtle game of intimidation never mentioned that fact. When the rotten borough presented the survey to Ministers, it did not even bother to break it down. Instead, endless pages of raw material without any explanation at all were submitted. It is no wonder that the civil servants did not read it; it was deliberately designed to mislead the Government.

Last week, “Johnny Rotten's” chief executive—let us call her Cruella de Vil—gave an extraordinary interview to a specialist local government magazine called *The Municipal Journal*, a good publication that many here will know about. She said that she was trying to turn the screw on the Secretary of State—I am sure that he is frightfully excited—and threatened that if the rotten borough did not get the green light to take over West Somerset, she would sail away and let my district council drown. Intimidation! What is going on here?

**Jo Swinson:** I am not entirely sure of the ins and outs of the particular issue with the district council or, indeed, its relevance to this debate, but does the hon. Gentleman think it appropriate to use the “Cruella de Vil” reference about a female civil servant in a debate about the intimidation of candidates?

**Mr Liddell-Grainger:** I thank the hon. Lady. I realise that she does not understand the issue, but if she appreciated the civil servant involved, she would probably join me. We have a major problem in our area.

There is no way that West Somerset is doomed—that is a complete and utter lie—and it is a disgrace that a jumped-up chief executive should ever use blackmail. I have seen the intimidation from the rotten borough of



Taunton in action. If one reads the *County Gazette*, the extremely good local Taunton paper, one will see that it is certainly not just me speaking. The good people of un-precepted Taunton are being lead over a cliff, and that must be stopped before the intimidation gets worse.

3.38 pm

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate; it is a privilege to follow the previous speech. I want to put on record my appreciation for the comments made earlier about the House's security services and the police in our constituencies who do an excellent and often difficult job in ensuring that candidates and, probably more importantly, their staff are safe.

Democracy and society demand that intimidation and abuse have no part in the process. Coupled with individual responsibility, it is well beyond time that social media platforms look to their responsibilities. The growing use of social media is well documented, as is the effect of its use as a tool of intimidation and abuse. Research into why it is used as a tool of intimidation is increasing. A Demos report from May 2017 states:

"What is clear though, is that the anonymous and 'safe distance' nature of social media platforms allows such abuse to be handed out far less respectfully than it would usually be if delivered face-to-face."

That highlights the conflict between the platform and the democratic and societal function we require of it, and indeed what social media platforms offer.

It is the removed nature of social media that creates an environment that is so conducive to abuse and intimidation—it is made so easy. In their November 2016 report, Lowry and Zhang said:

"Heavy social media use combined with anonymity facilitates the social learning process of cyber bullying in social media in a way that fosters cyber bullying."

In other words, the very tool of intimidation and bullying facilitates and promotes the learning of that bullying. The addictive nature of such communication, which is so important to society, is now being corrupted as an addictive tool of abuse.

If anonymity were removed, an individual or group would need to think, "I will be held to account for what I am about to say." The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) was kind enough to allow me to make a short intervention in the 12 July Westminster Hall debate on abuse in UK elections, which allowed me to raise questions about a code of conduct and anonymous social media accounts. Within hours of that debate I—and, I expect, the hon. Gentleman—received social media abuse pointing to not just the stupidity of my idea, but my stupidity for raising it. I will take this opportunity to answer those people.

I agree that the anonymity of a dissident's public-facing social media account is essential. However, I do not accept a user's anonymity to the facilitator of their account. It is unacceptable for someone to intimidate and abuse an individual for whatever reason. Disagree and argue about the idea, but not about the individual characteristics of the advocate. Platforms should have a responsibility to react much quicker to such comments.

I fully accept that my experience after that debate is but a mere toe in the water compared with the vile abuse received by other right hon. and hon. Members, especially

women. It must also be borne in mind that the intimidation and abuse of those who unsuccessfully stand for elected office, and of those who offer assistance—both paid and as volunteers—will surely make people question their future participation.

I raise that example because of the damage any such personalised abuse and intimidation does to the younger generation who watch on. As a teacher, I know the damage that social media abuse does to our young people when that abuse is started and spread by other young people. When such abuse is highlighted, society rightly points to it and says how wrong it is. When children share inappropriate photographs with each other, we highlight the damage to the victim, the danger and the criminality, but we also seek to educate and to point out why such sharing is wrong.

But the generation that follows us witnesses our actions, our behaviour and our choices, and those actions, behaviours and choices have as great an impact on their behaviour and choices as any face-to-face discussion after the event. Our younger generation—our future politicians, activists and leaders—witnessed appalling behaviour by adults during the general election. I speak beyond those who are a member of a political party, and beyond the staff and friends of independent candidates. I speak of the responsibility of those who affiliate, sympathise or associate with candidates, or who just use a candidate's name. There is a duty to act respectfully and responsibly.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) said in the Westminster Hall debate:

"We owe it to our democracy to make clear that intimidation and abuse have no part in our society, not only for candidates who stood at the recent general election but for future generations of men and women who are considering entering public life and standing for election."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2017; Vol. 627, c. 168-69WH.]

I completely agree with those sentiments. Our future generations demand of us more respect for each other.

In summing up, I wish to make reference to principles for the protection and promotion of human rights. This has been quoted frequently before, but it can stand another quote:

"Impunity arises from a failure by States to meet their obligations to investigate violations; to take appropriate measures in respect of the perpetrators...ensuring that those suspected of criminal responsibility are prosecuted, tried and duly punished; to provide victims with the effective remedies...and to take other necessary steps to prevent a recurrence of violations".

Perhaps it is time for those who seek to act like states—the great social media platforms—to look to their responsibility not merely as a tool, but as a publisher and a major participant and facilitator of the modern-day social demos. We, as adults, need to look to the responsibility we have to future generations not only to take no part in intimidation and abuse, but not to stay silent when that occurs. Now is the time to end online tribalism—

**Graham P. Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech and some powerful points. When these debates occur online, there needs to be some clarity, as there is a difference between free speech and abuse. The point he is alluding to is that abuse is often dressed up as free speech, but when there is such an intervention, we have to say that abuse is not free speech.

**Martin Whitfield:** Absolutely. I am extremely grateful for that intervention, which clarifies a point on which I think there is agreement across the Chamber.

Abuse of an individual for being an individual or because of their characteristics is wrong. The argument lies in the debate, the opinion and the party policy; it should not be against the individual. I therefore call for an end to this online tribalism and abuse from across the whole political spectrum.

3.46 pm

**Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) for his valuable contribution to this debate. I am particularly pleased to be speaking in it, having missed the opportunity to do so prior to the recess when it was postponed. It is crucial to bring such issues to the Floor of the House and not simply sweep them under the carpet. We all know that parliamentary candidates face tough questions when we make our case to our constituents and that is part of what makes our democracy robust: the willingness of parliamentarians to make their case on the doorstep. Equally, we all know that sometimes the robust debates about the future of our country go beyond what is right and proper. All too often, a minority of small-minded cowards lash out at those whom they disagree with, doing so not with reasoned argument, but with abuse, intimidation and threats. In Scotland, that has become a disappointingly familiar part of political life, a regrettable legacy of that divisive independence referendum in 2014. We must now work together with the common aim of eradicating this behaviour from British politics, because, frankly, enough is enough.

No one, of course, is suggesting that we should duck the big questions or fail to stand up to make our case, but I am increasingly concerned that the bitterness that attaches itself to our political discourse is putting off the new faces that we all wish to welcome into politics. Yesterday, I spoke in a Westminster Hall debate about the barriers facing women standing for Parliament, and the fact that we need to have today's debate is one such barrier. That is not to say that it is just the abuse of candidates that puts women off standing for office, but we should also recognise that the especially vile abuse targeted at women will undoubtedly have an impact. From my own personal experience of speaking to females of a similar age to me during the recess, I can say that it was always the females who stated time and time again, "I do not know how you do the job you do. Forgive me for making a brushing statement, but I doubt they are avid viewers of Parliament TV, nor do they come to my surgeries; they are making these presumptions because they can see the scrutiny we are under through the media—press, broadcast and social. Can we really be surprised that women are not always willing to throw themselves into such an environment?"

I welcome the fact that the Committee on Standards in Public Life will review the intimidation of candidates, and I look forward to seeing its conclusions. Of course, changes to the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 will allow for tougher sentences that will contribute to driving out such unacceptable behaviour from public life. I wish to take this opportunity to thank my local constabulary for acting so promptly when a constituent entered our local office and intimidated my staff. I cannot praise them enough for the support they gave me and the swift action they took.

Even in my relatively short time in the public eye, what I have found most disturbing is the anonymity that seems to give permission for inexcusable abuse. I, along with many colleagues, enjoy taking advantage of the unprecedented levels of engagement that social media allows us to have with our constituents, but we have to acknowledge and tackle the dark side of technological advance. I hope that the establishment of a social media code of practice, brought in by the recent Digital Economy Act 2017, will go some way towards reducing the negatives of what should be tools to make being a candidate a better experience, not an avenue for abuse and intimidation.

I am especially privileged, because I not only represent my home constituency of Angus but have been elected to the Women and Equalities Committee. I hope during my time on the Committee to work on ways to ensure that women in particular are not put off from putting themselves forward for public office, because, quite simply, Parliament needs them.

The vast majority of people in this country engage positively in the democratic process and have thought-provoking discussions with their representatives. The disruptive minority who seek to block out alternative views offer nothing and conceal themselves behind anonymous screen names on Twitter and Facebook. We will lose nothing, and only gain better candidates and representatives, when we succeed in demonstrating that there is no place for such unacceptable behaviour in our society.

3.51 pm

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) for her speech.

I am particularly pleased that this debate is taking place, and to be able to take part in it, because for me it has a very personal resonance. During the most recent general election, I was one of the many who discovered just how easily an online platform can be used to spread hurtful or personally abusive untruths. My experience, which is far from the worst example—I did not face the racism or sexist abuse that some have faced—started as something I originally put down to a genuine mistake or misunderstanding, before I quickly realised that it was actually an attempt to gain political advantage, with no respect whatsoever for the personal impact or the truth.

During the break in campaigning that we had as a mark of respect following the Manchester attack, I was accused on social media, by a known activist from an opposing party, of ignoring the break and going out campaigning on one of those days. It was, in fact, the day that I had been at my husband's funeral. I was surprised: my husband's death had been widely reported—not least by the newspaper for which he had worked—but the abuse was retweeted and explanations were demanded, and there were more abusive comments. That, too, was a surprise, as I had had many supportive messages from people from all political parties.

Partly to avoid embarrassment for my accuser when he realised his mistake, I replied and explained. From then, though, the abuse did not stop but actually escalated. That was when I realised that for many of those now ploughing in with comments, all that mattered was the opportunity to appear clever with sarcastic comments, to put someone else down or, sadly, in this case, to use intimidation to gain political advantage. What they had was a public forum where they could say whatever they

liked with impunity. As a politician, I accept that I put myself in the firing line. Criticism, political disagreement and the public spotlight are all part of the job. But not intimidation, and not abuse—often not of ourselves but of our family. On a day when I was coping with not just my own grief but that of my daughter, I had to put up with a mindless, vindictive attack. I raise this now not for sympathy—I had much of that at the time—but to illustrate a problem that we have faced not just in this general election, but in the referendum in Scotland before it. The most important thing I took from that experience was the extent to which the current online free-for-all leaves those who are far more vulnerable than I open to the sort of mindless bullying that can have devastating consequences.

Although I am concerned that it might discourage politically active women from becoming more involved, there is another issue that we must address. Mental health charities tell us that social media is often the only contact that some people have with the outside world; that for someone coping with depression an online communication may be their only relief from solitude; that in an otherwise isolated existence, it is their doorway to an outside world that they may not feel they have the strength to enter in any other way. It is somewhere they can express themselves and feel comfortable doing so; somewhere they can find acceptance and understanding for what they are going through; and somewhere they can begin to heal.

Those of us who have experience of mental health issues—whether ourselves or someone we love—know just how all-consuming, life-changing and exhausting it is. Let us imagine now what happens when that lifeline turns into tormenter, throw online abuse into the mix of suffering, and replace comfort with the perpetual fear of what fresh abuse our phone or computer screen could bring—it could prompt anxiety, a panic attack or so much worse. The potential consequences are why it is time that those of us in this place who have the support network and the strength to resist that intimidation do something to protect those who do not. It is time that we acted; time that we came up with a regulatory framework that does not restrict freedom of speech, but does destroy the ability to abuse. We need some way of telling those abusers that they cannot exploit social media to indulge their own viciousness, either anonymously or with impunity. We need a framework—as we have for every other form of media in this country—which insists on respectful, non-abusive and non-defamatory publication. It is time to take responsibility not just for our own practices and our own safety, but for those who have put their faith in us to do it for them.

3.57 pm

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): Something is rotten in the state of Britain. I underline that opening remark by highlighting and referring to what the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) has just said in a remarkably concise and powerful speech, in which I found nothing to disagree with.

I stand here this afternoon as one who has fought six parliamentary elections, the first being in 1997—in that watershed year for the Scottish Tories—in Greenock and Inverclyde and then, more luckily, in East Devon, which I have represented since 2001. Although I know that some Members believe that the changed way of

politics—this growing bullying, harassment and intimidation that we see on social media—has been growing over a period, I do not actually believe that. I think that there is absolutely no question at all but that 2015 and, worse, 2017 saw the highest levels of personal abuse that we have seen.

We need to put this into some form of context. As elected representatives, we are not above the law. We should be held to the highest standards, and we should not put ourselves on a pedestal. We are open to criticism. Some of our constituents like to criticise us on a regular basis. It gives some of them enormous pleasure to berate us when they see us in our constituencies and tell us that we have not answered an email or a letter. If that gives them pleasure, that is part and parcel of the job as far as I see it. However, what we and our families should not be subject to is anonymous attacks. Granted, when I said that we should put this into context—I do not believe that we should be precious—we should look back at elections fought by our predecessors in the 17th and 18th centuries. Look at the cartoons around this House by Gillray, Rowlandson and Hogarth. They were much more physically intimidatory. Street fights and candidates getting beaten up were a regular occasion. I am not suggesting for a minute that we should return to that rather uncivilised way of going about our business. What I am saying is that there is a history of holding politicians to account during election campaigns.

I do not know what has happened. I look forward to the forthcoming review because that will better inform us. Perhaps it is the result of new people coming into politics for elections. The referendum in Scotland and the referendum over Europe were both very divisive; maybe that has engendered some rage that we had not hitherto been aware of or tapped into. Maybe it is because people no longer accept the democratic will of elections and feel that they have been cheated in some way.

My constituency is normally a very civilised place in which to go about one's electoral business, but we have seen an increase in such activity. Our political opponents historically were the Liberal Democrats. We used to say that the Liberal Democrats were ripping down our posters and so forth but, amazingly, the Liberal Democrats lost their deposit in the last election. They were replaced by an independent candidate who hoovered up all the anti-Conservative vote. Regrettably, this candidate—either advertently or inadvertently—attracted a huge amount of people online who were very abusive towards me. That did not matter so much, but they were often abusive to those canvassing on my behalf. The candidate was backed up by independent councillors and a website that I will not dignify by naming. It is all part and parcel of a group of disaffected people who believe that personal abuse is the best way of attacking the sitting Member of Parliament. They are people for whom the glass is always half empty. If one target fails, they move on to another. That is not particularly healthy.

Earlier, I asked the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), how many people had been prosecuted for such abuse and intimidation, and the answer was 15,000. I now ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), who in his place, how many people have actually been sentenced for this

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vile behaviour. How many people have been given a custodial sentence? You see, I can take it; I do not mind this level of attack. I did point it out on election night—that did not go down particularly well with some of the propagators or with a local newspaper that supported them—but I can take it. However, the levels of racist abuse that some Members and candidates have had to put up with, and the levels of attack on women, are unfair and completely unacceptable.

We were talking only yesterday in Prime Minister's questions about how many women there are in Parliament. It is something we can all celebrate. The Conservative party is enormously proud that we were the first party in the country to have a female Prime Minister. We now have a second female Conservative Prime Minister. I have daughters who may one day want to come into this House. Indeed, I very much hope that they will consider it, but why should they if they know they are going to be subjected to these vile, anonymous goings-on on the internet?

We need to look carefully at the existing legislation and protections and at how the police handle these things. It is almost tempting to say that the police have a lack of resources, but I think it goes much wider than that. During the recent general election campaign, a large number of my posters were regularly vandalised and disappeared. We reported that to the police but, frankly, they did not seem particularly interested—although, in all fairness, there is not much they can do if the poster has disappeared.

We want to attract people into this place. It should be full of short people, fat people, white people, black people, gay people and straight people—it does not matter. It is meant to be representative of the country. But people look at this place and see the levels of abuse to which we are subjected. They must think to themselves, “Do I really want to subject myself to that level of abuse? If I want to represent my community, is it worth subjecting me and my family to those levels of abuse?” The answer must be no. We should be able to go about our business without fear or favour and without being hounded by anonymous bloggers or other people online. So we need the defamation and libel legislation that follows the newspapers to be mirrored online, and we need the sanctions to be the same.

As the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham P. Jones) said earlier, there is a very, very narrow balance. On the one side, there is the freedom of speech, and I think all of us in this House would fight to preserve people's right to criticise us in good faith and with reason, because we should be held to account—we are the people's representatives here at Westminster. However, on the other side of the divide is something that is not about the freedom of speech, but about people who seek to undermine others by slander, libel, bullying and intimidation. That is where the line is—it is a very clear line—and it is about time we took it a little more seriously.

**Graham P. Jones:** I am listening intently to the points the right hon. Gentleman is making, and he refers to the point I made earlier, but does he not accept that we are in danger of losing a degree of freedom of speech because of bullying online? It is simply not possible to

engage in a broad-minded and open debate when a volume of people insist on handing out personal abuse.

**Sir Hugo Swire:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I do not want to be party political at this point, but I would just say this: it is also incumbent on us to say the right things and to behave in the right way, and it is regrettable when we have people such as Len McCluskey and the shadow Chancellor seeking to cherry-pick which laws of the country should be obeyed, and encouraging, at times, civil disturbance if they do not get their way. That, in turn, engenders a feeling that the people have been cheated of the electoral result that was their due and, again, creates a whirlwind of abuse online.

**Graham P. Jones:** I am simply not going to disagree with the point the right hon. Gentleman has just made.

**Sir Hugo Swire:** This is not really a political point, but I also feel tremendous sympathy for my friends on the Opposition Benches—and I do have friends of long standing on the Opposition Benches—who have come under horrendous criticism from the Momentum movement in their own party. Some of that has been absolutely vile, and I feel extremely sorry for them, having to operate with that going on as well.

Whether it is Momentum or people on the right criticising, let us try not to be *parti pris* over this. Let us get some regulations, and let us get some convictions of people who are making it extremely difficult, particularly for women and people from ethnic minorities, to come into this Chamber and to operate in this environment, because if they do not, Parliament and the country will be weaker.

4.7 pm

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): First, let me congratulate the Members who brought this debate to the House. I was keen to take part, because I bring a specific perspective, having been a councillor for 13 years before arriving here and being a parliamentarian. I came in in a by-election, when Parliament was in a quite interesting place. We were obviously going through the referendum period, and I think that had a particular impact on how strongly people felt about voicing their concerns about politics.

We probably ought to be a bit careful not to present Parliament as a house of innocents who are somehow misunderstood by the public and who therefore get unfair criticism. Part of our democracy is that people can make contact and hold us to account, and sometimes that is robust. I would also say that I have heard the same things in this building that I have heard outside.

However, there is a line, and I cannot understand why it seems to be blurred in the eyes of organisations such as Facebook and Twitter. If people are inciting violence and racial hatred, or if they are being overtly sexist and calling for women to be raped, I cannot understand how anybody reviewing their posts would believe that they met the standard of fair and open speech. We need to be careful not to say that politics is the way it is and that it is uncomfortable at times, and not to allow that somehow to blur into something that is firmly over the line and that ought to be taken on by the organisations that are making a lot of money from these activities.

When they were established, Facebook and Twitter were meant to be, yes, social media but also publishing platforms. They were meant to be a way for everyday people to publish their views and thoughts, to interact and to share their ideas. It is fair to say that more often than not Facebook and Twitter are not publishing platforms—they are mind dumps where people just put stuff, and I am not entirely sure that they always think twice about what they put. Although I have experienced abuse, and perhaps I am slightly thin-skinned about some of it, it is in no way comparable to the level, in volume and tone, experienced by female Members of this place, and particularly BAME Members. There is a noticeable increase in the volume and tone of the vitriol that comes with that. We need to be honest about this, because if we are not honest about the problem, we cannot hope to find a solution.

When I was a local councillor, I had some interesting experiences that I want to relay, because they put into perspective how the public stray over the line, and how, as a politician, it can be difficult to navigate that situation and to know what is the best thing to do. Are we being too thin-skinned and there is a degree of challenge that we ought to accept, or should we be robust in defending our position all the time, because that is the way to clamp down on it? I do not think there is a book that tells us how to do this; if there is, I would like to see it. It is about judgment. I am very risk-averse with regard to challenging constituents in return. I am not comfortable with doing that. If a constituent is making threats of violence, I would expect the publishing platform to take action against that. If a constituent is setting up fake profiles in my name purporting to be me, I expect Twitter or Facebook to take action, not to ignore it and turn a blind eye.

Even worse in terms of trying to navigate the situation is the fact that when we send an email or press a button to report a racist or sexist tweet, or a tweet that is threatening violence, quite often we do not even get a response. We get absolutely no feedback unless we are the named victim. If somebody is saying, “Let’s rape all Labour women MPs”, who is the victim there? I report it because I have seen it, but I have no idea what action has been taken about it by Twitter in order to make a judgment on that.

Quite often in public life, we become the place where people lay their grievances. It is not fair. We have not done anything personally to deserve it, but we are in positions of power and authority, and people want to lay responsibility at the door of power and authority. As council leader I had a number of issues—in particular, a website that was designed to do nothing more than attack and try to damage people’s characters and reputations. It was very difficult to know what to do about some of that.

On the police response—I am being honest about this; I am a defender of the police force—I think that it goes deeper than resources and that there is a cultural problem. There is a view that says, “Well, that’s politics, isn’t it?” and people do not quite understand that there is a line of acceptable behaviour that crosses private and public life. Abuse is no more acceptable just because someone is a politician. At times, the police think it is something over there that is not for them to get involved in. I have seen candidates being followed and intimidated. I personally could not go to my local shopping precinct

with my children on a Saturday without being harassed and abused by a political opponent. The police advice at that time was “Find somewhere else to shop.” There is a deeper cultural problem with regard to some of these issues.

Because we publish our addresses as local authority members, we have been the victims of direct action at our house. We had somebody who was clinically diagnosed as mentally ill waiting outside my son’s school and waiting outside the house—somebody who had made threats to take my children. I think people sometimes do not understand that behind the politician—the face, and the person on the ballot paper—is a network of family and friends, and that we have a personal relationship with our family and friends and a duty of care to them. Because I am fearful about the impact on them, I am always very protective of my family and careful of what I say about some of the things I see and hear. I should say that on the most serious occasion, the police and the council were very good.

To put my personal experience into perspective, the most shocking thing that I have come across was the experience of an Asian woman councillor in Oldham. She dared to be in her 30s and not married, and her political opponents used that against her in an election campaign. She was campaigned against by the opposition but also, I have to say, by some registered members of the Labour party, even though she was a Labour candidate. The police, the authorities and political parties have a responsibility to set the bar high and to make sure that complaints are dealt with quickly in a way that is fair on the victims and fair on those who have been complained about. Allowing complaints to drag out for years on end is to nobody’s benefit.

The candidate I have just mentioned lost her seat as a result of that direct targeting. The worst part of the campaign against her were the people who came down the street outside the polling station in cars and shouted through megaphones, “It’s time to vote for a real man.” If her opponents believed that the candidate was weak and easily intimidated, they massively underestimated the person they were up against. She is one of the strongest people I know in politics. That situation still has not been resolved, and the people responsible have still not been held to account. I found that example the most shocking.

We need to look, in our politics—in this place as well as outside it—at the tone of our debates and what we say to each other, because people take their cue from that to some extent. Equally, we should be absolutely clear that there is a line that is continually crossed, and that the response from organisations such as, but not limited to, Twitter and Facebook is unacceptable on too many occasions.

Finally, I have heard a few times the comment, “People are different on social media, aren’t they? If you met them walking down the street, they would not dare to act in the way they act online.” I do not believe that for a second. I think that what we get on social media, from someone who is at their keyboard in their bedroom, is the real person. We see them without the veneer that they maintain outside because they are worried about being seen for who they are.

**Sir Hugo Swire:** I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Does he not agree that a lot of these people are intrinsically cowardly and that they would not do to

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our faces what they think they can get away with when they are sitting in their little attic room typing out abuse in the middle of the night, knowing that we do not know who they are?

**Jim McMahon:** I am not sure that I would take entirely what the right hon. Gentleman says, because there is a danger, if we follow that train of thought, of assuming that the person who is committing that kind of abuse cannot be dangerous. My concern is that people who continually harass and obsess about public figures do have the capacity to take it further—we have seen that, of course, with the loss of one of our friends from this place—so I would be careful not to jump to that conclusion. But the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that, at heart, those people are cowards.

Some of my colleagues have gone through abuse at a level that I cannot comprehend. Regardless of colleagues' political beliefs, regardless of how they have voted in this place and regardless of what they have said in the printed media, they have my absolute support and back-up. Whatever the House of Commons needs to do to tackle this, I guarantee my support for it.

4.18 pm

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): “Where’s my shotgun?” Those were the words I heard from the receptionist at a venue where I held a surgery a year to the day after the murder of Jo Cox. I should confess that my reaction was to think of it as just another example of the casual contempt with which many members of the public treat politicians in this day and age. Wrongly, I rather brushed off the comment, which in any other context would be treated as pretty obscene. I say that that was wrong partly because of the upset it caused to my staff, who were helping me with the surgery. They are by no means thin-skinned, and I do not think that I am either, but they see a continuum, as the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) has said, from the contempt—particularly online and very often in person—that starts as casual abuse but somewhere crosses a line and can become some form or other of very real abuse and pose a threat to people in real life.

In my judgment, I have never experienced any serious abuse on the scale of some of the extraordinary and quite moving examples we have heard today, and I do not want to pretend that I have experienced anything that equates to any of those examples. However, I want to talk about the continuing contempt with which the public—in small numbers, but often at great volume—treat politicians. I want to pose questions, to which I do not necessarily have any answers, about whether everyday contempt and abuse are to some extent the building blocks or enablers of greater levels of much more extreme abuse, as well as about the extent to which we can tackle it or should put up with it.

Several Members have talked about the role of social media companies, particularly Twitter and Facebook. It seems to me that, as has been mentioned a couple of times by the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham P. Jones), we need to tread a very careful line between reining in free speech and setting the right parameters for debates that are rightly robust, given the gravity of the decisions we as politicians have all signed up to take.

Some Members have suggested that the way in which Facebook or Twitter deal with complaints of abuse are inadequate, and in some cases the evidence we have heard shows that that is clearly true. However, it strikes me that I do not want to live in a country where those who set the parameters of free speech are Facebook or Twitter. Whether or not we like it, it is down to us to set the parameters of free speech. I would like the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary to set out what constitutes free speech, not Mark Zuckerberg or the founders of Twitter, although I mean no disrespect to their remarkable achievements.

**Graham P. Jones:** I am enjoying the hon. Gentleman’s arguments. Does he share my view that free speech arises where a debate is able to reach a conclusion without being interrupted or stopped by abuse, and where such a democratic debate is based on discourse and an exchange of views?

**Matt Warman:** Absolutely. Although we would never seek to end the debate on Facebook, if the hon. Gentleman sees what I mean, we must acknowledge that some of those debates will ultimately end with a vote in this Chamber. That is the case that we as politicians must continually make.

I do not pretend for a moment that we will ever convince everyone to be nice or to agree with us on the internet—nor should we seek to do so—but we should realise that part of tackling the smaller building blocks enabling larger problems of abuse is relentless political engagement, whether that is in the form of the Education Centre a few hundred yards from the this Chamber or all of us continuing to hold our regular surgeries whatever a receptionist may say. We should not blame Facebook or Twitter for the abuse we face. Ultimately, we have to acknowledge, as the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton said, that we are sometimes experiencing the unpalatable real face of views that are sincerely held by members of the public. If we find those views unpalatable, it is surely our role to have the debate we just talked about and try to change some of those minds, but that is harder than ever in the social media age. Whatever the size of a constituency, there will always be more constituents than Members of Parliament, so we cannot engage with every single individual, much as we wish we could.

As a number of speakers said, politics should be a debate about policy, but the fact is that in every election campaign we all make politics personal. We talk about our own characters and about why people should vote in a representative democracy for one representative rather than another. We should be careful about having our cake and eating it, and saying, “We should talk only about policy, but here on my leaflet is a picture of me and my family.” To tackle all of those things, we have to say that politicians ultimately set the boundaries of free speech and that, by working with social media companies, we will ensure that free speech is properly experienced in the real world.

Ultimately, we should acknowledge that there are hugely passionate debates online and in person, which we should protect, because of the gravity of the decisions we take in this place. We should be clear about where we draw the line between abuse and free speech. In recent years, thanks to social media, the line has become a lot blurrier and the area has become a lot greyer than we

might wish it to be. If politicians are to tackle the small building blocks of abuse, we have to address that issue much more clearly—I do not for a moment suggest that it is of the same order of magnitude as the extreme forms of abuse that we have heard about today, but if we are to tackle the social media side of the problem, which so many people have spoken about, we have to acknowledge that we hold the solution in our hands, and we cannot pass the buck to others.

4.27 pm

**Graham P. Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): I want to make a few points. We have to be defenders of free speech, and debates that do not end with a conclusion from both sides or are curtailed for whatever reason cannot be described as free speech. Debates are often curtailed because of abuse, and I believe that free speech is diminishing in this country because of the amount of abuse that is handed out—on social media, by and large. I will come to that point in a second.

There are extreme cases. Some people have mental health issues and pose a threat, but they are in a different category from the people who carry out volume abuse. During the general election, one of my constituents, who had problems, decided to post online that he was going to stab me in the chest multiple times. Of course, I reported it to the police. I did not personally feel under any threat, and it transpired that the person had a lot of issues and needed help. I was just the person they were targeting at the time; they could have targeted anybody.

Then there are people who just hand out abuse. We had a great MP in my constituency; the last MP was good, but I am talking about the MP before him, a Conservative, Ken Hargreaves. I had a lot of time for him, and I spoke to him about being an MP many times before he passed away. He used to say to me, “I would get a few letters on a Friday. I had a part-time member of staff, and I would answer three or four letters.” MPs today live in a completely different world from the one Ken lived in as MP for Hyndburn between 1983 and 1992. This House must address those issues and the different world we live in.

I come to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) made about people who carry out volume abuse at a very low level. My concern is that a lot of these people—I know them in my constituency—are handing out abuse to other people, too. They are doing it on the street. It is their nature and their character. I say to them, “You’re giving me abuse as though it is transactional—as though you would do this just to an MP—but it is not. It is a display of your character and of what you do to other people, not just me.” It is incumbent on us as Members to challenge these people, because they go on to do unpleasant things to other people. Members of Parliament are not the issue here. The real issue is those who are handing out abuse and how they conduct themselves in general, because some of them go on to do dreadful things to other people. We should reflect on the fact that if someone is handing out abuse, generally they have a problem, and generally that problem affects other people in society.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): During the election campaign, I called out abuse, as an LGBT candidate. I spoke to many young

LGBT people in Plymouth who are scared of calling out abuse themselves, but to whom the example of calling it out gave strength. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is incumbent on us to call it out, even though it might be hard and difficult?

**Graham P. Jones:** I think we are sometimes hesitant to call out abuse. Sometimes the volume can be so great that we walk away. I hope that the Government review will look into the cumulative impact of low-volume abuse, how we manage free speech, and how people, as my hon. Friend suggests, sometimes recoil from engaging. As he says, when Members who feel abused come together and make a strong point, it offers a deterrent to those who are being abusive. As a society, we must tackle the issue. On a small point, it would be nice if social media had “dislikes” as well as “likes”. Let us have a disapproval rating for some of these abusers—that would be very helpful.

Finally, the nadir of this issue. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton said, we have families. I would like to say for the first time something that I never say—I never put my family on leaflets; I keep them out of it—which is that I have an eight-year-old daughter at school. The abuse directed at me from my own side when the airstrikes vote took place affected my family. I look at that eight-year-old. She did not deserve the comments from some disgraceful people who call themselves Labour party members. They should be thrown out. We have families and they are affected. It is about time some people woke up to the fact that we are not robots and are not there to be abused. Also, there are people who are not on the ballot paper who are victims of this abuse.

4.32 pm

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): It is a real pleasure to speak in a debate in which there is so much to agree with on both sides of the House. Members are not always good enough at standing up for themselves and the importance of being a Member of Parliament. I have suffered my fair share of electoral abuse, not so much in my current seat but when I was churlish enough to be a Conservative candidate in Islington North. On a daily basis, my team were chased down the street, were accused of being paedophiles and had things thrown at them. I know that many other Members across the House have had similar experiences. This is not the sort of environment in which we wish to pursue our politics.

I would like to make three brief points. The first relates largely to social media and how we can do more to call out the abuse that some of us suffer. When abuse on Twitter takes place, our instinctive reaction is normally to report it, block it and move on. I suggest that we all take the time to capture the abuse before we block it and report it. We should retweet it and share it to name and shame, and to let our followers, colleagues and opponents know the Twitter identity of the people who are putting the stuff around.

We have heard very good contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) about how social media companies could do more, but I think we could do more as well. We could do more in a collegiate sense. If I saw a colleague or an opponent being abused online, I would want to block the abuser, too.

[Alex Burghart]

We could even get together and draw up banned lists of people on Twitter who are abusing MPs. I do not mean abuse in the sense of, “X party has got its figures wrong” or “Y party doesn’t know what it’s talking about”; I mean physical threats, racism, sexism, homophobia—things that we all agree are totally unacceptable in modern political discourse. We could easily have a system whereby we report Twitter users making abusive threats to the head of the 1922 committee on the Conservative side and the head of the parliamentary Labour party and swap notes weekly.

My third point is about the language that we MPs use. This is a place where language is important. The House does not need reminding that the word “parliament” comes from the French word “parler”—“to speak”; we are perhaps one of the great talking shops in history. The language we use, therefore, is absolutely essential, so when we fail to condemn the language of other Members, even Members on our own side, we let the House down. I am not making a political point against the Labour party or its traditions, but I do want to make a point about one MP who happens to sit on its Benches. When somebody comes out of a meeting in which another Member has suggested that a female Conservative MP should be lynched, the correct response is not, “I didn’t say that myself,” but “I condemn what they said, I’ve reported them to the authorities and I hope that disciplinary action is taken against them.”

Similarly, in being careful about the language we use, we have to stay away from phrases such as “day of rage”. Rage is the language of uncontrolled emotion. Perhaps I am being oversensitive—perhaps it is the language of the barricade and of romantic revolution, or perhaps just a little political Viagra to some doddering old militants—but it is also the language of the flick-knife, of the boot in the face, of the garrotte; it is the language of violence, and it does not belong in the mouths of hon. Members of this Chamber.

4.37 pm

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): This has been a reasoned, somewhat sombre and, with a couple of notable exceptions, non-partisan debate in which Members from across the House have discussed the unacceptable abuse that candidates and the public experience during election campaigns. The hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) also emphasised the abuse suffered by our staff, to whom we are all always grateful. Members have shared their experiences, very distressingly in some cases, and the contribution from the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine), in particular, highlighted that as well as politicians we are human beings. My hon. Friends the Members for Hyndburn (Graham P. Jones) and for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) also made those points.

I echo the words of many colleagues: abuse and intimidation have no place in our democracy or our party. This kind of behaviour must never be viewed as the price to be paid for political involvement. It is our duty as public office holders to protect the integrity of electoral processes and the safety of candidates standing in future elections. It is clear from listening to colleagues from across the House that this is an issue for all political parties. Although it is difficult to listen to so

many horrific examples of abuse, this debate presents an opportunity for us to work together to find effective solutions, so will the Government commit to working with the Opposition, and with other political parties, to agree a joint code of conduct with a framework for reporting and assessing discrimination, racism and other forms of electoral abuse, and for disciplining those responsible?

The hon. Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) approved of the idea of removing addresses from ballot papers for council candidates, while the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, who opened the debate, suggested that there should be greater powers for returning officers and the police, as well as strengthened guidance.

We all know that candidates are often targeted because of their gender, sexuality, class and/or ethnicity. Labour Members condemn all acts of intimidation, including the death threats, rape threats, criminal damage, sexism, racism, homophobia and anti-Semitism of which we have heard today. The gendered nature of abuse directed at candidates is a reflection of wider sexism in our society. Women and girls face abuse and harassment every day. That is not unique to British society or politics. A survey carried out by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2016 found that 82% of women parliamentarians in 39 countries had experienced some form of psychological violence, and 44% had received threats of death, rape, beating or abduction.

**Mrs Latham:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Chi Onwurah:** I am afraid not. I am sorry, but we have very little time. However, I am sure the hon. Lady agrees with me that the safety of women is far too important for anyone to turn a blind eye. Will the Minister tell me what progress the Government have made on achieving the aims set out in their policy paper, “Strategy to end violence against women and girls: 2016 to 2020”, and whether, as part of that strategy, they will agree to review the abuse that women candidates face?

Abuse not only causes physical, psychological and emotional harm to its victims, but poses a significant barrier to participation in public life. One in six women MPs surveyed said that they would not have stood for Parliament in the first place if they had known what was to come. We cannot allow abuse to prevent women and ethnic minorities from entering politics. This Parliament is the most diverse in history: a record number of women, LGBT and ethnic minority MPs were elected this year. Although there is much more work to be done, that is a positive step. However, we cannot allow ourselves to move backwards, and failure to act risks reversing the progress made.

As has been observed, we as politicians are responsible for setting the tone of the national debate, not just at election times but in politics and discourse generally. When a politician is seen to legitimise hate speech or intolerance of any group in society, that politician must take ultimate responsibility for his or her words. The right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) posed the question whether we were a more divided nation following the two recent referendums. I hope he will accept that while we may disagree with each other, it is part of our role to help bring the country together, and I hope the Government will accept that political



parties have a responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect, including those with whom we strongly disagree.

Those who reject the idea that women and ethnic minorities are especially targeted should consider the level of abuse received by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), which, as was stated earlier, amounts to half of all online abuse received by MPs. They should also consider a study conducted by *The Guardian* that found that black, female and gay journalists were the most likely to be criticised.

The abuse that I have detailed, and of which we have heard today, would not be possible on this scale were it not for the growing use of social media platforms. That point has been made by many Members today. Twitter, for instance, states that it does not

“tolerate behavior...that harasses, intimidates, or uses fear to silence another user’s voice.”

However, this is exactly what is happening on Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms.

The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) rightly raised the role of the press in setting an example. My hon. Friends the Members for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) and for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) emphasised the importance of social media, and that point was also made by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart). Social media platforms have a responsibility to respect our human rights and ability to express ourselves freely and without fear, particularly as the rise of bots and networks allows others on social media to industrialise the abuse that politicians are experiencing. Will the Minister reassure us that he is working with social media platforms to combat these issues, especially the industrialisation of the abuse of target figures?

As the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) emphasised, the toxic political culture surrounding President Trump has done little for British politics, with far-right US websites helping to drive abuse against Members of Parliament. Labour Members immediately condemned the President’s reckless and irresponsible rhetoric, while the Prime Minister was somewhat slower to do so. Does the Minister agree that we have a responsibility to oppose sexism, racism, homophobia and anti-Semitism in the strongest terms, both at home and abroad?

Many Members who report abuse to their local police find that investigations are cut short due to a lack of police resources. If we really want the police to tackle abuse, they need to be properly resourced. Will the Minister tell us how he will ensure that they have the resources they need? Jo Cox paid the ultimate price as an MP, and it is always an honour to stand in front of her memorial in the Chamber. As the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) said, we are not facing that kind of sacrifice, but we must see action on this issue, because the two things are related. The abuse and intimidation of candidates and the public have no place in our elections.

I want to end with some of my own experience, albeit slightly reluctantly because when I have raised the abuse of politicians in the past, I have been told, without irony, that I need to “grow a pair”. Last week, I wrote an article about the reprehensible crimes uncovered by

Operation Sanctuary in my constituency. As a consequence, I have received thousands of abusive tweets threatening me and accusing me of unspeakable crimes. As well as being unpleasant in themselves, those tweets prevented me from seeing what my constituents had to say about the issue, and that is what concerns me most. The abuse that politicians and candidates often attract not only prevents the interaction between constituents and MPs, but puts constituents off becoming MPs. Everyone here has a duty to promote the House as being representative and as somewhere all can come to represent their views, their cities and their constituencies. However, it is hard to see this place becoming more representative while Members of Parliament are subjected to such abuse, which is putting many people off aspiring to what is nevertheless the best job in the world.

4.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Skidmore):** I thank all Members from both sides of the House who have participated in this important debate: my hon. Friends the Members for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham), for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger), for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) and for Angus (Kirstene Hair), my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire), and the hon. Members for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield), for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine), for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), for Hyndburn (Graham P. Jones) and for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah). I thank all of them for their considered and measured tones. This is one of those occasions when we come together as a House. We are, of course, members of separate political parties, but we are first and foremost Members of Parliament and we have a collective duty to future Members and to those who wish to stand as candidates for the best job in the world, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central put it. We have a duty to safeguard our democracy and to ensure that such abuse has no place in it.

Once again, we have heard about the disturbing instances of abuse and intimidation suffered by Members on both sides of the House—they were similar to what was described in a vivid Westminster Hall debate on 12 July. Members and the Government take such instances seriously as a matter of great concern. The Government were determined to ensure that we had this second debate in the main Chamber to ensure that all Members who wanted to put on record their experiences of abuse and intimidation were able to do so. The descriptions of the abuse and intimidation suffered by hon. Members are worrying, but the fact that such behaviour seems to be on the rise is deeply concerning. The Prime Minister has said:

“Robust debate is a vital part of our democracy, but there can be no place for the shocking threats and abuse we have seen in recent months.”

No one in our open and tolerant society should have to suffer this vile treatment directed towards themselves, their staff, or their friends and family. The Government condemn such behaviour in the strongest terms.

Turning to the review being undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the Government believe that it is fundamental to our democratic process that no

[Chris Skidmore]

individual should feel unwilling to stand for office due to a fear of suffering abuse and intimidation. That would be a victory for the perpetrators of this heinous behaviour, which we cannot allow. That was why the Prime Minister asked the committee to conduct a review into the intimidation experienced by parliamentary candidates. The independent committee—it is vital that it is independent—is looking at the nature of the problem of intimidation and considering the current protections and measures in place for candidates. It aims to report back to the Prime Minister by the end of the year with recommendations to tackle the issue further.

The committee has already issued a call for written evidence—the consultation ended on 8 September—and is today holding oral evidence sessions with representatives from the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the political parties. Parties have also submitted their own written evidence. The Government will look closely at the committee's recommendations and conclusions, and that will be the appropriate time for the Government to take action—we should not prejudice or pre-empt the conclusions now.

In tackling online abuse, internet trolls, cyber-stalking and harassment, and the perpetrators of grossly offensive, obscene or menacing behaviour, the Government are determined to take forward measures to ensure that effective legislation is in place. That has included modifying relevant offences through the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 to ensure that people who commit them are prosecuted and properly punished, including with sentences of up to two years.

The law is clear that what is illegal offline is also illegal online. Section 127 of the Communications Act 2003 creates an offence of sending, or causing to be sent

“by means of a public electronic communications network a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character”.

Revised guidance on social media was published by the Crown Prosecution Service in August 2016 to incorporate new and emerging crimes that are being committed online, providing clear advice to help the prosecution of cyber-enabled crime. When launching the CPS's hate crime awareness campaign in August 2017, I was pleased to hear the Director of Public Prosecutions commit the CPS to treating online hate crime as seriously as crimes committed face to face, which is an important step forward.

Social media, like all forms of public communication, comes with risks, and the Government are aware of concerns about content and inappropriate or upsetting behaviour on social media. The law does not differentiate criminal offences committed on social media or anywhere else—it is the action that is illegal. Again, what is illegal offline is illegal online.

**Sir Hugo Swire:** I asked earlier about the number of prosecutions and was told 15,000. I then asked about the number of custodial convictions, so I wonder whether the Minister has some idea of that figure.

**Chris Skidmore:** I was coming to that point. The figures mentioned earlier were for prosecutions for hate crime. There were 15,442 prosecutions in 2015-16, of which 12,846 were successful. I hope that deals with my right hon. Friend's point.

The recent Digital Economy Act 2017 will help to ensure that online abuse is tackled by requiring a code of practice to be established. The code will set out guidance on what social media providers should do in relation to conduct on their platforms that involves the bullying or insulting of an individual, or other behaviour likely to intimidate or humiliate. That work will be part of the ongoing work on the digital charter, which was mentioned in the Queen's Speech.

Additionally, an internet safety strategy Green Paper will be published shortly and will include a consultation, which we expect to be published in the autumn, on a variety of issues related to countering online harm and internet safety. In answer to the hon. Members for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) and for Newcastle upon Tyne Central, there will be, and have been, regular meetings with social media platforms as part of the internet safety strategy consultation.

The Government are determined that hate crime of any form will have no place in our society, and last summer the Home Secretary set out the steps the Government will take to prevent all forms of hate crime, to increase the reporting of offences and to support victims through the hate crime action plan. The plan focuses on five key strands, including preventing hate crime by challenging beliefs and behaviours and by building on the understanding of hate crime.

The Home Secretary has also commissioned Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to carry out an inspection on all five monitored hate crime strands—race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and transgender identity—including for online hate crime, to build a national picture of how effectively and efficiently police forces deal with hate crime. The Government will consider the findings of that review and how best to take them forward.

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood asked about specific figures over the general election period. I note her concern that we do not have the reported figures for that period. I assure her that I will raise the issue in a meeting with the Electoral Commission and the National Police Chiefs Council. She is right that we can only go forward if we have increased transparency on the level of crimes committed during the election period.

As I have said, what is illegal offline is also illegal online. No one should ever be the victim of threatening or intimidating behaviour. Although the consultation of the Committee on Standards in Public Life has now closed, it should not preclude any Member with an example of abuse from going to their local police and, importantly, to the Metropolitan police parliamentary liaison investigations team. I am sure many Members will have seen the recent figures showing that the team has already dealt with 71 complaints of malicious communication. It is important that Members know that the Metropolitan police has this investigations unit and that it is used.

Members on both sides of the House have mentioned the imprint and the current inconsistency between parliamentary elections and local elections, with councillors having to reveal their address. I entirely sympathise with those concerns. The Cabinet Office has begun to review and to look again at the imprint, and particularly at the issue of candidates' addresses being put on ballot papers. My officials are already engaging with the

Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators, and I assure the House that we are looking closely at how we can take action to sort that inconsistency.

Everyone in society should feel that they can participate in the democratic process. As our democracy is built on the foundation of inclusion and tolerance, no one should be deterred from standing for office. As the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) said, this is a noble profession.

I thank Members for contributing to the debate. Although, as my hon. Friend said, the consultation is closed, as Members of Parliament we must stand up for ourselves and for anyone who stands in our democratic elections wherever we spot abuse and intimidation. We need to ensure that we safeguard our democratic processes.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the abuse and intimidation of candidates and the public during the General Election campaign.

## PETITIONS

### Corby Urgent Care Centre

4.59 pm

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the people of Corby, east Northamptonshire and the surrounding areas, who rely on this fantastic facility to ensure their healthcare needs are met. I am pleased to be able to raise this matter again, after my Westminster Hall debate on the issue yesterday, and this petition is a reflection of the huge strength of local feeling about how important this facility is. The petition has collected 2,545 signatures and has been brilliantly organised by the Save Corby Urgent Care Centre group.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the Corby Urgent Care Centre should receive proper funding.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to compel Corby Clinical Commissioning Group to provide adequate funding to allow the Corby Urgent Care Centre to continue running.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002059]

### The Rohingya in Myanmar

5 pm

**Eleanor Smith** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): This petition is from the Muslim community in my constituency and is about the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that urgent action should be taken to stop the violence against Myanmar's Muslim ethnic minority, the Rohingya i.e. genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity... The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to issue an urgent statement calling for an immediate end to all violence in Myanmar; and further calling for immediate entry of aid into Myanmar (which has been suspended).

Following is the full text of the petition:

*[The petition of residents of the UK,*

*Declares that urgent action should be taken to stop the violence against Myanmar's Muslim ethnic minority, the Rohingya i.e. genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity; further that the petitioners cannot continue to watch the beheading of babies and children, gang rapes, and the displacement of hundreds and thousands as a genocide unfolds; further to impose conditions or sanctions on trade with Myanmar; further that Aung San Suu Kyi be stripped of her Nobel Peace Prize; further to ensure the UK does not supply arms or military training to the military; further to bring the perpetrators to the international court of justice for crimes against humanity; further to send a UN peacekeeping force to Rakhine state (Myanmar); further to establish safe haven areas within Rakhine state to stop the mass forced exodus; further to stop any arms getting to Burma junta (arms embargo); further to implement the Rakhine commission recommendations chaired by ex UN secretary Kofi Annan; further to allow in UN observers, humanitarian aid charities (British and others) and journalists; further to send emergency aid to all victims and refugees in neighbouring countries, especially Bangladesh; further that it is time for the Foreign Minister to ensure that there is not a repeat of Srebrenica or Rwanda.*

*The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to issue an urgent statement calling for an immediate end to all violence in Myanmar; and further calling for immediate entry of aid into Myanmar (which has been suspended).*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

[P002061]

## Support for Witnesses of Terror Attacks Overseas

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Nigel Adams.*)

5.2 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I am very grateful to have this opportunity before the recess to raise the issue of support for witnesses of terror attacks overseas. I had originally hoped to bring this matter to the House as a Backbench Business debate, and I am grateful to the previous Backbench Business Committee and Members from across the House—and some former Members now—who had supported my bid, which unfortunately had to be cancelled as a result of Dissolution and the general election.

Let me start by paying tribute to all the victims of terror attacks in recent years, to their families, to all those affected and to all those who have provided support in times of need. Even in the short time I have been a Member of this House, the number of such attacks has only continued to grow—Tunisia, Nice, Stockholm, Paris and Barcelona, to name but a few in a very small part of the world. Of course in recent months there have been atrocities here at home, in Manchester, at London Bridge and here at Westminster. Again, I pay tribute to all those affected, and echo the thanks given and tributes already paid in this Chamber to the heroism of our late colleague, PC Keith Palmer.

That brief and by no means comprehensive reflection on recent attacks highlights the sad and stark reality that the number of terrorist incidents at home and overseas—and therefore the number of people who witness such attacks—is only going to grow. We must strive never to become complacent or inured to such atrocities, or somehow to accept them as “the new normal”. Terrorist atrocities are not normal; they are a perversion of ideology, and action must be taken at every level to tackle the root causes. At the same time, on every occasion there will be lessons to learn that can take us closer to preventing future attacks and lessons on how we respond and support those affected by an attack.

I wish to reflect on the experiences of constituents who were caught up in the attacks in Tunisia in June 2015 and the Stockholm attack in April this year and to ask the Government to consider what lessons can be learned from their experiences and what structures or policies can be put in place for the future. I commend my constituents for their bravery in the face of terror and for their permission to highlight their experiences in this debate.

When the dreadful news broke of the attacks in Sousse, Tunisia, on 26 June 2015, I stood in silence with Members of this House, in solidarity with the victims. I listened to the statements from the Government and the questions asked by Members on behalf of constituents caught up in the country or who had been tragically bereaved. But at the time I had no idea that one of my own constituents had been what was later described as a category 1 witness to the events. It was not until early 2016 that my constituent, Elizabeth McMillan, decided to contact me—a decision she made in frustration, disappointment and concern at how she, and many

others from that day with whom she was in contact, felt they had been treated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the institutions of government in this country.

Elizabeth will never forget her experiences on the day of the attack—on the beach only metres from the gunman, running for her life from the bullets, seeing other holiday-makers killed, hiding first in a drainpipe, then in a hotel, and being separated from her husband for more than three hours, with neither of them knowing whether the other was dead or alive. I will never forget meeting Elizabeth for the first time and hearing her recount and relive this horrific experience.

In many ways, and by her own admission, Elizabeth was one of the fortunate ones: both she and her husband are alive and sustained no physical injuries. But that does not mean that they are unaffected. They will have to live with the memories and the trauma for the rest of their lives. When we might all have expected and hoped for them to have received support from the state, to help them come to terms with what they witnessed and readjust their lives to a new reality, instead they have experienced bureaucracy and confusion, and what has often felt like a lack of compassion.

In the aftermath of the attack, my constituent spent almost 11 hours providing statements to the UK police, first when she first arrived back in Manchester, then again when she spoke to four Scottish police detectives at her home in Glasgow. However, it was not until 19 months later, and two days before the official inquest began, that she was informed by letter whether her statements would be used in evidence. In the intervening period, she heard nothing at all.

Ahead of the inquest, bereaved families and those who had sustained injuries were quite rightly given access to evidence, maps and information about the events on the day, but Elizabeth and, she tells me, others who witnessed the attack at close range but were not bereaved or injured, were denied access to such information. Although the FCO organised meetings in various locations around the United Kingdom, a meeting in Scotland was organised, at short notice, only after pressure from survivors. Such meetings were then segregated and classified: some were open to those bereaved or injured, while additional meetings were open to “others” or “anyone”.

My constituent is not an “other” or an “anyone”—she is a survivor of and witness to one of the most horrific and violent attacks anywhere in the world in recent years, and her life will never be the same again. In her own words, she says:

“As I ran bullets pinged off the fence in front of me. I was millimetres from being injured. It wasn’t my choice not to be, and it wasn’t the choice of those who were, but those who were not injured were ignored and forgotten about as soon as the ink had dried on their police statements...I was denied access to information even though I was 20 feet away from the gunman when he started shooting. I deserve answers too. I have to live with watching someone die...I felt ignored and excluded from what was happening. It was like an awful game of Chinese whispers and relied on other folk who were involved via a Facebook group for information. From the outset I’ve had to fight to get anything from the FCO.”

When the memorial service was organised, my constituent and others in her situation had to specially request an invitation, and they were told that there would not be space for them at the reception afterwards. I appreciate that for the Foreign Office and relevant authorities this was complicated, and a traumatic experience for everyone involved. Nobody can be expected to get everything

right all the time, especially in the face of such atrocity with such far-reaching effects. But as time went on, it began to feel for my constituent like an increasingly deliberate exclusion, or a lack of awareness of, or willingness to adapt to, the reality of the experience of those caught up as witnesses.

I am grateful to the former FCO Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. and gallant Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), for the lengthy correspondence we have had on this matter and, indeed, for the time he took to meet me to discuss the specific concerns and experiences of my constituent. She needs and deserves a personalised response, as do all those in her situation. I believe there are a number of lessons to be learned from her experiences that can help the Government to be better prepared for any future incidents, which are sadly almost inevitable.

My belief that such preparations are necessary has only been enhanced by the experience of two other constituents who were caught up in the Stockholm attack last April. They approached my office just as I was preparing a bid to the Backbench Business Committee for a debate on this topic.

My constituents, who do not want to be named but who I know are watching this debate, were sightseeing in the city and were not primary witnesses to the attack itself. Their hotel backed on to the street where the attack took place. They found themselves in a city in lockdown, stranded outside the security barrier and not knowing where to turn. When they phoned the UK embassy, there was no answer for more than an hour. Then they were directed by a voice message to call an emergency number in London. The advice from that call was to contact their travel insurers, but insurers very rarely provide cover for terrorist attacks.

At no point were their details recorded, so if family and friends attempted to call the embassy they would have been unable to verify their safety. When my constituents finally returned to their hotel, they witnessed the shocking aftermath of the attack from the window of their room. They saw body bags—even body parts—and other aspects of the police operation. This has been a traumatising experience, which requires psychological and emotional support, at the very least, and yet my constituents feel that there has not even been basic signposting to services or support organisations from the FCO or other Government Departments. They said:

“We are seriously concerned about the gap between expectations and reality when it comes to the support that the FCO...provides. Care, concern and understanding were not offered to us by the FCO when we tried to contact the embassy and then phone the emergency consular assistance number. We felt that we were completely abandoned, and that sense of abandonment could put other UK citizens at greater psychological risk because they are made to feel helpless...We felt betrayed when we read statements by the Foreign Office and the UK Government claiming that they were helping UK citizens in Stockholm because we knew that this was not true.”

It may have been tempting to look at the experience of my constituent in Tunisia and think that perhaps that was an isolated incident, or very specific to the circumstances of the tragic situation. However, to have similar experiences recounted, completely independently, by different constituents less than a year later makes me concerned that there are some systemic issues that need to be addressed.

Indeed, my constituent who was caught up in Tunisia is in close contact with several others who were involved in that attack, others in Paris, in Stockholm and even in the 7/7 London bombings who have expressed very similar concerns about the support that they received. I have now lodged the motion that I proposed to the Backbench Business Committee as early-day motion 303. I am grateful to hon. Members who have already signed it, and I hope that, over recess, more will do so as a sign of solidarity and support with victims and witnesses of terrorist attacks overseas. That motion states that

“the Government has a responsibility to provide specific and appropriate support to all UK citizens affected by terrorist attacks overseas; recognises that witnesses to terror attacks, whether or not they have been physically injured or bereaved, may live with trauma and mental health impacts as a result of what they have witnessed; and calls on the Government to learn lessons from its response to previous attacks, and to continually review its preparedness to respond and provide support for witnesses and survivors of any future incidents.”

What are the lessons that can be learned? First, there seems to be a significant gap between the expectations and reality of consular support in these situations. The experiences of my constituents in Stockholm are sadly not anomalous. In far less trying circumstances, I had significant difficulty getting through to the UK embassy in Berlin by phone when I arrived late for a visit, which was organised by the FCO itself.

I also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to another constituent, Julie Love, who founded the Death Abroad, You are Not Alone organisation, after the tragic death of her son, Colin, and her struggle for answers and consular assistance. The FCO review in 2014-15 makes several promises to change operational policy and the culture within the FCO, including training to make staff more sensitive and compassionate in their communications with survivors. It would be helpful to hear from the Minister when we can expect updates on how those recommendations are being taken forward and what evidence he can provide that the changes promised are taking effect.

The FCO has a choice here: either it has significantly to up its game in terms of communications and expectation management, or—and perhaps this would be the better option—it could consider how it can actually provide the kind of information and support that UK citizens are looking for when they find themselves caught up in extreme and vulnerable situations overseas.

There are lessons to be learned about how people are supported on their return to the United Kingdom. Basic signposting to general service providers is simply not good enough. Many of the charitable organisations, such as Victim Support and the Samaritans, do outstanding work, but the needs of people traumatised by terror attacks require specialist advice and support.

As part of my preparations for this debate, I visited the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball peace centre, established in Warrington in memory of the two young people killed by an IRA bomb in 1993. I had the privilege of meeting Colin Parry, who helped to found the centre in memory of his son. I pay tribute to the work of the chief executive, Nick Taylor, and his team, who have created an oasis of peace and support out of that atrocity. They do incredible work bringing people from divided communities together to promote understanding and reconciliation.

[Patrick Grady]

The centre runs a specialist Survivors Assistance Network, which provides advice and support to any victim, survivor, witness or person affected by terrorism, political violence or some aspects of war. Its aim is to help those people to cope, recover and establish a new normality in their lives. But the Ministry of Justice will only provide funding to cover support for people in England and Wales. The centre has to raise funds to make up an annual budget shortfall. I sincerely hope that the UK and Scottish Governments can work together to ensure that specialist support, such as that offered by SAN, is readily available to all who need it.

There is a question of financial compensation. Even without physical injuries, witnesses of attacks need time off work to adjust, and there can be costs associated with access to counselling or support services. There are various schemes in existence, but the Government must ensure that they are applicable to the circumstances we find ourselves in and the nature of modern terrorism and that they are accessible and straightforward to apply to.

I mentioned that it took several months between the attack and my constituent first approaching my office. That contact was on her own initiative. None of the advice or information provided to her suggested that she might want to make contact with her local elected representatives. Likewise, I had no idea that constituents from Glasgow North had been caught up in the attack. I am not suggesting for a minute that the Government disclose confidential information or personal details about constituents to MPs without permission, but I do wonder whether it would have been totally impossible to alert MPs to the fact that constituents generically had been affected. Likewise, perhaps it would have been possible to make those constituents aware that their MP is in a position to make representations on their behalf. If any good can come from this debate—if the Minister can undertake to learn some of the lessons and take forward some of the suggestions proposed—the credit lies entirely with the initiative and, indeed, bravery of my constituents who have chosen to come forward.

The events here in Westminster on 22 March this year mean that the vast majority of people who work on this estate are now witnesses to and survivors of a terrorist attack. Like many Members, I was locked down in the Chamber—in many ways, shielded from the goings-on elsewhere on the estate—but I am aware of members of staff who have been severely affected and traumatised by the events of that day. Quite rightly, support and advice are being put in place and plans are being made should such a situation ever occur again. That day will stay with us all for the rest of our lives, and it gives us at least some share in what the experiences must be like for those caught up in random violent attacks overseas, often far from home.

I have raised the experiences of constituents brave enough to come forward. I do not know how many other people in Glasgow North will be in a similar situation but I can guess, from the number of members who were willing to support my Backbench Business Committee bid, that these experiences are not unique. Indeed, they may only be the tip of the iceberg. Many of the lessons about providing adequate support, and clear, effective and frequent communication will also apply to situations of terror attacks here in the United Kingdom.

I hope that, in a constructive spirit of solidarity and support, the Minister and the Government will listen to the experiences of my constituents and to the points I have made. I hope and pray that nobody else ever has to go through such experiences, but the reality of our modern world suggests otherwise. We owe a duty of care to all those who have already been affected by terrorism at home and overseas, and we have a duty to prepare for the future.

5.18 pm

**The Minister for Africa (Rory Stewart):** I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) for bringing this important debate to the House.

Terrorism by its very nature intends not just to kill but to instil terror. One of its primary aims is psychological: trauma is at the heart of the terrorist incident. Let us reflect on what somebody goes through during a terrorist attack. It is not simply the act of violence itself and the sense that they might be shot, nor is it simply the consequence of that violence and the blood that they might see; it is the sense of whether it will be repeated—are they seeing just the beginning of a repeated series of attacks?

Even for somebody in the military who is trained to deal with this kind of violence, the trauma of witnessing an attack can be long-lasting. Veterans experience traumatic consequences as much as 10 years later. For a civilian who does not exist within a military unit, and who lacks that kind of support process, to find themselves a long way from home and hundreds of miles from a British embassy, in an environment in which they may be unable to speak the language and in which they may be unwilling to approach the police—in some of these cases, the terrorists dress as police when they mount the attack—and in a situation in which they are separated from anyone they know, in which their telephone signal may no longer work or their battery may be running out, and in which they feel completely hopeless and unsure whether it is best to remain in a room and take cover or to go out to get help, is one of the most terrifying experiences possible.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to bring this issue forward, and the fact that he has is a real tribute to the work that Members of Parliament—that politicians—can do, because it represents the difference between the thoughts and approach of somebody who represents a constituency, dealing on a personal level with individuals, and the way a Government system works. What do I mean by that? Traditionally, Government systems dealing with this kind of thing have tended simply to look at the nature of the trauma. The traditional national health service approach to this would be simply to ask how intense the trauma and the mental impact are and to ignore the cause and the context in which they arose. What the hon. Gentleman has produced for us is a very important moral lesson, which it is sometimes difficult for systems to take on board: the cause and the context—in this case, the particular form of directed evil inherent in terrorism—mean that the trauma somebody suffers requires a special and different form of treatment from the kind of treatment we might expect for other kinds of trauma and bereavement.

Two particular cases have been raised, and there are serious lessons from both of them for us—for me and for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The first

was the Stockholm attack. In that case, there were clearly significant problems with the telephone lines—with actually being able to take the information from the British citizen—and with our ability to get back to that citizen to check that they were okay after they had contacted us.

In the case of the terrible event in Sousse, in Tunisia, where the hon. Gentleman's constituent witnessed the horror directly, the situation went further. It was about the British Government learning that what matters is not simply whether someone is a victim of the attack. Inherent in terrorism is the impact on the witness, and the trauma experienced by the witness can even be as extreme and long lasting as that of the individual who was subject to the attack.

I would like to take it even further, because there is a broader lesson. In my own experience in Iraq, not only the people who witnessed the attack, but even people who were slightly away from it—who may have been locked in a windowless room taking shelter—and who did not physically act as category 1 witnesses, can continue to feel a sense of guilt, helplessness and trauma for months, or even years, after.

The question, then, is, how do the British Government respond to that? We have taken a number of measures, and I am going to give a list of them. They are going to sound quite bureaucratic, but it is in the nature of a Government that the way in which we address things is by putting systems in place; otherwise, we have nothing that endures—a particular Minister or a particular official can be moved on. We have to try to put systems in place to make sure that things work better in the future.

So what have we done? In relation to Sousse, we set up the Sousse joint officials unit. We brought together nine different Departments, ranging from the Foreign Office right the way through to the Home Office to try to jointly learn the lessons of how we deal with the aftermath of what was the worst single terrorist attack experienced by British citizens overseas—30 people killed, and 600 families affected. Coming out of that, we set up a bespoke mental health programme specifically for victims of terrorism, run by the Maudsley Trust.

We then began to amend—this was a question asked by the hon. Gentleman—the victims of overseas terrorism compensation scheme. The scheme was set up for victims of overseas terrorism, but we have now expanded it—I am sure the hon. Gentleman will communicate this to his constituent—so that witnesses of terrorism are also eligible to compensation.

We have transformed the training in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and that is not only for our consular staff. Before heads of mission go out, they are now subject to training in crisis response. We have improved our systems; they are now better at gathering data. Now, for example, if someone was to ring a British consular office, they would have the full police missing persons form to run through to retrieve any data.

We also have much better IT. It is possible now for a police officer to access the Foreign Office system and for a post thousands of miles away to access the Foreign Office system in real time to get information. We have

better follow-up procedures, and we have now put procedures in place so that if something of this nature happens again, the Foreign Office would, hopefully, feel that it was a question not simply of logging the information, but of calling again and following up to check the individual was okay. We have created partnerships. For example, we fund the non-governmental organisation Victim Support. Through the Ministry of Justice, we work with the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace. We have set up new bodies. In relation to the very good work done by Julie Love and DAYNA—Death Abroad You're Not Alone—we have set up the murder and manslaughter unit, which works specifically within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on dealing with issues of bereavement through murder. We have established a victims of terrorism unit—a bespoke unit set up within the Home Office which has its own Minister. The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), is now the Minister for victims of terrorism. We have set up surge capacity. We have set up an ability, if there is a huge attack somewhere in the world that overstretches our resources, to draw in people from other parts of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Departments and reach out to specialists outside Government to enhance the response.

However, none of the systems that we put in place is ever going to be an alternative to what is really required in a situation like this. These situations are inherently bewildering, chaotic, uncertain and violent, and often take place in very remote locations. Our own staff may be unable to access these people; we may have a very small embassy on the ground; and the information may be changing very quickly. The qualities required are therefore human qualities of empathy, imagination and compassion. Our obligation, as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is to make sure that our staff have the proper resources in place to enable them to act as humans. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our consular staff for the work they do. We have to make sure that they have the time, the systems and the resources so that they really can do this very difficult job, often feeling very powerless themselves, with not as much information as they would like, in patiently dealing with victims, with families and with an array of other people—other Governments, police forces, the army—and keeping the patient engagement that is absolutely central.

In the end, a victim who witnesses terrorism—who has experienced that mental trauma—is dealing with something that is fundamentally connected with the mind, but the mind in the most desperate, horrifying sense. The only way of dealing with that is personal. It has to take into account the context and the origin, and it requires the patient, constant reaction, extending potentially over years, that can bring health, settlement and fulfilment back to a family. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the hon. Gentleman for bringing this extremely important matter to the House, and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the consular staff for the work they do with British citizens in some of the most vulnerable and terrifying situations on earth.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.28 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Westminster Hall

Thursday 14 September 2017

[IAN PAISLEY *in the Chair*]

## Energy in Wales

1.30 pm

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I beg to move,  
That this House has considered energy in Wales.

It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response, though I am a tad disappointed that it is the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) who will respond on behalf of the Government. If the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy truly wanted to spread wealth across the whole of the United Kingdom, and if energy and the industrial strategy were the central plank of this Government's approach, I would at least have expected an Energy Minister to come along today. However, the Under-Secretary is a very good friend of mine—he helped me with many projects even before he became a Member of Parliament—and I know that he understands the subject of energy in Wales.

The purpose of this debate is to take stock of energy in Wales, to press the reset button—that is a polite way of telling the Government to get their finger out on certain projects—and, although it might not sound like I am doing so, to recreate a consensus. I stress the word “recreate” and will come to that in a moment. My contribution will look fairly at the good, the bad and the frustrating in energy policy, including some very welcome consensus in the late 1990s and the noughties, right through until about 2012.

Wales has enormous potential in energy. It has the potential to drive the energy policy of the whole United Kingdom and, indeed, its industrial strategy. We have natural resources, human resources and skills in the energy sector; welcoming local communities to host many of the proposed projects; and a forward-looking Welsh Government.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that we need the UK Government to commit to big projects? Whether we are talking about the electrification of the railway to Swansea or the tidal lagoon, such commitment to Wales has been missing from this Government.

**Albert Owen:** We are at a crucial time with the UK Government. As I said in my opening remarks, if BEIS, in particular, and other Departments are serious about spreading wealth across the United Kingdom, they need to look at Wales in a more positive way.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): Following on from the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), if the Government were to invest in electrification and the lagoon projects, much-needed jobs would be delivered throughout south Wales, as well

as in north Wales and Ynys Môn. Such commitment from the Government would help with some of the longer-term unemployment issues that some parts of Wales have had for a number of years. It would also improve the skills agenda in Wales.

**Albert Owen:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When we talk about energy projects, we are talking about building infrastructure, helping the environment, climate change, jobs and skills. They are important and linked to the other projects he mentioned. Wales not only complements the United Kingdom, but can lead the United Kingdom and rekindle a pioneering spirit in many projects.

Since I entered this House, I have been interested in energy. I used to work in the energy sector. One of my first jobs was in the oil industry: for many years I was a galley boy on an oil tanker going around the middle east. During the 1970s I saw some of the big issues of the oil crisis at first hand, when people talked about developing renewable, solar and other technologies because of the crisis. Sometimes it takes a crisis to focus attention and to concentrate minds. Afterwards, however, we went back to oil and coal, carrying on as normal in many ways.

I am proud that we now have the Climate Change Act 2008. I was proud to vote for it and I think I am the only Member present in this Chamber who did so. It was a pioneering Act that showed that the United Kingdom was a lead nation in looking after the environment. To complement the Act, to ensure that we reduce carbon and improve the environment, we need low-carbon projects. There have been some good results.

As the Minister knows, I am pro-renewables, pro-nuclear and pro-energy efficiency, and I see no contradiction in taking all three views, if we are to achieve the targets we all want. Even ardent climate change deniers now acknowledge that the climate is changing and accept—humbly, some of them—that mankind is contributing to that. We need to dispel the idea that the climate is not changing and that we need do nothing. We have to do something for this and future generations.

I repeat that I was very proud that under the previous Labour Government, but with the support of all parties in the House, we passed the Climate Change Act. We need a rich mix of energy technologies, to ensure that we reach our targets. When I sat on the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, we produced a number of reports on energy in Wales and they were very good platforms to build on. I have also been on the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change and am now on the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, and we are considering the issue. I have scrutinised Governments of both colours—of three colours if we include the coalition, which was a mix of Conservatives and Liberals—but, to be fair, in the early days there was a consensus on how to progress.

We need to push the case for new renewables, new nuclear and new opportunities for jobs and skills in the future. I welcome the initiatives of previous Governments. The renewables obligation was introduced to help kick-start solar and wind, the development of which is now producing lower-cost clean energy. That was because of subsidy, which is not a dirty word but an essential tool to get firsts of a kind going. We need the help and support of subsidy. We rightly subsidise our buses and trains; we should be subsidising the development of renewable and future generation technologies.

[Albert Owen]

I repeat that I welcome the consensus between the two major parties that promoted and developed a low-carbon economy. In 2001 and 2003, during a review, I lobbied the Labour Government to introduce new nuclear and to push the wind agenda to offshore as well as onshore. The Conservatives adopted that policy and supported the Climate Change Act. There was a great period of continuity from when the Conservatives were in opposition and Labour in government, to when the coalition came to office and the stewardship of the then Energy Minister, Charles Hendry, to whose name we will no doubt return. That continuity gave essential certainty to investors, which is important because such projects are long term and cannot be done in a single parliamentary cycle. In many cases, we need to consider working over two or three Parliaments.

That was the good part. The bad part was the populism of the coalition, with some of the Conservatives dancing to the tune of *The Daily Telegraph* and many others, pulling projects because they were not popular. The wind industry was coming to the end of its subsidies anyway, but the Conservative-led coalition turning against it hampered investment in the sector. Offshore wind is now back on the agenda; many of the projects started in 2006 and 2007 are now coming to fruition and producing the wind energy the country needs. Wind is important. I know it has its critics, because it is intermittent, but that means it can be switched off when demand is at a certain level. We can have continuous demand and supply, but also demand when needed.

We moved from a good period to a frustrating period because of external factors—the global financial crisis—when external investment became difficult to obtain. I understand that, but we need a stimulus. We needed it then, and I argued that the stimulus could have come in the form of investment in the energy requirement. That would have created the jobs and skills necessary to boost a flat economy that is on its knees.

**Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab):** Does my hon. Friend agree that we should ask the Government to secure a price per unit for wind energy for a year, rather than price variation?

**Albert Owen:** I will come to price mechanisms in a moment, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need certainty. Investors need to know what the price will be and what return they will get in the long term. I think that everyone accepts that economies of scale enable lower-cost energy production, and that should be reflected in subsidies. The governance framework needs to be a little tighter. The contract for difference, which I will come to, is a good principle. Many people do not appreciate that with a strike price, if prices fluctuate, big developers do not get the money; it comes back and stays with the Government, so we get certainty about how much the Government spend. That is good.

Major energy policies are reserved. I appreciate that the Wales Act 2017 devolved control over projects up to 350 MW, which reflects the larger scale of projects, but we require a partnership between local communities, local businesses, devolved Administrations and the UK Government, within—remember that we are still in the European Union—the European framework.

I acknowledge that whoever won the 2010 general election would have had to reform the electricity market. I sat on the Committee that discussed the relevant legislation before it went through. I did not agree with everything in it, but I did agree with the principle of reforming the electricity market to ensure certainty for investors and value for money for the consumer. Energy Ministers have changed frequently—that has been a problem with both Labour and Conservative Governments—so we have perhaps not given energy the attention it deserves. I support the contract for difference principle and the need for a capacity market mechanism, but during the period of populism I referred to, the oil price and energy prices went up, and that became a big political issue. We were significantly reliant on oil and gas prices, because we were not developing the renewable, new nuclear and low-carbon technologies we should have been.

Wales is still heavily reliant on oil and gas as part of our mix, so we need to move forward. It is ironic that Wales and Scotland are huge producers of energy, yet household and business bills are higher in those areas than in the rest of the United Kingdom. It is totally unfair that a consumer in Wales pays extra for their energy. They might be close to a power station that generates energy for the grid but, because of the transmission and distribution mechanisms, they end up paying more for it. I would not say that the energy market is completely broken, but it is fractured and those issues need to be addressed. Wales is still reliant on gas and coal, and it needs to wean itself off them. I am disappointed that combined storage schemes for coal and for oil have not progressed in the past five to six years. We could have retrofitted many of our power stations so that we had clean coal and oil production as we transitioned to renewables, but we did not do so.

Let me turn to some of the technologies. I will start with marine technology, which is important. We have a history in Wales of small hydro schemes. The Dinorwig pumping station in many ways revolutionised storage. We need to consider storage, and here is a scheme that was developed in Wales many years ago that pumps electricity up at night, when energy prices are low, and stores it.

**Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC):** I echo the hon. Gentleman's comments about the potential in Wales for hydro schemes. Dinorwig is a fantastic example of a larger hydro scheme. Does he agree that smaller hydro schemes—the potential of which we perhaps have not fully realised—are just as important for our energy mix in Wales? He also talks about the UK and Welsh Governments working in partnership. We desperately need to look at the revaluation of business rates, which is affecting many hydro energy schemes, particularly community energy schemes. Does he agree that we have an opportunity to fully realise the potential of hydro in Wales by addressing that revaluation?

**Ian Paisley (in the Chair):** Order. I remind Members to keep their interventions as short as possible.

**Albert Owen:** I welcome the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) to the House—this is the first opportunity I have had to do so. He is a new Member and he will get used to making shorter interventions as he gets going.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we need to look at barriers and at whether the rates system deters such schemes. We are going back to basics with some of

these smaller hydro projects. Many farms and small communities had their own hydro projects many years ago. We get an awful lot of wind and rain in west Wales and the west of the United Kingdom, and we need to harness that. Many of the windmills that produced food in the past were driven by both hydro and wind; we are only returning to that.

Wales and the UK's west coast have enormous marine energy potential. Their tidal ranges are some of the best in the world. The Welsh Government and the UK Government have done numerous studies in Scotland, west Wales and the west of England, yet although prototypes have been set up, many have not been developed. Indeed, I visited Strangford lough in Northern Ireland to see some of the pioneering schemes there, but those have not reached the necessary commercial scale because of a lack of investment. There is a blockage, and it is in all our interests to undo that blockage and ensure that such schemes are successful.

Minesto, a Swedish company in my constituency, is moving forward a project, which the Minister knows about, 8 km off the coast of Holyhead that links with the port of Holyhead. Not-for-profit organisation Menter Môn, which the Minister also knows about, is involved in the grid connection there and will benefit from that. That project is up and going.

This Parliament and the Welsh and Scottish Governments have talked for some time about tidal lagoons; we now need to move forward with them. We could have a cluster in Wales because of the tidal range from Colwyn Bay to Swansea Bay—the potential is absolutely there. I am sure that colleagues will want to elaborate on the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon, but I mention it because it has been identified as a first-of-a-kind project that could go forward. The Government have taken it seriously and a lot of development work has been done on it.

This Government set up the electricity market review and capacity mechanisms that I talked about, and they also set up the Hendry review, which reported at the beginning of this year. Reports take time, and I understand the Government's frustration when they get external issues. Brexit is dominant, and we had a two-month election period that everyone wanted—apart from the Conservatives themselves, when they saw the results. That election cost the taxpayer £140 million, excluding the figure for Northern Ireland, which we have not yet seen. That money could have been invested in some of these projects, which could have been moving forward as I speak.

Tidal lagoons could generate 250 MW to 350 MW of electricity. The tidal range allows some 14 hours of generation per day—it is huge. That would enhance the area, since it could be used for tourism as well as for producing much-needed low-carbon energy. Of course, we need great connections, which are controversial. I will come to connections for transmission and distribution; we need to handle them properly and have them underground so they are not unsightly.

I urge the Minister to give us a response to the Hendry review. It is no good the Government saying, "We're looking at it"—they have been looking at it for many months. The civil servants were not involved in the election campaign; they were diligently doing their work in the BEIS office. They should come up with recommendations for Ministers, and Ministers should have the grace to make their mind up and come back to

the House to say where they are going. Investors need certainty; they do not need the Government to abandon decisions after setting up a review. In my humble opinion, the only thing holding the project back, having looked at the potential mechanisms and the price—the first of its kind will be expensive—is the political will of the Government. It will be the job of the Minister to convince the House that that is not the case. The only way he will be able to do that is by announcing the date of an announcement. The Government should stop prevaricating and do that immediately. The Orkney isles, the west coast of England and south Wales have the potential for marine technology.

Let me turn to new nuclear, because it is important that we keep these projects on track. Again, this is older technology that has been modernised for the 21st century. In my constituency, the Wylfa power station site generated safe nuclear power for a record number of years, which created jobs for many decades. In fact, it is the only industry I know where classmates who left school at the same time as me worked in the same high-quality, high-paid jobs in one industry, thereby contributing to the local economy. The supply chain is huge and the technical skills are high.

We need to move forward. The project that started in 2007 to 2009 is on track. We now have new developers in Hitachi with proven technology and capacity, and I know that, working with the Welsh Government, the local community, local government and the UK Government, we can move forward on the project and produce high-quality jobs. There is some £12 billion of investment, which I remind Members—I have raised this enough times—is the equivalent of the London Olympics being invested in north-west Wales. There is huge potential to develop the economies of Anglesey, Conwy, Gwynedd and the whole of north Wales. Indeed, it is the biggest project in Wales in terms of jobs—construction jobs and ongoing jobs as well.

The Minister is aware of this, but I also want to talk about small module reactors and the potential for them. I met with the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre in Sheffield and have also visited. It has got all these companies together so that we can forge the modules for nuclear reactors with British steel in the United Kingdom and deliver the kits to different locations. Trawsfynydd is ideally located for that. It has a welcoming community that would play host, and it has the infrastructure in place. What we need, once again, is for BEIS to stop sitting on reports and papers and to start making announcements. That is what the business world and local communities want to hear: the trade unions and business working together to develop these high-skilled jobs.

I could also talk about many other projects. Orthios wants to develop an eco-park in my constituency. It was not successful in the auctions—the auctions are cumbersome, and it did not meet the criteria. We need to simplify those criteria. The threshold of 299 MW has, I think, been reduced to 150 MW, so it did not qualify.

We also have great offshore wind projects. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) may interject, or he may wait—he is now a patient Front Bencher and statesman—and respond in his speech. Many people opposed the offshore project, including the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member

[Albert Owen]

for Clwyd West (Mr Jones), who I remember lobbying the Welsh Affairs Committee when we went to north Wales, saying, “Save our shore,” because the project was not wanted. It has now developed and was a flagship of the Conservative-led coalition Government in which he served. He suddenly changed his mind on that and then flew the flag for wind farm development. My point is that sometimes these projects are controversial and appear costly when looked at, but they are a worthwhile investment because they produce low-carbon energy off stream and jobs in localities. Celtic Array Rhiannon, just off my constituency, would have been the biggest offshore wind farm. That was aborted in many ways because of the mechanism as well as technology developments, but the potential is still there.

I am conscious that I have taken a lot of time, but I want to talk about distribution and transmission. Hon. Members will be aware that British Gas hiked its gas prices and that many other companies, including Scottish Power, have highlighted that the high cost of distribution and transmission has pushed bills up. I am sure, Mr Paisley, that you are diligent and look at your bill either online or in paper form, like I do. When we look at it, we see that 25% is for distribution and transmission costs. That is a huge amount of the bill.

If we are serious about reducing and capping energy prices, we need to look at distribution costs. The national grid is a monopoly—there is no competition in it—and it almost holds developers at ransom. I know it is regulated, but it does not work. Had there been a different result in the general election, the Labour party would have nationalised it or introduced a not-for-profit model, like we have for water in Wales. We are used to not-for-profit organisations, which reinvest all their money into infrastructure. Welsh Water—Dŵr Cymru—is an excellent example of that. Instead of paying directors in the United States of America and shareholders, it puts the money back into the communities in which it works.

The proposal for pylons across Anglesey and north-west Wales is controversial: 1950s-style pylons are to be attached to 21st-century nuclear power. National Grid needs to listen to the communities it is working with and look at undergrounding and subsea rather than pylons.

Finally, we need to deal with energy prices. As I have said, Wales has high bills compared with the rest of the United Kingdom. Transmission is cited as one of the reasons for that. There are also higher levels of fuel poverty in Wales and pockets of fuel poverty. I know there are issues elsewhere in the United Kingdom, but we do need to address that. When we invest properly in new technology, we are creating a better country and high-skilled jobs. If I had more time, I would go into energy poverty issues, but we do need to deal with them.

The coalition Government changed the criteria for measuring fuel poverty. They were archaic in many ways—the Queen was in fuel poverty because a high percentage of Buckingham Palace’s outgoings were on energy—but the serious point is that many people in Wales, in areas that produce a lot of energy, are paying a higher price and are in fuel poverty. The Welsh Assembly and devolved Administrations have done good work in that area, and I hope that the Government are listening. There needs to be more work on that as we go forwards.

I called for the debate because I believe there is huge potential for Wales to be a huge contributor to the United Kingdom’s industrial strategy when it comes to energy and manufacturing. We have successful projects going forward, which is good for Wales, for the United Kingdom, for Welsh businesses and for the consumer. They will reduce carbon emissions into the environment and help to deal with climate change. The skills issue, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), is essential. These projects create clusters of high-skilled science parks and faculties for research and development, which link into higher and further education institutes. This is a win-win situation.

I support the Government’s principle of an industrial strategy. They talked about nuclear and energy as being part of that. Electric cars are a good thing, but we need to get on with it. We need to press the reset button and get these projects going. We need to invest in them and work together to produce the low-carbon economy that the Minister, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and everyone in the Chamber wants to see. Wales can be the pioneer, creating the jobs, the technology and the energy that the country needs.

I hope that the Minister is in listening mode and that he has some answers for us. If he does not, I hope he will pass these points on to the BEIS Minister, who may have the grace to come to the next debate with “energy” in the title. Wales is part of the United Kingdom and part of the industrial strategy, and Ministers need to be aware of that. Wales is a forward-looking country when it comes to many things, including energy. We want the best for the people we come here to represent and we want a better, clean environment, clean air, and climate change to be dealt with. We want to play a leading part in that.

2 pm

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you very much, Mr Paisley. It is a great pleasure to follow the excellent speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen). As the Minister will know, within the next few weeks the Government will launch their clean growth plan. I very much hope that he will use all his energies to ensure that the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, the tidal lagoon planned for north Wales and rail electrification to Swansea will be in that plan. Without trying to be rude to him, he is a Minister in the Wales Office: my great fear is that it is a small Department with very little bite and, arguably, very little bark. We hope that he speaks up for Wales on green energy.

I have to say that my other great fear is that the Swansea bay tidal lagoon and rail electrification to Swansea are set to burn on the altar of Brexit fundamentalism. I say that because the Government now face a bill from the EU of perhaps more than £50 billion, which translates to thousands of pounds for every family in Swansea and in Wales. The Government are now dashing out forward looking, long-term green plans—whether rail electrification to Swansea or the Swansea bay tidal lagoon—and prioritising London and the south-east once more, where they are not needed. They are looking at the short term, not the long term, and thinking about how they can pay that bill so that they can keep on pushing forward with a project that people now realise does not resemble anything like what they voted for.

I stood in the general election on a platform of saying that I will defend the 25,000 jobs in Swansea bay that depend on access to the single market, promote rail electrification and keep it on track, keep the lagoon moving forward and oppose fracking. On that basis, my vote went up by 50% in both share and number. I will stick to my pledges and will use this occasion to again promote the Swansea bay tidal lagoon. The tidal lagoon has been talked about for years. George Osborne, the then Chancellor, announced in his November 2014 autumn statement that he thought the lagoon was a fantastic idea and that he wanted to get work on it moving. David Cameron echoed that, and then the Hendry review gave it and its costings a clean bill of health.

However, we now have uncertainty and prevarication, which is making investors, who came around the table to support this important, pioneering project in good faith, wonder what will happen next. We face uncertainties owing to Brexit, but people in Swansea and in Wales need the certainty that we will make these investments. On costings, the Treasury is obviously looking around and saying, “Oh, well how does the unit price for the Swansea bay tidal lagoon compare with the spot price for oil?”, but one has to remember—as I am sure you do, Mr Paisley—that 80% of fossil fuels that have already been identified cannot be exploited if we are to avoid irreversible climate change, sustain our commitment to the Paris agreement and fulfil our obligations under the Climate Change Act 2008. In the medium term, the price of oil will go up if we are not allowed to exploit it, while the value of green energy will be much greater. We need to pioneer forward.

Economists’ evaluations of the Swansea bay tidal lagoon showed that, if there is a marginal increase in the actual units of electricity produced—we are talking about a relatively small amount of global energy from this particular lagoon; enough to power 120,000 households—the actual cost is very small for market entry into what could be a global marketplace in a green future. The short termism of the bean counters at the Treasury, who ask about the cost over the next few years, is therefore completely counterproductive. We are looking to have a portfolio of lagoons around Britain and then beyond, to start off an export market during tough times. We know that the lagoon is in fact cheaper than new nuclear and, as I have said, it will be cheaper than oil in the future.

We want a green future for Wales and for Britain, and we want our fair share of infrastructure investment. We should be getting our fair share of HS2, for instance, which would be £2 billion that could be invested in infrastructure, whether that is rail electrification or helping to support the green energy of the future.

I am proud to say that I sit on the Welsh Affairs Committee, and we will produce reports on rail electrification and the lagoon. It is useful to have these exchanges, but the Minister needs to know that other Ministers, from energy to rail, will sit in front of us and will have to answer these questions, rather than flipping them away in the main Chamber in two seconds. We will issue responses to those. Infrastructure investment is important for lifting productivity in Wales, where, as the Minister knows, gross value added is only 70% of the UK average. We are delivering on skills and education to lift productivity, but we need to deliver on infrastructure, which we are not. That is why this is so vital.

On a green future, like my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), who has just left, I think there is also a case for investing in and supporting Ford’s attempt to generate batteries to support a new generation of electric cars as part of a plan to push forward with electric infrastructure across Wales. Investors need to know what is happening; there has been a lot of uncertainty, and not only with Brexit. While it is a long way away, I understand there was no consultation with industry on the announcement of the ban on sales of new petrol and diesel cars after 2040, which I welcome. We need to work with industry in setting our objectives in the clean growth plan to show our ambition. They should be ready for action, and we should put our money where our mouth is.

The question for people in Wales has always been “How green is my valley?”, and we very much hope that it will be a very green valley. We are here to ask the Minister to do everything he can to support both the Swansea bay tidal lagoon and other green energy, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn said, and an integrated green future that provides productivity, prosperity and hope for all of us for the future.

2.7 pm

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) on securing the debate. In March last year, I stood in the main Chamber and spoke in the St David’s day debate about how accustomed to waiting for things we are in Wales. We waited so long for rail electrification, which is now merely another broken promise from the Government, and we waited for the Welsh national team to reach the European championships. That one was worth waiting for.

**Albert Owen:** We beat Northern Ireland as well.

**Carolyn Harris:** No comment. We were also waiting for Charles Hendry’s review on the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, which was published 10 months later. It was conclusive, and it provided the assurance that the Government sought on whether tidal lagoons could play a cost-effective role in the UK energy mix. It recommended moving forward with a pathfinder lagoon in Swansea bay

“as soon as is reasonably practicable”.

That was eight months ago, and once again we are still waiting.

Since the review’s publication, the Government have made no concerted effort to proceed. The Conservative party’s manifesto for the 2017 general election merely touched on renewable energy in Wales, with a promise to

“explore ways to harness Welsh natural resources for the generation of power”,

but failed to make any commitment to the Swansea bay tidal lagoon. By comparison, all other major political parties committed in their manifestos that it should happen as a priority. Since the election, we have heard nothing more from the Government about any plans to develop the project.

We all know that the tidal lagoon is the way forward; it harnesses natural power from the rise and fall of the tides, so offers an entirely predictable year-round supply.

[Carolyn Harris]

It is a guaranteed power source for generations to come, and the long-term cost benefits speak for themselves. The Welsh Labour Government, local councils and city regions all support a tidal lagoon in Swansea. Welsh businesses, community leaders and the people of Wales and Swansea support it. Swansea is ready for this now.

There are many benefits that will have immediate impacts on the economy and the community. The lagoon will bring an estimated 2,000 new jobs to the region, and there will be a demand for approximately 100,000 tonnes of locally sourced steel. The tidal lagoon already has 1,300 British businesses registered on its supply chain database. This is a golden opportunity to use British resources to develop British industry in Wales. Why are we stalling?

In his review, Sir Charles Hendry said:

“We can either stand back and watch other countries take the lead...or we can decide that we should do what the UK has done so well in the past—spotting an opportunity, developing the technology and creating an industry.”

As Britain moves into a post-Brexit world, we need to ask whether we want to be leaders or followers. Today, I ask the Minister that very question. Are we ready to be world leaders and develop this new energy source in south Wales, or are we going to be left behind waiting, this time for someone else to steal our lead? We cannot afford to let this slip through our fingers. We need an answer. We need the lagoon, and we need it now.

**Ian Paisley (in the Chair):** I call Tonia Antoniazzi.

2.11 pm

**Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab):** Thank you, Mr Paisley. You have indeed improved your pronunciation of my name. I would like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) for securing this debate.

With the Government pursuing an ill-advised and short-sighted attack on renewables, the UK is set to miss its target. To put that into context, the EU is set to meet its target of producing 20% of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2020. The UK is missing even its own unambitious targets. That has not happened in a policy vacuum: it is a direct result of the Tories scrapping subsidies for onshore wind farms, solar energy, biomass fuel conversion, and killing the flagship green homes scheme—I could go on, as they have made many more decisions as part of their sustained attack on renewable energy.

In my constituency, we have a company called Gower Power that develops renewable energy projects and specialises in putting them into community ownership. That project will provide enough energy for 300 homes and create more than half a million pounds of funds for developing other community eco-projects. The Gower Regeneration project has been supported by the Welsh Government. It would not have been supported by the Conservatives. It serves as a telling case study into the contrast between a Labour Government's support for new, renewable forms of energy and the Conservatives' slashing of support for them.

The Welsh Government are completely committed to renewable energy and, despite significant budget cuts passed down from Westminster, have supported projects

such as the Gower solar farm through their Energy Wales plan. Energy Wales is a framework and delivery plan for how Wales will transition to becoming a low-carbon country. Only a few years after its inception, solar farms such as the one in my constituency are springing up as a result of the Welsh Government's foresight on this issue. Gower offers the perfect environment for a wide range of renewables, including the impressive onshore wind farm in Mynydd y Gwair.

In this harsh climate for renewables, new solutions and radical ideas are needed. We are talking about the Swansea bay tidal lagoon today, which is supported by parties of all colours. It is particularly notable that Conservatives from Swansea took to the seas this summer to support the tidal lagoon. Welsh Tories are behind it, so what is going on? The conditions around the Swansea bay make it perfect for a project of this nature. Both the River Tawe and River Neath enter the sea there. The proposal would build 16 hydro turbines and a six-mile breakwater wall around the area, generating enough energy to power 155,000 homes for the next 120 years. Where the Government's short-sightedness has created a huge hole in our capacity to power our country in future years, the Swansea bay tidal lagoon offers us a way forward.

The benefits are not just environmental. West Wales was found by the Inequality Briefing to be the poorest region in northern Europe. Large infrastructure projects are few and far between. The Swansea bay tidal lagoon offers a rare glimpse of UK Government-provided hope in an area too often forgotten about by those who currently run Westminster.

**Geraint Davies:** My hon. Friend, who is a great advocate for the lagoon, will know that the constitution of the Welsh Government contains a commitment to sustainable development. With talks about changing powers post-Brexit, does she agree that this is the time to move the power to take leadership of green projects with the resources from Westminster to Wales, so that we can get on with the job of delivering a green future with our lagoon?

**Tonia Antoniazzi:** I agree with my hon. Friend. We have to move forward, and we need the infrastructure commitment from Westminster to be able to do that.

The tidal lagoon has a projected £1.3 billion capital spend, the majority of which will be spent in Wales and across the UK. The construction period is expected to contribute £316 million in gross value added to the Welsh economy and £76 million a year thereafter. In an area still struggling to recover from the loss of mining and manufacturing industries, the Swansea bay tidal lagoon offers a bright future for Wales post-Brexit.

Despite the money invested so far and the Government-commissioned Hendry report calling for the project to be signed off as soon as possible, where are we? The Government have now been sitting on the Hendry review for longer than it took Charles Hendry to conduct it. That is not acceptable. Investors' money will not last forever, and we need to move on.

Labour's Welsh Government and First Minister Carwyn Jones are delivering for Wales. We have Labour's Swansea Council leader Rob Stewart delivering through the city deal. Everybody is behind it, but when the Conservatives

in Westminster have a chance to deliver for renewable energy, for investment and for my constituency of Gower, they dither and delay.

Ultimately, it is not just my constituency that would feel the benefits of this project. Swansea bay tidal lagoon is a pathfinder project; we all know that. It offers a completely scalable blueprint for the programme, opening up the opportunity for a fleet of tidal lagoons across the country of varying sizes. Economies of scale apply, so the proposed follow-up larger lagoons could provide an even cheaper energy price. The Swansea bay tidal lagoon is therefore the litmus test for a renewable energy revolution across the UK.

2.18 pm

**Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your esteemed chairmanship, Mr Paisley. May I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) on securing this important debate? He coined the phrase “energy island” to describe his constituency. His dynamism and personal energy are recognised far and wide, in the Chamber and across Wales. In fact, I think if National Grid were to plug a couple of power cables into him, it could probably power the whole of north Wales—that might be painful, though.

My hon. Friend made a comprehensive speech, lasting half an hour—and thank God he did, because I think the debate will run short. He touched on many big projects, such as Wylfa Newydd and the tidal lagoon project for Wales, but also smaller projects, including small solar projects, Dinorwig pumping station and clean coal as a transition. It was a wide and comprehensive speech, and once again I congratulate him.

Wales as a nation is blessed with natural geographical and geological assets, which have contributed to the energy of these islands for centuries. Our coalmines supplied the energy for the industrial revolution; as we all know, the first industrial revolution in the world was in the United Kingdom. That energy was supplied from south Wales coalmines. They supplied the steel mills, the factories and the steamers that traded around the world. I pay tribute to the brave miners who dug black diamonds from the earth. As the saying goes, the earth does not give up its treasures lightly. Many miners lost their lives. In fact, there were 200 mining disasters and 6,000 men died. The first disaster was in 1766 and the last in 2011.

I pay tribute to the miners. The loyalty of and sacrifice by those brave men was rewarded by the previous Conservative Governments’ pit closure programmes in the 1980s and 1990s. The Minister may laugh, but the constituencies and communities affected are still suffering to this day.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** There is this myth about the closure of mines by Conservative Governments. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that more pits closed in Wales under the leadership of the Labour party, under Labour Governments, than under any Conservative Government?

**Chris Ruane:** The big difference between what occurred under Labour and under the Conservatives is that the communities were left high and dry under the Conservatives.

It was a political decision to close those mines. It was spite because of the industrial action by the miners. That was the big difference, and those communities are still suffering today. I want to move on to more modern times, but I thought I would just give the historical perspective.

**Albert Owen:** I hear this argument from the Conservatives about closures under the Wilson and Callaghan Governments. Those mines were exhausted; there was no coal left—that was one reason why they closed them—or they were dangerous and flooding. That was why they closed them down; it was not for political reasons, but for economic reasons.

**Chris Ruane:** I will move on now, Mr Paisley.

We now live in greener, cleaner times, but the Conservative Government’s attitude to energy, and especially renewable energy, in Wales has not changed. I was privileged to open Wales’s first offshore wind farm—in fact, according to Wikipedia, it was the UK’s first major renewable power project—which was located off the coast of my constituency, off Rhyl and Prestatyn. North Hoyle was a pilot, test-bed project for this new industry in the UK. It had the full support of the Welsh Government, the UK Labour Government, the local MP—me—and Ann Jones, the Assembly Member. Can I ask the Minister whether he supported that project—the wind farms off north Wales—when it was proposed?

**Guto Bebb:** The hon. Gentleman asks whether I supported the project. The project in question was completed well before I was elected to this place.

**Chris Ruane:** Gwynt y Môr?

**Guto Bebb:** In relation to Gwynt y Môr, I was on the beach in Llandudno, insisting that the Gwynt y Môr project should ensure that there would be a local supply chain, and I am very proud of the fact that the further education college, Coleg Llandrillo Menai, is supporting the training of people to work on that site. The hon. Gentleman tries to score a cheap point, but fails again.

**Chris Ruane:** I am pleased that the Minister is able to say that, but as has been said, there were Conservative Members in County Conwy who did not support the project.

**Guto Bebb:** Is it not the case that the diktat for some of the wind farms was opposed by every single councillor in Conwy, including the Labour leader of Conwy Council at that time?

**Chris Ruane:** The leadership in Denbighshire was totally different, but again, we move on.

The North Hoyle project was an outstanding success, and I pay tribute to npower renewables, which has donated £80,000 a year since 2003 to local charities in the communities of Rhyl and Prestatyn. It was a blueprint for other renewable companies to embed themselves in those communities. Again, the support for these projects came from Labour politicians.

**Guto Bebb:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Chris Ruane:** No. The Minister has had two bites of the cherry. He will have bags of time at the end as well; he can expand as he sees fit.

When the previous Prime Minister, David Cameron, was a candidate for leader of his party, he tried to curry favour in Wales. He visited the Tory party conference in Llandudno, pointed to the turbines outside in the sea and described them as giant bird blenders.

**Guto Bebb:** The hon. Gentleman must give way.

**Chris Ruane:** The Minister will have a chance to respond. David Cameron then went down to Notting Hill and put a giant bird blender on top of his chimney. *[Interruption.]*

**Ian Paisley (in the Chair):** Order.

**Chris Ruane:** It was an example of the way the Conservative party has crudely used renewable energies to change its image. As well as the wind turbine on the Prime Minister's house, there was "Hug a Husky", but we all know that it was superficial. As soon as the Conservatives got into power, the worm turned—the winds of change turned. The Minister will know that many in his party were climate change deniers. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn pointed out that some of them have come around, but there is still a deep, ingrained resistance to green, renewable energies in his party.

I would like to compare and contrast the position of the Conservatives with the support that Labour gave, both in the Welsh Assembly and in Westminster. Labour supported this nascent renewable energy, wind energy, and it was a great success. We are seeing the benefits of that support today—last week, in fact—with prices per kilowatt-hour tumbling as the economies of scale take hold, research improves and manufacturing costs are reduced. It was a sound investment then, and we are looking for sound investments now and in the future in renewable energies.

Labour attempted the same level of support for the solar industry in the UK. In 2009-10, we set feed-in tariffs, in conjunction with listening to Japanese and British manufacturers, at a level that would result in investment in and actual manufacture of solar panels in the UK—not in China, but in the UK, and specifically in Wrexham in north Wales. There was a plan by the Japanese manufacturer to build the biggest solar panel factory in the whole of western Europe, but when the Conservative-coalition Government got in, they reduced the feed-in tariff rates and the Japanese factory pulled out.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn said several times that what these new industries, and established industries, need is continuity—certainty for the future. Industries that will require billions of pounds of investment need consensus and continuity, to ensure that their investments will be sound and solid and the plug will not be pulled on them with a change of Government or on a whim.

We see the same measures being employed right up to today with tidal lagoons. The Labour politicians in south Wales, the Labour Welsh Assembly Government, are engaging with those companies because they realise that of the six tidal lagoons proposed for the UK, four will be in Wales. One is proposed off the coast of my

own constituency, off Rhyl and Prestatyn, and one is proposed off Conwy as well. I have had a briefing from the two companies that want to take the project forward. It will be fantastic: it will create jobs and tourism; it is futuristic; and it will have a road all the way round it. That is the type of project that needs to be supported by the Government.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) and, even though he is from 200 miles away, my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn, who talked about tidal lagoons in his speech because he recognises their importance.

There is the tidal pilot project planned for Swansea bay. That will be the first purpose-built tidal lagoon in the world and it needs extra care, nurturing and attention, because it could change the way energy is delivered or harnessed on the whole of the planet. That is worth investing in. The investment that we put into wind in 2003-04 looked as though it was a bad investment at the time, because it was at a high rate, but we are reaping the benefits now, 13 or 14 years later. That is the kind of long view that we are looking for from the Government for lagoon energy in the UK, because good things will flow from it.

I am talking about research, building skills and manufacturing expertise, and all those could be exported around the world. The Government have shown little enthusiasm for this sector, and it is beginning to dry up. There is lots of enthusiasm all over Wales and especially around the Swansea area. Can I ask the Minister a question?

**Guto Bebb** *indicated dissent.*

**Chris Ruane:** He says I cannot, but I am going to ask it anyway. Will he declare his love for the lagoon? There is a local campaign called "Love the Lagoon"—it involves Conservative councillors, Conservative politicians and Conservative Members who are keen to expand that because they can see the benefit for their community. Does he love the lagoon—if that is not a personal question?

Let us look at some of the arguments that the Government have put or may put forward for weakening their support for tidal lagoons. Will they be saying that prices for wind power have dropped so much that it will make lagoons unviable? The success of wind energy is down to early political and financial support, and we want the financial support that we offered then to be replicated now by the Conservative Government to make sure that these proposals go ahead.

The Swansea lagoon, like North Hoyle, was a test bed—a pilot project to test the effectiveness of lagoons and to learn from that experience. The cost of funding the Swansea lagoon—the pathfinder—is equivalent to the cost of a pint of milk a day for every household in the UK. That is a sound investment, as far as I am concerned. If it works, we can expand it to Cardiff bay, Liverpool bay, Colwyn Bay and England, to make sure that we stay at the forefront of this great, new, green technology.

The Welsh Government have given their full support to tidal lagoons. Senior Cabinet Ministers from many Departments have met Charles Hendry and fully engaged with him. The Welsh Government have invested in the



skills demand and supply report for the proposed Swansea bay lagoon development, and have provided a £1.25 million commercial loan to the tidal lagoon company.

**Ben Lake:** I acknowledge the support that the Welsh Government have provided for the tidal lagoon. The National Assembly also declared by resolution its support for it, cross-party.

**Chris Ruane:** Absolutely, there was cross-party support. I think that there are even Conservatives who support it down there. In the meantime, we have prevarication and procrastination by the UK Government on the matter of lagoons. Welsh Government Ministers wrote to their UK counterparts in April and June of this year, and I believe that the June letters have still not been responded to. Will the Minister look into that?

Tidal lagoons also have an added benefit in that they will protect the coastlines where they are located from flooding. Both Denbighshire and Conwy have suffered terrible floods. The Minister will remember the floods in the early '90s in Sir Anthony Meyer's old seat, Clwyd North West, in Conwy county. Five thousand homes flooded. We had floods as recently as two years ago in my constituency. There has been coastal flooding from waves and the sea. That would be prevented if we were able to establish these tidal lagoons off the coast of Wales.

**Guto Bebb:** Will the hon. Gentleman quickly give way?

**Chris Ruane:** This is the last time.

**Guto Bebb:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for quickly giving way. His point on the flood defences is really important, but does it not highlight the fact that tidal lagoons are often about more than just energy generation?

**Chris Ruane:** That is the point that I am trying to make. They are about tourism, flood defence, manufacturing, skills and research. That is why Welsh Ministers from different Departments have engaged on the issue, and that is what we want to see from the UK Government. We want to see Ministers from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and other UK Departments engaging positively with Charles Hendry, the Welsh Government and the Welsh Assembly to make sure that these projects go ahead.

One of the arguments made—perhaps not by the Minister, but by others—is that with wind power and solar power, the wind is not always blowing and the sun is not always shining. With tidal lagoons we can predict down to the minute when the energy will be created over the next 125 years. It is all down to the moon and the movement of tides. That could create a predictable baseline of support for our national energy mix, on top of solar, wind power and nuclear, so that we have a good baseload of support.

All these renewable energy sources also become more viable with the advent of batteries. The lagoon will produce energy throughout the night, and if that can be stored in batteries it can benefit the rise of the battery-powered car industry in the UK. I ask the Minister to

take these issues way and to consider them carefully. Hopefully, cost will not be an issue. I believe that £700 million will be saved by the cancellation of the electrification of the Cardiff to Swansea route. Can some of that money—just a fraction of it—be used to prime the Swansea economy and to support it?

I move on now to Wylfa Newydd. At £12 billion, it will be single largest investment project in Wales over the next 10 years. It has the potential to transform the economy of not only Ynys Môn and Gwynedd, but the whole of north Wales. Again, the Welsh Government have been working flat out to secure this development. It is their No. 1 priority as far as the economy is concerned. Successful delivery will involve many Welsh Government Departments if we are to maximise the economic benefit and reduce any negative effects on the environment and culture in Wales, so there is total engagement.

Big issues need to be addressed, such as the new power station's access to the national grid and the building of a third crossing over the Menai strait. All those ducks need to be put in a row before this project starts. Again, we are looking for engagement and consensus between the Minister, MPs and Departments in Whitehall and the Welsh Government. There are many stakeholders, including local authorities; the company itself, Horizon Nuclear Power; the North Wales Economic Ambition Board; and the national Government. There is a good mix of groups and organisations, and we need to gel them together to get this renewable energy up and running in Wales.

**Geraint Davies:** I do not mean to take my hon. Friend off track, but I will just take him back to what he mentioned a moment ago about the cost of rail electrification to Swansea being put somewhere else. I just make the point that there are many of us across Swansea who want to hold the Conservatives to David Cameron's promise to bring about electrification, and to keep that money in that project and deliver electrification for Swansea bay.

**Ian Paisley (in the Chair):** Order. I call Chris Ruane. I encourage you to bring your remarks to an end and to start to wind up. I want to give the Minister time to respond.

**Chris Ruane:** I will do that, Mr Paisley—absolutely. Our No. 1 fight in Wales at the moment is to ensure that electrification from Cardiff to Swansea takes place. We have not given up. We will still be pestering. We tabled questions last week and this week, and are organising meetings. We have not given up on that.

In conclusion, we have two great opportunities to return Wales to her former glory as a provider of the nation's energy, this time with cleaner, greener technologies that will last hundreds of years, create tens of thousands of jobs and, most importantly, save the planet. I urge the Minister and his Government to rise up to the challenge, do their bit for Wales, the UK and the planet, and get these projects moving.

2.38 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Paisley.

[Guto Bebb]

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) on a wide-ranging, detailed speech, which is nothing less than I would expect from him. He has always shown a great interest in the energy sector in Ynys Môn, and his enthusiasm and hard work in Anglesey is well understood by myself, from both before I was elected to this place and since. I suspect that he was very pleased that in June the people of Ynys Môn acknowledged that hard work when they provided him with the largest majority that he has enjoyed since he was first elected to this place in 2001. I congratulate him on that comprehensive success.

I considered the hon. Gentleman's speech to be very wide-ranging and thoughtful. It was made in his typical manner—he always tries to be consensual and cross-party in his approach. I believe that is one reason for his recent success. It is fair to say that some of the speeches then fell into party political point scoring. That is a great shame because, as many Members have said, there is cross-party support for energy developments and opportunities in Wales. There is cross-party support for the nuclear sector in Anglesey—perhaps not from all parties in all parts of Wales, but certainly from all parties in Anglesey. There is cross-party support for the concept of a small modular reactor in Trawsfynydd, and for the concept of a tidal lagoon.

It is important to deal with the issue of the tidal lagoon at the outset. People want a tidal lagoon to be developed at Swansea. They can see the potential of the technology, and that the lagoon offers an opportunity for economic regeneration in Swansea and other parts of Wales. All Members in this place should support that. As the hon. Gentleman and other Members have mentioned, it is important to ensure that we have a cost-effective energy supply, prevent fuel poverty and avoid a situation in which businesses struggle to compete internationally due to energy prices. I therefore make no apology that this Government have commissioned the Hendry review and are taking it seriously.

My point, as the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) conceded in his speech, is that the funding of a tidal lagoon is a complex calculation that must be done by Government. He is absolutely right that we do not have to go back to the floods that struck Towyn in my constituency, for example, to understand the importance of flood defences in north Wales; there was flooding in Deganwy fairly recently. The construction of a tidal lagoon has the potential to deal with those issues, but I argue that flood defences are a devolved issue, not an energy generation issue.

A complex set of calculations need to be undertaken. The hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd also said that the cost, equal to a pint of milk a day, was eminently affordable. A pint of milk a day is £3.50 a week, or £14 a month. Before being flippant about £14 a month, he should remember that not all pensioners in Wales enjoy the salary of an MP. I would expect a Labour Member, of all Members of this House, to understand that £14 is a significant sum on a pensioner's bill.

**Chris Ruane:** If I did say £14 a month, I apologise. The figure should have been £14 a year; I hope that the Minister will take that in the spirit in which it was meant. Also, can he give us a date when the Government will respond to the Hendry report?

**Guto Bebb:** I believe that it was the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) who commented that good things are worth waiting for; that was certainly the case with the Welsh football team's appearance at the European championships last year. I would rather have a good decision made in time than a rushed decision. This debate has highlighted the previous Labour Government's decisions to invest in all sorts of concepts in Wales, but it is fair to say that by the time the coalition came into government, we were paying the price for how the Labour Government dealt with public money. It is much better to have a decision made on sound grounds, which is what we will provide, than an early decision.

**Albert Owen:** The Minister is engaging in the knockabout that he said earlier he did not like. What I was arguing in my contribution was that we must make difficult decisions and investments in first-of-a-kind technology, to get that technology going. We did it in solar and wind, and we are reaping the benefits; I believe that we can do it in tidal as well, and the review says so. We have a competent Minister in Charles Hendry, who delivered it. He knows his onions. What we are getting from this Government is prevarication and pushback.

**Guto Bebb:** I welcome that intervention, but the hon. Gentleman would be entirely unreasonable to state that the Hendry report included a comprehensive financial review. It is only fair for the Departments in question and the Government to take the issue seriously.

**Albert Owen:** I am sorry, but I need to establish this. I have been trying to tie this issue into the electricity market reform and the mechanisms set up by this Government. The Hendry review fits into that. We have cost-effective mechanisms and capacity mechanisms. For joined-up thinking, we now need a decision from Government.

**Guto Bebb:** That is the same question that I have been asked several times in Welsh questions and in this debate. The answer is the same: we will provide the right answer in due course, but it is important that we take our time to consider all the implications.

**Geraint Davies** *rose*—

**Guto Bebb:** No, I will not take another intervention on this issue. I would like to move on to the main elements of the debate—the issues raised by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn. As he rightly said, there has been an element of political knockabout towards the end of this debate, but it is important to highlight that we in Wales have an opportunity to contribute significantly to the energy mix in the United Kingdom, and to lead on energy generation. To those hon. Members participating in the debate who commented that we have not provided that leadership or that opportunity, I highlight recently consented projects in Wales: the Brechfa Forest wind farm, the Clocaenog Forest wind farm, the South Hook combined heat and power station, the Hirwaun power station, the internal power generation enhancement at Tata Steel and the North Wales wind farm circuit connection, which has benefited both my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd. We have had the Brechfa Forest connection; the Glyn Rhonwy

pumped storage system, also approved recently; and the Wrexham energy centre at the Wrexham industrial estate.

If we were to believe the comments of the Labour party—

**Geraint Davies:** On a point of order, Mr Paisley. Is it in order for the Minister to refer directly to a comment that I made about the Government's prevarication over three or four years about the cost of energy, which has created massive uncertainty in the business community, but not to allow me to intervene on that point?

**Ian Paisley (in the Chair):** You have made a point, but I do not believe that it is a point of order.

**Guto Bebb:** I highlight again, therefore, in response to the comments that this Government have not supported energy generation in Wales, that the facts speak for themselves. The opportunities for further development have been discussed by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn and other hon. Members. I turn particularly to Anglesey's potential for nuclear.

I think that everybody who is committed to the economic regeneration of north-west Wales is aware of the potential in nuclear. The hon. Gentleman has been rightly applauded by colleagues from all parties for the work that he has done to ensure that the development of nuclear does not happen in a vacuum but is fully integrated into the further and higher education sectors. We in north Wales can only be proud of how the HE and FE sectors are investing, in advance of any decision on the nuclear station on Ynys Môn, in order to ensure that the economic opportunities that come along with it are available for local people as well. We should be proud of that integration. Similarly, he highlighted that renewable energy is a success story in Wales. One of those successes, as I mentioned in an intervention, is the way that the FE sector in north Wales has tried to ensure that work opportunities servicing wind farms off the coast are open to local people.

North Wales is taking an integrated approach. The Government—both the Wales Office and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—recognise that as a positive sign of an area that is looking constructively at how we can contribute to the UK energy mix. Nuclear offers great opportunities as well as great challenges. This Government are the first to have commissioned and agreed to a new nuclear power station, but that was also a long-drawn-out process, because the sums involved and the implications of the investment are significant. The same will be true of the new Wylfa Newydd. It is imperative, in my view, that we reach a successful conclusion. In Horizon, we have significant partners willing to work with Government, but the decisions have to be right.

As a Minister in the Wales Office, I am pleased. I take with a pinch of salt the view of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn that I should not be in my place today, but I would have attended this debate regardless. Since taking my position at the Wales Office, I have been pleased to visit the current Wylfa station before decommissioning started, I will be pleased to visit the new proposed site and I have been pleased to visit Trawsfynydd, because the Wales Office knows full well how the energy mix in

Wales can contribute to our economic redevelopment. That is why so many Conservatives in south Wales support the lagoon.

The small modular reactor opportunity is also an exciting prospect. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn mentioned the cabling systems that will be required to transfer electricity from Wylfa Newydd; my understanding is that the potential site of a small modular reactor in Trawsfynydd already has enhanced connectivity to the national grid. I take seriously the opportunity to build a small modular reactor in Trawsfynydd, and I am pleased to say to the House that I will visit there on Tuesday with a Minister for the northern powerhouse. We understand that although the consequences of a decision on Wylfa Newydd or a small modular reactor in Trawsfynydd would benefit the economy in north Wales, they are far more significant than that. As hon. Members have said, they have the potential not just to transform the economy of north Wales—as other projects could in south Wales—but to have an impact on the wider supply chain within the United Kingdom.

Contrary to Opposition Members' comments, the Government have invested in city region deals for Cardiff and Swansea, so I must ask why we are accused of ignoring the Swansea city region. One reason for the Welsh and UK Governments' keenness to see a cross-border north Wales growth deal is the energy supply chains. The energy opportunities in north Wales are not confined to north Wales; they are dependent on cross-border connectivity.

**Geraint Davies:** In the short time available, will the Minister say whether he has any idea when the decision will be made on the lagoon—not what it will be, but when it will be made? Will it be part of the clean growth plan?

**Guto Bebb:** I am surprised by that question, because the hon. Gentleman represents Swansea East—

**Carolyn Harris:** I'm East!

**Guto Bebb:** I apologise; I meant Swansea West. The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the Swansea city deal includes a number of projects, but the tidal lagoon is not one of them, although it has certainly contributed to the development of the city region. I would have expected him, as the local MP, to understand what was within the deal in question.

**Geraint Davies:** I was asking about the timetable, not the city deal.

**Ian Paisley (in the Chair):** Order. The Minister has not given way, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

**Guto Bebb:** Thank you, Mr Paisley. The tidal lagoon was not part of the Swansea region deal, as the hon. Member for Swansea West should have been aware.

**Geraint Davies:** I am.

**Guto Bebb:** Good.

I should also address the possibility of moving forward with the small modular reactor—as I said, we will visit Trawsfynydd very shortly—and the renewables issues

[Guto Bebb]

that hon. Members have raised. Our track record on renewables is positive. I fully accept that wind farm costs have fallen quite significantly as a result of investments made, but I think the comments of the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd about the success of our renewables project since we have been in government were unreasonable. There has been more than £52 billion of investment in renewables since 2010—not an insignificant sum.

As for expected energy generation, we are now on track to deliver 35% of the UK's electricity demand through renewable sources. Far from being a failure, that is a success story that we should be proud of. I am surprised by the accusation that the Government have not been proactive in our investment within the renewables sector. The evidence points the other way. It is all very well talking about projections, but in 2015 we achieved 25% of energy generation through renewable sources.

These are successful outcomes of an integrated Government policy that should be supported. Their success is reflected in the fall in the cost of renewable sources of energy. Opposition Members talk about failure to support developments in Wales, but it is worth pointing out that 49,662 sites in Wales are generating renewable energy—another success story that we should be proud of.

That point brings me on to an issue raised by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake). I have not responded to him in this Chamber before, so I welcome him to his place. He is absolutely right that one of the success stories of north-west Wales has been community hydro projects. My constituency has a few such projects, and I know full well that there are similar projects in the constituency of the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams), who is not here today. Community energy projects are really exciting, because they generate electricity locally and give a financial benefit to the locality. The Government support such developments, which are crucial to our energy policy, but we need to highlight to the Welsh Government how they are taxed differently in Wales from in Scotland and England.

The Welsh Government have been very constructive on energy generation in many ways, but the taxes on community projects—on equipment used in small hydro plants, for example—are not beneficial to the development of further community projects. That can be contrasted with the situation in England, which is a result of the UK Government's decisions, and in Scotland. The Barnett consequential of the decisions made in England could be applied in Wales; certainly the funding has gone to Wales.

We have a good story to tell on renewables. It is a success story that has really touched the grassroots, but we need to make sure that it continues, and that requires action both from the Welsh Government and from Westminster.

I apologise that I am running out of time, but I would like to allow the hon. Member for Ynys Môn time to conclude. He mentioned marine energy opportunities beyond tidal lagoons. I fully understand why tidal lagoons have dominated the debate—the hon. Members for Gower

(Tonia Antoniazzi), for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and for Swansea West have a real interest in the issue, as do Members throughout Wales, because we understand the potential—but there is a real opportunity for innovatively designed marine energy proposals in Wales. I know that for a fact, because I have visited potential developments off Holyhead and off the Pembrokeshire coast. This is an opportunity for new technology to be developed to put Wales at the forefront of renewable energy opportunities.

The Government are looking carefully at these issues. We want to be supportive, which is why I have visited sites in Pembrokeshire and Ynys Môn and met Anglesey developers. We want to see renewable technologies operating in Wales, but within the context of an energy policy that is fair to the consumer and the business user and supports the development of the energy sector in Wales and the job creation that goes with it.

I thank the hon. Member for Ynys Môn again for bringing the matter to our attention. I apologise if I did not respond to every issue he raised, but 15 minutes is 15 minutes, and I am more than happy to write to him with further guidance on any specific issues. To hon. Members who are concerned about the wait for the tidal lagoon decision, I say that the Wales Office continues to argue strongly for that decision to be made, but—as has consistently been stated—it must be right for Swansea, for people who support the tidal lagoon there, and for our energy policy and its costs. That is the decision that the Government will deliver in due course.

**Ian Paisley (in the Chair):** At the beginning of the debate I thought we might run out of speakers. We clearly did not; Members were very energised. Will the Member who moved the motion, the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), give us a two-minute wind-up?

2.57 pm

**Albert Owen:** I will not take two minutes, because Members who are here for the next debate missed my opening remarks; they would be at a loss if I came to a lengthy conclusion.

Welsh Members of Parliament are passionate about energy in Wales. We have a good record; we pioneered many technologies in the past, and we want to do so in the future. I take on board what the Minister said about the continuation of renewables policy, but the heavy lifting was done by the previous Government. This is the time and the opportunity for the Government to show their credentials. They started the Hendry review; it is time for them to respond positively to that review and to move forward.

I give the Government nine out of 10 on new nuclear. We need to move forward on small module reactors. We need to be pioneers. I want Wales to be central to the industrial strategy, which it can and will be if the Wales Office, BEIS and others work with the Welsh Government, with business and with the community, so that Wales is at the forefront of energy in the United Kingdom.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered energy in Wales.

## Armed Forces Pay

[STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

3 pm

**Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered armed forces pay.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, and to have secured my first debate in Westminster Hall today, following my maiden speech in the main Chamber yesterday.

Portsmouth has a proud military history. It is one of the most famous ports in the world and our association with the Royal Navy continues to go from strength to strength. Our naval base is home to almost two thirds of the Navy's surface ships and we have recently welcomed the new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth. We look forward to welcoming the second new carrier, HMS Prince of Wales, in the near future.

The Navy is an intrinsic part of my home city, its DNA and my own family's history, and the naval dockyard is hugely significant to the local economy. A tenth of Portsmouth's workforce is employed there, either in the armed forces or as part of the civilian workforce who support the Navy's work there. I pay tribute to all their work, but for today's debate I will focus on the work of our armed forces and specifically on their pay.

I called for this debate because our armed forces have been subject to years of pay restraint in the face of rising costs and increasing pressure on their incomes. This week, we have all seen the displeasure of public sector workers about the 1% pay cap as well as the hard work of their various unions in speaking out for them, which, hopefully, is now starting to effect real change. However, our armed forces do not have that voice; we have a responsibility in this place to be their voice. We have to speak out about their pay, pensions and working conditions if they are to see any improvements.

I will focus on three areas today: pay restraint; rising costs; and, finally, recruitment and retention. First, there is pay restraint. Like other public sector workers, members of our armed forces have been subject to pay restraint for several years. New figures from the House of Commons Library show that the starting salary of an Army private is now down 5.3% in real terms since 2010—a cut of more than £1,000 a year.

I suspect that the Minister will tell us that it is the Armed Forces Pay Review Body that makes recommendations for armed forces pay, and that the Government have accepted those recommendations. However, it is clear from the review body's 2017 report that they are making recommendations with the constraint of the cap in mind. The report states that both the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Defence Secretary reinforced that approach in Government policy. The report even goes so far as highlighting the review body's concern with the cap, saying that

“We commented last year that we were concerned about the sustainability of the current ongoing pay restraint policy, and that continues to be our view”.

I ask the Minister today whether similar constraints will be put on the review body when it makes recommendations in the future. If the Government decide to lift the public

sector pay cap for our armed forces, will the review body be given a chance to produce an interim report so that new pay levels for our armed forces can come in as quickly as possible?

The second area that I will cover is rising costs. It is not just the case that pay is being restrained; it also comes at a time of rising costs for families across the UK, with some specific rising costs for forces' families, which my constituents have raised with me personally. There is a new combined accommodation assessment model that uses new grading criteria, and it will see charges increase for about three quarters of service families accommodation occupants.

Armed forces personnel have also seen their national insurance contributions rise. Again, I refer to the pay review body's 2017 report, which made the situation very clear:

“A common theme from our visits was that the one per cent basic pay award...was not perceived as an increase as it coincided with increases in National Insurance, changes in tax credits and...increases”—

that is, other increases—

“that left a number of Service personnel seeing a reduction in take home pay.”

My third and final point is about recruitment and retention. Pay restraint is not only hurting our armed forces personnel in the pocket but it is clear that it is having an impact on the ability to recruit and retain personnel. When it comes to recruitment and retention, our armed forces are in crisis. All of our services are running at a liability of 5.1%. Figures released just today show that, for the first time and even by the Government's new and questionable definition of “trained”, the Army has fallen below 82,000 in number. Its full-time “trained” strength is 81,920 and the numbers are trending downward.

That is nothing short of a broken manifesto commitment by the Conservatives. They promised us that they would keep Army numbers above 82,000. The Government now urgently need to take action, and although I recognise that dealing with pay will not solve all the existing problems, it is a good place to start. This year's armed forces continuous attitude survey showed how unimpressed our services personnel are with their pay. Only 33% of respondents were satisfied with their basic rate of pay. By comparison, in 2010 satisfaction with pay was at 52%. Can the Minister identify what might have changed since 2010 to cause that 19% drop?

Among all those members of our armed forces who have put their notice in to leave, pay was the fifth most significant factor in making that decision. However, when we look just at “Other Ranks”, pay was the fourth most cited reason. Opportunities outside the armed forces also played a strong role in people's decision to leave. The Army Pay Review Body's latest report highlights that the review body has experienced this attitude at first hand, stating on page 53 that

“our visit programme made clear that Service personnel are becoming increasingly frustrated with public sector pay policy. They feel their pay is being unfairly constrained in a period when costs are rising, private sector earnings are starting to recover, and the high tempo demands on the Armed Forces have not diminished.”

The evidence is there: voluntary outflow is hugely high and recruitment is stagnant. If the Government do not get to grips with this problem soon, operational capability will start to diminish. Our armed forces are

[*Stephen Morgan*]

enormously professional and are respected around the world. They can do a lot with a little, but we have to be realistic: if we do not meet recruitment targets, they are not going to be able to do everything that we want them to.

So far, I have been disappointed with the Government's responses to questions from my colleagues about recruitment targets. When asked for specific details about future targets, Ministers have responded with vague, single-sentence answers, such as:

"The Government is committed to maintaining the overall size of the Armed Forces",

which the Minister for the Armed Forces recently wrote in response to the shadow Defence Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith). This makes me concerned that the Government are not taking this issue seriously.

In conclusion, I have recently returned—hot-foot—from the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, where I saw at first hand some of the challenges that our armed forces face, and I want to put on the record my encouragement to any Member of Parliament to consider attending this useful scheme. However, some of those on the frontline have said to me that they now feel undervalued and unappreciated, and that morale is low. When I asked them what I personally could do as a new Member of Parliament, their feedback was, "Make sure the Government make us feel valued again".

Given all his experience, the Minister will understand the severity of the current problems regarding the plans to lift the 1% pay cap for the armed forces. I hope that he will get to grips with that issue.

3.8 pm

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), who made such an eloquent maiden speech in the main Chamber yesterday. To throw himself in at the deep end with a maiden speech and then a 90-minute Westminster Hall debate less than 24 hours later shows the grit and determination that Portsmouth seems to instil in its MPs. I commend him on securing this debate.

I share my hon. Friend's interest in the armed forces. As the son of a submariner, I know that armed forces pay is not only about supporting and rewarding those people who serve our country but about putting food on the table for families right across the country. Nowhere is that closer to my heart than in Devonport, which is the country's largest naval base—indeed, it is the largest base in western Europe—and home to many of the frontline fighting forces that our country so relies on. It is also home to half our nation's frigates and to our amphibious assault craft, including HMS Ocean, which at the moment is doing such a good job in supporting the relief effort for our overseas territories and our friends in the Caribbean.

Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport is also the spiritual home of the Royal Marines, at Stonehouse Barracks. Sadly, that base is due to close under Conservative Government cuts. We are also home to the Army and the Artillery at the Royal Citadel: again, a base that is closing. The Army numbers and the Royal Marines and

Navy personnel in Plymouth are an integral part of our city. The cap has had an effect not only on the ability of those forces' families to afford to pay their bills, but on the contribution that they can make to our local economy.

Figures from the Library show that the number of armed forces personnel in the Navy and Royal Marines in Plymouth have fallen from 7,240 in 2010 to 5,000 now. Each job lost and each job transferred away from Devonport means less money spent in our communities and in our shops. There is a further cut in terms of officers in the Army and even in the RAF, which is not something that Plymouth is widely known for, although we have a few of them.

It is important to look in detail at what the pay means for each of the different ranks in the armed forces. There is a real manpower and personnel crisis in our armed forces, not only in terms of recruitment, but in retention as well. In particular, I want to talk about what it means for the engineering grades in the Royal Navy. Within the engineering sector there is a real concern about how many engineers we are producing and where we are recruiting them. If it were not for the assistance of our friends in the US Coast Guard and in fellow NATO countries, we would not currently be able to put the ships to sea that we are able to because we have so few homegrown engineers. One of the big reasons why engineers are leaving the senior service is pay: not only the pay cap, but the draw of larger rewards in the private sector.

In the far south-west, if someone holds an engineering qualification, particularly a nuclear engineering qualification, they are in heavy demand. The ability of the nuclear industry to continue to grow with the new nuclear builds and the potential decommissioning work adds to the draw of the private sector for a lot of our Royal Navy engineering grades. That needs to be looked at because the pay cap is an arbitrary tool that has been applied for ideological reasons; it does not look at what the consequences are. Can the Minister tell us what is the additional cost of recruitment and the additional cost of the uplift that we need to bring in freelance and other types of engineers to support our Royal Navy and whether a relaxation of the pay cap for those grades would be a more efficient use of public money?

Figures from the Library show that, throughout the entire military, if there had been a 3% increase over the course of the pay cap since 2010, a private would now be earning over £3,000 more. A corporal and equivalent ranks would be earning nearly £5,000 more. Lieutenants—many people mispronounce that; I think they watch too much "Star Trek" and Americanise our grades—could be earning £4,000 more, and majors and equivalent ranks whose actual pay was £59,783 could have been earning £66,886. All of those are a draw against staying in our military.

The British armed forces are the finest fighting forces in the world. The arbitrary, ideologically driven pay cap affects not only our ability to retain the first-class talent that we have within our armed forces, especially at engineering grades in our naval dockyards and bases that both I and my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South represent—it also affects how we recruit people to those grades. Will the Minister address what we are doing about engineering grades in the Royal Navy?

I imagine that Members here today share a common desire for the Royal Navy to succeed. An integral part of the Royal Navy's success is looking not only at the

capability of hulls and what we put on them—the new frigates, the new carriers, the new offshore patrol vehicles, the Type 45s and other ships—but at the personnel on board. I am really concerned that if the arbitrary pay cap continues in our armed forces, we will hollow out the expertise, especially around the specialist grades that we need to put our ships to sea. In a more uncertain world, we need to retain and recruit the very best for our engineering grades and for our frontline fighting forces.

The Government could take a big step forward and consider whether an arbitrary pay cap for our armed forces is the right way forward. Relaxing that pay cap or removing it altogether to ensure that people are paid the same in real terms this year as they should have been last year would be a way of recognising not only the fantastic work they do, but would recognise that in their pay cheque as well. I have had—I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South has as well—people come to me since the election to say they are growing sick and tired of politicians saying warm words when people in our armed forces have stepped up to serve the country, but not rewarding them when it comes to the budget settlement about how much those people take home.

As we are all here because we respect and value the work of our armed forces, I ask the Minister to think seriously about how the pay cap is having a serious effect on retention and recruitment of specialist personnel in our armed forces and how that could be addressed in the coming years. We know a lot of skilled engineers are facing retirement, so we will be hollowing out our engineering grades. Will the Minister address those points when he responds?

3.15 pm

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you preside over proceedings this afternoon, Chair. I congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) on securing this debate and doing so just 24 hours after he gave his maiden speech, also on the issue of public sector pay restraint. It is obvious, given his first two outings in Parliament, that he will be a thorn in the side as far as public sector pay is concerned. He is absolutely right, so I wish him well.

Earlier this week I saw a tweet from the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard). It said that he and his hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South often get mixed up because people think they represent the same cities. If they carry on in this vein, following each other, that will likely continue for the life of the Parliament. If you will allow me, Mr Chairman, I also wish to put on record my thanks—I hope other Members will join me, particularly the Minister—to a former Member of this House who sadly did not hold on to her seat at the general election: Kirsten Oswald, the former SNP armed forces spokesperson, who did a tremendous amount of work on the issue we are debating this afternoon.

I am surprised to see that there is not a single Conservative Back Bencher here to defend the Government's position. Given their defence of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill on Monday, the power grab on Tuesday and the pay cap on Wednesday, I thought they would at least make it along to defend their own Government, but clearly armed forces pay restraint was just a step too far. It seems there are indeed brass necks on the Tory Benches.

Is it any wonder? The Conservatives have continuously painted themselves as the sole party in this Parliament that defends and stands up for the armed forces, while continuously painting my party and lambasting the Labour party as being what they see as weak on defence. But we have heard the figures this afternoon: targets for the size of the Army have been missed; morale is low; recruitment is in crisis; and pay has been cut and cut, by over £1,000 a year, with pay restraint for the past seven years.

There are other issues surrounding the pay and conditions of members of the armed forces. One of those was highlighted by a colleague of mine in the Scottish Parliament, Gordon MacDonald, the MSP for Edinburgh Pentlands. It concerned Ministry of Defence housing where the rents go up all across the country. In Scotland the new charging system introduced by the MOD has seen 81% of service families having to pay more rent than under the old regime. Complaints about MOD housing in Scotland, outsourced to Carillion, have gone up by a massive 43%.

I do not wish to speak for long because I am keen to hear from the Minister, who is very diligent. Although we crossed swords a couple of times in the previous Parliament, and no doubt will do so again in this Parliament, I and many in my party have a great deal of respect for him. I look forward to hearing what he has to say, but I will end with this. As was adumbrated in the House yesterday by members of my party, the Scottish Government have now committed to lifting the pay cap for all public sector workers in devolved Government agencies. It is about time this Government followed suit. The utterly bizarre stunt that was pulled yesterday, when they did not even have the gumption to march through the Lobby and vote for what we all know they believe, says it all. It made this place look like a banana Parliament. I have spent my political life arguing that it is a banana Parliament, but yesterday was perhaps the best—or should I say the worst—example of that.

I commend the Scottish Government for what they do to support service personnel, service families and veterans in Scotland as far as they can. The “Renewing our Commitments” document that they published last year came with £5 million of funding to try to support service families, who are having to deal with the burdens of the pay cuts imposed on them by Whitehall.

Defending the country is of course the first duty of Government. It is increasingly difficult to know how that is to be done with hollowed-out armed forces, a recruitment crisis and forces whose morale is at an all-time low. It is not just a matter of our commitments to them—and those commitments are supreme. We must ask what effect there will be on national security, and whether the current situation allows us properly to live up to the commitments that we make to our allies, to be a strong and ready fighting force to protect the people of this country.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth South on securing the debate. I look forward to seeing him take on the Government, on this issue and many others, as the Parliament progresses.

3.21 pm

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South

[Wayne David]

(Stephen Morgan) on making his second maiden speech. His eloquent words show strongly that he is a stout supporter of the interests of his constituents—particularly the armed forces and the Navy. It is particularly appropriate that we are holding this Westminster Hall debate today, because tomorrow is Battle of Britain Day and today is Support Our Soldiers Day. I have seen people taking to the streets of London to raise awareness of and funds for ABF The Soldiers Charity.

There can be no doubt that today, sadly, our armed forces as a whole face a crisis of recruitment and retention. In figures from the Ministry of Defence published only this morning, we are told that there are a total of 142,100 full-time trained personnel in all the services combined. That figure represents a stark reduction: on 1 April there were 143,090. The reduction is throughout the services—the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, the Royal Air Force and the Army. Let us not forget that the Conservative manifesto of 2015 said that the Army should not fall below 82,000. Yet the figures today show it is down to 81,920, and the situation is getting worse, not better.

A few months ago there was a good report, commissioned by No. 10 Downing Street, from the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), a former Armed Forces Minister. He reported that there was a crisis. That is my word, not his, but nevertheless he noted a severe reduction in the number of personnel in the armed forces. His figures were slightly different from what the MOD said this morning, but nevertheless the trend is quite clear. He said:

“The Regular strength of the UK Armed Forces is currently 138,350, 4.8% below the required number...In the year to April 2017, 12,950 people joined the UK Regular Armed Forces but in the same period 14,970 left.”

I share the regret that has been expressed that no Conservative Back Benchers are here for this important debate.

We must ask the reason for this unfortunate trend, and, as the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford said, there are several clear reasons. He comments that “while more personnel continue to leave each year than to join, the recruiting organisations across the Services are increasingly ‘running to stand still’ to try to fill the widening gaps in the ranks. Whilst the most serious problems remain in the Army, this is also likely to prove an increasing challenge for the Royal Navy and the RAF as their liability will increase by several hundred over the next few years”.

He hints that the problem can be put down, in part, to concerns about the future prospects that the armed forces offer, and declining standards of accommodation, with quite minimal improvements, in many areas. There is also real concern about the levels of remuneration available—or not.

The findings and recommendations in this year’s report by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body are governed by Government diktat, but it is nevertheless obliged to paint the picture that it sees, objectively. It states:

“On levels of pay generally, our visit programme made clear that Service personnel are becoming increasingly frustrated with public sector pay policy. They feel their pay is being unfairly constrained in a period when costs are rising, private sector earnings are starting to recover, and the high tempo demands on the Armed Forces have not diminished.”

I think that that is objectively correct, and it underlines the unfairness of the Government’s policy and attitude. It is essential to provide an objective facility so that honest

recommendations can be made. Unless the Government have real reasons to reject those recommendations, they should be obliged to accept them. New figures from the House of Commons Library show that, for example, the starting salary of an Army private is down 5.3% in real terms since 2010. That is a cut of more than £1,000 a year.

We all want young men and women to join the armed forces in greater numbers, but—hand on heart—how on earth can anyone be persuaded to go into something with limited career prospects, where the living conditions for them and their family would be far from good, and where they would be likely to see a continuing fall in their standard of living? It is clearly unacceptable, and we strongly urge the Government to take a comprehensive approach to lifting the 1% public sector pay cap and to allow the Armed Forces Pay Review Body to make recommendations on pay rises for the armed forces. The Government should allow it to do so without restriction.

That seems to be a perfectly reasonable request, and it is one that many in the House support, including, I suspect, many Conservative Members—that is why they are not here to support the Government this afternoon. It will be warmly welcomed by the armed forces and those proud men and women who defend our country, sometimes in the most difficult circumstances. A point was made earlier about how the armed forces do not have a trade union to speak for them and are constrained in their access to the media to get their message across.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** The issue of an armed forces trade union for non-commissioned personnel featured in the Scottish National party’s manifesto. I am unsure about the hon. Gentleman’s party’s manifesto, but it sounds as though he supports the principle. Will he note that, just this month, a captain has been named as the general secretary of the trade union for non-commissioned armed forces in Denmark? Is it not about time that we followed countries such as Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands and established that here in this country?

**Wayne David:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and there is a strong argument for it, but it would be unfortunate if we allowed that issue, important as it may be, to distract us from the central issue before us this afternoon, which is our request—it is a cross-party request, I hope—for the Government to comprehensively lift their 1% pay restraint on the public sector, including the armed forces.

In conclusion, as things stand at the moment, there are few external voices to support the armed forces. The armed forces themselves are constrained in what they can say, so it is all the more up to us to put forward their case with strength, determination and, I hope, unity. Through that, the Government can clearly hear the voice of the House of the Commons. They should adopt common sense and fairness and change their policy forthwith.

3.31 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, and to respond to this debate. I declare an interest, which is in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests: I am ex-Army and a lieutenant colonel in the reserves. I pay tribute to the



other coastal towns that have been represented in the debate by the hon. Members for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) and for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard). I represent Bournemouth. I think the only Members present who do not represent coastal towns are the spokesmen for the SNP and the Labour party, the hon. Members for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) and for Caerphilly (Wayne David). Nevertheless, the debate has been helpful in understanding and sharing concerns about public sector pay specific to the armed forces.

A number of Members have made perhaps a little bit of a political point, asking where the Conservative Members are in this important debate. I could say to the SNP spokesman that there are no SNP Back Benchers here either; he is his party's sole representative. Many Members who would have been here today are participating in the armed forces parliamentary scheme. That is why they are absent.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Portsmouth South for calling this debate. Like the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, he represents a historical city that has a connection with all services, but specifically the senior service. We need to place the debate in context and against the backdrop of the nation's finances, which ultimately are the question mark hanging over the size of the coffers that the Treasury has to provide financial support not only to the Ministry of Defence, but to all armed forces. I will not go into the politics of the situation, but when we came into government in 2010 there was a significant deficit. That deficit has been reduced by three quarters and the economy is now growing. The low taxes we are seeing are creating growth in our economy. We have record lows in unemployment, which is a good thing.

However, let us be honest: the election result and the debates during the campaign showed a nation concerned about our public sector and the length of time that the pay freeze has affected them. That concern was shared not only by those individuals affected, but by those who support our teachers, nurses, doctors, fire service, police, ambulance service and armed forces. Our armed forces do not have the voice of the unions, as has been mentioned a number of times. Members will be aware that the Government have been continuing the difficult task of balancing the books, but we must recognise that that ultimately means a period of pay restraint that has affected all public sector workers, including the armed forces.

We are aware, as we bring fiscal discipline back to the public finances, that that restraint has had an impact on the salaries of our people, but looking forward, the Government's recent announcement of greater flexibility where required in public sector pay means that the independent pay review bodies can now make their own judgments on future pay awards, which will mitigate the impact. As the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said on Tuesday, our public sector workers, including those in the armed forces, are among the most extraordinarily talented and hard-working people in our society. I would go further: our public services are one of the things that define Britain across the world, by which I mean not just our blue light services, but our armed forces in particular. I echo other contributors by saying that professionalism is what defines us and gives us our reputation across the globe. It is important that we look

after the people using equipment in operations. They make their mark and step forward to make a contribution with allies as a force for good in this very difficult and challenging age. They, like everyone else, deserve to have fulfilling jobs that are fairly rewarded. We have to take a balanced approach to public spending, dealing with our debts to keep our economy strong while also ensuring that we invest in our public services.

**Wayne David:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Ellwood:** I think there might be enough time for me to do so.

**Wayne David:** The Minister is hinting at something important, but I would like clarification. He talks about greater flexibility for the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. Is he suggesting that were that greater flexibility to produce a recommendation for a significant increase for the armed forces, the Government would accept that immediately, without question?

**Mr Ellwood:** I will not do what the Leader of the Opposition suggested when we came back to office after the general election, which was a knee-jerk removal of the 1% pay freeze. That was suggested in proposed amendments to the Queen's Speech. I will work extremely hard to ensure that that ambition is fulfilled. If the hon. Member for Caerphilly recognises and reads what is happening this week, there is greater clarity to provide independence, to ensure that Departments are free to reflect what is required in this day and age.

The Government will continue to ensure that the overall package for public sector workers is fair to them and that we can deliver world-class public services that are affordable within the public finances and fair to taxpayers. The last spending review budgeted for 1% average basic pay awards, as has been mentioned a number of times, but that is in addition to progression pay for specific workforces, such as the armed forces, and that must not be forgotten. There will still be a need for pay discipline over the coming years to ensure the affordability of the public services and the sustainability of public sector employment. The Government recognise that in some parts of the public sector, particularly in areas of skill shortages—such as with engineers, as has been mentioned—more flexibility may be required to deliver those world-class public services, including in return for improvements to public sector productivity.

The detail of the 2018-19 remit for the Armed Forces Pay Review Body and the Senior Salaries Review Body—I stress that they are both independent bodies that provide advice to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State on pay and remuneration for the armed forces—is still under consideration and will be agreed as part of the Budget process. Recommendations from the AFPRB and SSRB are expected in the new year.

The Government, as I have emphasised, fully recognise the invaluable work undertaken by our gallant members of the armed forces, often in dangerous and difficult circumstances. A good example is the response of our personnel to the recent events in the Caribbean and Hurricane Irma. That is a timely example of the professionalism of our armed forces in a crisis. More than 1,100 armed forces personnel have been deployed so far under Operation Ruman, to provide relief to the

[Mr Ellwood]

people of the devastated Caribbean islands. A further 600 are en route on board HMS Ocean, which was mentioned earlier. I am sure all hon. Members will join me in paying tribute to the valuable work of our armed forces personnel.

The armed forces pay and wider remuneration package is designed to reward their unique service to our country and to support the recruitment and retention of personnel. The Government are of the view that the armed forces receive an attractive package of terms and conditions of service, which have not been mentioned so far and include a competitive salary with incremental pay scales. I stress that there are pay bands for privates, lieutenants and other ranks, such as captain. Each year they move up the band and their salary does not stay still. In fact, across the armed forces, the average individual pay rise has been about 1.5%.

**Wayne David:** As someone with a distinguished service record, does the Minister personally think that remuneration in the armed forces is adequate? What is his personal view?

**Mr Ellwood:** I am going to do everything I can to make sure that we do our best to have the remuneration package that our armed forces deserve, but we have to bear in mind the context and the backdrop, which I have spelled out. There has to be fiscal recognition of the place we are in, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should all work as hard as possible to make the case and ensure that personnel get the salary they deserve and need.

There is also a non-contributory pension scheme, subsidised accommodation and food, and access to free medical and dental care. Service personnel also have access to an allowance package that provides financial assistance towards additional costs incurred as a result of their service. Throughout the pay restraint period, many personnel in the armed forces have received an annual increase in pay of well above 1%.

During the period of pay restraint, armed forces pay has not stood still. In 2016 we introduced a major revision to armed forces pay in the form of the Pay 16 pay model, which was designed to simplify an individual's pay journey, enabling them more accurately to predict their future career earnings. That has also rebalanced pay to reward armed forces personnel more effectively in line with their skills, while addressing many of the concerns raised by the AFPRB regarding the previous Pay 2000 structure.

We also employ remunerative measures to address issues of recruitment and retention, which have been mentioned, to ensure that our armed forces are manned to the required levels and with the requisite skills. Where there are particular issues in recruiting or retaining personnel, for which career management action by the services has had limited impact, we have the option of introducing targeted payments. Those payments can range from time-limited financial incentives, to longer-term recruitment and retention payments that recognise the particular challenges we face in retaining certain defence specialisms, such as military pilots or submariners.

Armed forces pay is subject to annual review by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body and the Senior Salaries Review Body, which are independent bodies tasked with

providing the Government with recommendations on armed forces pay and charges for all military personnel, including the reserves. Their terms of reference require them to give consideration to the need of the services to recruit, retain and motivate suitably able and qualified people, taking account of the particular circumstances of service life.

As part of its review, the AFPRB undertakes a detailed and comprehensive programme of work each year, which consists of a package of both written and oral evidence from the Secretary of State for Defence, senior officials and service families federations, representatives of which I had the pleasure of meeting only yesterday. The AFPRB also undertakes a series of visits to military units to hear directly from service personnel about their views on pay. In 2017, the AFPRB met more than 2,300 service personnel and 154 spouses and partners during 186 discussion groups. It visited establishments both in the UK and overseas, including operational theatres and ships.

In addition to the evidence it receives from Government, the AFPRB also commissions its own independent analysis and research, including on the pay comparability of the armed forces within the wider UK economy. A programme of visits has just concluded and the Government look forward to receiving the AFPRB recommendations next year.

Turning to the 2017 report, which the hon. Member for Caerphilly mentioned, in January this year the AFPRB and SSRB recommended a 1% pay increase for service personnel, taking into account the evidence received and independent pay comparability data. Those recommendations took into account the need to recruit, retain and motivate high-calibre people; the Government's policies on the public services; inflation targets and the public funds available for Defence. The AFPRB reported that it believed that a 1% increase in base pay would "broadly maintain pay comparability with the civilian sector."

We need to bear that in mind, because that is the competing area.

The Government accepted in full the recommendations of the AFPRB and SSRB. I take this opportunity to thank the members of both pay review bodies for their work; it is greatly respected.

Turning to future pay, on which we want to focus, as I stated previously the detail of the 2018-19 pay remit for the pay review bodies is still under consideration and will be agreed as part of the budget process. As the Secretary of State said this week at the Defence and Security Equipment International conference, "we will have greater flexibility to respond to the recommendations of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body."

I hope that answers directly the question posed by the hon. Member for Caerphilly. It is for the AFPRB to make its recommendations for 2018-19, and as I mentioned earlier its remit allows it to consider any specific recruitment and retention issues that may apply to the armed forces. I am sure it will consider some of the issues raised in this debate. Over the coming months, the Chief Secretary will write to all the pay review bodies setting out the Government's pay policy. The Defence Secretary will submit formal evidence to the AFPRB, setting out any specific recruitment and retention issues.

The armed forces are among the most extraordinarily talented and hard-working people in our society. The Government are committed to ensuring that the overall

package that they and other public sector workers receive reflects the value we place on their work. The last spending review budgeted for 1% average basic pay awards, but the Government recognise that in some parts of the public sector, particularly in areas of skills shortage, more flexibility may be required, as reflected in this week's announcement. There does, however, need to be pay discipline over the coming years, to ensure the affordability of the public services and the sustainability of public sector employment.

I make a personal statement that I will do all I can, as Minister for Defence People and Veterans, to make sure that the remuneration package that our gallant armed forces personnel get is what they deserve.

3.47 pm

**Stephen Morgan:** I pay tribute to everyone who has spoken in this debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) for his important comments on the contribution that armed forces personnel make to local economies, and on the shortages for engineering jobs. I understand that that is also the case with chefs, and it is certainly an issue in Portsmouth too.

I also thank my colleague from the SNP, the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), for his contribution on what the devolved Government

in Scotland are doing and for his important message about the lack of Back-Bench Conservative Members in this debate. That says a lot about their support for the armed forces and it is a concern.

I thank the Labour spokesperson, my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David), for his contribution on accommodation. He reminded us of the key findings of recent reports and the real challenges we face on recruitment to the armed forces.

As I said in my introduction to the debate, it is for us in this place to speak up for those who dedicate their lives to the armed forces, because they often feel unable to do so owing to a sense of loyalty to Queen and country. We have heard about the impact that the cap has had on morale, retention and recruitment. I will continue to work with colleagues throughout the House to build a cross-party consensus to hold the Government to account and to ensure that the armed forces get the pay they deserve.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered armed forces pay.

3.49 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Thursday 14 September 2017

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Energy Policy

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** As part of preparations for EU exit, the UK is establishing a domestic nuclear safeguards regime to ensure that the UK continues to maintain its position as a responsible nuclear state and that withdrawal from Euratom will not result in the weakening of our future safeguards standards and oversight in the UK.

This Government believe that it is vitally important that the new domestic nuclear safeguards regime, to be run by the Office for Nuclear Regulation, is as comprehensive and robust as that currently provided by Euratom. The Government have therefore decided that it will be establishing a domestic regime which will deliver to existing Euratom standards and exceeds the standard that the international community would require from the UK as a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). International oversight will be a key part of the future regime. The UK is seeking to conclude new agreements with the IAEA that follow the same principles as our current ones. This will ensure that the IAEA retains its right to inspect all civil nuclear facilities, and continue to receive all current safeguards reporting, ensuring that international verification of our safeguards activity continues to be robust.

Discussions with the European Union are on-going. We will be exploring a number of options for smooth transition from the current Euratom regime to a domestic one. The unique and important nature of the civil nuclear sector means that there is strong mutual interest in ensuring that the UK and Euratom community continue to work closely together in the future. The UK's ambition is to maintain a close and effective relationship with the Euratom community and the rest of the world that harnesses the UK's and the Euratom community's expertise and maximises shared interests. By maintaining our current safeguards and standards we are providing the best possible basis for continued close co-operation with Euratom in the future.

Whatever the outcome of those discussions, the Government are committed to a future regime that provides at least the existing levels of assurance. The legislation to provide for this was announced in the Queen's Speech and will be brought forward in due course. This policy statement provides important context both for parliamentary consideration of that Bill, and for the forthcoming talks with the European Union, which take place in the last week of September.

[HCWS137]

## CABINET OFFICE

### Ministerial Correction

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Skidmore):** During the Westminster Hall debate on 12 April 2016, the Minister for Civil Society should

have said that the potential cost of introducing a National Defence Medal had been estimated as £475 million by the Ministry of Defence, not by the Independent Military Medals Review. The incorrect attribution was repeated in a written parliamentary answer by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 April 2016.

[HCWS138]

## TREASURY

### Bermuda/Kyrgyzstan

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):** An exchange of letters was signed with Bermuda in London on 19 June 2017 and in Hamilton on 27 June 2017. The text replaces the original exchange of letters signed in London on 4 December 2007.

A first time double taxation agreement with Kyrgyzstan was signed on 13 June 2017. The texts of the exchange of letters and the double taxation agreement have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and made available on the HM Revenue and Customs pages of the gov.uk website. The texts will be scheduled to draft Orders in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course.

[HCWS134]

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Business Rate Reliefs

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** At the spring Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced a £435 million package of support for ratepayers over the next four years following the 2017 business rate revaluation. Overall, the revaluation was revenue neutral with the majority of businesses seeing a fall in their rates.

The package of support announced at the Budget comprised three schemes: one that caps the annual bill increase for any ratepayer losing small business rate relief or rural rate relief as a result of the revaluation to £600; a second that provides a £300 million fund for local authorities to distribute over four years to help hard-pressed businesses facing higher rates bills; and a third that gives a £1,000 discount to all pubs with a rateable value of less than £100,000. On top of this, from April 2017, the Government permanently doubled the rate of small business rate relief and increased the threshold for eligibility, meaning that 600,000 small businesses now pay no business rates at all.

All of these schemes are being delivered by local government and I am pleased to confirm that some local authorities have made significant progress towards implementation. The London Borough of Westminster has already rebilled eligible businesses under the pubs and supporting small business schemes. The consultation on Westminster's discretionary scheme which will provide over £11 million in the first year alone has now closed. Formal approval to the scheme is due this week, with applications invited from this Friday.

Furthermore, some authorities have awarded relief to eligible ratepayers on all three schemes. For example, Leeds City Council has provided over £1.5 million in

relief to over 3,600 ratepayers, including 50% discounts on bill increases to 3,300 small and medium sized ratepayers under their discretionary scheme. Some smaller authorities have also made excellent progress. For example South Norfolk and Rutland Councils have implemented all three schemes. Rutland County Council has provided almost £250,000 in relief to over 100 ratepayers to offset average rateable value increases of 13.5%, and is awarding a discount of 26% to eligible businesses.

The Government have been consistently clear that we expect local authorities to make rapid progress in helping business by implementing these relief schemes. Overall, however, despite various examples of good practice, the pace of providing relief to ratepayers has not been acceptable. I have written today to those authorities that have not fully implemented all three schemes asking them to rebill businesses that are set to benefit from relief as soon as possible. From Tuesday 3 October, I will publish a list of those authorities that have notified us that they have rebilled for each of the three relief schemes.

[HCWS140]

## EDUCATION

### Primary Assessment: England

#### **The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):**

Primary education is fundamentally important to ensuring that every child receives the best possible start in life. As I set out in my statement to Parliament in March this year, the primary assessment and accountability system has a crucial role to play in ensuring that every child, no matter what their background or where they go to school, benefits from a high-quality primary education.

Last October, I set out my intention to establish a settled, trusted primary assessment system. To help us move towards this, we published earlier this year parallel consultation documents on the long-term future of primary assessment and on future assessment arrangements for children, working below the standard of the national curriculum tests. These consultations considered a number of the key issues facing the primary assessment and accountability system, including how the assessment system can help teachers to prepare pupils to succeed at school, the starting point from which to measure the progress that schools help children make in primary school, and how end of key stage teacher assessments could be improved. The consultations closed in June and I am grateful to the many people and organisations, and particularly the headteachers and teachers, who took the time to provide thoughtful, considered responses.

Having considered the views expressed, I am today publishing the Government's responses to both consultations, which set out how we will establish a stable and effective primary assessment system. These documents include commitments to:

- improve the early years foundation stage profile by: revising the early learning goals to make them clearer and align them more closely with teaching in key stage 1; this will support us to meet our manifesto commitment to strengthen the teaching of literacy and numeracy in the early years. We will also strengthen the way assessment information is passed on to year 1 teachers; and review the guidance and moderation process to reduce administration burdens;

- improve school-level progress measures, and give schools credit for the education that they provide to their pupils in the reception year, year 1 and year 2, by introducing a statutory assessment in reception to replace the existing key stage 1 baseline;

- reduce workload and administration burdens on teachers by making end of key stage 1 assessments non-statutory in all-through primary schools, once the new reception baseline has become established, with national sampling to be introduced so that we can continue to monitor standards;

- remove the statutory duty to report teacher assessment in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 from the 2018 to 2019 academic year onwards which will form part of our drive to bear down on unnecessary administrative burdens, while keeping our rigorous key stage 2 national curriculum tests in these subjects, which will enable schools to uphold high standards while also reducing workload and administrative burdens on teachers;

- improve the way that writing is assessed, so that teachers have more scope to use their professional judgment when assessing pupil performance;

- aid children's fluency in mathematics through the introduction of a multiplication tables check, from the summer of 2020, to be administered to pupils at the end of year 4. This will help us to deliver on our commitment that every child will know their times tables off by heart by the time that they leave primary school; and

- improve the statutory assessment of pupils working below the standard of national curriculum tests by extending the interim pre-key stage standards to cover all pupils engaged in subject specific learning, and by piloting the Rochford review's recommended approach to assessing pupils who are not yet engaged in subject specific learning.

We will continue to work closely with headteachers, teachers and all those with an interest in primary education as we implement these changes, building on the dialogue started by the consultation. It is by working together that we will achieve our goal of a proportionate assessment system that supports every child to meet their full potential.

Copies of both of these Government responses will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

[HCWS139]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Hong Kong: Sino-British Joint Declaration

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson):** The latest six-monthly report on the implementation of the Sino-British joint declaration on Hong Kong was published today, and can be found as an online attachment. It covers the period from 1 January to 30 June 2017.

The report has been placed in the Library of the House. A copy is also available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office>.

I commend the report to the House.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-09-14/>  
HCWS131/

[HCWS131]

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

### Trade Matters

#### **The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):**

*EU-Canada comprehensive and economic trade agreement (CETA)—provisional application*

The Government wish to inform the House that on 21 September 2017, the comprehensive and economic trade agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada will be provisionally applied. The date of provisional application was confirmed by the European Commission to EU member states in the last meeting of the Trade Policy Committee.

The UK has always been a strong supporter of CETA and remains a constructive partner in support of EU free trade agreements.

Canada is one of the world's most developed economies and a significant trading partner for the UK. The provisional application of CETA will benefit consumers and provide opportunities for British businesses with 98% of all Canadian tariff lines being eliminated.

This will create major opportunities for UK businesses across the whole economy and the Government are now working with our Canadian partners to ensure that UK businesses take full advantage of the provisional application of this agreement.

[HCWS132]

## JUSTICE

### Judicial Conduct Investigations Office

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Lidington):** With the concurrence of the Lord Chief Justice, I will today publish the 11th annual report of the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office (JCIO), formerly known as the Office for Judicial Complaints.

The JCIO supports the Lord Chief Justice and the Lord Chancellor in our joint statutory responsibility for judicial discipline.

The judiciary comprises approximately 26,000 individuals serving across a range of jurisdictions. Over the past year, the JCIO received 2,126 complaints against judicial office holders and 526 written enquiries. Only 42 investigations resulted in disciplinary action. The JCIO met all of its key performance indicators for processing complaints.

I have placed copies of the report in the Libraries of both Houses, the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office. Copies are also available online at:

<http://judicialcomplaints.judiciary.gov.uk/publications.htm>.

[HCWS136]

## PRIME MINISTER

### Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Terms of Reference

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** On 15 August 2017, I announced the formal setting up of a public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire, to be chaired by Sir Martin Moore-Bick, and its terms of reference. This followed Sir Martin Moore-Bick's letter to me of 10 August,

which advised me of the outcome of the public consultation on the scope of the terms of reference, and his recommendations. I was happy to accept Sir Martin's recommendations without amendment.

The inquiry's full terms of reference are:

to examine the circumstances surrounding the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, including the immediate cause or causes of the fire and the means by which it spread to the whole of the building;

the design and construction of the building and the decisions relating to its modification, refurbishment and management; the scope and adequacy of building regulations, fire regulations and other legislation, guidance and industry practice relating to the design, construction, equipping and management of high-rise residential buildings;

whether such regulations, legislation, guidance and industry practice were complied with in the case of Grenfell Tower and the fire safety measures adopted in relation to it;

the arrangements made by the local authority or other responsible bodies for receiving and acting upon information either obtained from local residents or available from other sources (including information derived from fires in other buildings) relating to the risk of fire at Grenfell Tower, and the action taken in response to such information;

the fire prevention and fire safety measures in place at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017;

the response of the London Fire Brigade to the fire; and

the response of central and local government in the days immediately following the fire; and

to report its findings to the Prime Minister as soon as possible and to make recommendations.

Sir Martin has said that he is considering appointing assessors to assist him in his task. He considers it likely that he shall wish to appoint a diverse group of people whose experience extends to the occupation and management of social housing and the administration of local government more generally, as well as to matters of a more technical scientific nature. He also states that at a later stage, he may also wish to appoint others to assist on particular aspects of the investigation. He will make his decisions public in due course. I have not appointed any other members to the inquiry panel at this stage. However, the Inquiries Act 2005 allows for appointments to be made, with the consent of Sir Martin, during the course of the inquiry. This enables the composition of the inquiry panel to be kept under review.

My exchange of correspondence with Sir Martin is in the Library of the House.

Sir Martin is holding a preliminary hearing later today where he will set out further detail on how he intends on conducting the inquiry.

In addition to the work of the inquiry, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has already announced an independent review into building regulations and fire safety, led by Dame Judith Hackitt. This will urgently assess the effectiveness of current building and fire safety regulations and related compliance and enforcement issues, with a focus on multi-occupancy high-rise residential buildings. The review will co-operate fully with the inquiry. Sir Martin has set out his reasons for not looking into the broader social housing issues but, as he said in his letter, they should not be ignored and I am determined that these important questions are not left unanswered. As a first step, I have asked my hon. Friend the Housing Minister (Alok Sharma) to personally meet and hear from as

many social tenants as possible, as well as other residents of social housing estates, both in the immediate area around Grenfell Tower and across the country. The Housing Minister has already met a number of representative groups and will continue to meet tenants during October and November.

[HCWS135]

## WALES

### **National Assembly for Wales Elections 2016**

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** The Government are today publishing their response to the Electoral Commission's report on the administration of the 2016 elections to the National Assembly for Wales.

We are grateful to the Commission for preparing its report and for its ongoing work to support the administration of elections. We note that, following the implementation of the Wales Act 2017, powers over Assembly elections will be devolved to the National Assembly for Wales and Welsh Ministers. It will therefore be the responsibility of the Welsh Government to implement the Commission's recommendations in respect of the next scheduled Assembly elections in 2021. The Government will consider the Commission's wider recommendations in respect of polls that remain non-devolved.

Copies of the Government's response will be placed in the Library of both Houses.

[HCWS133]



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**not later than  
Thursday 21 September 2017**

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