

**Wednesday  
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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 25 October 2017**

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# House of Commons

Wednesday 25 October 2017

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### SCOTLAND

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Jobcentre Closures

1. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed closures of jobcentres on local communities in Scotland. [901324]

**The Minister for Employment (Damian Hinds):** Most jobcentres are staying put. We are merging some into neighbouring offices to create bigger, multi-skilled teams, moving them into better buildings, or placing them into shared local authority space, all of which can lead to better customer service.

**Liz Twist:** In Glasgow, unemployment has consistently been higher than the national average, child poverty is rising, and the use of food banks has increased by 20% in the past two years. How can Ministers justify closing so many jobcentres, which provide vital support for people struggling to access the labour market?

**Damian Hinds:** I can confirm that Glasgow will continue to have a considerably higher concentration of jobcentres not only than the large cities in England but compared with most other large cities in Scotland. We have redesigned the estate to make sure that we can provide well for our client base, but from bigger jobcentres. There are a number of things we can do from larger jobcentres to help unemployed people that it is not so straightforward to do from smaller ones.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Bridgeton jobcentre in my constituency will close and people will have to take two buses to get to Shettleston. Will the Minister give a commitment that not a single one of my constituents will be sanctioned for being late because they could not get there on time because of his cuts?

**Damian Hinds:** We expect people who are not in work to have the working week effectively available for their job-search activities, including visiting the jobcentre and, of course, applying for jobs. As I think the hon. Lady already knows, the rate of sanctions is down significantly. The vast majority of people do not get sanctioned every month, and we run a policy of having a reasonable approach. If people have a good reason for not being at an appointment, they will not be sanctioned.

**Lesley Laird** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): The Department for Work and Pensions claims that the need for jobcentres is declining with the growth of online services, but in the constituency of Glasgow East, which has one of the highest claimant rates in

Scotland, at around 35%, many do not have access to the internet and 51% are not IT literate; yet the Government are still closing three jobcentres, one of which serves three homeless shelters. What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of closures on service users, many of whom rely on face-to-face interaction with jobcentre staff?

**Damian Hinds:** We did of course make an assessment of the effect of the changes. Where the changes would involve people having to travel more than 3 miles or 20 minutes by public transport, we had a public consultation. *[Interruption.]* In one case, we changed the plan in the light of the consultation, as the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) well knows. We think it is right to move to larger jobcentres in which we can do more. They are better equipped and have computers to ensure that that facility is there, and there are specialists in the jobcentre who can help people with the computers and get through the problems of digital exclusion that the hon. Lady mentions.

**Lesley Laird:** I thank the Minister for that answer, but I am afraid it is not very convincing or particularly reassuring. He knows full well that equality impact assessments have been conducted, as the Secretary of State for Scotland told me in response to my letter. The Secretary of State also said in his letter that if I wanted to access that equality information, I would have to make individual freedom of information requests for every single jobcentre. It is outrageous that the Government are covering up this vital information. They claim to value openness and transparency, but they refuse to publish information that should be freely available, no matter how much it shames them. I have in my hand an FOI request—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but I need a single sentence and a question mark at the end of it. There is a lot of pressure on time. I apologise to the hon. Lady, but she is taking far too long. She must be very quick.

**Lesley Laird:** The Minister has one more chance to publish the information. Otherwise, here is my FOI request.

**Damian Hinds:** The key point is that an equality impact assessment is not just a document; it is an entire way of thinking and working and it runs throughout these processes. I can confirm that we have been absolutely compliant with our duties under the Equality Act 2010, as we should be.

#### Brexit: Further Devolution

2. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What his policy is on devolving further powers to Scotland as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU; and if he will make a statement. [901325]

8. **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): What his policy is on devolving further powers to Scotland as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU; and if he will make a statement. [901331]

10. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What his policy is on devolving further powers to Scotland as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU; and if he will make a statement. [901333]

14. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What his policy is on devolving further powers to Scotland as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU; and if he will make a statement. [901338]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** We are in agreement with the devolved Administrations that common frameworks will be necessary in some areas but, as I have made it clear, we expect that there will be a significant increase in the decision-making power of each devolved Administration.

**Patrick Grady:** We hear about this powers bonanza all the time, but the Prime Minister was unable to give us details on Monday, and it seems that the Secretary of State was unable to do so yesterday at the Scottish Affairs Committee. Let us give him another opportunity: can he name one power that will definitely come to the Scottish Parliament as a result of Brexit?

**David Mundell:** We hear repeatedly from the Scottish National Benches about engagement with the Scottish Government, and this engagement will be with the Scottish Government. That is where the discussions are going on in relation to the transfer of powers. I am absolutely certain that, at the end of this process, the Scottish Parliament will have more powers and responsibilities than it does right now.

**David Linden:** Among all the fluff of that answer, there was absolutely no substance. For a second time, may I ask the Secretary of State what new powers will be coming to Holyrood as a result of Brexit?

**David Mundell:** The hon. Gentleman will have seen a list of 111 powers and responsibilities—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr Linden, you are a most over-excitable individual. Calm yourself. I understand your interest, but the question has been put—[*Interruption.*] Order. There is no need for excessive gesticulation. Whether or not you like the answer, Mr Linden, you must pay the Secretary of State the respect of hearing it, preferably with courtesy.

**David Mundell:** This is all about grandstanding; it is not about the substantive issue of ensuring a transfer of very significant powers from the 111 powers that were listed to the Scottish Parliament. I believe in devolution. I am committed to devolution and I want to see the maximum number of powers transferred. The Scottish National party does not believe in devolution.

**Martyn Day:** Can I, for the third time, ask the Secretary of State to name one power that is coming? If he is struggling for powers, may I suggest that he considers immigration, so that we can tackle things such as the skills immigration charge, which will be causing a skills shortage and damaging the economy in my constituency?

**David Mundell:** I can give the hon. Gentleman a definitive answer on the last part of his question. Immigration is not being devolved to Scotland. The Smith commission process identified those areas of responsibility to be devolved, and immigration was not

one of them. The Scottish National party accepted that report and, on the basis of that, we implemented it in the Scotland Act 2016.

**Gavin Newlands:** I am disappointed that, after three questions, we still have not had an answer. On immigration, I am disappointed that the Secretary of State was disinclined to listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day). Perhaps he will listen to Nobel laureate Joe Stiglitz who, over the weekend, said that Scotland should have the powers to go its own way in migration policy. He knows a bit more about this than we do, so is he right?

**David Mundell:** I seem to remember that Professor Joe Stiglitz supported independence for Scotland, but the people of Scotland knew a bit more than the professor and decided to keep Scotland in the United Kingdom.

**Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con):** My right hon. Friend has been crystal clear that Brexit offers opportunities and powers. The SNP talks down Scotland, and specifically Aberdeenshire, the city that has managed to recover from the oil downturn. Why cannot it recognise that the new powers and EU withdrawal offers opportunities to Scotland, specifically to Aberdeenshire?

**David Mundell:** I am disappointed that the SNP is here in Westminster adopting this sort of pantomime approach to the very important issue of powers rather than engaging in a constructive way. Fortunately, it appears that the Scottish Government are adopting a more responsible approach, which is why there are substantial discussions between the UK and Scottish Governments.

12. [901336] **Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the new inquiry on devolution and Brexit launched by the Select Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs? As well as promoting discussion among the governments of the United Kingdom, we want to promote discussion among the parliamentarians in the four parliaments of the United Kingdom in order to resolve these very difficult issues.

**David Mundell:** I very much welcome the contribution to the debate of my hon. Friend's Committee. Of course, it is very important that there is engagement across Parliaments, and I will be appearing before both the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee and the Finance and Constitution Committee of the Scottish Parliament in the next couple of weeks.

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that Scotland's trade with the UK is worth four times as much as its trade with the EU. Does he find it confusing, as my constituents and I do, that the SNP is quite happy for us to stay in one single market, but advocate Scotland leaving the greatest single market right here on its doorstep—the United Kingdom?

**David Mundell:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is important that some of the powers and responsibilities that come back from Brussels are subject to UK-wide frameworks so that we can continue to benefit from our internal market in the United Kingdom.

**Ross Thomson** (Aberdeen South) (Con): Leaving the EU will inherently make the Scottish Parliament more powerful as we take back control from Brussels. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the SNP Government's confused EU policy would simply see the new powers gained handed straight back to Brussels?

**David Mundell:** It is very important that the 500,000 yes supporters who voted to leave the European Union are absolutely clear that the SNP's position is to take Scotland right back into the EU.

**Mr Paul J. Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): We all know that the Tories have a dubious record on devolution. After all, they opposed the creation of the Scottish Parliament in the first place. In stark contrast, the Labour party laid the foundations for the Scottish Parliament and will always act in its best interests. The Secretary of State says that the Scottish Parliament will get new powers eventually. Well, new powers require additional resources to deliver, so will he tell us how much more money the Scottish Parliament will obtain to fund these new powers? Will he also guarantee, unequivocally, that Brexit will not result in the Scottish Parliament's budget being cut?

**David Mundell:** I take issue with the hon. Gentleman's analysis of devolution. I have been in this Parliament to see through both the Scotland Act 2012 and the Scotland Act 2016, which have seen a significant transfer of powers to the Scottish Parliament. I am determined that Brexit will see a further transfer of powers and responsibilities to the Scottish Parliament. Of course, it will need to be done in an orderly way, which will be the purpose of clause 11 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. We will work closely with the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament to ensure that that transfer of powers is orderly.

**Mr Speaker:** We need to speed up a little bit: a very pithy question, I am sure, from Mr Stephen Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that Scotland's two Governments—the UK Government and the Scottish Government—should work together in co-operation to get the best Brexit deal for the people of Scotland?

**David Mundell:** Yes.

**Mr Speaker:** Splendid.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): The London School of Economics has said that a hard Tory Brexit will cost Scotland £30 billion, the Fraser of Allander Institute has said that 80,000 jobs could go and a former Department for Exiting the European Union official has said that Scotland will be get the hardest impact. The Secretary of State said at the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs yesterday that economic impact assessments are available for Scotland. Will he release them to the Scottish people so that they can examine them and know the full scale of this disastrous Tory Brexit?

**David Mundell:** It would not be Scotland questions if we did not hear from the doom-monger-in-chief. Let me be quite clear, as I was in my appearance before his Committee. Both Governments have carried out important

analysis, which they will share and discuss, but this Government—as Parliament has approved—will not be publishing anything that would be detrimental to our negotiating position.

**Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): In evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee yesterday, the Secretary of State suggested that a common framework should not be imposed on the devolved Administrations by the UK Government but should instead be the output of a collaborative process. Will he confirm that that is indeed the Government's position?

**David Mundell:** I very much welcome my hon. Friend's important question, which gets to the heart of the issue—in marked contrast to the pantomime stuff we had earlier. I can absolutely confirm that. A UK framework does not mean the UK imposes a framework; it means agreement is reached between the UK Government and the constituent parts of the United Kingdom.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Four times the Secretary of State has been asked to name a single power that will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, and four times he has declined to answer. I see little point in asking him a fifth time, but let me ask him this: when will the Government publish a schedule setting out which powers will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament and which will not? [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) really should not walk across the line of sight.

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): Sorry, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful for the apology. It was unfair to the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard).

**David Mundell:** If the hon. Gentleman had not prefaced his question with those initial remarks, he would have asked a sensible question. I have set out that there is a dialogue ongoing with the Scottish Government in relation to the 111 powers. I set that out in much more detail at the Committee for which he was present yesterday, so I will not repeat what I said, but I am hopeful that, in early course, we will be able to publish exactly that sort of list.

**Tommy Sheppard:** The right hon. Gentleman's refusal to name a single power, or even to set a timetable for saying when he will do so, can lead us to only one conclusion: that there are forces in his Government that do not want to see any powers devolved at all. How does that sit with his Department's responsibility to protect the devolution settlement?

**David Mundell:** I have rarely heard such complete and utter nonsense. I will be judged by the Scotland Office's record on devolution, and that means implementing the Calman commission in full, implementing the Scotland Act 2016 in full and taking forward the return of powers from Brussels, with a presumption of devolution. We will deliver, and the people of Scotland will see that we have.

### Oil and Gas Industry

3. **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support the oil and gas industry in the north-east of Scotland. [901326]

4. **Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support the marine oil and gas industry in the north-east of Scotland. [901327]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues and Scottish Government Ministers on a wide range of issues, including fiscal policy across the UK, fisheries, and the oil and gas industry.

**David Duguid:** My right hon. Friend will know as well as I do the importance of the oil and gas industry in north-east Scotland. Considering the recent decision by the First Minister in Scotland to abolish the Energy Jobs Taskforce, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the UK Government remain fully committed to our North sea industries and will work with colleagues from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to ensure the brightest future for the oil and gas industries in the north-east of Scotland?

**David Mundell:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I share his disappointment. Through challenging times, the broad shoulders of the UK Government have supported the oil and gas industry to the tune of £2.3 billion. We have invested in surveying the seabed, established a new independent regulator and invested in developing world-leading infrastructure, research and technology through the Aberdeen city deal. [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** These are very important matters affecting the people of Scotland, and I think we ought to respect them by having some attention to our proceedings.

**Andrew Bowie:** I welcome the announcement last month of the Scottish Business Taskforce. Would my right hon. Friend like to expand on what its role will be with the oil, gas and sub-sea industries, which are predominately based around my constituency?

**David Mundell:** I recognise that my hon. Friend, although a new Member, has become a champion of the oil, gas and sub-sea industries. I can confirm today that the Scottish Business Taskforce, which was announced last month, will meet for the first time on Friday. The taskforce will provide expert advice and guidance on how best to support our most important sectors—not least oil, gas and sub-sea—and strengthen Scotland's economy. I will be announcing its membership later today.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): It is difficult to see how we can support the oil and gas industry in Scotland when the Secretary of State refuses to release the assessment of the impact of Brexit on the Scottish economy. Will he tell the House whether the Secretary of State for Brexit was correct today at the Exiting the European Union Committee that that assessment has been shared with the Scottish Government? When will it be shared with the Scottish people?

**David Mundell:** I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not follow the Scottish Affairs Committee's deliberations; he used to be a very prominent member of it. I made it very clear yesterday that there was a sharing of analysis, as is appropriate between Governments, but we will not be publishing anything that will be detrimental to our negotiations, and that is what the people of Scotland would want.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Given that, as we have heard, information has been shared with the Scottish Government, would it not be appropriate to make it public and perhaps to impress on the Scottish Government that they should also do that? The people of Scotland should see what the impact of Brexit is going to be in order to make a proper assessment of it.

**David Mundell:** We are regularly called on to respect the Scottish Government. I respect the Scottish Government and this Government respect the Scottish Government—that is why we are working with them on Brexit. But it would not be in the interests of Scotland or the United Kingdom to publish any information that would be detrimental to our negotiating position.

### VAT

5. **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his Cabinet colleagues and the Scottish Government on VAT exemptions. [901328]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues and Scottish Government Ministers on a wide range of issues, including fiscal policy across the UK.

**Ian C. Lucas:** Will the Secretary of State have a word with his very good friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer about VAT in Scotland to try to help clear up the mess created by the Scottish Government when they centralised police and fire services in Scotland, making them liable for VAT?

**David Mundell:** I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will have heard the hon. Gentleman's contribution.

### Borderlands Growth Deal

6. **Mr Alister Jack** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): What progress he has made on the borderlands growth deal initiative in Dumfries and Galloway. [901329]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** Only last week I hosted a meeting with local MPs to review progress. I am pleased to report that we are driving forward the innovative, cross-border borderlands deal and hope to agree a deal next year that will see investment to transform the local economies within the borderlands area. [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** I want to hear the question and I want the people of Dumfries and Galloway to have the chance of hearing it.

**Mr Jack:** Hear, hear to that. Will my right hon. Friend commit to ensuring that local communities have the opportunity to feed their thoughts into what the final deal will look like?

**David Mundell:** I am sure that the people of Dumfries and Galloway will be absolutely delighted to hear what my hon. Friend says. I was very pleased to receive a submission from all five local authorities involved in the borderlands growth deal. I hope that we can now move forward with local communities being able to include their ideas and contributions in this process.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I think the hon. Gentleman's constituency is quite nearby.

**Alan Brown:** There is a risk that the Secretary of State is prioritising the borderland deal over the Ayrshire growth deal. In a simple written question, I asked how many meetings he has had on the borderland initiative, with who, and on what dates. His answer was that he has had numerous meetings. Will he answer the question directly, or otherwise I will report him to the Procedure Committee again?

**David Mundell:** I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman displays an unpleasant SNP trait of seeking to create division within Scotland. I want to see all areas of Scotland benefit from growth. At least the people of Ayrshire know that in their new Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), they have a real champion of Ayrshire.

#### **Brexit: Joint Ministerial Committee**

7. **Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): What discussions he has had with his Cabinet colleagues and the Scottish Government on the role of the Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Negotiations in the negotiations on the UK leaving the EU. [901330]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** The Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Negotiations provides a valuable forum for the UK Government and devolved Administrations to discuss exit issues. We held a very constructive meeting on 16 October and I hope to convene another meeting shortly.

**Alex Sobel:** It was agreed at the last JMCEU that common frameworks would be needed in certain areas. What update can the Secretary of State give the House on talks with Scottish Government Ministers on the establishment of common frameworks for progressing, and is he able to identify areas where the need for common frameworks is anticipated?

**David Mundell:** I gave very extensive evidence on this matter to the Scottish Affairs Committee yesterday, and the hon. Gentleman will be able to access the transcript.

13. [901337] **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): When the time comes for decisions to be taken about the fate of the 111 devolved powers coming back from Brussels, will the Secretary of State give an assurance that those decisions will be taken by consensus at the JMC rather than unilaterally by the UK Government?

**David Mundell:** If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my answer to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton), he would know that the position is that although there is a UK framework, the framework is agreed between the constituent parts of the United Kingdom.

#### **Universal Credit Roll-out**

9. **Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the roll-out of universal credit on families in Scotland. [901332]

**The Minister for Employment (Damian Hinds):** Families are benefiting from real, positive employment outcomes as people move into work faster and progress in work. Of course, and rightly, extra support is there for those who need it.

**Danielle Rowley:** Almost 2,000 universal credit claimants in my constituency, along with thousands more across Scotland, are stuck in limbo after seeing the vote in this place to pause the roll-out but no action from the Government. What is the Secretary of State doing to reassure and represent those people?

**Damian Hinds:** We will continue with the roll-out in a very careful and staged way. It is happening over nine years, and we continue in very active dialogue with Members across the House and people outside it.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** We must hear the voice of Torbay.

#### **Welfare Powers Devolution**

11. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What progress he has made on the transfer of welfare powers to the Scottish Parliament under the Scotland Act 2016. [901335]

**The Minister for Employment (Damian Hinds):** We have made significant progress on the Scotland Act 2016 welfare powers. All DWP sections of the Act have been commenced, and we are working with the Scottish Government to support them in taking on these responsibilities, to ensure that the transition is safe and secure.

**Kevin Foster:** I am surprised to hear that only a small portion of the powers that have been devolved to the Scottish Government are being used, given the complaints that we hear from some Members in this House. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is yet another example of the Scottish National party griping rather than governing?

**Damian Hinds:** I agree with my hon. Friend, and I am sure that the people of Scotland agree that it is of concern that we have no clear plan from the Scottish Government for how they will use many of the powers. This Government are focused on delivering for the people of Scotland. It is time for the SNP to stop ducking its responsibilities and use its considerable powers to do so as well.

### Prime Minister

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

#### Engagements

Q1. [901384] **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 25 October.

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** I am sure that all Members from across the House will want to join me in wishing all the home nations teams the very best of luck in the rugby league world cup, which starts this week.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and, in addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

**Afzal Khan:** Social care services in England are in crisis. Since 2010, the local council in Manchester has had its annual social care budget cut by £32 million. By March, the Government will have taken £6.3 billion out of social care. Why will the Prime Minister not match Labour's commitment and invest £8 billion in social care in next month's Budget?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said in this House before, we recognise the pressure on social care as our population ages. I have said before that there are short-term, medium-term and long-term answers to this. In the short term, we have made extra funding available to local authorities. The announcement made in the last Budget by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was for an extra £2 billion for local authorities. In the medium term, we need to make sure that best practice is observed across all local authorities and NHS trusts. Delayed discharges are higher in some cases than they are in others, and we need to make sure that best practice is followed. In the long term, we need a sustainable footing for our social care system. That is why we will, in due course, be publishing a full and open consultation on ideas and proposals to ensure that we can have a sustainable social care system in the future.

Q3. [901386] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware of the vital role that supported housing plays for many vulnerable people in Torbay. What reassurances can she give me about the ongoing support that the Government will give to those vital services?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises an important issue, and this is something that we have been looking at very closely over the past year since my right hon. Friend the First Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) commissioned work on it in September last year, when he was Work and Pensions Secretary. I can confirm that we will be publishing our response to that consultation on Tuesday 31 October, and it will look at a wide range of issues. We need to ensure that the funding model is right so that all providers of supported housing can access funding effectively. We need to look at issues such as the recent significant increases in service charges, making sure that we are looking at cost control in the sector.

I can also say today that as part of our response to the review, we will not be applying the local housing allowance cap to supported housing; indeed, we will not be implementing it in the wider social rented sector. The full details will be made available when we publish our response to the consultation.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in wishing the rugby league team all the very best in the competition. I hope they win it.

Last week, the House voted 299 to zero to pause the roll-out of universal credit. Will the Prime Minister respect the will of the House?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said before, we acknowledge the fact that people have raised concerns with universal credit. That is why, as we have been rolling it out, we have been listening to those and changes have been made. Perhaps I could just update the House on where we are on the roll-out of universal credit. Currently, of people claiming benefits, 8% are on universal credit. By January of next year, that will rise to 10%. The roll-out is being conducted in three phases, and the intention is that it will be completed by 2022, so it is being done in a measured way, and I am pleased to say that four out of five people are satisfied or very satisfied with the service that they are receiving. Universal credit helps people into the workplace and it makes sure that work pays, and that is what the welfare system should do.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I would have thought that if only 8% of the roll-out has taken place and 20% of the people in receipt of it are dissatisfied with it, that is a cause for thought and maybe a pause in the whole process. Last week, only one Conservative MP had the courage of their convictions to vote with us on suspending the universal credit roll-out. Then a Conservative Member of the Welsh Assembly, Angela Burns, said:

"For the life of me I cannot understand why a 6 or 4 week gap is deemed acceptable."

She called universal credit

"callous at best and downright cruel at worst",

and concluded by saying she is "ashamed" of her Government. Can the Prime Minister ease her colleague's shame by pausing and fixing universal credit?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said to the right hon. Gentleman, we have been making changes to the implementation of UC as it has gone through the roll-out, but let us be very clear about why we introduced universal credit. It is because it is a system—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Members are getting rather over-excited. The question has been put, and the answer will be heard.

**The Prime Minister:** We introduced universal credit as a simpler, more straightforward system that ensures that work pays and helps people into the workplace. Let us look at what happened in the benefits system under Labour. Under Labour, the low-paid paid tax and then had it paid back to them in benefits. Under Labour, people were trapped in a life on benefits for years. Under Labour, the number of workless households doubled, and Labour's benefit system cost households

an extra £3,000 a year. What the Conservatives have done is given the low-paid a pay rise, given the workers a tax cut and ensured we have a benefit system that helps people into work.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Under Labour, 1 million children were lifted out of poverty. Under Labour, we introduced the principle of the national minimum wage—opposed by all Tories over there.

If the Prime Minister is not prepared to listen to Angela Burns, perhaps she could listen to the architect of universal credit, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who said:

“One of the reasons I resigned from Government was I didn’t actually agree with the additional waiting days. This is something the government needs to look at”.

Does the Prime Minister agree with him?

**The Prime Minister:** This is the answer that I have given not just three or four times in this PMQs but in previous PMQs: as we look at universal credit roll-out, we look at how we are introducing it. The right hon. Gentleman talks about what happened under Labour, and I am happy to talk about what happened under Labour—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is far too much noise and finger pointing on both sides of the Chamber. The responses from the Prime Minister will be heard, as will the questions from the Leader of the Opposition and every other Member without fear or favour.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman is talking about rolling out new benefit systems, but let us think about what happened when Labour rushed to introduce tax credits. I was not the only Member of Parliament who had people in my constituency surgery who had filled the forms in properly and given information to the authorities only for the Government to come back years later and land them with bills for thousands of pounds. That is what happens when you rush into a system rather than introducing it properly, as we are.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thought that we had passed a threshold last week and that the Prime Minister was going to answer questions, but we obviously have not achieved that yet. Labour introduced working tax credits to help people on low pay out of poverty and it made a very big difference. The sad truth is that universal credit is in such a mess that councils are forced to pick up the Bill. Let me give an example. Croydon Council, which piloted the scheme, is now spending £3 million of its own budget to prevent tenants from being evicted due to rent arrears caused by universal credit. Does the Prime Minister think that it is right or fair that hard-pressed local authorities, having their budget cut by central Government, should have to dip into what little money they have left to prevent people from being evicted when they know full well that it is this Government and their system of universal credit that are causing the problem?

**The Prime Minister:** Labour introduced working tax credits and then clawed thousands of pounds back from people who were working hard. The right hon. Gentleman raises the issue of rent arrears and I know that Members have concerns about people who are managing their budgets to pay their rent. For the vast majority of

people on universal credit, managing their budgets is not an issue. After four months, the number of people on universal credit who are in arrears has fallen by a third, but we recognise the issue so we are working with landlords. We have built flexibility into the system so that landlords can be paid directly, and I want to be clear that nobody can be legally evicted from social housing because of short-term rent arrears. That is an important point for us to get across to people, but I come back to the essential point about universal credit: this is about a welfare system that helps people into work, makes work pay and does not trap people in a life on benefits for years.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I note that the Prime Minister could not say anything about people being evicted from the private rented sector because of universal credit problems. The costs in the benefit system are being driven by low pay and high rents. In 2015, the then Chancellor, her former friend, promised a £9 an hour living wage. However, in the March Budget it was sneaked out that the Government’s minimum wage would reach only £8.75. The welfare state was not created to subsidise low paying employers and overcharging landlords, so will the Budget in November put the onus back—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr Hoare, I expect better of you. You were much better behaved when you were at Oxford University—what has happened to you, man? Calm yourself.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** My question is this: will the Budget in November put the onus back on to employers to pay a decent wage so that workers can make ends meet?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course we want to ensure that there are higher-paid jobs in this country. That is precisely why we are investing in the economy for the future. It is precisely why we are investing in our infrastructure and investing in skills for young people, and it is why we are introducing a modern industrial strategy. The right hon. Gentleman says the welfare system was not created to subsidise employers who are paying low wages. That is exactly what Labour’s working tax credits system did.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The Government’s own Social Mobility Commission reported that low pay was endemic in the United Kingdom. One in four workers are permanently stuck in low-paid jobs. That is why Labour backed a real living wage of £10 per hour to make work pay. The Government do not really know whether they are coming or going. The Conservative party and the Government say they have full confidence in universal credit, but will not vote for it. They say they will end the NHS pay cap, but will not allocate any money to pay for it. The Communities Secretary backs £50 billion of borrowing for housing, but the Chancellor says it is not policy. The Brexit Secretary says they are planning for a no-deal Brexit. The Chancellor says they are not. Is it not the case that the Government are weak, incompetent, divided and unable to take a decision—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I said that the responses from the Prime Minister would be heard and the remarks of the right hon. Gentleman will be heard. You can try to shout him down and other Members can try to shout the Prime Minister down. It will not work. End of.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Is it not the case that this Government are weak, incompetent and divided, and unable to take the essential decisions necessary for the good of the people of this country?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course we want to see people earning higher wages. Of course we want, as we are doing, to be able to ensure we can invest in our public services. But the way to do that—the way to have a higher standard of living, to have higher wages, to invest in our public services, to have a better future for people in this country—is to build and continue to build that stronger economy. You do not build a stronger economy by losing control of public finances. You do not build a stronger economy by uncontrolled borrowing. You do not build a stronger economy by hitting people with the highest taxes in our peacetime history. You do not build a stronger economy by voting against progress in our Brexit negotiations. You do not build a stronger economy by planning for capital flight and a run on the pound. That is what Labour would do and we will never let it happen.

Q5. [901388] **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): Some people in Plymouth are campaigning, by way of a petition, to say that lifeboats must be launched immediately when a fishing vessel is overdue. I believe this is irresponsible and puts our valiant lifeboat crews in peril if they do not know where they are going. We know this in Cornwall. Will the Prime Minister look at making safety grants available, so that all fishing boats can have an AIS, or automatic identification system, locator beacon on board? This would cost well under £4 million, even if every registered fishing vessel under 15 metres got a grant to cover the whole cost. My late husband had one aboard his boat.

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. As she has just said, I know this is an area where she tragically has personal experience. I would like to commend her for the work she has done in this important area and for championing these causes. She is right: launching a lifeboat whenever a fishing vessel is overdue may be the wrong decision. It could, as she says, be dangerous for the crew involved. That is why the coastguard takes the time to gather valuable information before deciding how best to respond. On the issue she raises, a number of grants are available from various safety schemes. I encourage all those involved in fishing to make the most of the grants that are available.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Does the Prime Minister agree that migration is key to delivering sustainable economic growth?

**The Prime Minister:** What is absolutely key is ensuring we have controlled migration in this country. That is what the people of this country want and what the Government are delivering.

**Ian Blackford:** An American couple, the Felbers, moved to Scotland and invested £400,000 to run an award-winning guesthouse in Inverness. They contribute to their community and the local economy, yet they will be deported because of a retrospective change to Home Office rules. Will the Prime Minister meet me and their

MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), to discuss this case and the systemic problems with UK migration?

**The Prime Minister:** There are no systemic problems with UK migration. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is happy to meet the right hon. Gentleman to discuss the case he has raised, but it is absolutely right that the Home Office work to ensure that the immigration rules are properly applied and that action is taken according to those rules.

**Mr Speaker:** Now it is time to hear Mr Simon Hoare.

Q9. [901392] **Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have composed myself.

I was greatly cheered last week, as I am sure were many colleagues in the House, to hear the German Chancellor say that a final deal on Brexit was going to happen. Does my right hon. Friend agree with my assessment that we will get a good deal that works for our country, for the EU and, possibly more importantly, for my constituents?

**The Prime Minister:** I agree with my hon. Friend. Our job is to get the best Brexit deal for Britain. I believe we can get it and that it will benefit all parts of the UK, including his constituents, and that we will maximise the benefits of leaving the UK while maintaining the greatest possible access to EU markets. That is what we are continuing to work on and the vision I set out in my Florence speech, and as we know, the EU is now preparing its response.

Q2. [901385] **Jo Platt** (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has previously stated her commitment to apprenticeships. In my constituency, however, the apprenticeship levy has not been helping those for whom it was designed. What steps will she take to ensure that apprenticeships help those from lower-income backgrounds?

**The Prime Minister:** Apprenticeships are important. Under the Government from 2010 to 2015, we saw 2 million more apprenticeships created, and we are committed to a further 1.9 million being created. This is important. The important point about apprenticeships is that they are an opportunity for young people not to feel encouraged down an academic route when that does not work for them. When I meet apprentices, many say that it is the best thing they have done, and we want to make sure they are available for all those who could benefit from it.

Q12. [901395] **Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): Cherwell tops the leader board for new housing. Will the Prime Minister assure me that the right roads, school places, post boxes and especially healthcare provision will be in place to support both my new constituents and the ones I have at the moment?

**The Prime Minister:** First, may I congratulate my hon. Friend and say how pleased I am that Cherwell District Council is doing what we want to do and what we recognise we need to do to tackle our dysfunctional housing market, which is to build more homes? She is right, however, that infrastructure is also an important part of that, which is why we have committed £15 billion

for our road investment strategy, why over half a trillion pounds will be spent on the NHS during this Parliament, and why a record £41 billion will be spent on core funding for schools this year. That, I am pleased to say, is the record of Conservatives in government.

**Q4.** [901387] **Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): In 24 hours, the people of Dundee will wave off the bid for the 2023 European Capital of Culture. It is a fantastic bid that will generate 1,500 jobs and add 5% to local GDP. Will the Prime Minister, notwithstanding her current difficulties with Europe, back this bid, given that it comes from the most innovative and forward-looking city in the whole UK?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course we are always willing to back bids from any city in the United Kingdom to become the European city of culture. I welcome the fact that Dundee has put forward a bid and is part of the process, but, as I have said, we want to support all cities in the United Kingdom that are submitting bids.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): It is a criminal offence for those, such as teachers, who are in a position of trust to have sexual relationships with young people under 18. However, a constituent came to me recently distressed about exactly such a relationship between his 17-year-old daughter and a middle-aged driving instructor. While—if consensual—that is not illegal, I am concerned about the possibility that young drivers might be at risk of being groomed by predatory instructors. Does the Prime Minister agree that driving instructors are, by the nature of their work, in a position of trust, and should be covered by the same rules as teachers? If so, will she ask the relevant Minister to work with me on the issue?

**The Prime Minister:** I am concerned to hear about the constituency case that my hon. Friend has raised. I recognise the position, and the role that driving instructors play. I will ask the appropriate Department to look into the matter, and to get in touch with my hon. Friend to obtain further details of that case.

**Q6.** [901389] **Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): In March 2017, the Prime Minister told the House that Parliament would be given a meaningful vote on the terms of the Withdrawal from the European Union (Article 50) Bill. This morning, in the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union, the Secretary of State told us that that vote might not take place until March 2019. Will the Prime Minister please explain how it is possible to have a meaningful vote on something that has already taken place?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are in negotiations with the European Union. The timetable under the Lisbon treaty allows the negotiations to take place until March 2019, but, because it is in the interests of both sides, and it is not just this Parliament that wants to have a vote on the deal—there will be ratification by other Parliaments—I am confident that we will be able to achieve that agreement and that negotiation in time for Parliament to have the vote to which we committed ourselves.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): We enter a week of commemorations of the centenary of the Balfour declaration. Will my right hon. Friend re-dedicate us to the pursuit of peace and justice for both the Israelis and

the Palestinians, but will she also celebrate with pride our small national contribution to the creation of a democracy in the middle east, a sanctuary for those who have suffered from anti-Semitism and fear its rise again, and, in the state of Israel, a true friend of the United Kingdom?

**The Prime Minister:** We are proud of the role that we played in the creation of the state of Israel, and we will certainly mark the centenary with pride. I am pleased about the good trade and other relationships that we have with Israel, which we are building on and enhancing. However, we must also be conscious of the sensitivities that some people have about the Balfour declaration.

We recognise that there is more work to be done. We remain committed to the two-state solution in relation to Israel and the Palestinians, which is an important aim. I think it important for us all to recommit ourselves to ensuring that we can provide security, stability and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians through such a lasting peace.

**Q7.** [901390] **Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): Trying to get a decision on the Swansea bay tidal lagoon is becoming like groundhog day. Swansea is ready, and the investors are ready. May I ask the Prime Minister when she will be ready?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Lady well knows, that raises a number of complex issues. We were grateful to Charles Hendry for his review. The relevant Department—the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—is still considering his report, and we will respond in due course.

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that as we leave the EU and take control of our land management policy, our manifesto commitment to plant 11 million trees is a critical part of the holistic countryside management framework that we can now build to ensure long-term home-grown wood for our housing industry, as well as increasing our natural carbon capture potential and reducing flood risks?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we did commit in our manifesto to plant 11 million trees. We are putting that at the heart of our work to protect the environment for future generations. I am pleased to say that since April 2015 we have planted just over 2 million trees, but we do have much more to do, and we will be continuing to work with landowners and stakeholders on this issue. My hon. Friend is also right that it is not just about the look of the countryside; it is also about the role that trees play in reducing flood risks and helping to hold carbon dioxide.

**Q8.** [901391] **Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): The Prime Minister has spoken on mental health, and I thank her for that. When she was Home Secretary, she outlawed police cells being used for those in mental health crisis. Today, however, parts of our mental health system are in crisis. In my North Durham constituency children, young people and families are waiting two years for autism assessments. The Secretary of State agrees that that is unacceptable. What is the Prime Minister going to do to turn her well-intentioned statements on mental health into action?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are taking a number of courses of action in relation to mental health, but he raises the specific issue of the autism diagnosis, and the length of time that takes in his constituency. My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary has promised to look into this and will be doing so, because we are very clear that we want to ensure that adults and children should not have to face too long a wait for an autism diagnosis. The Department of Health is working with partners to help local areas address these issues where there are long waiting times for an autism diagnosis, and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has published clinical guidance which sets out that assessments should begin within three months of referral. Obviously it is for the Department of Health to be working with those local areas to make sure it is possible to achieve that.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Tomorrow at Cornwall Newquay airport the Bloodhound will carry out its first live test run in the next step on its quest to achieve the land speed record. Will the Prime Minister join me in wishing the whole Bloodhound team, especially driver Andy Green, a successful test run, and does she agree that such projects show that the UK continues to lead the world in innovation in science and engineering?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in wishing the Bloodhound team well; indeed, I have met some of the members of the team in the past. I also agree with my hon. Friend's other point: this continues to show what a world leader in science and innovation the United Kingdom is. We have some of the world's best universities, with four of them in the world's top 10, and we have more Nobel prize winners than any country other than the United States. This is a record of which our country can be proud, and I am sure we will all be proud of the Bloodhound team and its achievements.

Q10. [901393] **Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister agree that the potential downgrading of Huddersfield Royal Infirmary—479 professionals lost, over 300 hospital beds cut, and a 90-minute journey to the nearest A&E—is not in the best interests of my constituents? Will she meet me to discuss the detrimental impact this will have on Colne Valley and the surrounding area?

**The Prime Minister:** The principle that we want to base all these decisions on is that service changes should be based on clear evidence and led by local clinicians who best understand the local healthcare needs. I understand that Calderdale and Kirklees Councils have referred the proposed changes to my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary, and I know he will be considering the issues very carefully, and will be coming to a decision in due course.

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): Next year is the centenary of the first woman Member of Parliament. Will my right hon. Friend tell us what leadership and encouragement to the women and girls in his constituency to take part in public life the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Jared O'Mara) has shown in his remarks?

**The Prime Minister:** It is important that we mark this centenary next year, and recognise the role that women have played in this House and in public life. I want young women and women to be able to see this House as a place they actively want to come to—that they want to contribute to their society and respond to the needs of constituents and make a real difference to people's lives. That is what I am in it for, that is why I have encouraged more women to come into this House, and I am pleased to say that we have more women on our Benches than ever before.

Finally, all of us in this House should have due care and attention for the way in which we refer to other people and should show women in public life the respect they deserve.

Q11. [901394] **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Yesterday, the Scottish Parliament voted by 91 votes to 28 to ban fracking in Scotland. May I ask the Prime Minister why she would not consider following Scotland's lead and introduce a moratorium in the rest of the United Kingdom in order to carry out a full evaluation of the health and environmental consequences of this controversial technology, and in order for the public to be consulted?

**The Prime Minister:** This is an issue on which the hon. Gentleman and I are simply going to disagree. I think that shale gas has the potential to power economic growth in this country and to support thousands of jobs in the oil and gas industries and in other sectors. It will provide a new domestic energy source. We have more than 50 years' drilling experience in the UK, and one of the best records in the world for economic development while protecting our environment. The shale wealth fund is going to provide up to £1 billion of additional resources to local communities, and local councils are going to be able to retain 100% of the business rates they collect from shale gas developments. We will be bringing forward further proposals in relation to this during this Parliament. This is an important potential new source of energy, and it is right that we should use it and take the benefits from it for our economy, for jobs and for people's futures.

**Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): I am sure that the Prime Minister is aware of the terrifying incident on Sunday in which a gunman held hostages at a bowling alley in my neighbouring constituency of Nuneaton, a facility that is enjoyed by my own constituents of North Warwickshire and Bedworth. Will she join me and my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) in praising the excellent work of Warwickshire police and the West Midlands ambulance service in ensuring that the situation was brought to a swift conclusion without any casualties?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course we were all concerned to hear about that incident as it was taking place, and I am happy to join my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton in commending the professionalism and bravery of the Warwickshire police in bringing it to a swift conclusion and of the ambulance service in ensuring that there were no injuries. Our emergency services do an amazing job in protecting us; they do not know, when they put on their uniforms in the morning, whether they are going to be called out to

exactly this sort of incident. I was pleased to welcome a number of our emergency services personnel to a reception in Downing Street on Monday. What they always say is that they are just doing their job, but my goodness me, what a job they do for us!

Q13. [901396] **Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): On 29 March, I asked the Prime Minister whether she would help the people of New Ferry after the huge explosion that had devastated the town centre. She said that she was be happy to help and that support would be offered to the community in the future. Two weeks later she called a general election, and her Government seem to have all but forgotten about the people in New Ferry. Well, she may have forgotten but my constituents have not, so I ask her again: precisely when will her Government put their hands in their pockets so that the people in New Ferry can rebuild their town and their lives?

**The Prime Minister:** The Government have not forgotten about this issue. I understand from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government that we are waiting for the local council to produce proposals and a business case for those proposals, and we will of course look at those proposals seriously.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): In acknowledging the hard work that the men and women of RAF Benson in my constituency did in the Caribbean, will the Prime Minister also acknowledge that the Puma Mk 2 helicopter was ready and available for work in the Caribbean within a couple of hours of having arrived there?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to commend the work of all those at RAF Benson and indeed all those in our military and the volunteers who were able to provide support after the devastating hurricanes that took place in the Caribbean. I am also happy to agree with my hon. Friend that, contrary to some of the stories that were being put about, we were there, we were there on time and we were able to act very quickly to give people that support.

Q14. [901397] **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): We can all agree that no one should ever be persecuted on account of their sexuality. Last week at the *PinkNews* awards, the Prime Minister said that we had come a long way on LGBT+ rights, but there is still much more to do. May I ask her to start on that remaining work today by promising that the Home Office will never again deport LGBT+ asylum seekers to countries where they are likely to be persecuted with the instruction that they pretend to be straight?

**The Prime Minister:** This is an issue that we take seriously. Indeed, I think I am right in saying that it was a Conservative Government who actually changed the rules on asylum seeking to introduce the category of those who could face persecution in their country of origin because of their sexuality. I am pleased that that was able to be done, and I am sure that the Home Office treats all these cases—I want it to treat all these cases—with the sensitivity that is appropriate.

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): As of 2016, 17% of premises in Scotland were without superfast broadband, compared with just 11% for the UK as a whole. Will my right hon. Friend join me in

calling on the Scottish Government to do more and to engage constructively with Departments here in Westminster to deliver this crucial service to communities in Scotland?

**The Prime Minister:** Can I say to—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. All sorts of very curious hand and finger gestures are being deployed, each trying to outdo the other in terms of eccentricity and, possibly, of prowess, but I am interested in hearing the Prime Minister's reply.

**The Prime Minister:** I say to my hon. Friend that we all recognise the importance of broadband and of fast broadband being available to people in our constituencies. He is absolutely right—the Members of the Scottish National party come down here and spend a lot of time talking about powers for the Scottish Government, but actually it is time that the Scottish Government got on with using their powers for the benefit of the people in Scotland.

Q15. [901398] **Mr Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): In the past fortnight, we have heard the announcement of the loss of many hundreds of jobs in Lancashire at BAE Systems sites at Warton and Samlesbury, which comes as a hammer blow to workers and their families. Today, I want to raise the proposed closure of the Alstom factory on Strand Road in Preston, which will mean the loss of another 180 jobs. We keep hearing hype about the so-called northern powerhouse, so why are aerospace companies and train manufacturers in the north shedding jobs by the hundred?

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise that this is a worrying time for the workers involved. We will obviously ensure through the Department for Work and Pensions that they have the support they need to look for new jobs, and that does include the rapid response service, which gives particular support to people in these areas. However, in relation to the decision by BAE Systems, for example, I can assure the House that we will continue to promote our world-leading defence industry, and I hope that all Labour Members will continue to promote our world-leading defence industry. I am very pleased that just last month my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence signed a statement of intent with Qatar, committing it to the purchase of 24 Typhoons and six Hawks from BAE. Last year, the Ministry of Defence spent £3.7 billion with BAE and is working with it to maximise export opportunities for Typhoons and Hawks in the future to ensure that we can retain jobs here in the United Kingdom.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): When it comes to tackling homelessness, prevention is better than cure, so I am delighted that the Government backed my Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. However, one of the obstacles for people who choose to rent is putting together the deposit and getting help with the rent. Will my right hon. Friend look at a scheme that would provide 32,000 people a year with the opportunity to rent for an investment of £3.1 million a year? Not only would it do that, but it would save the public purse up to £1.8 billion over a three-year period.

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend. He has long campaigned on homelessness and its prevention, and I am pleased that we were able to support his Homelessness Reduction Act, which will be an important

contribution in this particular area. On his specific issue, he has made a pre-Budget representation to the Chancellor, who I am sure will be looking at it very carefully. On the more general issue of helping people to buy and helping them with deposits, I am of course pleased that we have been able to announce an extra £10 billion for our Help to Buy scheme, which does make a real difference to people and enables them to get into homes.

**Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP):** The workforce, the unions and the management at Bombardier in Belfast deserve enormous credit for the way in which they have responded to the threats to their jobs and livelihoods coming from the United States, and from Boeing in particular. Can the Prime Minister assure us that she will continue building on the good work that has already happened through herself, the Secretary of State for

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and that she will continue to work with us, the unions and management to ensure that the threat of tariffs is removed, that the C series is a success story and that thousands of jobs in Belfast and across the United Kingdom are protected?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to give that commitment. A lot of work has been done in relation to this issue by me, the Business Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and other Ministers with our opposite numbers in America and Canada. We will certainly continue that work. Obviously, the most recent announcement in relation to Airbus and the C series is important. We want to ensure that those jobs stay in Northern Ireland, because we recognise the importance of those jobs to the economy of Northern Ireland and, obviously, also to the people and their families.

## Points of Order

12.47 pm

**Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I refer you to the Committee of the whole House on the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill on 7 February 2017.

**Mr Speaker:** It was a Tuesday.

**Chuka Umunna:** Yes, it was a Tuesday. Very well remembered.

The then Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union, the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones), gave a commitment in this House that this House of Commons would have a vote on the arrangements for our withdrawal from the European Union before our exit. He said,

“we intend that the vote will cover not only the withdrawal arrangements but also the future relationship with the European Union. Furthermore, I can confirm that the Government will bring forward a motion on the final agreement, to be approved by both Houses of Parliament before it is concluded.”—[*Official Report*, 7 February 2017; Vol. 621, c. 264.]

He went on to say:

“It will be a meaningful vote. As I have said, it will be the choice between leaving the European Union with a negotiated deal or not.”—[*Official Report*, 7 February 2017; Vol. 621, c. 273.]

This morning the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union told the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union that the vote, which the then Minister committed to happening before we leave, could actually happen after we leave the European Union. As such, that is in clear breach of the commitment given by his own Minister that

“it will be the choice between leaving the European Union with a negotiated deal or not.”

Obviously we will not have that choice if we have already left the European Union by the time of a vote. It seems to me that this House, on behalf of the people we represent, cannot take back control unless we have that vote.

Mr Speaker, can you advise on what we, as a House of Commons, can do about the, at best, contradiction or, at worst, false impression given to the House during the debate on 7 February?

**Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con):** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) *rose*—**

**Mr Speaker:** Oh, very well.

**Mr Bone** We were there.

**Mr Speaker:** They were there, as the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) chunters from a half-sedentary position. We will come to him in a moment. I am saving him up; it would be a pity to waste him too early in our proceedings.

**Mr Chope:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I was indeed present at the Committee this morning, and I heard exactly what the Secretary of State said and the questions that were put to him. I am sorry to have to say that the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) has misunderstood the situation. The question the Secretary

of State had was whether or not he thought there would be an agreement before midnight on 29 March 2019 and he indicated that he thought it might be reached a nanosecond before midnight on that day. He was then asked whether that meant this House would not be able to vote on such an agreement until after 29 March, and he said that obviously it will not be able to vote on an agreement until after 29 March if there has not been an agreement until 29 March. That was the point he was making, and it was a perfectly sensible one.

**Mr Speaker:** I am always grateful to the hon. Gentleman for providing a bit of extra information to me, which, in one form or another, he has been doing for over 30 years. I am greatly obliged to him.

**Mr Bone *rose*—**

**Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab) *rose*—**

**Mr Speaker:** I do not think that at this point we need the intervention of the hon. Member for Wellingborough, and I will come to the former Europe Minister, but what I would say to the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) is that, put very simply, what he is seeking is an assurance that there will be a vote on a final deal before Brexit happens—if I understand him correctly, that is what he is asking. What I would say to him is that these are matters of political debate. He quoted a very clear commitment from several months ago. Different interpretations have been placed upon proceedings in a Committee this morning, but the hon. Gentleman, beyond advertising—I do not mean that in a pejorative sense—his considerable irritation with what he heard this morning, is presumably keen to ensure that he gets what he thinks he was promised. He is also, presumably, keen to get my advice on how to go about it, and the answer to that is: there will be a great many debates on European matters in this Chamber, not only in respect of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, but on many other occasions. I absolutely anticipate that the hon. Gentleman and others will be making the same points repeatedly. That also is not pejorative. As I often say, repetition is not an unknown or rare phenomenon in the House of Commons; people have a point and they tend to return to it again and again and again, almost, if you will, in the spirit of campaigning, and that is perfectly proper. So there will be lots of opportunities for the hon. Gentleman, here in Parliament and doubtless outside as well, to press his case with the intellect and eloquence he has brought to bear on our proceedings over the past seven years. I keenly anticipate his contributions from one side of the argument and those of the hon. Members for Christchurch (Mr Chope) and for Wellingborough, to name but two, on the other.

**Mr McFadden *rose*—**

**Mr Speaker:** I would feel the sequence was incomplete unless we heard from the former Europe Minister.

**Mr McFadden:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am not actually the former Europe Minister, but I am grateful to you for calling me. I was at the evidence session this morning and I listened carefully to what the Secretary of State said. He said that Parliament would not be likely to get a vote on the future arrangements with the European Union until

after March 2019. That makes a material and significant difference to this House's ability to have a meaningful input and a meaningful say on the content of those negotiations. So at the risk of repetition, following on from what my hon. Friends the Members for Strettham (Chuka Umunna) and for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) have said, I ask your advice on what this House can do to make sure it has a meaningful say and input on these most important of negotiations, rather than being used as an after-the-fact rubber stamp.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. As somebody who was also in attendance at the Select Committee meeting—indeed, I was the person who asked the question of the Secretary of State—my understanding is that which has been reflected by my Labour colleagues. If the Government had changed their position on something of such constitutional significance, would it not be in order that that change should be brought before this House in a ministerial statement?

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Is the hon. Gentleman's point of order on some other matter?

**Sammy Wilson:** On this matter—

**Mr Speaker:** Very well. We must hear the voice of Mr Sammy Wilson.

**Sammy Wilson:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. It seems that different members of the Committee heard different things from the Secretary of State this morning, so would it not be better to wait until the record of the meeting has been published, as then it will be clear what the Secretary of State did say? I did not hear what these Members have alleged they have heard.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I know he always likes to be helpful to the Chair and to the House. He anticipates me, but he is right in doing so. There will be a transcript of the proceedings, and I rather imagine that, in conformity with the usual practice of the House and of our distinguished Committees, it will be published sooner rather than later. I know it will then be subject to the beady eyes of colleagues on both sides of the Chamber and on both sides, if I may put it that way, of the Brexit argument. They will read into it what they wish and pursue their cause as they choose.

What I would say to the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) is that if there is a material change in Government policy or intended practice on a very significant matter, it is customary that there should be a statement to the House. It would not always be an oral statement, but it might very well be an oral statement. The House knows very well that there are means by which to secure the attendance in the Chamber of a Minister if such a statement is not proffered. The position of the Chair is that the Chair does not seek to take sides on this matter. The Chair simply seeks to facilitate the expression of opinion. I would add that in addition to all the other debates we might have on these matters, there will in due course be legislation returning to the House, and it is a matter of public record that

very large numbers of amendments have been tabled to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. At the Committee stage, the Chairman of Ways and Means will make a proper and judicious selection, based upon advice but deploying his own judgment, and at Report stage that responsibility will fall to me. I think Members know that I always will the fullest possible debate on the widest range of issues pertinent to a Bill, and so both sides of the argument can always feel that they have a friend in the Chair.

**Mr Bone:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not know whether you recall what you were doing six years ago today. I suggest you were recovering from a mammoth session in the Chair, following a Backbench Business Committee debate, in prime time, when 81 Conservative Members declined to accept the advice of their Whips and voted for a referendum on the European Union. How could we mark that event, sir? Does it not show that Backbench Business motions do have an effect on Government policy?

**Mr Speaker:** Not for the first time, the hon. Gentleman is right on a matter of parliamentary history and precedent. I well recall that debate. It was a very significant debate, and I am going to vouchsafe to the hon. Gentleman something he probably did not know—he might not even want to know, but he is going to know. I regularly refer to that debate, together with the debate on Hillsborough and a number of others, as an example of a very significant debate under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee—it was significant not just because of the quality of the debate, but because it had an impact on public policy. These references are in speeches that I make at universities and in front of other forums around the country, most recently at the invitation of the Hansard Society. I do not suppose the hon. Gentleman is such a sad anorak that he wishes to attend to all of my speeches on these occasions, but I am giving him the highlight.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wish to raise another issue of public policy: the contaminated blood scandal. What with "Sky News" today running a story about what appears to be a 1987 Cabinet cover-up related to the contaminated blood scandal, and with the consultation for the public inquiry having ended last week, have you, Sir, had any indication of when the Government are going to come to the House to make a statement about when that public inquiry will be set up? They promised that it would be done in a speedy manner.

**Mr Speaker:** I have received no such indication, but if memory serves me correctly, the hon. Lady has raised this matter in the House many times, including on an urgent basis. I seem to recall that she did so at the tail end of the 2010-15 Parliament and has done so on several other occasions since. Like the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), the hon. Lady is a most versatile, experienced and dextrous parliamentarian, and she knows the opportunities that are open to her. I have a hunch that she is going to try to take advantage of them.

If there are no further points of order, perhaps we can come to the ten-minute rule motion, for which the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) has been so patiently waiting.

## Live Animal Exports (Prohibition)

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

1 pm

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit the export of live farmed animals for slaughter or fattening; and for connected purposes.

The export of live farm animals can cause immense and unnecessary suffering to many of the animals involved. There is evidence that public concern on this issue dates back as far as the 1950s, and even further in the case of the export of horses. I am sure that many Members present will remember the mass protests that featured on our TV screens during the 1990s.

The objection to the live export of animals for slaughter is essentially twofold. First, some countries in Europe have far weaker animal welfare rules than we have. Secondly, there is a real risk that the rules on the transport and slaughter of animals that are supposed to apply throughout the European Union will not be enforced effectively once the animals leave our shores.

Figures from the Animal and Plant Health Agency show that every year around 40,000 sheep are exported from Britain for slaughter on the continent. The long journeys are stressful for the animals, and in some cases they result in suffering caused by overcrowding, high summer temperatures and animals sustaining injuries en route.

Many of those 40,000 sheep are sent to France. Regular film reports by the organisation L214 have revealed inhumane and illegal slaughter practices in French slaughterhouses. In one shocking case, a slaughterman is seen stabbing a knife into the eye of a conscious sheep. A 2016 report by a French *Assemblée Nationale* committee of inquiry confirmed that there are serious welfare problems in French abattoirs. In my view, and in the view of many of my constituents, it is not acceptable for the UK to send animals to die in such horrendous conditions.

Around 20,000 calves were exported from Northern Ireland to Spain in 2016, and 3,000 were exported from Scotland to Spain. On the Scotland exports, the animals are first shipped to Northern Ireland and then taken by road to the Republic of Ireland, from where they are sent on a 20-hour sea journey to northern France. Finally, they are driven all the way through France to Spain.

Scientific research indicates that young calves are not well adapted to cope with such lengthy journeys. Their immune systems are not fully developed and their bodies' capacity to control their internal temperature is limited, making them particularly susceptible to both heat and cold stress. Morbidity and mortality following transport can therefore be high. Once they are in Spain, it is entirely permissible for calves to be reared in barren conditions without bedding. Keeping animals in such conditions would be illegal in the United Kingdom, where we apply tougher rules than the EU minimum.

The Bill is drafted to cover all parts of the UK. Animal welfare is devolved, but exports are a trade issue and therefore a reserved matter. Although the Bill would cover and ban exports for either slaughter or

fattening, it would not prohibit the export of animals for breeding. Because of their higher value, breeding animals are generally transported in better conditions, so their transport does not give rise to the same animal welfare concerns.

Because the Bill deals only with exports, it would not prevent the transport of animals from the Scottish islands to the mainland. It also includes an exception to allow the cross-border export of live animals from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland to continue. That is essentially a local trade and I have seen no evidence to indicate that journeys are excessively long. Nevertheless, the exception is framed to try to ensure that the Republic of Ireland could not be used as a back-door route for continued live exports from the UK to mainland Europe.

The fear has been expressed that were a ban to be introduced, there would be a risk of challenge under the rules of the World Trade Organisation, but WTO rules provide for certain clear exceptions to their general prohibition on trade restrictions, one of which covers public morals. The WTO appellate body has ruled that it is possible for animal welfare matters to fall within the public morals exception. For example, the United States ban on the import of cat and dog fur and the EU ban on seal fur remain in place, despite both being members of the WTO.

There are therefore good grounds to believe that the UK would be able to defend a WTO challenge, were one to be made, by showing that the export ban proposed in the Bill would be a proportionate response to the deeply held concerns of many members of the UK public, with strong opposition to live exports dating back around half a century. Indeed, only recently the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals delivered to the European Commission a petition with more than 1 million signatures, expressing grave concern about the suffering caused by the poor enforcement of rules on the long-distance transport of animals. Signatures came from many countries throughout Europe.

Over the years, there have been repeated calls for this harsh trade to be brought to an end—I first got involved in the issue some 18 years ago, when I was a Member of the European Parliament—but, so far, all attempts to ban it have failed. They have failed because a ban would contravene EU law. In 1992, the Conservative Government then in power sought to restrict live exports and refused licences to export sheep to Spain. Their decision was overturned by the European Court of Justice on the grounds that it would breach EU rules on the free movement of goods.

Now that the UK has voted to leave the EU, we have the opportunity to make the decision here, in this House, on whether to allow or prohibit the export of live animals. But that will be the case only if we leave the customs union and the single market. If we do not, we will remain subject to the restrictions that make a ban impossible today. That provides a further important reason to respect the result of the referendum and create a new partnership with our European neighbours, outside the customs union and the single market.

The case for a ban has been made clearly by a wide-ranging coalition of animal welfare organisations, including Compassion in World Farming, the RSPCA, the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation and World Horse Welfare. The Conservative manifesto states:

[Theresa Villiers]

“As we leave the European Union, we can take early steps to control the export of live farm animals for slaughter.”

The Bill provides the Government with an opportunity to do exactly that.

We need to deal with not only the slaughter trade but the export of calves for fattening, which can also lead to serious and unnecessary suffering. Nor should we just “control” the trade; we should end it. Nor should we wait until the UK leaves the EU to take action; we should put a prohibition on live export on the statute book now, to come into effect on exit day, as soon as the United Kingdom leaves the European Union. The time has come to end this inhumane, cruel and unnecessary trade, which has no legitimate part to play in modern farming. Exports should take place on the hoof, not the hoof. I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Theresa Villiers, Zac Goldsmith, Craig Mackinlay, Richard Graham, Henry Smith, Caroline Lucas, Angela Smith, Kelvin Hopkins, Sir Roger Gale and Kate Hoey present the Bill.

Theresa Villiers accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 2 February 2018, and to be printed (Bill 117).*

## Opposition Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

### Social Care

[*Relevant documents: Eighth Report of the Communities and Local Government Committee, Session 2016-17, Adult social care: a pre-Budget report, HC 47, Ninth Report of the Communities and Local Government Committee, Session 2016-17, Adult social care, HC 1103.*]

1.11 pm

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes the Conservative Party’s manifesto commitment to a funding proposal for social care which would have no cap on care costs and would include the value of homes in the means test for care at home; further notes that this proposal would leave people with a maximum of only £100,000 of assets; calls on the Government to confirm its intention not to proceed with this commitment; and further calls on the Government to remove the threat to withdraw social care funding from, and stop fines on, local authorities for Delayed Transfers of Care and to commit to the extra funding needed to close the social care funding gap for 2017 and the remaining years of the 2017 Parliament.

After the debacle of the dementia tax, there has been continuing concern that the current and future issues about the funding of social care are not being addressed. The worries stirred up by the Conservative party during the general election will not be resolved without a better idea about what the future now holds for social care.

One place where people were expecting to hear some discussion on this was at the party conferences in September, but if we thought that we would hear about it in the conference speeches of the Secretaries of State responsible for social care, we were sadly let down.

At the Labour party conference, I talked about the crisis in social care and how it was failing those who need care and their families, failing unpaid family carers and failing hundreds of thousands of care workers. People needing care and their carers face the greatest impact. Since the Conservatives came to power in 2010, there are 400,000 fewer people receiving publicly funded care and, sadly, more than 1.2 million people now living with unmet care needs, many of whom are isolated and lonely.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is raising a very important issue, which is leading to a lot of suffering among elderly people in particular. Will she make reference to the Royal Commission on Long Term Care for the Elderly, which, almost two decades ago, recommended free long-term care for all? That is where we should be.

**Barbara Keeley:** I will talk about how the Labour party will take forward proposals on the future of social care. We wait to hear what the Government choose to do. My hon. Friend is right that there is a driving need now.

The number of people—1.2 million—living with unmet care needs will inevitably rise without an injection of new funding. A lack of publicly funded care means that the task of meeting care needs falls more heavily on

unpaid family carers. Many carers have to give up work because of the demands of caring, which has a real impact on their finances and future career prospects. The case for listening to carers and giving them more support is overwhelming. We were expecting a new carers' strategy this spring, or, at the latest, in the summer. Some 6,500 carers had taken the time over and above their caring responsibilities to respond to the Government's consultation. However, the Care Minister told me that the responses will merely be taken forward into a new consultation on social care.

Katy Styles, a carer and a campaigner for the Motor Neurone Disease Association, contributed to that consultation and hoped that her voice would be heard, alongside 6,500 other carers. She told me:

"Not publishing the National Carers Strategy has made me extremely angry. It sends a message that carers' lives are unimportant. It sends a message that Government thinks we can carry on as we are. It sends a message that my own time is of little worth."

That is a shabby way to treat carers—the people who provide more than 50% of the care in this country.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The hon. Lady refers to unpaid carers. Labour's motion references the Communities and Local Government Committee report on adult social care, which looked at the German system of social insurance. Under that system, payments are made to family members to remunerate them for that care. Has she read that report, and is it something that she is willing to look at in further detail on a cross-party basis?

**Barbara Keeley:** I will come on later to discuss how we should proceed and whether we should proceed on a cross-party basis. The hon. Gentleman's point about carers and family carers is important. The plain fact of the matter is that there was nothing for carers in his party's manifesto. We had announced that we were going to lift carer's allowance at least to the level of jobseeker's allowance. That is the only improvement that was discussed during the general election. He should turn to his own Minister and his own party and ask them what they will do for carers.

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): I welcome the hon. Lady's tone in this debate. It is very valuable. I know that she has taken an enormous interest in this subject, even when it has not fallen within her Front-Bench responsibilities. These debates are very helpful in educating people about difficult issues. I am happy to accept that we did not handle this issue well in the general election. The mistake that we made was not being clear about the current system, which is why her reference in the motion to our proposal without setting out the current system in which people can potentially lose all but £23,000 of their assets is disappointing. Such information would have helped to contribute to the public debate.

**Barbara Keeley:** We will come on to that. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to get into the mess that his party made, the truth is that we legislated a number of years ago to lift the asset floor to £118,000. What his party did during the election was drop that to £100,000. At the weekend, we learned that there was an intention to make it only £50,000. He should be clear about what his Front-Bench colleagues were trying to do. Since then, all we have heard is a deafening silence.

We need to focus on the crisis in social care now. We on the Labour Benches have raised many times just how fragile the care sector is after years of swingeing budget cuts by the Government. A survey by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services reported that more than two thirds of councils had reported closures of care providers in the first five months of the financial year. Nearly half those councils had had homecare providers handing back contracts.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** My hon. Friend refers again to local authority care homes. In my constituency, three superb local authority care homes were forcibly closed effectively by Government policy. They were loved by the residents. They had full-time, permanently employed trade union staff and were supported and applauded by the local healthcare professionals. They were all closed. Now we have only the private sector, which is in crisis.

**Barbara Keeley:** It is very important that we bear in mind that the 1.45 million workforce in care will have been local government employees and will have enjoyed local government terms and conditions. We have talked many times about the fact that they are not now paid the minimum wage or travel time. They are very badly paid, with no pensions in prospect.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): As my hon. Friend knows, in my constituency, which neighbours hers, we have a real problem in recruiting and retaining care workers, many of whom tell me that they can get better paid work in the local Asda than by doing the job that they love. Does she not agree that that is in part due to the fact that private providers, who would like to pay their staff more, cannot do so because of the insufficiency of the value of the contracts that they receive from the local authority?

**Barbara Keeley:** That is absolutely the case. In fact, in a recent meeting with Unison, I was told that, in our area in Greater Manchester, one person could be paid more for putting toppings on to pizzas at Morrisons than for providing care—often to people with dementia or to those who really need that help.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The hon. Lady talks about a squeeze in funding. On that basis, does she agree that it would be right to ask those who do have the means to contribute more towards their social care in the home?

**Barbara Keeley:** No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is one of the reasons why his party's dementia tax policy failed so badly. Suddenly to bring hundreds of thousands of people into means-testing using their homes was one of the biggest flaws in the policy that the Conservative party floated.

I will now make a little bit of progress on the state of care, because the fragility of the care sector is a key issue. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) about closures in his area, but councils cannot even influence these closures much any more because home care providers are handing back contracts. Indeed, one in five councils in the ADASS survey reported closures in all three services:

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home care, residential care and nursing home services. There are also serious issues of care quality in many areas of the country.

The survey reported that 70% of the councils surveyed had experienced quality issues across all three types of care services. ADASS estimates that 28,000 people have been affected by care-quality issues or by a change of service due to contracts being handed back. We know that it is a big issue for a person with dementia to have a continual change in the care staff visiting them. Those arguing in favour of cuts need to think about those 28,000 lives affected negatively by cuts to local authority budgets. Worryingly, the Care Quality Commission now reports that almost a quarter of care services are not meeting standards on safety, and nearly a fifth of services require improvement overall.

I said earlier that budget cuts mean that more than 400,000 fewer people are now getting publicly funded care. Of course, councillors, council leaders and social workers have had to make difficult decisions about cutting budgets and cutting support to local people. It is of great credit to councils and council leaders that so many still continue to prioritise adult social care in their budget setting, but the overall position is one of cuts. There will be a real-terms loss of £6.3 billion to adult social care by the end of this financial year, and we heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) about the level of cuts in the city of Manchester. The cuts have an impact on staff working in social care.

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): At last, the Government and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs have acknowledged that care workers who sleep in, giving loving care to those badly in need of care, are entitled to the national minimum wage. But, as a consequence, a crisis confronts the sector. Mencap says that it is the

“final nail in the coffin for many providers”,

with jobs lost and the risk of bankruptcy for a number of people with personal care packages. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government who created this problem should solve this problem and not expect local authorities to pick up the bill?

**Barbara Keeley:** I absolutely agree, and it was helpful of my hon. Friend to make that point. The sleep-ins issue has been a real cause of worry for many organisations over many months. It just goes to the heart of our assertion that people who work in care should be paid the minimum wage, including when they are working at night, which is what they are doing on sleep-ins. I have a constituent who looks after two households of people in adjoining properties, and she does not get normal sleep during the night as alarms can go off in any part of the properties. It is not right at all that those people were paid just fixed amounts, not the minimum wage. The Government must find the funding for that decision.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I do apologise for intervening so often. Does my hon. Friend agree, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) has hinted, that the whole care sector ought to be in the

public sector in the longer term at least, provided on the same basis—free at the point of need—as the national health service?

**Barbara Keeley:** As I said earlier, I will come to our proposals; I do not want to jump around in my speech too much more.

Going back to staff working in social care, it is important to remember and think about social workers, not just care staff. A recent study found that less than half the social workers surveyed felt that decisions about a person's care and support were being left to their professional judgment; it is now all about budgets. More than a third said that they had felt unable to get people the care they need. Less than half felt supported to have necessary difficult conversations about changes to care with people needing care and their families.

The social care crisis is a direct result of the cuts that this Government have chosen to make. The King's Fund, the Health Foundation and the Nuffield Trust estimated that there would be a funding gap in social care budgets of £1.9 billion for this year, but the extra funding in the Budget was only £1 billion, so there is still a funding gap of £900 million this year. Labour pledged an extra £1 billion for social care this year to start to deal with that funding crisis. However, the Government have chosen instead to put the pressure on local authorities and hard-pressed local council taxpayers to deal with that social crisis, which was made in Downing Street.

Delayed transfers of care due to social care cuts increased by more than a quarter in the 12 months to August this year, putting extra pressure on local councils. Now, sadly, Ministers are threatening councils with fines and further funding cuts to social care if targets for cutting delayed transfers of care cannot be met. Indeed, ADASS reported that half the social services directors it surveyed believe that their targets for delayed transfers were unrealistic. It is barely believable that the Government's response to the social care crisis is to threaten to make the situation worse by cutting funding for social care even further. Some councils experiencing problems meeting targets were even summoned by NHS leaders last week to a meeting to review their performance challenges.

Many people have said that the approach of blaming and penalising local councils is not sustainable. The Conservative chair of the Local Government Association, Lord Porter, said of the warning letters sent from Ministers to councils:

“No council wants to see anyone stay in hospital for a day longer than necessary. These letters are hugely unhelpful at a time when local government and the NHS need to work together to tackle the health and social care crisis.”

The president of the ADASS, Margaret Willcox, has described the Government's actions in threatening councils with further sanctions as, “frankly bizarre”. David Oliver, who is clinical vice-president of the Royal College of Physicians and a geriatric consultant, said about delayed transfers of care:

“Some of these delays are due to systematic cuts to social care budgets and provision. Others are due to a serious lack of capacity in community healthcare services...attempts to solve the problem through initiatives like the Better Care Fund or pressure from NHS England have failed”.

Interestingly, Andrea Sutcliffe, the chief inspector of social care at the Care Quality Commission, said:

“I worry that if people focus just on moving people through the system quickly then does that mean that they will force the discharge of somebody that is old and frail into a service which we have rated ‘inadequate’”.

We now have a Government who are driving the NHS to be obsessed with dealing with delayed transfers of care, seemingly above all else. This obsession causes further problems if patients are discharged without planning what they need outside hospital.

Age UK give an example that was brought to it:

“Terry’s father Richard, 85, is in hospital following a stroke. He is ready for discharge and has been assessed as needing rehabilitative care through two home visits a day. However he was then told that there are no reablement services available in his area. Terry has been told to ‘get his father out of hospital’ and to look for and fund the care himself.”

My own local hospital, Salford Royal, sadly seems to have similar issues. Last week, I spoke to a constituent who described her own discharge by saying, “I was thrown out of hospital.” Having had surgery for an infected bite that caused sepsis and a hand that she could not use, my constituent was given no discharge summary, no advice on how to manage her wound and no advice about her recovery. When she struggled to get dressed, she was told that she had to get out quickly, otherwise, “This will count as a failed discharge.” This a theme we may remember from last winter.

I remind the Minister that the British Red Cross talked then of a humanitarian crisis whereby people were sent home without clothes or into chaotic situations. Those chaotic situations involved them falling and not being found for hours, or not being washed because there were no care staff to help them. Ordering patients out of hospital when there is no reablement service for them, without advice about wounds or recovery, or to a care facility rated as inadequate just to meet unrealistic targets on delayed discharge is a recipe for an even worse crisis this winter.

**Huw Merriman:** The social care and hospital budgets have been merged in East Sussex, where my constituency is. As a result, the A&E is now the fastest-improved A&E department in the whole of England. That change is working. Would the hon. Lady’s local authority consider the same model?

**Barbara Keeley:** My local authority has the most advanced example of an integrated care organisation in the country—we have already transferred all our social care staff to work for Salford Royal. I have just quoted a situation that shows how the pressure being put on hospitals because of delayed transfers of care is causing them to treat people such as my constituent in the way I described. Conservative Members ought to listen to that, because it is their Government and their Ministers who are causing this pressure to be put on hospitals.

We know that demand on social care is increasing as more people live longer with more complex conditions. The number of people aged 75 and over is projected nearly to double by 2039. That ought to be something to celebrate, but instead the Government have created fear and uncertainty for older people by failing to address the health and care challenges raised by those demographic changes. Indeed, the Conservative party is spending less money on social care now than Labour was when it left office in 2010. The Government seem to have no plan to develop a sustainable solution to the

funding of social care in the longer term; they have talked only of a consultation followed by a Green Paper.

Furthermore—and this is raising real fears—the focus has been entirely on the needs of older people, without consideration being given to the needs of the 280,000 working-age people with disabilities or learning disabilities in the social care system. That is profoundly short-sighted, because the financial pressures on local authorities due to the increasing care needs of younger adults with disabilities or mental health problems are now greater than those due to the need to support older people.

**Kate Green:** I am glad my hon. Friend has mentioned younger adults. Does she agree that investing in the care they need will facilitate the Government’s achievement of their ambition to have more disabled people who can work in paid employment? Relatively low levels of expenditure on care for those people would pay great dividends for the Government and the country.

**Barbara Keeley:** Very much so. I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. It is concerning that planned consultations or discussions about future policy should focus so much on older people, when the needs of people with disabilities and learning disabilities are so important. We talked about learning disabilities in a debate last week.

Labour will fill the policy vacuum that exists around social care under this Government. Over the coming months, we will consult experts on how we can move from the current broken system of care to a sustainable service for the long term. We will look at funding options for social care in the long term, such as wealth taxes, an employer care contribution or a new social care levy. Those experts will help clarify the options for funding our planned national care service. Our approach will be underpinned by the principle of pooled risk, so that no one faces catastrophic care costs as they do now or as they would under the Conservative party’s dementia tax.

Our plans are for a national care service. They are based on a consultation—the “Big Care Debate”—that involved 68,000 people. People in that consultation told us that they needed a system that will support them and their families to live the lives they want, that will treat everyone with dignity and respect and that will give them choice and control over their care. I believe those needs remain the same, and they will be at the heart of our ambition for social care.

I urge hon. Members from all parties to vote with the Opposition today so that we can set the foundations for a safer, more sustainable and higher quality care system for the future and reassure those who have become worried about the Conservative party’s dementia tax mess.

**Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con):** I am always very impressed by the hon. Lady’s knowledge in this area, but just to clarify, did I hear her say that she was considering wealth taxes as a means to pay for these proposals? She talked about a policy vacuum, but I would be interested to hear how the money vacuum

[Craig Mackinlay]

would be filled. I am also somewhat concerned—I hope she will explain this—that a national care system rather puts families aside.

**Barbara Keeley:** I am obviously coming to the end of my speech, but I recommend that the hon. Gentleman, if he is interested, read a number of documents. The Labour Government produced a White Paper for a national care service; it is still available, and I advise him to look at it. Given everything I have said about carers in this speech, there is no way that we would not include them as an important part of our proposals, but the burden should not just be dumped on them. Carers should be partners in care, and they should be supported so that they have a life of their own. It is said that the only numbers put on the Conservative party's proposals for a dementia tax in its manifesto were the page numbers. The Labour party has produced the document I have here—"Funding Britain's Future"—and a fully costed manifesto. If the hon. Gentleman has a bit more time for reading, I advise him to go to our manifesto and to look at how we laid out the options. We laid them out; we did not get into a mess, as the Conservative party did, and try to change things after four days. We will take this issue forward; we will not kick it into the long grass, as the Conservative party is trying to do.

**Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con):** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Barbara Keeley:** No, I am just going to finish.

Our motion asks for action to make sure the care sector gets the urgent funding it needs to prevent collapse. It would also ensure that hard-pressed councils are not penalised for failing to meet unrealistic targets for delayed transfers of care.

1.35 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price):** I am grateful for the opportunity to respond in this debate. It gives the Government an opportunity to set out exactly where we are in this space—and the position is not as characterised by the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley). The hon. Lady was characteristically challenging, and I hope to answer some of the questions she raised. I have some sympathy with some of her messages, and I hope through my remarks to reassure her on some points.

No speech on this issue should start without paying tribute to everyone who works in social care—from the care assistants, managers of care businesses, occupational therapists, social workers, nurses and trusted assessors to the many officials in local authorities who organise care packages and adaptations for people's homes. [Interruption.] As the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) has just said, the number of people is increasing.

**Jim McMahon:** Decreasing.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** They all have the best of motivations in providing care, and we should celebrate the work they do to support those who find themselves in vulnerable situations across our society. I would like all of us to recognise the excellent work they do.

The quality and provision of care has been hitting the headlines even more than ever recently. It is therefore reassuring and humbling to see the care and support sector respond with such resilience, commitment and compassion. I was delighted to see that the Care Quality Commission has rated 80% of social care settings as good or outstanding.

**Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con):** I thank the Minister for raising that issue, because we should not be so negative about this area. The latest report from the Care Quality Commission said that four out of five institutions offer good or outstanding service. In my constituency, I recently visited Abbeyfield to celebrate its 30th anniversary. Its staff are well paid and they love their jobs, and the people there were very happy. Somerset Care has some excellent institutions, and Cream Care was recently rated outstanding for its services. I took the Secretary of State for Health to visit it relatively recently. Our old people in Somerset need to know that that is the kind of care they can have, and this Government are facilitating it.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** My hon. Friend highlights just some of the many examples up and down the country, but we should not be complacent about the 20% of settings that require improvement, and there will be lots of work we can do to raise the standard in them. That includes, not least, the work we are doing in collaboration with the voluntary sector and the Local Government Association to spread examples of good practice and quality. We will obviously continue to do that.

We should also celebrate the other good work going on around the country. In just one year in Sutton, for example, even though the number of beds for care homes supported by GPs in the clinical commissioning group increased by 14%, there was an overall reduction in care home residents attending. That is because the CCG has stepped up to the challenge and has better co-ordination of care, enhanced training of care staff and better health care support for older people in care homes. That shows that, with collaboration, we can get better care standards. Social care therefore continues to be a key priority for the Government.

**Jack Dromey:** The Minister is right to say that there are none so noble as those who care. However, may I press her on a specific issue? The care sector is facing a disaster as a consequence of having to pick up a £400 million bill because of the confusion in the ranks of Government, and likewise in HMRC, with regard to the entitlement to the minimum wage of those who sleep in. Can she say today that that burden, which was not the creation of the care sector, will not fall on local government and that instead the necessary funds will be met by central Government?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The hon. Gentleman raises an extremely important point that I am actively thinking about. He is absolutely right in the sense that providers have been following guidance that has changed. It is clear from our perspective that employers are obliged to meet their obligations under minimum wage legislation, but I am very clear on the challenge that that is giving to the sector, and we will work with it to develop a solution.

Turning to the substance of the motion, we announced in the Queen's Speech that we will work to address the challenges of social care for our ageing population and bring forward proposals for consultation to build widespread support for future provision.

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): At least 60% of those receiving social care in the home and 70% of those in care homes are people living with dementia. The underfunding of social care has meant that the burden falls disproportionately on those people. Does the Minister agree that whatever the system of social care provided, it is unacceptable that those living with dementia, and their families, should be disproportionately affected?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I invite the House to reflect on what the hon. Lady has said, because that is exactly the issue that we really need to tackle. One in 10 people face very significant costs that they have to meet from their own resources, with only 14,000 ultimately protected. She is right to point out that the vast majority of those people are suffering with dementia and Alzheimer's. We have now reached a time when it is critical that we have a consensus on the future funding of social care so that we can address the injustice that she has very ably highlighted.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Am I right in thinking that under current statute law, a cap of £72,500 will apply from the financial year 2021-22, and that if that settlement is to be altered, it will require primary legislation in this Parliament?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** My right hon. Friend is indeed correct.<sup>1</sup>

The ageing population presents one of our nation's most profound challenges. It raises critical questions as to how, as a society, we enable all adults to live well into later life, and how we deliver sustainable public services that support them to do so.

**Mr Harper:** In a spirit of cross-party consensus, may I add my support to the issue raised by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) by urging that when we bring forward our consultation we cover the nearly 50% of social care spending that is spent on adults with disabilities? I share the view that we must make sure that they are properly supported and able to live full lives, including, where they are able, moving into work. That sometimes gets lost in the debate when we completely focus on people towards the ends of their lives. We must deal with everybody. The hon. Lady made a really important point.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I could not agree more. I share my right hon. Friend's support for the hon. Lady's comments. There are still many opportunities to get working-age adults with disabilities into work. We have set ourselves a target of getting 1 million more people with disabilities into work, and we are very committed to doing that.

In response to the point made by the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South in her opening remarks, yes, much of the debate has focused on how we care for the elderly, but, as she and the whole House will be

aware, support for working-age adults is becoming an increasingly big proportion of local authority spending in this area, and it is very important that we focus on it. Alongside the preparations we are making for consultation in the new year, we have a parallel work stream looking specifically at working-age adults, because some of the solutions will be similar and some will be different.

**Barbara Keeley:** It is very important that we have got to this point today, because very many organisations and individuals have been worried for months about that. In the Queen's Speech and in letters the Minister has sent to me, the talk has been of a consultation on social care for older people. The wording needs to change if that is to encompass, as it should, working-age people with disabilities or learning disabilities. Let us stop focusing just on older people. If she would stop doing that in letters and we could have clarity on this, it would be helpful. I also wonder why there has to be a separate work stream.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** There needs to be a separate work stream because it is connected to the desire to get more people into work, but the two programmes are working in parallel. As I said, today is a great opportunity to get that on the record. Certainly, it has been very much a focus of my conversations with voluntary groups in the sector.

**Mr Harper:** Picking up the point about the work being separate but parallel, in thinking about how we are going to fund the care, it is really important to make sure that we do not inadvertently put in place any barriers to work, whereby somebody would find that moving into work would increase the cost of their care to the extent that working was of no consequence. That would not be an issue of funding care for older people, where there are some different challenges. A separate but parallel structure may well be the right one to go for.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** Again, I agree with everything that my right hon. Friend says.

To reassure the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South, we will have plenty of opportunity to discuss all these issues in the new year. We want to progress this by building a real consensus, because it is a strategic challenge facing us all. Not only are we all living longer, but working-age adults with disabilities are living longer. That is a matter for celebration, and we must do everything we can to make sure that we can meet all our obligations to them.

**Kate Green:** I am glad that we are spending time on this subject. The Minister will recognise, I am sure, that for working-age adults, relatively modest amounts of care may enable them to participate more fully in the workplace and in wider civil society. Will the separate but parallel work stream acknowledge that? I fear that there will be pressure just to look at the most severe and critical-level need, meaning that many people who could work with a small amount of help will be shut out of doing so.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I could not put it better myself. Necessarily, the system will always focus more on those with the most need, but, as the hon. Lady says, we can

1. [Official Report, 3 November 2017, Vol. 630, c. 3MC.]

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

get a lot more return from putting in good value for money measures that will support people to live independently and to be able to work. I am very keen to explore those areas.

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I will take one more intervention, but I really do need to make progress.

**Tracy Brabin:** I thank the Minister for giving way. Can she give me some advice for my constituent—a mother with a daughter who is quite disabled with epilepsy? When the mother was retiring, she realised that she would lose her carer's allowance as she went on to the state pension. When she rang HMRC and the Department to inquire, they said, “By your age, they are normally shoved into a home.” Can the Minister give me some advice on how I could support my constituent?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I am not very impressed by the tale that the hon. Lady describes, but I would like to look into it more directly and get back to her.

The Government have already invested an additional £2 billion to put social care on a more stable footing and alleviate short-term pressures across the health and care system. However, further long-term reform is required to ensure that we have a sustainable system for the future—one equipped to meet the challenges of the increasing numbers of people with care needs. To address these questions, the Government will work with partners—including those who use services, those who work to provide care, and all other agencies—to bring forward proposals for public consultation. The consultation will cover a wide range of options to encourage a very wide debate. It will set out options to improve the social care system and put it on a more secure financial footing, supporting people, families and communities to prepare for old age, and it will address issues related to the quality of care and variation in practice. It will include proposals on options for caps on overall care costs and means-tested floors. It is, however, a consultation, and the Government wish to approach the future of social care in the spirit of consensus. Our consultation is designed to encourage a grown-up conversation in order that society can rise to this challenge.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** The Minister refers to a number of options that the Government will consider. Will they also consider the suggestion contained in that Select Committee report of a system of social insurance, which would be sustainable and simple and would deal with some of the points raised about adults of working age with learning disabilities? The scheme would cover all those things and provide protection for people who are on low incomes. It seems to work very effectively in Germany, where it garnered cross-party support when it was introduced.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I agree that we want to learn from examples in other countries. As I have said, the spirit of the consultation will be to allow a well-informed debate, as a result of which consensus can be established.

In view of that, we will consider a wide variety of options, covering not just funding but lifestyle solutions and other issues.

**Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I must make some progress, because I have taken many interventions. I do apologise.

Adult social care funding is made up of Government grant, council tax and business rates. The better care fund, which was announced in 2013, has further helped to join up health and care services so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. The 2015 spending review introduced an adult social care precept that enabled councils to raise council tax specifically to support social care services. By 2019-20, that could raise up to £1.8 billion extra for councils each year. As a further boost to social care, the Chancellor announced in the Budget earlier this year that local authorities in England will receive an additional £2 billion for social care over the next three years. This year, £1 billion has been provided to ensure that councils can fund more care packages immediately. The additional money means that local authorities in England will receive an estimated increase of £9.25 billion in the dedicated money available for social care over the next three years. Statistics produced today show that spending on adult social care increased in real terms last year by 1.5% thanks, in part, to the precept.

**Barbara Keeley:** This is an important point. Our motion mentions the need to close the funding gap, which is not £1 billion but £1.9 billion. So £900 million is still not covered, and that is what councils are struggling with. The Minister makes the point about extra funding being raised from local taxation. Does she accept that there is still a funding gap, which means that people cannot be paid the national living wage? We are going to struggle all the way through winter unless the Government accept the existence of that gap and work to close it.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I do not accept that. Let us recognise that this has been hard in the past. We have made money available in recent years, but we know that local authorities have faced challenges. As one local authority put it to me, however, austerity has been the mother of invention, and I congratulate local authorities on the efforts that they have made. [Interruption.] That came from a local authority leader, and I agree that local authorities have shown considerable initiative by implementing savings. As for the national minimum wage, it is enforceable, so I do not accept the hon. Lady's point at all.

**Barbara Keeley:** Does the Minister accept that the Government are providing less funding for social care than they were in 2010? She can check that with NHS Digital. The funding is less in real terms. It does not matter that it has increased this year because of the social care levy; it is less. Given the complexity of the issue and the growing demographic challenge, it is clear why we have this gap.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I think it matters a great deal that we have made £9.25 billion available.

**Mr Harper:** Will the Minister give way on the funding issue?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I need to make progress. I apologise to my right hon. Friend.

On delayed transfers of care, the Government are clear that no one should stay in a hospital bed for longer than is necessary. Doing so removes people's dignity and reduces their quality of life. It leads to poorer health and care outcomes, and it is more expensive for the taxpayer. I will set out in more detail the work we are doing to reduce delayed transfers of care. That is critical, because a well-functioning social care system enables the NHS to provide the best possible service.

We are clear that we must make much faster and more significant progress well in advance of winter to help to free up hospital beds for the sickest patients and reduce pressures on overcrowded A&E departments. Last year, there were 2.25 million delayed discharges, up 24.5% from the 1.81 million in the previous year. Just over a third of those delays were attributable to social care. The proportion of delays attributable to social care increased over the last year by four percentage points to 37% in August 2017.

We have put in place an agile and supportive improvement infrastructure, and I have been very clear about priorities. First, in this year's mandate to NHS England we set out a clear expectation that delayed transfers of care should equate to no more than 3.5% of all hospital beds by September. Those in the system have worked extremely hard to agree spending plans and put in place actions to make use of the additional funding, and they deserve real congratulation for their efforts. Since February, there have been significant improvements in the health and care system where local government and the NHS have worked together to tackle the challenge of delayed transfers of care, with a record decrease in month-on-month delayed discharges in April 2017.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I must make progress. Secondly, we put in place a comprehensive sector-led support offer. In early July, NHS England, NHS Improvement, the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services published a definitive national offer to support the NHS and local government to reduce delays. This package supports all organisations to make improvements and includes the integration of better care fund planning requirements to clarify how this and other aspects of the better care fund planning process will operate.

**Liz Kendall:** Will the Minister give way?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I have limited time, and I really must get this improvement on the record.

The package also includes joint NHS England, NHS Improvement, LGA and ADASS guidance on implementing trusted assessors; the introduction of greater transparency through the publication of a dashboard showing how local areas in England are performing against metrics; and plans for local government to

deliver an equal share to the NHS of the expectation to free up 2,500 hospital beds. The package sets out clear expectations for each local area, reflecting the fact that reducing such delays in transfers of care must be a shared endeavour across the NHS and social care. Those expectations are stretching, but they are vital for people's welfare, particularly over the winter period.

Thirdly, we have asked the chief executive of the Care Quality Commission to undertake 20 reviews of the most challenged areas to consider how well they are working at the health and social care boundary. Twelve of the reviews are under way and a further eight will be announced in November, based on the performance dashboard and informed by returns from July. Those reviews commenced in the summer, and the majority of them are due to be completed by the end of November. They are identifying issues and driving rapid improvement.

Fourthly, we have provided guidance on best practice, including how to put in place "trusted assessor" arrangements, which can allow more efficient discharge from hospital by avoiding duplicative patient assessments by different organisations. All areas have now submitted their better care fund plans, which include their trajectories for reducing delays.

Finally, in October we asked NHS England to extend the GP and pharmacy influenza vaccination service to include all paid careworkers in the nursing and residential care sector. They will be able to access the service via local GPs and pharmacies free of charge.

I know that the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South is concerned about the provisions for those that fail to improve, and I want to tackle head-on the suggestion that there will be fines. We are not talking about fines at all. The money that has been earmarked will continue to be retained by local authorities.

**Liz Kendall:** Leicestershire County Council fears that it could have £22 million removed from its budget because of fines for delayed discharges, when the Government have cut its funds. The Conservative deputy leader, Byron Rhodes, says:

"I can't think of anything more stupid."

The Conservative leader, Nick Rushton, says:

"How long can we put up with the Secretary of State?"

That is the reality of the policy. What is the Minister going to do about it?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I reject the suggestion that there will be any kind of fine. The £22 million that the hon. Lady talks about will be retained for spending within Leicestershire. That funding has been allocated for a specific purpose, and where local authorities are not showing the improvement that we expect, we will work collaboratively with them and advise them how best to use that money.

Let me put on record exactly what we are going to do. There is significant variation in performance across local areas. We know that 41 health and wellbeing boards are collectively responsible for 56.4% of adult social care delayed transfers of care. That cannot be right, when other local authority areas have none. In particular, Newcastle has no adult social care delayed transfers of care, and if it can do that, other areas can as well, provided we have good partnerships and good leadership. I trust that I have demonstrated the extent

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

to which the Government are supportive of the best performing systems where local government and the NHS are working together to tackle this challenge. However, we are clear that we must make much faster and more significant progress in advance of winter to help to free up hospital beds for the sickest patients and to reduce pressures on our A&E departments.

It is right that there should be consequences for those who fail to improve. Earlier this month, we wrote to all local authority areas informing them that if their performance did not improve, the Government may direct the spending of the poorest performers—it is not a fine—and we reserve the right to review allocations. It is important to note that the allocations will remain with local government to be spent on adult social care. It is not a fine; this is about making sure that public money delivers the intended outcomes.

**Barbara Keeley:** Is the Minister saying that revising an allocation is not a fine? When an allocation is revised—presumably downwards, not upwards—that is a fine.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I am sorry, but that is not the case. The money will be retained by local government, but we will direct the spending to achieve the outcome the money is intended to deliver. That is exactly what we should do as a Government, and it is how we ensure value for money.

The health and care system has committed staff and managers up and down the country who are working every single day to deliver the best outcomes for people.

**Karin Smyth:** Will the Minister give way?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I have already taken too much time.

The measures I have set out have given our hard-working workforce and their leaders clarity about how the Government expect the NHS and local government to work together to achieve the joint ambition of reducing delayed transfers of care, which will be instrumental in delivering high-quality care.

To summarise, we accept that there are significant challenges in the health and care systems, which is why we are increasing funding in real terms over the lifetime of this Parliament, but this is not just about money. It is about sharing innovation and best practice; it is about integration and defining new models of care; it involves thinking about a long-term sustainable solution to the care system; and, most importantly of all, it is about supporting the 1.5 million people who work in the care system, as well as the millions of people who selflessly look after families and friends with little or no reward. We are committed to all of these.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who is speaking for the SNP, let me say that we have a lot of speakers this afternoon, so after her speech I will bring in a time limit. The time limit will be five minutes to start with, but it may have to be reduced later.

2.2 pm

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): We have all seen the figures about everyone getting older. If we look over the lifetime of the NHS from 1948 to the predictions for 2030, we see that the number of people over 65 will double and the number of people over 85 will increase by 10 times, yet the number of funded places for care has gone down by a quarter. Those two things simply do not match up. As the Minister mentioned, those under 65 with disabilities or learning disabilities are also, thankfully, living longer. The problem is to provide them with care. As a doctor, I obviously tried to do my little bit for people living longer. We should not look at this as a catastrophe; we must celebrate it. We are all heading there, so it is in our own vested interest to ensure that the services will be there for us.

We know that a lot of people's state of health in older age is laid down in the early years. In Scotland, we are focusing on the early years collaborative—from the baby box for every newborn child, the 30 hours' early learning entitlement, doubling active transport and rolling out through schools what is called the daily mile. However, we will not get a financial return on that for 50 or 60 years, so we must also invest in our older citizens. In Scotland, we are trying to expand elective services to meet the demand for operations on hips, knees and eyes, but the King's Fund reports that hip and knee joint replacements are being rationed, and we know that three quarters of trusts have set such strict limits on accessing cataract surgery that people are, in essence, losing their sight, and certainly losing the ability to drive, with half of the trusts fixing only one eye.

Doing such things means driving people into their own homes and into isolation, as well as increasing their need for care and increasing the speed, or lowering the age, at which they need care. It really does not make sense. Age UK points out that 1.2 million people are not getting the care they need, and that matches almost exactly the 1 million family carers who are actually providing the bulk of the care required. In Scotland, we have already committed to raising carer's allowance from £60 to match jobseeker's allowance, but that is pretty paltry for someone working, in essence, seven days a week, while 40% of them are reported not to have had any respite or break in a year.

Such a situation arises because the statutory system is not supporting carers, and we need to look at this. Care homes are closing because of the extra costs brought in by the national living wage, and part of that is simply because the price paid is being driven down. As has been mentioned, over half of local authorities are seeing either home care providers or nursing and care home providers closing. The thing is that we need to pay people a decent wage—not the national living wage, but the real living wage. This needs to become a profession that attracts and retains people. Who would we like to look after us or our mother or father—someone who is doing it only for six months until they can get something better, or someone who actually believes in looking after our older population with the greatest possible love, care and dignity?

We need to put in the funding. The Minister talked about the better care fund, which has indeed put in extra money, but that is at the cost of the new homes

bonus in England, while local authorities are also being told to build more houses. What are they meant to do? We need to put this on a sustainable footing. We also need to address the issue of those under 65. In Scotland, our programme for government includes a commitment to the under-65s with what is called Frank's law, in honour of a football player from Dundee who developed early dementia. We have people aged under 65 with the same needs—those with early dementia, multiple sclerosis or motor neurone disease. Why should their birth date dictate whether or not they get help?

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): The hon. Lady is painting quite a rosy picture of the social care system in Scotland, but does she not accept that it has serious problems as well? In my constituency, I know of a gentleman who was in hospital 150 nights after he could have been transferred because no care package was in place. Freedom of information inquiries have shown that people have spent 400 nights in care when they could have been transferred. Does she accept that the picture in Scotland is not entirely rosy?

**Dr Whitford**: I totally accept that the position is not entirely rosy. I said many times in the Chamber before the hon. Lady entered the House that we face the same challenges. Those challenges are increased demand, workforce needs—they will be made significantly worse by Brexit—and the fact that money is tight. We face exactly the same challenges. Some of the patients she refers to will have had particularly complex needs that it was a struggle to meet. We are talking about the fact that we are funding free personal care—it is not based on means-testing—and we are working towards providing it for under-65s.

Everything happening in England at the moment will seemingly be solved by the sustainability and transformation plans, yet they have been set backside forwards, with designers having to work backwards from the budget line, which is made the predominant thing. That will not produce the desired result, and it must be recognised that supporting people at home and in the community is desirable in its own right. None of us wants to be stuck in a hospital or in a care home if we could be looked after in our own home; that is the choice we would all make. That will not necessarily cut the money required by a hospital. The nurses will still be there, the lights will still be on. What it might mean is that that bed can be more effectively used and waiting times for surgery or other treatments can be achieved, and they are not at the moment.

On the news yesterday, there was talk about the inefficiency of operating lists, and the former president of the Royal College of Surgeons clearly said that this comes down to beds. The number of beds in England has been cut in half over recent decades, and the problem is that if a patient cannot be put in a bed before or after the operation, the operation cannot be done. That is often discovered only the day before, and we cannot just drum up another bed.

All sorts of things, not just delayed discharges, are driving inefficiencies within the system. The thing generating the biggest pressure on the NHS has been the cuts in funding to social care that mean that by 2020 in England a funding gap of more than £2 billion will have to be met. We all want to look forward to a dignified older

age. We hope that we will be independent and healthy. We need to invest in that, yet public health spending has gone down 5%. Should we need care, we will also want care that is dignified and decent. That has to be funded.

2.11 pm

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) and I particularly commend her comments on the importance of prevention, which we must not forget. I join the Minister in paying tribute to the wider care and health workforce, and of course the many unpaid family carers for all that they do. I would like to touch on the forthcoming consultation and some of the current and future challenges. If hon. Members will forgive me, I will take very few interventions because I know that many are waiting to speak.

On the consultation, the Health Committee yesterday had the pleasure of hearing from members of the House of Lords Committee on the Long-term Sustainability of the NHS on the subject of the long-term sustainability of the NHS and social care. They started out with the remit of talking about the NHS, but rapidly realised that the two systems are completely inseparable and that we have to stop considering health and social care in separate silos. The Minister will hear overwhelmingly from the people who contribute to the consultation that we cannot keep thinking of these systems in isolation, so right from the outset will she make it a consultation on the sustainable future funding of both health and social care?

One thing that we heard loud and clear from members of the Lords Committee yesterday was that we need to do more about future planning and that the system for this has been dismal for decades. Their recommendation was that we should set up an office for health and care sustainability that gives us all good-quality, reliable data about not only the demographic challenges but the future needs of both systems so that we can plan ahead for the costs we face in a realistic manner.

Too often in this House we have very divisive debates on this issue, and the challenges in funding future health and care costs are so enormous that I fear the only way we will meet them is by those on both Front Benches and all Members across the House agreeing that we need to work jointly to reach solutions, because no political party has a monopoly on good ideas. Particularly in a hung Parliament, where it is very difficult for us to pass primary legislation, the only way we will move forward on behalf of the people we all represent—we all want the best for them—is if the solutions are worked towards jointly across the House. I hope all Members will move forward in this debate in a spirit of co-operation, because we have to fund this properly. I am afraid that there is a funding gap, although I absolutely welcome the £2 billion that has been pledged. There is consensus that by the time we reach 2019-20, we will face an estimated funding gap, despite the uplift, of more than £2 billion. That will have a real impact on all those we represent.

We must fund this properly not just now, in the short term, but in the long term, and we must come forward with solutions, but it is not just about funding. It is about staffing, and planning properly for a wider workforce across health and social care, so I very much hope that

[Dr Sarah Wollaston]

that will also be included in the consultation. Unless we plan ahead for our future workforce, we will always be playing catch-up, as we do at the moment. Of course, we have seen many important changes. In the future, for example, healthcare assistants will be able to train to move forward through the apprenticeship route to become nursing associates and on into degree nursing. We know from Camilla Cavendish's review that it is not just about pay in the sector but the lack of continuing professional development and training opportunities and, in particular, the inability to rotate through the NHS and social care community settings. That gives an example of how the Government are making some positive moves, which I welcome.

I hope that from the start the consultation will cover both health and social care and that the Minister will go further in covering not just the sleep-in crisis but some of the many other issues that affect my constituents. For example, some are having their assessments re-examined, and disabled young adults facing a change in the support that will be available to them. I hope that the Minister will meet me to discuss some of the issues raised by my constituents in Kingsbridge who face significant changes to their care.

2.16 pm

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): It is a privilege to follow the Chair of the Health Committee, and I shall pick up on some of the themes she raised.

During the election, Conservative Members were no doubt dismayed that their manifesto proposals were dubbed a "dementia tax", conveniently forgetting their "death tax" assault on Labour in 2010. While some of us could be forgiven for experiencing more than a little *schadenfreude*, the truth is we face a fundamental problem. Our population is ageing, more people need help and support and our care services desperately need more money to cope, yet any party that comes up with a significant proposal for funding social care risks their political opponents destroying them.

We could carry on like this for yet another Parliament, and yet another election, or we could face up to reality: we will only get lasting change if we secure a cross-party approach. That is why I have joined the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and other Select Committee Chairs in calling on the Prime Minister to establish a cross-party commission on the future funding of health and social care. We cannot allow this issue to be kicked into the long grass any longer. More than a million people are not getting the help and care they need. Many end up in hospital, and are getting stuck in hospital for longer. That is not good for them, and it costs the taxpayer far more.

It is not just the people who need care who face a daily struggle. Six and a half million people in this country now care for an older or disabled relative; 40% of them have not had a break for a year, and a quarter have not had a single day away from caring in five years. What is the result? A third of unpaid carers have to give up work or reduce their hours, so their incomes are reduced, the cost of benefits increases and the economy is denied their talents and skills. The failure

to deal with the funding problem has not just created a care crisis—it has created a crisis for families and our economy.

Alongside a significant and immediate injection of cash, which we must see in next month's Budget, three long-term questions must now be addressed. First, what is the right balance between the contribution made by individuals and the state? Do we leave all the extra costs of care to individuals who are unlucky enough to need it, and who might end up seeing all their savings wiped out as a result, or do we pool our resources, share the costs and risks and create a fairer system for all?

Secondly, what is the right balance of funding across the generations? The Conservative manifesto proposals were deeply flawed, but with the longest period of wage stagnation for 150 years and rising personal debt, I do not believe the working-age population can pay for all the additional costs of caring for our ageing population. Wealthier older people will need to make a contribution, too.

Thirdly, how do we get rid of the inequities between the NHS and social care, and make the fundamental reforms we need to provide a single joined-up service and shift the focus of care and support towards prevention? The Barker review for the King's Fund rightly calls for a single budget for the NHS and social care, and a single body to commission services locally. It also says that we must face up to the deep unfairness that while cancer care is provided free at the point of need on the NHS, if you suffer from dementia, you may have to pay for all your care yourself.

These are inevitably difficult and controversial questions, but the Prime Minister's experience during the general election campaign and Labour's experience in 2010 simply reinforces the argument that we need a cross-party approach. The Government must now act.

2.20 pm

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my fellow east midlands MP, the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall).

Like many Members from across the House, I was compelled to speak in today's debate because of my personal experience with the social care system, and because of my deep respect for all who work in it and contribute to it. For five years, my father has been in the care of a nursing home in Keighley. At age 94, my dad is still in good spirits, but he has significant care needs as a result of a massive stroke in 2012. It is a testament to the fantastic work of our NHS that we now find ourselves in a position where every care home in the country has residents who 10, 20 or 30 years ago would not have survived serious health issues such as a stroke, a heart attack or cancer. For the Government, however, this success in the NHS can be seen as a double-edged sword, with successive Administrations failing to prepare our social care system adequately for an ageing population living with co-morbidities.

Let me be clear, when I talk about adequate preparation, it is not just about additional funding. As we have heard, the Chancellor has already announced an additional £2 billion of funding for local authorities to fund social care over the next three years and has also introduced a precept. That must be welcomed, as it rightly acknowledges the significant extra pressure that our social care system, and consequently our NHS, is now under.

Opposition Members seem to want to blame the Government, whereas successive Governments, going back to when they were in government, failed to act. They failed to act on the royal commission they set up, and they failed to act on the Wanless report and their own Green Paper. As my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) indicated, we now have the opportunity to effect radical change to the current system, as the Government embark on their comprehensive consultation on adult social care. Others have alluded to the fact that Britain needs a sustainable programme of social care for the long term. We need to stop thinking short term. To achieve that, I would like to explore the idea of removing the social care remit from local authority responsibility and instead placing it under the wider umbrella of the Department of Health, which would become the Department of Health and Care. This stems from the fact that health and social care have now become intrinsically linked, but are currently administered in vastly different ways. If the two are unified, it would allow for closer integration of services and a greater understanding of what demand there will be for future needs from both the social care and health perspective.

It would also protect the social care system from political manipulation, which has happened in Derbyshire at county council level, where the new Conservative administration found itself facing a social care bombshell left by Labour. Over the previous four years, and despite holding around £233 million of Derbyshire taxpayers' money in its reserves, Labour failed to maintain care homes such as Hazelwood in Cotmanhay in my constituency, in order to trot out the same old line about Tory Government cuts. As a result of this shameful political practice, the county council must now consider closing the care home altogether, because of the significant repairs required to make it safe and warm for residents. I urge the Minister today to do all he can, from the local government point of view, to help Derbyshire County Council to keep this much-loved care home open. There is no doubt that Derbyshire County Council and others face more tough decisions over the next five years. As the MP, I will continue to do everything in my power to ensure that Erewash residents remain well provided for, for both their health and social care needs.

2.25 pm

**Jo Platt** (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this important debate.

As I am Member of Parliament for the borough with the largest ageing population in Greater Manchester, social care provision is an extremely serious matter for my constituents. Consequently, social care funding accounts for almost a third of the total spend by Wigan Council. However, hit by local authority budget cuts, there will be an overall reduction in social care funding of £26 million over the next three years. When factoring in the increased demand on social care, the local authority's black hole rises to £40 million. These funding cuts have been met by the local authority largely through efficiency and transformational programmes to reduce costs while maintaining and, in some cases, improving standards. However, the Government's proposed supported housing cap, the universal credit roll-out and the living wage obligation all limit severely the services that local authorities can provide.

What we have seen from this Government is an attack from all angles on local authorities, leaving them simply unable to meet their care obligations. The future for local authority funding looks even bleaker. The Government have so far failed to set out a long-term social care strategy, or explain how they intend to fund local authority provision after 2020. This leaves constituents deeply concerned about the care they will receive, and local authorities unable to find any further savings to protect their core service provision. As the ageing population begins to require care services just as budgets are so ruthlessly slashed, the opportunity to realise further reductions in costs diminishes.

Local authorities are rightly very concerned that even the threat of restricted care funding will deter third sector organisations from investing in services. When factoring in the Government's flawed introduction of their living wage, it is unsurprising that in my constituency planned projects have been cancelled and care provision reduced, resulting in dangerous levels of excess demand in the local care sector. Where does that leave people and who can they turn to? It will force them either to rely on their remaining savings and their family to meet their care needs, or to put the burden on the NHS, with patients who require social care provision sitting in hospital wards instead. Not only are patients not receiving the correct care they require, but this is an enormous drain on already stretched NHS resources.

That brings me to my final point on this vicious circle: the delayed transfer of care. Is it any wonder, when local authorities face budget cuts, that third sector organisations are pulling out of the care sector, the demand for care services is greater than ever, and delayed transfer of care is rising at a rate of 25% per year, costing the NHS £173 million in the last year alone? The social care crisis will continue to grow until the Government propose a fair, comprehensive and long-term funding strategy. This strategy cannot include cuts to local authority budgets or any additional pressures on the NHS, and, most importantly, it cannot risk draining social care patients of their life savings, as the Prime Minister proposed during the general election campaign. I hope that after this debate the Government will realise the extent of the pressure their policies are putting on local authorities, care providers and the NHS, and introduce a national and fully integrated care service that puts social care patients first, and fairly funds the care sector for the future.

2.29 pm

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leigh (Jo Platt).

I think that there is a consensus in the House that social care is one of the biggest policy challenges we face and that we need to get it right not just for current elderly people, but, as pointed out by hon. Members on both sides of the House, for working-age adults with disabilities. In that respect, it is important to see social care in relation to the mental health of people with learning disabilities. Funding is clearly crucial in this discussion, too, as the Government recognised in this year's Budget, which increased funding for social care and gave local authorities freedom over the council tax precept. I have seen in the Borough of Dudley, part of which I represent, how that has had a positive impact on the frontline of adult social care.

[James Morris]

I want to make two points about the future strategy for adult social care. The first is about structures, and the second about people. Despite positive efforts made—let us not forget it was this Government and the previous coalition Government who introduced the better care fund to begin the process of health and social care integration—the picture is still a fragmented one. People have talked about delayed transfers of care. In reality, there is huge variation across the country in relation to delayed transfers of care, as a result, broadly, of the fact that the process of integration between health and social care has only just begun. We need to move further and faster. I agree with the Chair of the Health Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), that we need to see this system as one system—a health and social care system. We will make progress only if we see it in that light.

It is also important to think about the devolved nature of adult social care. In Greater Manchester, funding for social care and health is devolved. It is probably too early to say whether this has been a success, but there are strong arguments to say that if we are properly to reform the system of health and social care, we should not be trying to do it nationally, as the Opposition are arguing; we should chunk it into smaller bits at a regional level and perhaps give responsibility for adult social care to bodies such as the West Midlands Combined Authority and devolved Mayors. We need a fully integrated system of sufficient scale, however, and I think the regions are the best place to locate that.

The second point I want to make is about people. Others have mentioned the crucial role of people working in the care sector and of informal carers. People are clearly a massive constraint on adult social care, so we need to think carefully about how we develop the carers workforce as we move forward. Others have said that it needs high levels of professional recognition and better career structures and incentives. The objective should be to have people working in the care sector who feel on an equal standing to those in nursing and other professions. Currently, we see the health and social care workforces in two separate places, but we should be perceiving them as a single seamless workforce who need to be developed, with the right incentives, to cater for the needs of our health and social care system. We also need to consider the arguments about statutory rights for informal carers, who do not have any rights at the moment, and we need to think about incentives, because clearly informal carers benefit the economy and reduce costs to the Exchequer.

We need to think about the future of an integrated social and healthcare system. It will require extra funding, but funding will be effective only if we achieve that fundamental reform of a seamless health and social care system capable of responding to the needs of people in the health system and social care. We will achieve that only if we take a radically different view of what we mean by a carer workforce, how we treat that workforce and how we treat informal care. If we get that right, we will make a lot of progress.

2.34 pm

**Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): I begin with these words:

“The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life; the sick, the needy and the disabled.”

Those words, spoken by Vice-President of the United States Hubert Humphrey, still ring true today. Social care should be not just a process of government but a moral duty of care for each and every one of us. We should make sure that every person being looked after in social care systems, whether run by a local authority or a private company, can expect the level of care that any of us would expect for our families and ourselves one day.

Whether someone is rich or poor, has a debilitating illness or is elderly, they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Money should not be a factor in the level of care that someone receives. The Conservative manifesto proposed a tax on people affected by dementia. Why do the Government consider people affected by dementia any less worthy than those with, let us say, cancer or diabetes, or those who have had a stroke? Let me repeat myself, Mr Speaker: whether someone is rich or poor, has a debilitating illness or is elderly, they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Dementia costs the UK economy about £26 billion a year. That is enough money to pay for every household's energy bill for a year. It is estimated that 1,330 people in my constituency have dementia and that every three minutes someone in the UK will be diagnosed with the condition. Every one of us in this place has had, or will most likely have, some experience of supporting someone with dementia, whether a family member or friend, or a constituent whose family has contacted us for support or a neighbour.

Let us not ignore the elephant in the room. Local authorities have faced crippling cuts to budgets owing to the Government's austerity-driven agenda. My local council, Kirklees, is currently spending £101.8 million per year on adult social care, which is 35% of its total budget. Kirklees has had its direct funding from the Government cut already by £129 million, and a further £65 million will be cut in the next few years. In addition, it is predicted that the number of people in Kirklees over the age of 65 will increase by 29% in the next 13 years. With cuts to their budgets and growing demand, our local councils are struggling to make sure the most vulnerable in society are protected and looked after. Government Members can try to blame the social care crisis on local councils, but we all know that their hard-line austerity agenda is the reason.

I return to the first part of my speech. What Vice-President Humphrey said needs to resonate with every single one of us in this House. This is a moral issue. I feel that we also need to recognise the work that unpaid carers do. In Kirklees, there are 45,400 unpaid carers. These family members, friends and neighbours are often a lifeline to those with long-term illnesses, and I hope the Government will do more to support them.

2.39 pm

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): I concur with pretty much everything said this afternoon. As an MP who recently fought a marginal seat, I fully felt the pain and discomfort over how we handled the proposals for

social care. Since then, however, several constituents have come to me having lost family homes because they needed to pay for a family member in care. As we know, the money people have can dwindle down to £23,000 before the local authority steps in.

Our manifesto plan to protect people with up to £100,000 and to ensure that their properties were sold only after they had passed away has been welcomed by those who have come to see me. People often do not realise—I am surprised that the Labour party has not picked this up—that that policy supports our poorest families rather than those who may have greater assets.

I am a Cornish Member of Parliament. Two weeks ago, the Care Quality Commission put our urgent care hospitals into special measures. The CQC's report, which also looked at social care and the role of the local authority in Cornwall, states that 82 people in the county are in beds in those urgent care hospitals owing to delayed transfers of care, as against 42 in comparable local authority areas. The report makes it clear that Cornwall Council, which has been run by the Liberal Democrats since 2013, has chosen to give half as much funding to social care as comparable authorities do. That has put enormous pressure on Cornwall's NHS budget, which is currently funding those gaps in social care support. In April, the Government gave a further £12 million to Cornwall council to address the delayed transfers of care, and a further £12 million is promised for 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Our health system is under enormous pressure, largely owing to delayed transfers of care, but we know that our care and support workers need and deserve proper pay that reflects the work that they do and is similar to that of NHS assistants. They deserve that extra money, and they deserve the training that would help them to do their job more easily and safely. My plea to the Government is to do what they can to help Cornwall Council to prioritise social care and help it to address the challenges that it faces in deciding how to allocate funds and how to reward those who provide social care services on the frontline.

It is very easy for people always to blame the Government, and that has been a habit of our local authority—every time a decision is made, it says that it is because of Government cuts—but sometimes the responsibility must be shared by local managers. I welcome the Government's intention to review social care, but I agree with other Members that their review must look at how we can integrate health and social care, because a weakness in one currently has dramatic impacts on the other.

People in Cornwall and the Scilly Isles deserve the very best care, and there are those on the ground who want to provide it, but all sorts of barriers hinder them from doing so. I ask the Government to work urgently to help our local authorities to address that crisis.

2.43 pm

**Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Nearly every day, my office is introduced to a new case in which a constituent and his or her family are facing the harsh and difficult realities of a social care system in crisis, but this is not a crisis born out of necessity. Unfortunately, it is the cruel consequence of an ideologically driven cost-cutting agenda in action. It is a crisis that has been created at the heart of No 10.

The Tories have presided over an unprecedented attack on social care budgets. Some £4.6 billion has been taken from adult social care budgets since 2010, at a time when demand is growing. Reports by the King's Fund make it clear that the adult social care system as it stands is

“failing older people, their families and carers”,

and that it will have a funding hole of £2.1 billion by 2019-20 which, if left unresolved, will continue to fuel the crisis. The same pattern is found in my home town, Sheffield, where there is a growing population of over-65s, all with a longer life expectancy than ever before. Sheffield City Council's budget has been cut to the tune of £352 million since 2010, and further cuts are on their way.

As a result of the cuts, councils have had to make difficult decisions. Across England, 400,000 fewer people are able to access publicly funded social care, and one in eight older people is living with unmet care needs. The impact on people and their families in our communities has been harrowing. What is more, the deep cuts inflicted by No. 10 are not only cruel, but nonsensical and ineffective. For example, councils are having to limit the hourly care fees paid to providers.

A recent case in my constituency has highlighted the doubly negative effect of limited administration and care payment resources. My constituent has significant daily care needs, and she and the council have struggled to keep up with resourcing those complex needs. Care providers have withdrawn at short notice, leaving the council and the patient's family frantically trying to find a new provider. The under-resourcing of social care creates the dual problem of a higher than acceptable turnover of providers, and councils without the resources to step in effectively. That causes much upset and pain to the most vulnerable in our society.

Another consequence of the deep cuts is the level of the duty of care that is being placed on unpaid carers, and, as we know, women are largely bearing the brunt of that work. In one case, a granddaughter cared for her grandmother for 100 hours per week, and when she applied for a care package in the hope of receiving some financial support, it took six months to come through. The long-winded process often leaves carers with no support at all. That is not an isolated case; in fact, there are 6.5 million unpaid carers in the UK.

I am proud that in Labour's election manifesto we pledged to increase carer's allowance for unpaid full-time carers to align the benefit with jobseeker's allowance rates. That is a practical and sensible solution, which also seeks to highlight the valuable work that nurses, social care workers and carers do for our communities. Too often, they are sidelined and their efforts shunned. They need a Government for the many, not just the privileged few, to stand up for them.

Crucially, the knock-on effects of a social care crisis are felt acutely by the NHS. Indeed, this year's general election was the ultimate litmus test for the social care policies presented by the Tories and the Labour party. Labour not only pledged to invest £8 billion to alleviate some of the immediate problems facing social care, but promised to build a new national care service bringing together health and social care, which we would implement following a cross-party consensus. In a civilised society, it is vital for us to pool the risk, and not allow the most vulnerable to fend for themselves in old age.

[Gill Furniss]

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister launched a nasty campaign against older people the likes of which we have not seen in decades. Following their U-turn on the dementia tax, the Tories have now turned their attention to blaming and threatening councils with fines and sanctions—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order.

2.48 pm

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): As part of my self-imposed induction into membership of the Health Committee, I undertook a tour of various institutions in my constituency in order to understand health and social care better, and learnt about the new concept of independent living schemes. Earlier this year the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh opened Priory View, which operates an independent living scheme in Dunstable. It presents a model of the way forward for social care. Older people are not isolated or lonely: there are exercise classes and loads of other activities. We need to get accommodation for such people right for the future, as Central Bedfordshire council has done.

I also visited Orchard Lodge care home in Tilsworth, and was struck by the very high standard of care. It has been rated “good” by the Care Quality Commission, and I was incredibly impressed by the dedication of all its staff. Another home, Rosewood Court in Dunstable, a beautiful building with wonderful facilities, closed this year because the owners could not find managers and staff to run it. That obviously caused a huge amount of stress and upset to residents and to their families, who had to move them at very short notice.

I also met some care providers in my constituency. I remember most clearly a conversation with a lady who ran one of the providers. She ran it very well, and is a former nurse who is working in care for all the right reasons. She said, “I would be too ashamed to go into a school to try to attract young people to come into my profession.” That is not right; we must not have such a situation. I asked, “What would it take for you to attract them?” She said, “A salary would be nice.” I asked, “How much?” She said, “£16,000 to £18,000 a year.” That is not much to ask for people looking after us in our old age.

On travel costs, I have said before and will say again that it should shame every one of us in this House that MPs get 45p a mile when we travel on parliamentary business, yet carers are often lucky to get 30p. What is good enough for an MP is good enough for a careworker. We need to sort that out.

Constituents have also raised the issue of the private subsidy of local authority places. It is not right that some people pay much more for the same place in order to subsidise local authorities. Constituents also tell me that they want even more rigour in the quality of care provided, so that we have real respect for those cared for and also real respect and proper career progression for carers.

We must also break down the division between nursing and social care. Simon Stevens has in the past described these as two great tribes of the healthcare system.

There could, in a properly regulated way, often be more co-operation; they could do more together, which would be more efficient.

I have called for a number of steps that will cost money, and we need real honesty in this debate, because it will cost. I am very impressed by what I have read in both the Communities and Local Government Committee report on adult social care published in March this year and the House of Lords Select Committee report on the long-term sustainability of the NHS and adult social care. Both Committees of this Parliament have in reports published this year pointed us to what is happening in Germany and Japan. Those countries have mandatory social insurance mechanisms, which have been in place for a long time; the German system was put in place in 1994. It is not only Germany and Japan who have got their acts together on funding; so, too, have France and the Netherlands. This is not a recent problem; it did not arise in 2010 or 2015. It has been with us for a long time, and parties on both sides of the House have failed to grasp the nettle.

So I say to the two Ministers on the Front Bench, for whom I have the greatest respect—my hon. Friends the Members for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) and for Nuneaton (Mr Jones)—that there must be urgency on this issue, and there is a willingness among our constituents for it to be grasped in a fair way. People are prepared to pay more; we know that there is public support for hypothecated taxes—people know that what they pay is going to look after them later in life.

Some of the social insurance systems—those in Germany and Japan in particular— can point the way forward. So I say to the Ministers, “Get on an aeroplane now, go to Japan, go to Germany, and do the preparatory work, so that when we have the Green Paper in January, we can have some really good ideas, and we can grasp the nettle, take this forward and give people the care they deserve.”

2.53 pm

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): It is an honour to follow my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous).

Before my election in June I was the portfolio holder for adult services on Bedford Borough Council. I saw the strain that my team of officers was placed under every day, in trying to meet rapidly growing demand with rapidly diminishing resources. The “solution” to this crisis that the Government put forward during the election campaign was astonishing. The dementia tax is not a good idea that was unpopular; it is a terrible idea that did nothing to address the immediate problem of severe underfunding.

Despite already making cuts of £90 million since 2010, Bedford Borough Council needs to identify further cuts of £27.5 million by 2020. In 2015 the grant received from central Government was £30.1 million; that will fall to £5.8 million by 2019-20, and is falling by £6.8 million next year alone. The social care precept is not a proper solution at all, and it is not nearly enough to bridge the gap. It is an inadequate sticking plaster for an ongoing funding shortfall, and a token gesture that pushes the responsibility away from where it really lies, which is with central Government.

A report published last year by the Nuffield Trust and the King's Fund on cuts to social care for over-65s found that access to care depends increasingly on what people can afford and where they live, rather than on what they need. The report found that underinvestment in primary and community NHS services is undermining the policy objective of keeping people independent and out of residential care. It also found that the Care Act 2014 has created new demands and expectations, with no extra funding to meet them.

The report also said that local authorities have little room to make further savings, and most will soon be unable to meet basic statutory duties. Bedford Borough Council is close to not being able to meet those duties. Fining local authorities for delayed transfers of care will do nothing to help address the problem, and will worsen the funding crisis. The Government's response to the social care crisis that we know exists in every local authority area up and down the country is hopelessly inadequate to deal with the levels of demand.

The Government have no answers to the social care crisis they have created. The only change needed now is a change of Government.

2.56 pm

**Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con):** Our ageing population is undoubtedly one of the challenges of our age, and I am proud of what we are doing locally in Somerset to be in the vanguard in this country on the integration of health and social care, which is an essential part of meeting the challenge. Some of our care providers have faced incredibly big challenges over recent years. The rise in the national living wage has put a lot of pressure on their budgets, as have rising pension costs and rising regulatory fees, the apprenticeship levy, and the normal inflation in rent and other costs. It is my understanding that our current council fee rates for care cover only 70% of the costs.

We also need to focus very carefully on the issue of sleep-in shifts and the national living wage being applied to that. I do not think it is sustainable for us to allow that, and we should try to legislate against it. Care providers in my area have informed me that it is not the same as waking duty hours.

Somerset Care is a well-run not-for-profit company that is performing very well and is a key part of the provision of care in Somerset. It is having to hand back some of its contracts from the local authority because they are underfunded, and we have seen 445 fewer beds in the south-west year on year in 2017.

Local authority funding is a factor. It has been drastically reduced, and I am keen to ensure that Somerset is, if at all possible, a pilot in the retention of business rates. I am a firm believer in giving local areas the revenue opportunities they need to be able to innovate and attract more business in various ways, to be able to fund some of these undoubted needs in future.

The sector must provide newer facilities. Some 85% of care home stock in the UK is now more than 50 years old. We need capital funding solutions to be able to lever in private capital. On current parameters, new care homes need at least 70% of self-funders to have the required return on investment. We also need a bigger

workforce, and Members have talked about some of the issues in that regard. We need 53% more people in this sector by 2030.

In terms of solutions, several people have spoken about social insurance, and I think that that is probably the best way to try to pool risk. However, I do not think this is a risk that should be pooled across the whole of society; that would not be fair. We should also incentivise savings schemes better and give tax breaks, and perhaps VAT exemptions, to the providers of new-build care homes. I have mentioned integration before, and we have seen the vanguard in Yeovil: getting patients out of acute beds and into social care settings earlier can save up to £300 a day, which is very encouraging.

I have already mentioned sleep-in shifts and local dynamism, and I am mindful of the fact that others want to speak, but I want to conclude by saying that I welcome the Government's paying attention to this issue. It is undoubtedly one we need to look at. This is a pressing matter, and I urge the Government to really motor along on this one. This is urgent for some of those providers who are facing serious situations. I do not believe that the answer is higher taxes, either at national or local level, and I do not believe in politicising the issue, as some Opposition Members have been tempted to do. Essentially, we need innovation. We need to create the conditions for the private sector to work with providers to give our older generations the support that they need.

3.1 pm

**Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this most important debate. I would like to thank my friends on the Opposition Front Benches for bringing the subject of social care to the House today. Social care must be treated as the national priority it rightfully is. It is a vital public service that allows people in every one of our constituencies to live their lives in the way they want. The system supports older people, those living with mental health issues and people with physical and learning disabilities. This should be the least that we owe people in our country, but instead there is simply not enough money in the system. The Local Government Association has said that social care services nationally are facing an annual £2.3 billion funding gap by 2020.

Of course, some areas are affected more than others, and funding pressure is being felt keenly in my constituency of Batley and Spen and in our local authority of Kirklees. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker) has said, a third of the entire local authority budget is spent on adult social care. This is a local authority that has had to effectively cut half its budget since 2010 and is the second worst funded metropolitan council in the country. Senior councillors have openly warned that they might need to stop cutting the grass or collecting the bins in order to meet their social care requirements laid out in the Care Act 2014. Of course it is completely right that social care takes priority over other public services, but I am sure Members will agree that councils should be in a position to provide more and better services to local people, rather than constantly cutting back.

Let us take the case of the father of a constituent of mine. He is currently in Dewsbury District Hospital, and he is ready to be discharged. He has had a stroke,

[Tracy Brabin]

and he also suffers from vascular dementia and a condition called sundowning, which means that his dementia symptoms become more severe in the evening. Because of a lack of funding, there is no specialist provision locally that can cope with his complex needs. This family are faced with the prospect of their relative having to go out of the area, even as far away as Sheffield, for care. We have to find a national solution to this national issue.

The Care Quality Commission's report earlier this month laid out the reasons for action in black and white. Only 2% of social care services were rated as outstanding, with 41% requiring improvement. A quarter of services are failing on safety and there are nearly 4,000 fewer nursing home beds now than there were in March 2015. This is at a time when demand is rising. In England, 1.2 million people do not receive the social care they need, which is up 48% since 2010.

The search for the much needed solution has to begin with getting the funding right, because the system's future depends on it. Clearly, one way of not getting the funding right was illustrated by what the governing party put forward at the general election. Its intention to implement a "dementia tax" without limits went down like a lead balloon in my constituency and plenty of others. We have to assume that that policy is off the table—I am sure that Ministers will be eager to confirm that today—but that does not mean that the Government can keep treading water. Social care is a vital public service, and having a hole of this magnitude at the heart of Government policy is irresponsible. We need action. Instead of writing to councils to threaten fines and the withdrawal of funding because of unmet targets on delayed transfers of care, let us have a plan to remedy the £6.3 billion-worth of cuts since 2010. The quality of care needs to be rising instead of falling. Social care is there for the elderly and the vulnerable, and the least we should expect is a decent system that works for everyone.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. I am afraid that I am going to have to cut the time limit on Back-Bench speeches to three minutes as a lot of speakers are still waiting to get in.

3.5 pm

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I am sure that all of us who have been out and about with care workers in our constituencies have found the experience not only informative but inspiring. I certainly had a brilliant experience when I went out and about with a care worker in my patch. I saw the enormous compassion in the care that she provided and how incredibly hard she worked. It was a tough job, but a rewarding one. As many Members have said, however, the work is not well enough paid, there is no career structure and there is not enough support for carers in their day-to-day work.

Everyone in the Chamber today recognises that the current system is not fair and not working. It is not fair that people can get care for free if they can stay living in their home, but if they have to go into a care home, they might be left with only £14,000 of savings. Most people would much rather be cared for at home, but that is not

always possible. The present system therefore discriminates against those who cannot stay at home to be cared for, and that is simply not fair. We need to bear that in mind as we talk about potential solutions. Let us not pretend for a moment that the current system is fair.

The system is also not working. Around 30% of the people in hospital in my constituency do not need to be there. They would be better off out of hospital, but there is often no outside support available for them. Delayed transfers of care are an ongoing challenge. There are also people in care homes because of the shortage of domiciliary care. We have to address what is substantially a funding challenge: there is simply not enough money going into care.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), said that she was going to give us Labour's solutions to the problem. I listened carefully to her speech, but I was disappointed that she spent only about one minute of her 24-minute speech talking about potential solutions. I am afraid that I did not really hear any solutions—

**Barbara Keeley:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Helen Whately:** I am really sorry, but I cannot take any interventions. I have been asked not to.

Most significantly, the hon. Lady does not have a plan for how to pay for all this. It all comes down to how we are going to pay for improving access to care, and the Labour party simply does not have a plan. As for cross-party working, that would be fantastic but judging by some of the language I have heard from Labour Members, I do not think that many of them are ready to work together on this. I encourage the Government to get on with the job of proposing a better, sustainably funded, care system so that our constituents can get the care that they need.

3.8 pm

**Faisal Rashid** (Warrington South) (Lab): Under the Conservative Government, social care is in crisis. That is clear to almost everyone in this House, and to the 1.2 million people across the country whose complex needs are not being met. In fact, it would appear that the only people it is not clear to are those in the Conservative Government. Anyone following either of the Secretaries of State responsible for social care over the conference period would have struggled to find any reference to the crisis, or indeed to social care. I am therefore pleased that the Opposition have used this day to bring this incredibly important issue to the Floor of the House, because we are faced with a complete Government policy vacuum.

Social care provisions have been neglected and gutted by central Government. By March 2018, £6.3 billion will have been cut from the adult social care budget during eight years of Conservative-led Government. Over the same period, the number of people with some form of unmet need will have increased by 48%. That is no coincidence. The Conservative Government's failure to tackle the social care crisis is having a hugely damaging impact on elderly and disabled people in our society, pushing them into increasingly vulnerable and precarious positions where they are not receiving adequate or appropriate care.

Government cuts to local authority budgets mean that councils are simply no longer able to provide the necessary level of care. In the first five months of the fiscal year, 48% of authorities have reported home care providers handing back contracts, and Warrington Borough Council is no exception. Indeed, two providers have already handed back significant contracts this year, so the council is short of approximately 500 hours of home care on any given day, resulting in delayed transfers of care. Members will be aware that the Government's response to the delays has been to punish local authorities fiscally for not meeting unrealistic targets by withholding funding and threatening extortionate fines. If the Government are not prepared to invest in essential care for the health and wellbeing of the elderly and disabled in society, what are they prepared to invest in? During the 2017 general election campaign, the Prime Minister infamously U-turned on her flagship social care policy. Five months later, she has still to provide us with any alternative, while other members of her Cabinet have yet to rule out the discredited dementia tax policy.

3.11 pm

**Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this debate on a subject that is vital to many in our communities and one that is close to my heart. It should almost go without saying that those working in social care deserve huge respect and thanks for their outstanding work on a daily basis. My role as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on social work presents a real opportunity to champion the sector and to work with colleagues to get the best deal for it.

No one doubts the importance of funding for important public care sectors, but the Opposition do not seem to realise that money alone does not solve everything. Addressing working conditions is hugely important for maintaining continuity and retaining workers. We should be looking at cutting the bureaucracy that increases the organisational work in these caring roles and at allowing them to do more of what they want and are trained to do. We should also consider how technology can help people in the sector. Medway Council has been looking at that in relation to caring for people in their homes, and some of our housing associations have worked with the council. These are ideas, and I am pleased to speak to colleagues from across the House instead of just throwing money at the problem, creating a financial black hole, and hoping that something comes out in the end.

If Opposition Members want to talk about money, they will surely recognise the additional £1 billion made available this year on top of the £2 billion offered to councils in the Budget. Since 2015, councils have had access to a total of over £9 billion of funding over a three-year period. We have also introduced the toughest standards regime in the world, and it is reassuring that the CQC rated 80% of social care settings as good or outstanding. Again, this is about ideas, not just funding, which is why an open consultation will be held on how to reform the system to drive sustainability and improve quality. In my area, Medway Maritime Hospital was struggling, but it is clear that change has been down to leadership, management and innovation in that setting.

In comparison, Labour's record does not give Opposition Members a high horse from which to look down on us. In government, they failed to deliver effective policies

over a long time. Their advisers even came out in public to admit that they failed to solve the problems of social care funding, saying that it was

“the largest piece of unfinished social reform”

during Labour's time in government, which I remind the House was 13 years. Even during the most recent election, promises were made, but we heard no plans from the shadow Minister for what Labour would do, so I support my Government in holding the consultation and wish them good luck.

3.14 pm

**James Frith** (Bury North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this Opposition day debate, and I thank colleagues for bringing it to the House. I pay tribute to the work of Carers UK and the Bury Carers Centre in my constituency in advocating and providing a voice for Britain's 6.8 million carers, almost 20,000 of whom work in Bury. In fact, it is a mark of the link between my office and the Bury Carers Centre that Ummrana Farooq came to help me with my constituency work and run my office—such is our commitment to the Bury Carers Centre.

The number of carers has grown by 1 million nationally over the past 15 years. Carers now provide care worth £132 billion every year, which is propping up a social care system in crisis. If we acknowledge the silent wards in bedrooms and front rooms and the people being looked after by loved ones, the crisis would be deeper still. Under the Tories, 400,000 fewer older people now have access to publicly funded social care and not because need has reduced; it has of course risen. Age UK says that 1.2 million older people in England now have unmet care needs. The Government's welfare policies have had an extremely detrimental impact on carers. Some 2 million people have given up work to care for relatives. The low level of the carer's allowance—£62 a week if caring for someone for more than 35 hours a week—and the freeze on many benefits combine into a toxic force against our carers and their communities.

I want to progress the debate. As a Greater Manchester MP—it is good to hear so many Greater Manchester MPs speak in this debate—I understand that there is a role for hospice care in the social care offer. We need a holistic approach, and we need practical arrangements, not just new money. We need three-year budgets up front. Hospices can play a vital role if the patient tariff can move from the ward to the hospice. They can offer vital respite care provision in towns such as Bury. Bury hospice has empty beds and rooms that would cost a lot less than a hospital bed for the night, so I urge the Government to look at the patient tariff. Have they considered the supporting role that hospices might play in the social care system? Come and look at Bury hospice and the work we intend to do with our Pennine colleagues.

3.17 pm

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): East Sussex has the second-highest proportion of over 85-year-olds in the country, and that number is expected to grow by 14% by 2021. As for the care homes in my constituency, 55 of them are rated good, but unfortunately 29 require improvement and one is inadequate. Not only does East Sussex have a large population of people who need to be looked after, but the system is clearly not working as

[*Huw Merriman*]

it should. In my constituency, 33% of the working-age population are on the living wage, so to continue to expect council tax payers to fund the social care model will not help them get on in life and will not help intergenerational fairness. I was therefore pleased to hear the Prime Minister talk at the Dispatch Box about the short-term impact of the Government's £2 billion announced in the previous Budget and the council tax levy. However, due to the situation with council tax payers and the small tax base that I have in East Sussex, I support her when she talks about the need for medium and long-term reform.

In the medium term, East Sussex's model is to work as a Better Together partnership, where the council, the NHS trust and clinical commissioning groups all work as one. Indeed, they are all on one email and have emailed me over the past couple of days about what can be done, which shows that they really are working together.

As I have mentioned, our accident and emergency team is the most improved in the last six months because the Better Together partnership is now working. People are now getting out of hospital earlier and, indeed, are not having the trips, slips and falls that cause them to go to A&E. The model works well.

However, I have one ask of the Minister, who has a background in compliance. The NHS trust is managed by NHS Improvement and the clinical commissioning group is managed by NHS England, and the regulators are not working together. Those organisations therefore sometimes struggle to work together, such as on billing, contractual challenge and payments, because the regulators are telling them different things. I would like a single accountable regulator for the entire sphere, and I hope that my leaders will be able to meet the Minister to discuss their challenges and what can be done.

Cross-party consensus is surely the way forward. I hope the Opposition will note that I have not once attacked them. I have heard some fantastic speeches. In particular, the hon. Member for Leicester West (*Liz Kendall*) talked passionately about what we can do together. In reality, we will have no majority for these five years, and social care will be reformed only if we work together. Please, can we do so?

3.20 pm

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Social care has been pushed into a state of emergency. A report by the CQC in July found that one in four social care services is now failing on safety grounds, with at least one care home closing every week. Only 2% of providers are regarded as outstanding.

In Cheshire East, almost a third of care homes have been rated inadequate or as requiring improvement. Imagine the uproar if Ofsted published such statistics for schools. The CQC's chief inspector, *Andrea Sutcliffe*, admits that adult social care is still approaching a "tipping point."

The only reason the social care service has not completely fallen to pieces is because it is being held together by an incredible and skilled workforce who are swimming tirelessly against the tide. A recent Unison survey of homecare workers found that more than three in five

are given only 15 minutes, or less, to provide personal care. Three quarters end up rushing and have to compromise the dignity or wellbeing of those they look after. Nearly a third are unable to wash, bathe or shower the people for whom they care.

I am always lost for words when I speak to care workers in my constituency. It takes a certain kind of person to be a care worker, and imagine how it must feel for that type of person to be forced to leave somebody for whom they care before they have had time to wash them or to help them eat. To make matters worse, many work on poverty pay, a consequence of the chronic underfunding of this service.

The National Audit Office has stated that 220,000 care workers in England are being paid below the minimum wage—the national minimum wage, not the Government's living wage. Care workers in my constituency have been underpaid for years by Cheshire East Council, which is breaching minimum wage regulations despite having a policy to pay all workers at least the local living wage. Those workers have yet to receive back pay for the duration that they have been underpaid, and it is unclear whether that back pay will lift them to a living wage.

Only yesterday, a care worker contacted my office because he did not know where else to turn. He described how staff morale is at rock bottom, with many care workers suffering from poor mental health, worrying about their job security and relying on food banks and payday loans. They are too scared to take time off sick and unable to afford annual leave. He described how care workers feel that they have no voice and receive no respect. Is it any wonder that more than 900 care workers are leaving their job every single day?

3.23 pm

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on the extremely important subject of how we care for the elderly and the most vulnerable people in our society. I start by declaring an interest. I come from an NHS family, and the NHS is in my blood. My husband is a consultant oncologist, and the work that he and others do in the NHS is saving lives and ensuring that we are all living longer. I thank our NHS.

It is because we are all living longer that we feel this pressure on our NHS and social services. I am an Essex MP, and in Essex it is predicted that in the next decade the number of over-65s will increase by 40%, the number of over-85s will increase by 50% and the number of over-95s will more than double. Also, a growing number of people have complex needs, such as diabetes, dementia and other conditions. In the next three years, the number of adults in Essex with physical disabilities will increase by more than 7%.

In England, 80% of our care homes are rated good or outstanding by the CQC, but we need to consider the long-term way in which we fund and care for our growing elderly population. Stuff is being done on the ground. We know that the NHS and social care are linked, and having integrated health and social care discharge teams is working in Essex and is helping to speed up transfers.

Essex plans to have 2,000 supported independent living units, which will help vulnerable people to stay in their own communities for longer. We can do more on

caring for the carers. We are introducing nurse apprenticeships, which I hope we will soon see in Chelmsford—that is excellent.

This country is also doing phenomenal work in science and research. Some £4.7 billion is being invested in science and research, more than any Government have invested in the past 40 years. We are leading the world in areas such as genomics and gene editing, which will radically change personalised medicines and will mean that many people will not need to live with certain conditions.

Although those changes will all help in either the short term or the long term, we need to look at funding now, which is why the Government are right to call this consultation. We need to consider what is happening in other countries, such as Germany, Japan and the Nordic countries, and we need to look at savings models, insurance schemes and equity release. We need to work with our local authorities. Let us have this consultation, and let us work together.

3.27 pm

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): The benchmark of a civil society is how it treats its elderly, its vulnerable and those who need support the most. Those are the values that underpin the outstanding work that happens every day in my constituency, Weaver Vale, and in constituencies across the country.

Whether care workers, nurses, social workers or volunteers who look after their neighbours, these people are motivated by a simple principle. As a country, we should care for, and care about, everyone in our society. Sadly, the reason we are having this debate today is that, when it comes to sharing and showing support for those values, this Government have let down the very people who deliver them and have failed those who rely on them.

Year after year, as they delivered their cuts, the Government who claimed that we were “all in it together”—remember that one—took aim at the most vulnerable instead of protecting them. Councils in my constituency have seen their budgets cut by 43%, with the most vulnerable struggling to access the care they need. Like many former councillors in this Chamber, I saw at first hand what cuts did to services and the effect on the people who relied on them. Now, as an MP, I witness this all too often. That effect was ignored by this Government again and again, until the Prime Minister was finally forced to listen. Even then, the action offered failed to deliver what was needed, putting the burden once again on local councils and residents, rather than on Downing Street, the only place that can deliver the proper funding needed to rectify this crisis.

The good news is that with proper, decent funding we can make a difference, by providing our amazing social care staff with the support they so desperately need. That is why we need a Labour Government. Earlier this month, I met the integrated care team in Cheshire West and Chester. Based at a local medical centre, they bring together district nurses, care workers, social workers, occupational therapists and co-ordination staff, providing excellent integrated care. The innovation and dedication of the team is exemplary, but unfortunately the funding is not. The workload exceeds staffing resources. The team needs six district nurses, but it typically operates with three or four. Recruitment is a struggle, and there is a shortage of carers in the area. Patients can be ready

to leave hospital but no care packages are in place because of the lack of funding. This is the consequence of years of cuts and of pay freezes, zero-hours contracts—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order.

3.30 pm

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the contributions from Members on both sides of the House today in this extremely important debate. I have personal experience of this, as my 80-year-old mother is in the early stages of dementia. She lives in Cumbria, many hundreds of miles from this place, and I have often had to run from these Benches to take phone calls from the local authority services in the past few weeks. I have seen for myself the experience that many of our constituents and their families are going through. I pay tribute to those who are at the sharp end; I have seen some fantastic examples of caring people in Cumbria and in my constituency. So I commend the Prime Minister and the Government for seizing this difficult and challenging issue. She was brave enough to talk about something that has been an issue for many, many years. Opposition Members have been very negative and critical of us. They are right to criticise our election campaign—not everything was right in it, and there are problems now—but I welcome the calls to work together. I really want to see us work together across this House to deal with this issue.

I make one plea to Opposition Members: please do not talk about a dementia tax, as there is no such thing. When I spoke to people in my constituency, I found that they were very concerned about the challenges that face their families and people in their communities, and this language was terrifying to them. It obscured the fact that care is not free now. Currently, people are being forced to sell their homes and they do face difficult challenges. We are right to have this debate, but please let us not do it in a way that frightens people who are vulnerable already.

We do face some big challenges and it is very important that we get the health and social care sector working together. I welcome the fact that in Redditch £100 million is being put into our accident and emergency in the Alex and we have a new elderly and frail unit, which helps to speed up the process of people leaving hospital when they need to go. I wanted to make a number of points, but time is short, so let me say that it is right to look at a balance of solutions.

I welcome what the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) said about people who are wealthy and can contribute. We need to consider how can we have a grown-up, intelligent and mature debate about that, because we are facing a large demand on the public purse to fund this in the next few years. The Labour party put forward a manifesto in 1997 to deal with this issue, but it was not resolved. We have grasped the nettle. I thank our Front-Bench team for bringing this forward. Let us have the consultation and deal with this for our constituents.

3.33 pm

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): We have heard that the Local Government Association has estimated that adult social care faces a £2.3 billion funding gap by 2020, and the reasons for that are

[Preet Kaur Gill]

wide-ranging. They include a growing population requesting adult social care support, cuts to local authority budgets in recent years and increases in costs to providers, including the national living wage and costs relating to sleep-in arrangements. In addition, the adult social care provider market is increasingly vulnerable, with 69% of councils reporting to ADASS that they have been affected by providers ceasing trading or handing back contracts. That can have a massive impact on the lives of people relying on this care. These short-term pressures must be addressed with additional funding, alongside allowing local areas to use additional funds in the way that addresses their local health and care issues.

3.34 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), who made a good point about the sustainability of providers, an issue to which I shall return shortly.

I was pleased to see the Communities and Local Government Committee report on adult social care listed as a document relevant to the motion. I serve on the Committee and contributed to that report. We established what I think we are all aware of: there is a demographic time bomb with respect to social care. The King's Fund said that there are hundreds of thousands of people in their 80s and 90s and that the number grew by third in the past 10 years and will double in the next 20 years.

The problem is not going to go away and there is no doubt that, as a result, the system is under pressure. This is about not only the overall numbers of people affected but the individual devastation. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), referred to "catastrophic care costs", which is a fair way to put it. It cannot be right that one person and their family can be affected in such a catastrophic way if they have long-term care needs such as dementia. We need to consider the impact on their family and the financial consequences of those catastrophic costs.

It is not right for either the Government or the individual to have a blank cheque on this issue, so we need to look for a different solution. When most of us see a potentially catastrophic risk, we insure ourselves against it. As part of its adult social care inquiry, the Select Committee visited Berlin to look at the German system. Adult social care in Germany was previously funded by local government, but a social insurance system was introduced in 1994. Every person has to pay into the system, although there is a threshold so that low earners are taken care of and do not have to pay. Everyone else pays around 1.2% of their salary, with their employer also contributing. It is a bit like auto-enrolment, but for social care.

The system in Germany has been successful. It was introduced with cross-party agreement, which is what has been called for today by Government and Opposition Members alike and which I absolutely support. In Germany, if care is needed, the money paid out of insurance policies can be paid to family members, so the social fabric element of social care is catered for, because more

families look after their relatives when they are in need—they are not unpaid carers; they are actually paid. The German system helps the provision of the right kind of support from the right people, and I really hope that the Government will consider it as a permanent, sustainable, scalable and simple solution to this problem.

3.37 pm

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): As the Minister clearly set out at the start of her speech, it is right and proper that we recognise all those who work in the social care sector. In fact, my own mum was a home carer for many years. She would go out early every morning and late of an evening to look after the people she was supporting. It is right that we support and recognise not only those who work in the sector, but those unpaid carers who quietly get on with looking after those they love and care for at home. That work often goes unrecognised.

There are several care homes in my constituency, including Pelsall Hall and the Hawthorns, which are part of the whole range of homes that provide social care and independent living for those who really need it. There are also many charities and organisations that provide invaluable support—in particular, the Alzheimer's Society, which was recently kind enough to run a dementia friends session in my constituency.

Aldridge-Brownhills has an ageing demographic, with 27% of the population aged between 45 and 64 and 21.6% aged over 65, so it is part of the challenge that we face as a country. Not just in my constituency but right across the country, the ageing population presents us with probably one of the greatest challenges we face, and it is one that we cannot leave alone.

We have heard how successive Governments have kicked this can down the road, and I have heard a lot of charges against this Government from Labour Members. They may well protest, but they, too, kicked the can down the road. Labour promised a social care solution in its 1997 manifesto, yet despite a royal commission, two Green Papers and a pledge to address the issue in the 2007 comprehensive spending review, it left government without having delivered.

Today, we have had many good contributions. The one thing that has come across loud and clear is the need for us all to engage in this consultation and to work together, because it is a challenge that is facing the whole country. I really hope that we can find a system that not only works today, but is ready and fit for the future.

3.39 pm

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this important debate. With the 70th anniversary of the welfare state approaching, it is appropriate to reflect on its promise of care from the cradle to the grave and to say that, in this country at the moment, we are perhaps getting that wrong.

We have heard much about the problems with funding and the delays in transfers. Perhaps the most important thing we can do, apart from raising money by putting a penny in the pound on tax as my party advocates, is to stop treating social care and the NHS as a political football. Perhaps it is time that we establish a cross-party

health and social care convention to carry out a comprehensive review of the longer-term sustainability of the health and social care finances and workforce and the practicalities of general integration. Perhaps that way we might see a more efficient social care system that is fit for purpose.

3.41 pm

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): We have had a good and full debate. I wish to thank the 25 Back-Bench colleagues who have contributed to it, including my hon. Friends the Members for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), for Leigh (Jo Platt), for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker), for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin), for Batley and Spenningsdale (Tracy Brabin), for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid), for Bury North (James Frith), for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) and for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) and the hon. Members for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), for Erewash (Maggie Throup), for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), for St Ives (Derek Thomas), for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), for Yeovil (Mr Fysh), for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) and for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine).

Clearly, on both sides of the House, there is a shared concern over the Government's inaction on addressing the growing crisis in social care. It has been illuminating to hear the thinking of the Social Care Minister in her opening speech. I am astounded that a Minister of the Crown thinks that austerity is the mother of invention.

**Jackie Doyle-Price** *rose*—

**Andrew Gwynne:** Let me finish. I will let the hon. Lady in if she wants to apologise.

It is a play on words of the old English proverb that necessity is the mother of invention. Let me tell the Minister that she might be quoting a councillor, but she did not deny that it was her view, too. There is nothing necessary about austerity. It is a political choice, and it is a choice that is driving up inequality and unfairness.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I need to remind the hon. Gentleman that the only money that we can spend is that we collect from taxpayers. I pay tribute to the innovation shown by local authority leaders who deliver better outcomes with less money. That is good value for money and should be celebrated by Opposition Members, too.

**Andrew Gwynne:** I pay tribute to councillors who are making very difficult decisions under very tightly constrained financial situations. I remind the hon. Lady that, yes, we can only spend money that we have, but it is a question of priority about how we spend it. That is why we set out in the election exactly how we would use the money in a better, smarter, fairer and more equal way.

As Members of Parliament, we have a duty to our constituents to defend the services on which many rely and the services that are there to protect us all should we find ourselves in need of support—care homes for

the elderly, child protection and support for parents with disabled children. It is the duty of all Members to protect the principle on which our welfare state was founded. All people deserve a life of dignity. As shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, I speak to council leaders, to councillors, to council staff and to organisations delivering public services, and they are all telling me the same thing. They are not only unable to cope financially; they have lost confidence in this Government. The country needs fresh ideas and leadership. Instead, it is suffering from the weakest and most divided Government in memory. One thing is clear: this Government are facing a looming crisis of trust in local government. Many within the local government sector, including the Tory chair of the LGA, had hoped that the Prime Minister would use her Tory conference speech to announce new measures to help to alleviate the pressures on adult social care. But I, like many, think they were left wanting for leadership.

Our ageing and growing population means that there is more demand for social care. An increasing number of people will need support with their mental health, a physical disability or learning and social needs. Skills for Care has predicted that we will need an additional 220,000 to 470,000 workers by 2025 due to population growth and ageing, but local government will be unable to meet this demand under current and projected budgets.

We do not have to wait until 2025 to witness a crisis. Across the country right now, our health and social care system is straining at the seams. Last year, councils spent over £366 million more than they had predicted on their social care budgets. That is double the overspend reported in 2015-16, and it is not sustainable. The only response that we receive from this Government is the long-awaited consultation, which a Minister first promised would be published in the new year. Now it is suggested that it might even be delayed until next summer.

When will our communities see action to help the one in eight elderly people who will not receive the care they need, such as help getting dressed, going to the toilet and washing themselves—basic dignity for those most in need? When will we see an end to the closure of children's centres that are providing support to families in need? Right now, one children's centre closes every week. When will people no longer have to live in fear in their own homes? Cuts to care hours mean that a fall in the home could leave somebody trapped on the floor, unable to get up for several hours. If Ministers had discussed these issues with the sector, they would know about them. They would know that the sector is warning that social care faces a perfect storm of staffing shortages, rising demand and a lack of funding made worse by this Government's policy on transfer of care.

I recently asked the Minister whether his Department had conducted an assessment to ensure that local authorities had the financial and staffing capacity to comply with their statutory social care duties. I was told that these were decisions for local authorities, not for the Government. Well, I have done the work for the Minister. The number of social care workers has fallen each quarter for five years to its lowest level since 1999. It has decreased almost 8% in the last year alone. Councils face a £2.3 billion annual social care funding gap by 2020. With this black hole in the Budget, I am unable to understand the justification for fining cash-strapped councils for failing

[Andrew Gwynne]

to meet transfer targets. The Minister denied that it is a fine. But if it looks like a duck, waddles like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is a duck; and this is a fine.

The Government are at odds with the whole sector. As the LGA has also argued, I am unable to see how this will not make the financial pressures affecting social care even worse. Ministers have failed to understand the depth of the problem with delayed transfer. Too many patients are stuck in hospital who could be better cared for elsewhere, but ensuring that patients can be cared for in the right settings requires investment in not only social care, but intermediate care, reablement services, and sheltered and supported housing. Added to that, we know that there are issues about pay too.

I urge the House to recognise that this problem does not fall on party lines: these cuts hurt all our communities, whichever side of the House we sit on. The *Evening Standard* reported this week on a new poll. Three quarters of Conservative councillors said that long-term funding for children's social care was a major concern. Over half said the Government's cuts had made it difficult to deliver legally required services. So this is a crisis in not just adult social care but children's services.

History will not look kindly on a Government who promised so little and delivered even less. That is why I urge Members on both sides of the House to vote to support Labour's motion. Abstention is a cop-out—join us in the Lobby.

3.50 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** This has been a wide-ranging and important debate on one of the most important social issues and challenges we face in our country.

Delivering good-quality care for our most vulnerable people is a clear priority for this Government. To ensure local government has the resources to fund adult social care through to 2019-20, the Government have given councils access to £9.25 billion of dedicated funding for adult social care over the next three years.

Beyond the immediate term, there is also the need to address the challenges of social care for our ageing population. Therefore, the Government will bring forward proposals for consultation, to build widespread support for reform. The consultation will set out options to improve the social care system, put it on a more secure financial footing, support people and their families to prepare for old age, and address issues related to the quality of care and the variation in practice.

Overall, local government spent £14.9 billion in 2016-17 on adult social care—up by £500 million from 2015-16, and over £500 million more than budgeted for. This year, councils are budgeted to spend £15.6 billion.

The Government continue to provide local government with the additional resource it needs to deliver care. At the spring Budget, an additional £2 billion of funding in England was announced, of which £1 billion has been provided in 2017-18. That was in addition to the resource made available in the local government finance settlement, where we provided £240 million for adult

social care. It was also in addition to the £2.5 billion put through local authorities in the improved better care fund.

Alongside Government funding, more flexibility has been provided. Local government has been able to raise more income through the adult social care precept, with the flexibility to increase it by 3% this year. That adult social care flexibility was subsequently used by 147 out of 152 social care authorities, with 109 using the full allocation, or close to the full allocation, of 3%. I should point out that it is also down to the Government that, overall, council tax remains lower in real terms than it was in 2010.

In terms of the integration of health and social care, we should remember that the better care fund is the first national mandatory integration policy. We should not shy away from the fact that integration is not easy, but the Government are supportive of the best-performing systems, where local government and the NHS work together to tackle the difficult issue of delayed transfers of care. We understand that delayed transfers of care are only one part of what authorities deal with to deliver social care in communities up and down the country, but we also understand that improving working between local government and the NHS is absolutely key to delivering better joined-up care for local people.

It is also right that, in November, we will consider a review of the 2018-19 allocations of social care funding provided at the spring Budget 2017 for areas that are not performing well. We expect that that would encompass only a small number of local authorities, although we are clear that the funding will remain with local government to be used for adult social care. We also favour, if needed, the option that places conditions on how a proportion of the 2018-19 funding is used to support an authority's delayed transfer of care performance.

**Barbara Keeley:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Jones:** I will in a moment, but I want to make a little more progress and mention some of the people who have spoken in the debate.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) finally hit the nail on the head right at the end of his speech in saying that we needed to approach this important, difficult and delicate subject in a non-partisan way. I was very disappointed, though, that 98% of his speech was spent on the politics of fear and, in some ways, misinformation. That was very much out of kilter with much of the debate across the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), the Chair of the Health Committee, made some very important points. She was absolutely right first to pay tribute to careworkers and carers—that is absolutely the right thing for us to do. She mentioned the remuneration of care work, as did other hon. Members across the House. It is important to point out that careworking is an extremely important job. The national living wage, which was £5.93 an hour in 2010, is now £7.50 an hour, and lower-paid workers pay £1,200 less in income tax than they did in 2010. We are well on the path to rewarding careworkers far more than they have been in the past, although we would acknowledge that there is more to do.

**Barbara Keeley:** If the Minister values care, would he comment on untrained members of the public being offered £1,000 a month to rent out rooms as an alternative to care for patients recovering from surgery? Do he and his Government support that, because it is frightening from a safeguarding point of view?

**Mr Jones:** It is important that we always have workers who are trained, and we are providing care in good-quality settings. We heard several times that 80% of our care homes are providing quality of care that is either good or outstanding.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes mentioned the integration of health and social care, and the importance of the health service in the context of the review that is going to be done. She spoke about future planning of the workforce, which is also very important.

The hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) made some very sensible points and comments about the politics of dealing with long-term funding of social care, and said that it does not serve people or their carers if we are partisan. Even so, she slipped into a bit of partisanship towards the end, showing how difficult this situation is. On the whole, however, she made some very sensible points.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) was right to point out that this is a long-standing issue that many Governments over decades have ducked. She mentioned the situation in Derbyshire with her council, which seems to have been left a difficult legacy by its Labour predecessor. I am certainly willing to meet her to discuss that issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) mentioned the positive impact that the £2 billion of additional funding that was announced in the Budget for the adult social care precept has had in his area. He also made a sensible point about the potential for devolution to bring more integration between health and social care. My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) said that health and social care is not just a responsibility for national Government because there is a responsibility on us all, particularly at a local level within the health service and in our local authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) raised the importance of suitable accommodation to enable older people to live independently and help us to avoid many of the healthcare costs that we face. My hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) mentioned the pressure that the national living wage puts on the system. It is quite right that we pay our careworkers more, and that is why we have given councils access to up to £9.25 billion of extra funding by 2020.

Many positive speeches were made during the debate, but unfortunately I have not got time to mention them all. The problems in social care have developed over

many decades. The Government are absolutely right to recognise the challenges of adult social care and tackle them head-on. That is why we have provided further funding up to 2020. We need to address the issue, and that is why we will work across the sector to bring about change and a sustainable solution for the future so that the most vulnerable in our society can get the care that they deserve and need.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes the Conservative Party's manifesto commitment to a funding proposal for social care which would have no cap on care costs and would include the value of homes in the means test for care at home; further notes that this proposal would leave people with a maximum of only £100,000 of assets; calls on the Government to confirm its intention not to proceed with this commitment; and further calls on the Government to remove the threat to withdraw social care funding from, and stop fines on, local authorities for Delayed Transfers of Care and to commit to the extra funding needed to close the social care funding gap for 2017 and the remaining years of the 2017 Parliament.

**Barbara Keeley:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Again we see the Government refusing to vote on a motion—[*Interruption.*]

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. I cannot hear what the hon. Lady at the Dispatch Box is saying, and she is speaking to me.

**Barbara Keeley:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Again, we see the Government abstaining—refusing to vote on a motion tabled by the Opposition. This time, we have been debating vital issues: the funding crisis in social care and whether the Government will confirm their intention not to proceed with the policy for funding social care that they put forward, frightening people, during the general election.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) has just described this Government as the “weakest and most divided” for many years. May I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether it is in order for this weak and divided Government to pick and choose when they will vote on matters that are raised in this House?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Lady has taken this opportunity to make the points that she wishes to make, and the House has heard them. She knows, and the House knows, that the Government's decision on what they answer, what Ministers say at the Dispatch Box and how individual Members of this House choose to vote—or not—are not matters for the Chair. We will have no more points of order on that; it is not a point of order.

## Supported Housing

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. People must not walk in front of the person who is about to speak from the Dispatch Box.

4.3 pm

**John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House calls on the Government to halt its current plans to cap, at the local housing allowance rate, help with housing costs for tenants of supported housing and to adopt instead a system which safeguards the long-term future and funding of supported housing, building on the recommendations of the First Joint Report of the Communities and Local Government and Work and Pensions Committees of Session 2016-17, Future of supported housing, HC 867.

This is the third Labour-led debate to confront the Government about their plans for supported housing. Perhaps it is a case of third time lucky, after the Prime Minister announced at Prime Minister's questions this morning that the Government had backed away from capping help with supported housing costs at the local housing allowance rate. I am really glad, as I was in previous debates, to see so many Members from all parts of the House in the Chamber. The Prime Minister's announcement was certainly welcome, and it was good to see Labour yet again winning the argument and making the running on Government policy.

**Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab):** I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) will also try to catch my right hon. Friend's eye, but may I say that this was a unanimous proposal from two Select Committees—the Work and Pensions Committee and the Communities and Local Government Committee—and that we are immensely pleased by the Government response? May I also take this opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), who was the lead member of the Work and Pensions Committee on the report and steered it to success?

**John Healey:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. He pre-empts some of the tributes I am going to pay to members of his Committee and the Communities and Local Government Committee for the role they have played. In particular, I want to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), who chaired the sittings on the very important joint report, which was published back in May.

After what the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister's questions earlier, we now know what the Government will not do, but we do not know what they will do. She said that the full announcement on future plans will be made on Tuesday, which is Hallowe'en, so the real question is: will this be trick or treat? Let us hope that this is third time lucky, and that the Government get the policy right this time. Ensuring that they did was the purpose of this debate, and even after the Prime Minister's partial statement about the Government's future plans, it remains the purpose of this debate.

Since November 2015, these plans have been like the sword of Damocles hanging over the homes of more than 700,000 frail and elderly people, young people leaving care, homeless people and those with dementia,

mental illness and learning disabilities, as well as ex-service veterans and women fleeing domestic violence. We called this debate to give a voice to the continued urgent warnings of organisations such as Mencap, Age Concern, Centrepoint, the Salvation Army and Women's Aid, and their concerns are still important as the Government finalise their plans. We called this debate to give Parliament a further opportunity to play its proper role in challenging and contributing to Government policy decisions, and our concerns are still important today. I trust that Ministers realise that Parliament, the housing sector and the Government must all play an essential part in sorting out a good, long-term system for supported housing for the future.

It is now nearly two years since the Chancellor revealed the plan for crude cuts to supported housing via the local housing allowance, it is over a year since the second version of the same plan was announced and there is now less than 18 months until any changes are set to start. The fears of many of the most vulnerable people in our society are very real, and the damage is already being done to vital specialist housing at a time when we already need at least 17,000 more such homes. The National Housing Federation reports that 85% of all building plans for new supported, sheltered or extra care housing have been halted over the past two years by the Government's plans, and the Salvation Army says that the future of nine in 10 of its lifehouses for homeless people

“could be placed at risk.”

Our motion is designed to map a way forward. It calls on the Government, first, to halt its current plans—tick. That is what the Prime Minister announced today, and that is what the Government say they will do. It also calls on the Government to adopt instead a system that safeguards the long-term future and funding of supported housing, building on the recommendations of the joint report. I hope that Members on both sides of the House will signal their support for this approach during the debate, and then back the motion so that the will of Parliament is clear to the Government.

Together, the Communities and Local Government Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee have done a really important service to the House and to the Government with their recent report. As I did earlier, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Gloucester and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood. I look forward to their speeches and to the contributions of many hon. Members on both sides of the House who I have previously heard make a very persuasive case in calling on the Government to change their plans.

Let me turn instead to the heart of what is at stake and what still remains to be settled. The decision to drop the local housing allowance part of the plans is welcome, as we and the Select Committee have been clear about the Government's error in this regard: it is too low and too variable to be the basis for supported housing. Will the Minister confirm today that any system for setting the level of support for those in supported housing will take full account of the costs? Will he confirm that the long-term funding levels will reflect the need for supported housing now and in the future? Will he guarantee that this policy will not be subject to the same ill-conceived, ill-judged decisions that we have seen over the past two years?

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, and I agree with what he is saying. Does he agree that it was a particularly bizarre proposal to link funding to the local housing allowance when all the evidence shows that the cost of providing supported housing bears no relation whatever to the local housing allowance in a particular area?

**John Healey:** My right hon. Friend is exactly right, and the Select Committees' joint report was very clear about that.

Not only does the LHA bear little relation to the actual cost, when the cost of providing supported housing is pretty consistent wherever people are in the country, but an LHA-based approach—I am glad the Government have backed off—would cause particular problems in the north and the midlands, where the level of the LHA is much lower. In my own area, the South Yorkshire Housing Association says that the majority of the 1,000 places it provides in supported housing for the frail elderly, people with learning disabilities and the homeless are at risk, and describes that approach as “catastrophic”. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), who knows such a great deal about welfare and benefits issues, is absolutely right.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is right that LHA would be completely unsuitable as a measure when rental costs and local housing markets are different, but is it not also the case that support costs vary between, say, sheltered housing at one end of the scale, where there might effectively just be a concierge service, and intensive support for ex-offenders or young people leaving care at the other?

**John Healey:** That is true, and my hon. Friend is another of the House's experts in this area. However, it is also the case that the housing benefit element of the costs of supported housing is designed to cover the housing costs and the management of housing costs, not the personal or support care costs.

Sometimes there is a confusion of those issues, but there should be no confusion for the Minister or the Government. In their own review in 2011, they listed the main reasons behind the costs of supported housing, where housing costs are often greater than those for general needs housing, saying that they included

“providing 24 hour housing management cover...providing more housing related support than in mainstream housing...organising more frequent repairs or refurbishment...providing more frequent mediating between tenants; and...providing extra CCTV and security services”.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) is absolutely right, and I am sure that the House will look forward to hearing her speak, and that she too will welcome the Prime Minister's partial announcement today.

For all of us in this House and, in particular, for the 700,000 people who currently have their homes in supported or sheltered housing, what the Government do instead matters a great deal. The devil is always in the detail and the funding. We are told that we will have to wait until next week for the detail, so let me turn to funding. The previous Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, now the deputy Prime Minister, said in a written ministerial statement in September 2016:

“we will bring in a new funding model which will ensure that the sector continues to be funded at current levels”.—[*Official Report*, 15 September 2016; Vol. 614, c. 37WS.]

That is simply not true. Total funding is only protected in year one, 2019-20. In year two, the sector faces a funding cliff edge with cuts of more than £500 million scheduled from April 2020. Government Members are right to look puzzled and a little alarmed. This has not been mentioned by Ministers and it is only evident in the small print of the Treasury's fiscal reports. If Members look closely at the Treasury documents, as I have, they will see exactly what the Government plan.

On page 87 of the Budget 2016 Red Book, table 2.2 shows that the Government scored cuts to supported housing spending of £390 million in 2020-21. Following the pledge by the then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to protect funding, page 12 of the Treasury's 2016 autumn statement policy costings report reflected the commitment that overall funding for supported housing will be the same in 2019-20. However, it also confirmed that the amended policy announced by the right hon. Gentleman will

“generate additional savings in subsequent years as it is applied to the stock of supported housing tenants”.

In other words, that includes all current supported housing tenants and not just, as originally planned, the new ones. It shows additional cost cuts in 2020-21 of £160 million. Of course, that was updated in the Budget 2017 Red Book to £165 million. As well as the £390 million of cuts already announced, therefore, there will be a further cut in 2020-21, the second year of any new system.

The upshot is clear: Ministers have lined up costs for this programme. And they have lined up cuts of over half a billion pounds for year two of any new system they put in place, and further cuts after that. This is a funding cliff edge for existing supported housing and it entirely demolishes Ministers' claims that they will protect supported housing. Will the Minister confirm today that the Government will make good this funding gap in full, so that the Prime Minister's pledge this morning to the House in Prime Minister's questions can be properly honoured?

In our motion, we say the Government should adopt a system that

“safeguards the long-term future and funding of supported housing.”

I want to set out four tests for the Government, which explain what we mean and how we will judge the detail of any plans for change. First, any new funding system must reflect the real cost of running supported housing. Secondly, any new funding system must be needs-led and be able to deal with increases in demand and need for supported housing, not subject to arbitrary cash limits such as departmental revenue spending. Thirdly, any funding model for the future must take account of the particular needs of very short-term accommodation, including homeless hostels and women's refuges—this is one of the very serious failings with universal credit. Fourthly, and most importantly, any new funding system must not lead to the closure of any vitally needed supported housing.

This is a Government with no majority or mandate for domestic policy, because this is not covered by their deal with the Democratic Unionist party. It is Britain's first minority Government for 38 years. As a Parliament, and as Members on all sides, we are still coming to terms with the much bigger role and much stronger say we have in Government policy decisions.

[John Healey]

The influence—[*Interruption.*] The Minister snorts, but the truth is that the influence of Members from all sides has had a very significant bearing on the policy on supported housing. It has been very significant so far, but there is a good deal more to do. I trust that Ministers will see this debate as another important contribution.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**John Healey:** I will. I was just about to finish, but I will give way to my right hon. Friend.

**Mr Howarth:** Good timing on my part! I suggest to my right hon. Friend that a fifth test might be in order: would any new Government scheme enable more supported housing to be built, thereby releasing family housing for those in housing need, while also saving money on care home costs further down the line?

**John Healey:** My right hon. Friend is right; perhaps that should be a fifth test. Certainly the first part of any fifth test must be whether, when the Government announce their plan, all the schemes halted in the last couple of years then get the go-ahead.

Finally, Parliament, the housing sector and the Government must together sort out a good long-term system for supported housing. I hope that our motion and this debate can be the basis for just that.

4.20 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** I thank the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) for securing this important debate and for allowing me to set out the Government's position on supported housing.

I have great respect for the right hon. Gentleman, but I think today he has somewhat overplayed his hand. I welcome his contribution, but in a sense he has come to the table rather late. I will set out our approach to this important issue and demonstrate how we have listened to the sector, to the people who need this important support and indeed to the joint Select Committee.

We are currently putting the finishing touches to our new funding model for supported housing, and as the Prime Minister said earlier, there will be an announcement next week. That is clearly within the timetable I have described in several debates now and which I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out to the Communities and Local Government Committee last week.

Our response to the consultation and the new funding model for supported housing follows our extensive and constructive engagement with providers and local authorities, the aim of which was to ensure we got the model right. I am sure that we all recognise the invaluable role that supported housing plays in our society. It helps some of our country's most vulnerable people to maintain their independence and is a vital lifeline for hundreds and thousands of people up and down the country.

Supported housing is also an important investment that brings savings to other parts of the public sector,

such as health and social care. In fact, we estimate that the annual net fiscal benefit of providing supported housing is probably upwards of £3.5 billion. It is essential, therefore, that we develop and deliver a sustainable long-term funding model for supported housing and that it works for providers, commissioners, taxpayers and, most importantly, vulnerable tenants.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Does the Minister accept, though, that during this prolonged period of uncertainty it has been hard for providers to bring forward new schemes? In my city, we have seen more and more people sleeping on the streets, and I am told that there is huge pressure on supported housing. Does he accept that during this period the situation has been made much more difficult?

**Mr Jones:** We have provided 27,000 new supported housing units since 2011, and I shall say something in a moment about our ambition to develop new units. However, the hon. Gentleman is right in that, before making a long-term commitment, providers want to make sure that there is a long-term, sustainable source of funds.

I think it is important that we took time to organise our consultation and listen carefully to providers, to the sector as a whole and to local government. I believe that when our policy and our plans are announced next week, it will be clear that we also listened to the Select Committees, which did a very positive job in respect of the policy that the Government are so keen to get right.

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): What my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) said was quite right. I cannot understand why the Minister wants us to be pleased that the Government have listened, given that they had more than two years in which to do that listening, and in the meantime our supported housing units have suffered, homelessness has increased, and women in refuges have been caused great uncertainty because the people who run those refuges have not been able to plan properly. Why has it taken so long?

**Mr Jones:** The hon. Lady makes a good point about women's refuges in particular. I can tell her that the number of bed spaces in those refuges has increased since 2010, and has not decreased as she tried to imply, but I take her point.

I must stress that getting this right has been an important process. The problem with the supported housing that is currently provided is that, although the vast majority of providers are very trustworthy and provide a good level of support for very vulnerable people, other organisations that purport to provide supported housing, and charge the taxpayer for it, are not actually providing support for those people. We have had to address that important matter by ensuring that there is oversight in the system.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): One of the submissions that the Minister has no doubt read is from the Salvation Army, which commissioned a report from Frontier Economics. I am sure he does not think that the Salvation Army is one of the organisations that are not able to provide good-quality care, but, according to

the report, it is unable to provide the service that it would like to provide under the existing cost regime. Can the Minister reassure the Salvation Army that there will be no further cost-cutting? That would be so unfair to the most vulnerable in our society.

**Mr Jones:** Organisations like the Salvation Army provide a very important service in many communities throughout the country, helping some of the most vulnerable people who have ended up on the streets and sleeping rough. As I think was mentioned in the joint Select Committee report, we have been very conscious of the need to look after the future of short-term as well as longer-term supported housing. That point was also made by the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne. I think that when our proposals are presented, the hon. Gentleman will see that we have certainly considered organisations that provide short-term supported accommodation, and we want to ensure that people receive the help that they need from organisations such as the one he mentioned.

Our consultation ended earlier this year. We welcomed all 592 responses, and since then we have taken careful stock of the views of local government providers and tenants. As I have already said several times, we also welcomed the Select Committees' inquiry and subsequent report on the future funding of supported housing. I thank the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) and the other members of those Committees for the part they played in putting forward many solutions on this important issue that we must get right. As I have said on several previous occasions, when our final proposals come forward it will be seen that we have listened.

**John Healey:** Will the Minister give the undertaking that when the Government are finally ready to announce their full proposals, that announcement will be made here in the House, and that the Minister responsible will make an oral statement so that Members of all parties have a chance to hear and to question the Minister about those plans?

**Mr Jones:** These are very detailed proposals because this is a very detailed policy area, and therefore Members will need to digest them. I will be candid with the right hon. Gentleman: we are currently considering what form that response takes, in terms of how we inform the House. However, we will certainly want to set out our plans, which we think are a very positive solution to the challenges in this regard, and will want to engage not only with Members, but with providers and investors, and with the people who receive this important support.

**David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** The Minister lists the people he will be consulting; will he discuss further with the Welsh Assembly Government how the proposals will play out in Wales? As is the case for my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), schemes have been delayed in Wales because there has been uncertainty about what happens with the block grant, whether there is a Barnett consequential, what happens with the Department for Work and Pensions, and how this will work at a local level. Will he discuss this matter with Cardiff, and has he already done so?

**Mr Jones:** I will reassure the right hon. Gentleman by saying that our officials are already engaged with officials in the devolved Administrations in Wales and Scotland, and will continue that dialogue because this is an important issue in England. Our Department is responsible, with the DWP, for this policy in England, but there is also an implication for Scotland and Wales, and we want to make sure we support the implementation of the new system in those Administrations as well.

As I have said, I believe that our proposals will show that we have listened. We have paid careful attention to user groups concerned about short-term supported accommodation, as well as the concerns expressed in the Committees' joint report. We know that a separate model is needed for short-term funding, and this different approach must work for both providers and vulnerable tenants. Hostels, refuges and other forms of short-term accommodation play a vital role in our society. They provide consistent high-quality support for vulnerable people, many of whom have experienced a real crisis in their lives, or are experiencing one at that point.

In particular, we are fully committed to ensuring that no victim of domestic abuse is turned away from the support they need. Since 2014 we have invested £33.5 million in services to support victims of domestic abuse, including refuges. Furthermore, in February we announced that 76 projects across the country will receive a share of our £20 million fund to further support victims of domestic abuse. We want to be clear that everyone who is eligible under the current system to have their housing costs met by housing benefit will continue to have their housing costs met through our funding model for short-term accommodation, and, as has been mentioned on several occasions in this debate, we also recognise that the sector needs the clarity to invest in future growth.

We recognise that we must foster and boost the supply of much-needed housing, building on the rent certainty given by the Prime Minister in her speech at the party conference and the announcement that she has made today. With demand set to increase, we know that it is vital to design a system that is fit for purpose.

Since 2011, we have delivered 27,000 units of specialist and general housing for disabled, vulnerable and older people. We know that the model of funding will need to build and encourage long-term sustainability, as well as supporting the development of new supply. It must also make the best use of the existing provision. Providers and investors have continued to bid for capital grant funding to finance and develop new supported and sheltered housing through this process, but we recognise that the supported housing sector needs greater certainty over funding to encourage and bring forward the new supply that many organisations up and down the country are looking to achieve. That certainty will help the sector to continue to deliver much-needed new supported housing and older people's sheltered housing. We must also inject confidence into the sector by bringing clarity to future arrangements and, as I have said, we will do that shortly. Our proposals will show that we have taken the time to get this right, that we have listened and that we have put forward a model that works for longer-term accommodation.

I also want to mention strategic planning. Our continued engagement with local authorities and providers of supported housing has been highly constructive in

[Mr Marcus Jones]

that regard. We have been able to broaden our understanding of the importance of local strategic planning, partnership working, commissioning and oversight. The Select Committees' joint report has highlighted the need to ensure that local authorities have sufficient guidance, time and resources if they are successfully to implement the new funding regime for supported housing. We have carefully considered these issues. We want to encourage local government, providers of supported housing and the wider public sector to continue to develop a joined-up strategic and holistic approach with a greater focus on local outcomes, oversight and value for money. We have also listened and recognised that, after our announcement, we will need to continue to engage with local government and the sector over the preparation and implementation of our proposals. As the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne pointed out, timing will be an important part of that.

We want the design of the reformed funding model to be flexible and responsive. We want it to meet the variety of demands placed on it for such a diverse sector and client base. We have therefore been working across Government, particularly with our colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions, to consider the needs of all supported housing client groups. Our reformed model must work for vulnerable older people and disabled people as well as those with learning difficulties and those suffering from mental ill health. In this regard, I believe that our announcement will demonstrate our willingness to listen.

We are fully dedicated to safeguarding the most vulnerable people in our society. That is why we announced £400 million of funding in the spending review to deliver new specialist affordable homes for vulnerable and elderly people and those with learning disabilities. This is also why the Department of Health has committed £200 million to build new homes through the care and support specialised housing fund. On top of that, the Department of Health has committed £1 billion by 2020-21 for mental health services, including putting crisis resolution and home treatment teams on a 24/7 footing. Moreover, the spring Budget 2017 announced an additional £2 billion of funding in England to spend on adult social care, £1 billion of which will be provided this year.

As I hope I have made clear, protecting the most vulnerable in our society is a key commitment of this Government, and developing a workable and sustainable funding model for supported housing remains a priority. We have listened to the sector through our consultation, we have taken account of the joint report of the Work and Pensions Committee and the Communities and Local Government Committee, I have taken on board the comments that the right hon. Gentleman made today, although they came to us very late in the day, and next week, as the Prime Minister set out, we will come forward with a positive, forward-looking solution to secure the future supply of supported housing.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. Before I call the spokesman for the Scottish National party, it will be obvious to the House that a great many people wish to speak this afternoon and that we have

limited time. There will be an initial time limit of seven minutes, but that is likely to be reduced later. The time limit of course does not apply to Mr Neil Gray.

4.40 pm

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will keep my comments as brief as possible. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in yet another important Opposition day debate—important, but unfortunate. Just like the debates on universal credit and many other topics, it has had to be called due to potentially damaging and ill-thought-out proposed social security cuts and changes by the UK Government.

It appeared as though the debate would be characterised by the many features that have unfortunately become a recurring theme in the past few years: changes being proposed in the name of austerity and deficit reduction at all costs, a lack of consultation with the relevant bodies and those who will be directly impacted, and no thought given to what some of the possible consequences may be. However, the Prime Minister's answer today to the question from the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster)—not to take away from his creativity or independence of thought, I suspect that he may have had some inspiration from somewhere for that question—stated that the UK Government will not apply the local housing allowance cap to supported housing, nor implement it in the wider social rented sector. That suggests that the UK Government finally listened to the concerns raised by Parliament, the relevant Select Committees and the important voices within the sector who have done fantastic work campaigning against the cut, and they finally realised the alarm and concern that the uncertainty and potential consequences of this policy announcement were causing. It is a welcome step, but as the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), the shadow Minister, said, the devil will of course be in the detail, and we will be keeping a close eye on the consultation response when it is published next week.

I hope that the reversal is not a one-off and that the Government will continue to review other policies that have been causing similar apprehension in Parliament and among constituents and relevant organisations—I am of course thinking of universal credit—but it is still worrying that the announcement was made only as a result of the Minister being forced to answer to the House in this way, thus prolonging the agony for a sector that has faced potential disinvestment as a result of the uncertainty caused by the proposals.

Such discussions should have taken place before the previous Chancellor's announcement in the 2015 autumn statement that he planned to cap the amount of rent that housing benefit will cover in the social rented sector to the relevant local housing allowance rate. That announcement raised many concerns about the impact on the whole sector, and as we are here to discuss today, it was particularly worrying for tenants and providers of supported accommodation due to the higher rents that understandably typify this sector. I hope that today's announcement has thankfully nullified some of the key reasons why this debate was called, but the debate still provides a useful opportunity to remind ourselves of what is meant by supported accommodation and why it plays such a vital role throughout all our constituencies and communities.

Supported accommodation encompasses a wide range of different housing types, including hostels, refuges and sheltered housing. It exists to provide a lifeline to some of the most vulnerable within society: women fleeing domestic violence who are in need of protection, those with disabilities who require support in their day-to-day living and elderly people who require assistance to maintain their independence. In my constituency, one of the best examples of that is Monklands Women's Aid, which is run by Sharon Aitchison and does fantastic work providing responsive domestic abuse services to women, children and young people.

Women's Aid's response to the UK Government's original proposals emphasised the fact that benefit entitlement provides some sustainability and financial security to refuges in an otherwise challenging funding environment and is a vital interim protection until a sustainable funding solution for refuge is secured. Women's Aid went on to call for the maintenance of the current funding system until a sustainable model for funding both the housing and support costs that refuges face is fully developed, piloted and secured.

It is crucial to preserve the stability on housing costs that housing benefit provides until the UK Government fulfil the commitment to a sustainable solution for both elements of refuge funding. Women's Aid also highlighted the important point, of which the UK Government now appear to have taken cognisance, that:

"Designed to control housing benefit costs in the private sector, LHA rates bear no relation to the actual costs of providing supported accommodation such as refuges."

Such places not only benefit those individuals and groups who rely on their services but provide a wider societal positive economic externality.

According to the National Housing Federation, the annual saving to the taxpayer through the reduced reliance of older tenants on health and social care services—that is also topical today—is estimated to be £3,000 per person. For people living with learning difficulties and mental health issues, the saving is between £12,500 and £15,500. The saving that the sector provides to the UK Government from lower costs for the NHS, social care and the criminal justice system is estimated to be in the region of £3.5 billion.

The reasons why supported accommodation carries higher rent costs than mainstream social housing are well known, and the previous Chancellor should have been more aware of them before he made this alarming policy announcement in 2015. Zhan McIntyre of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has said that the extra costs include 24-hour staffing of some facilities, the installation and monitoring of CCTV, high turnover rates in the accommodation, repair costs and enhanced fire monitoring and safety equipment.

Although this reversal is welcome, further clarity is still required on what the long-term policy and funding model will be and on whether the proposed replacement will be adequate for the future security of the sector, as the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne said.

A survey by the National Housing Federation in May 2017 suggests that some of the damage of the 2015 policy announcement has already been done, as it found that plans to develop new supported housing units have been reduced from 8,800 to 1,350 in the face of ongoing uncertainty about future funding streams, representing

a decrease of 85%. That is particularly worrying given the growing demand for specialist and supported housing, and as with mainstream housing, it is essential that we find ways to incentivise, not to deter, further investment. It will be interesting to see how the Government aim to fill that rather large gap.

Shelter has raised concerns that the proposal essentially "completely upends the financing of supported housing and introduces a huge amount of uncertainty to the sector."

It is also particularly worried that, with local authority finances already squeezed,

"funding identified for housing costs could be used for other services."

On 15 December 2016, the Select Committee on Work and Pensions and the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government announced a joint inquiry into supported housing funding, the report of which was published before the general election. The report, which my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) worked on, welcomed efforts to find a long-term sustainable funding mechanism for the sector but said:

"we share the concerns expressed across the sector that the funding proposals, as they stand, are unlikely to achieve these objectives."

Now the Government have stated that they intend to abandon this route, we hope they will also announce a robust and sustainable plan and will protect the sector from any further announcements of cuts.

The American poet Robert Frost once defined a home as

"the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in."

For many people, the only suitable homes available are offered by the providers of supported accommodation. The Government's reversal today is welcome, but concerns about the need for a system that safeguards the long-term future and funding of supported accommodation still need to be addressed to ensure that the most vulnerable people in our society always have a place that will take them in.

4.49 pm

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I welcome this debate, as it follows on well from the half-hour Westminster Hall debate I secured on 10 October. That was very well attended and, although I was able to take some interventions, I am very aware that a lot of colleagues were not able to have their say. Today's debate provides a further opportunity for Members from across the House to re-emphasise the vital importance of putting the funding of supported housing on a sustainable long-term footing. The task in front of us is not straightforward, but the more we debate the matter and talk about it in a constructive way, the better is the prospect of putting in place a sustainable system that can bring significant benefits to people who face very real challenges as they go about their everyday lives. We need a sustainable long-term solution; not a sticking plaster.

The case for supported housing is compelling. There is a rising demand for care and support, because of an ageing population and increased mental ill health and learning disabilities. A secure and comfortable home should be the cornerstone of life for everyone, regardless of their background and personal circumstances. If that cornerstone is in place, older people can retain their

[Peter Aldous]

dignity and their independence, those fleeing domestic violence can find refuge and stabilise their lives and the homeless can more easily make the transition from living on the street to a settled home.

Supported housing provides outstanding value for money. For the elderly, it is less expensive than an alternative residential care setting. It has huge strategic advantages for councils providing adult social care services within very tight budgets, and its costs compare very favourably with those in the NHS. It is vital that the two Departments leading this debate, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions, liaise and work closely with the Department of Health. There is a need to think outside departmental silos and to engage with NHS England.

For a relatively small cost to the public, supported housing reduces the strain on the NHS and care services, reduces unnecessary hospital stays and prevents moves to more costly residential care. It is important to highlight that if we get this right and put in place a sustainable and workable long-term funding system, it will be much easier to leverage in additional social investment capital into the sector. Cheyne Capital advises that if a sustainable framework had been in place over the past two years, it would have invested £120 million in supported housing.

Taking into account the strategic importance of supported housing, the Government were right to carry out the first evidence review of the sector in 20 years, publishing their findings on 21 October last year. On the same day, they launched their consultation on their preliminary proposals, setting up four task and finish groups to address specific challenges. The YMCA has welcomed much of the preparatory work that has been carried out, highlighting the Government's commitment and willingness to engage with the sector. It is also important to highlight the significant amount of funding provided by the Government over the past five years, which the Minister has outlined.

The Government published their preliminary funding proposals on 15 September last year and these were then put out to consultation. Various concerns have been identified, and as we have seen with the announcement by the Prime Minister today on the removal of the local housing allowance cap for supported housing, the Government are very much listening.

There is a concern that the proposals are a one-size-fits-all approach and do not properly take account of the needs of the different parts of the sector—that has been highlighted by Centrepoint. There is also a worry that a postcode lottery might be created—Sense has highlighted that as well. We hope that today's announcements will remove part of that concern, but the issue needs to be looked at closely.

There is clear evidence that developments are being put on hold; the Home Group advises that it has 1,842 homes in its build pipeline, but it has been unable to commit to developing these without clarity over future funding. There is a concern that the current proposed funding framework creates a funding gap for existing schemes—the YMCA has highlighted that. There are also worries about how the proposals will work alongside universal credit, as highlighted by Centrepoint and Emmaus.

On 1 May, the Communities and Local Government Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee published their unanimous joint report, in which they made three recommendations to complement and build on the Government's proposals. In my opinion, taking into account the feedback from across the sector, the Government should give full and serious consideration to adopting the recommendations. Along with five housing associations, my noble Friend Lord Best has looked at data from some 43,000 homes, and it appears that what they recommend does provide a viable and working option.

When the Government respond next week to the consultation that closed in February, they should put forward a revised funding framework. There should be a revised timetable for obtaining feedback on it, for carrying out an impact assessment and for road-testing it, and then for its introduction. There needs to be a clear direction of travel. As I have said, this is not a straightforward task, but I sense that by working together, a partnership of the Government, Parliament and the supported housing sector can put in place a long-lasting framework that addresses the concerns of many vulnerable people and in doing so provides them with dignity, peace of mind and hope.

4.56 pm

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Like the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) for their work in chairing the joint inquiry, which produced an excellent report that was agreed unanimously by both the Work and Pensions Committee and the Communities and Local Government Committee. It is a tribute to the strength of the Select Committee system that the joint inquiry listened to the evidence, which overwhelmingly said that the Government had got themselves into the wrong place on this issue.

The local housing allowance has no connection whatsoever with the costs of supported housing. By starting from the assumption that the two are connected, the Government could not come up with a system that worked. I am pleased that they have accepted that fundamental point today and agreed that the local housing allowance will play no part when they develop a new system to help supported housing. Having reached that position, away from the local housing allowance, the Government can get themselves to the point where they can develop a sensible system for the future. We will hear next Tuesday whether they will go on to develop such a sensible system, when they respond to the joint Select Committee report, but at least we are in a better place. I thank the Government for at least listening to that fundamental recommendation from the joint report.

We are currently waiting for the Government's detailed response, but as the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) just explained, Lord Best has worked with five housing associations and come forward with a considered piece of work that shows that a discrete and particular allowance for supported housing can be developed at no extra cost. Such an allowance should take into account the fact that the regional variations in the costs of providing supported housing throughout the country

are actually very small. If we develop a system with small regional variations that is more related to the actual costs of supported housing, with relatively small top-ups, we can provide a much greater degree of certainty for supported housing providers.

One of the problems with the LHA system was that the massive differences in LHA rates throughout the country meant that we needed significant top-ups, which varied up and down the country. That introduced great uncertainty to the system. Suppliers have not been sure whether the top-ups would be forthcoming in future years, so the housing providers have not been able to go to their investors and say with certainty what their future funding and financial arrangements are. That was a problem, but hopefully we have got away from it. The scheme that was put forward in principle by the National Housing Federation and worked on by the five housing associations and Lord Best shows that it can be done in a way that does not cost any more but results in a much more sensible and considered system. I hope that the Government will reflect on that and come forward with something similar when they respond next Tuesday. We look forward to the details of that response.

It is important that, next week, the Government give us a timeframe, because 85% of schemes in the pipeline have been put on hold. There have been doubts about the continuation of some existing schemes, but, certainly, a big hold has been put on other schemes in the pipeline. Those are schemes that are badly needed by people for a whole range of reasons. Some people struggling in their own homes, for example, could be helped to live in much better circumstances. Let us have a timeframe for implementation.

We must also recognise that it is not just what we think about the proposals, but what the local authorities think as they will have to implement the costs and provide the grants. Most importantly, it is also what the providers—housing associations and others—think about them. After next Tuesday, will they say, “We now feel that we can go forward with this investment with some degree of certainty?” Will the Government take on board the recommendations of the joint Select Committee to bring forward these proposals not merely with a timeframe, but in a considered way to allow organisations to adapt to the changes—adapt in a way that means that these developments will proceed in the future in the way that we all hope.

**Mr Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, alongside that geographical flexibility, it is also important that faith-based organisations, such as Emmaus and the Salvation Army, have flexibility about the model that they provide—very often they work alongside Shelter—so that the new system can accommodate a variety of approaches?

**Mr Betts:** The hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the Communities and Local Government Committee, makes a very good point. Supported housing is often a global term used to describe a very wide variety of provisions from different providers and different suppliers. When we have a grant system that covers all such provision, it is important that it also covers the differences, and allows for those differences to be reflected in the way that the provision is made. When we get that recommendation from the Government next week, in

response to the joint Select Committee report, it is important that it is flexible enough to take on board all those different circumstances. That is what I will be looking for. We will also be looking not just at the Government’s response, but at the response of housing associations and other providers as to how they view the Government’s proposals in terms of what they will enable them to do in the future.

I recognise that others wish to speak, so let me say to the Minister that I will wait for the recommendations next week before responding further. Obviously, that is the appropriate thing to do. However, it is clear that while the Minister’s response will be made directly to the two Select Committees—that is the way the Government will respond to our report—there clearly is a wider interest in the matter across the House among Members who do not necessarily belong to the two Select Committees. I am very happy to work with the Minister—I am sure that the same is true for my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead, the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee—to find a way in which these proposals can be shared and considered by all Members of the House. I hope that he will take on board that offer, because it is important that there is a wider debate on this as there is such widespread interest in it.

5.3 pm

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): There is consensus across this Chamber that supported housing plays a hugely important role across the United Kingdom. Such housing supports those with learning difficulties, allowing them to live as independently as possible; helps the elderly who need more support at home but do not require to be in care; provides a safe refuge for those escaping domestic violence; helps ex-offenders make a successful transition back into mainstream society; and supports those who have experienced being homeless.

Supported housing can transform the lives of young people whose families have either put them in care or are no longer around to support them. Being in supported housing means not only that those young people have a roof over their heads, but, for the first time, that many of them feel they have some stability. There are many examples of this public service being provided in my own area in the Scottish borders. There is the Eildon Group, which provides sheltered housing in Galashiels, Hawick and Melrose in my constituency to help older people live independently and with dignity in their local borders communities. Streets Ahead is an organisation that has helped adults with learning difficulties into supported accommodation across the Scottish borders for the past 30 years. Supported housing cuts across many other services. Without homes like these, our health and justice sectors would face even greater demands. Because supported housing helps so many people with different needs, it is a complex area and one that the UK Government have rightly taken time to consider.

The Opposition cannot have it both ways. They cannot criticise the Government for failing to listen to the sector, yet at the same time criticise them for taking too long to announce their proposals. The truth is that the Government have shown that they are willing to listen to concerns about future funding for supported housing. After initial concerns, implementation of the local housing cap was delayed and the Government proposed an alternative top-up funding model.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**John Lamont:** I just want to make some progress, if I may.

Today's announcement by the Prime Minister that the cap will not be rolled out for supported housing is just further evidence of the Government's willingness to listen. I look forward to the Government's detailed plans for supported housing funding, which will be published next week, as promised. I also welcome the Prime Minister's announcement that the UK Government have listened to concerns about the local housing allowance cap and that it will not be applied to supported housing or, indeed, the social housing sector more widely. I welcome the fact that the UK Government are engaging with the sector to decide how best to proceed. This is sensible.

**Matt Western:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but the criticism is actually about the cuts to local authority funding. To challenge his point, Warwickshire County Council's budget has been halved, and we have seen wholesale closures of much housing and many refuges, which has led to the number of people sleeping rough on the streets doubling in recent months. The issue is down to the lack of funding from central Government to our local authorities.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** The time limits in this debate are really tight, so we cannot have long interventions. An intervention should be a quick point.

**John Lamont:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point. Of course, in my area of the Scottish borders it is the Scottish National party, which is in government in Scotland, that is responsible for the cuts to our local authority budgets, not the UK Government. Therefore, I suggest that the intervention directed to me should be directed to my colleagues in the Scottish Parliament, where the Scottish Government have slashed local government funding.

It is right that the UK Government are looking at how to ensure a sustainable future for supported housing. Under the last Labour Administration, spending on housing benefit increased by 46% in real terms. Average social rents have risen by around 55 % over the past 10 years, compared to 23% in the private rented sector. This was simply just not sustainable. It is essential, therefore, that whatever funding model is introduced for supported housing is sustainable and works for providers, commissioners and vulnerable tenants, as well as for the taxpayer. Whatever funding model is adopted—and if devolved Administrations are given control over funding—it is crucial that local variations are considered.

The local housing allowance rate in my area of the Scottish borders is the lowest in the whole of Scotland. It is therefore important that any future funding model encourages investors to come to the borders instead of building elsewhere. I hope that the Minister has considered areas such as the borders when deciding on the future funding model for supported housing. Of course, it is also open to the SNP Scottish Government to provide additional funding for those in receipt of housing benefit

through discretionary housing payments, which have been devolved. I await with bated breath a commitment from any SNP Member who has concerns about the changes to supported housing payments actually to do something, rather than just complain. The Government have demonstrated that they are willing to listen to concerns.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is new to this House, so I will forgive him, but SNP Members have been doing and saying things on this issue for quite some time. It may interest him to know that a Department for Work and Pensions civil servant told the Communities and Local Government Committee on 13 June last year that the evidence review and policy conclusions would be published "before the summer recess". That was last year; we have been waiting for the Government to act for quite some time.

**John Lamont:** I thank the hon. Lady for that point. As she will know, I spent 10 years in the Scottish Parliament, listening to her colleagues complaining constantly about UK Government policy decisions. But despite the fact that the SNP there had more control over welfare than ever before, it was unable to use the powers it had to take action.

The Government have demonstrated themselves willing to listen to concerns about this important issue, and I welcome that. I am confident that we will see a set of proposals next week that will provide security and certainty for tenants and providers, as well as value for money for the taxpayer.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** I am sorry that I have to reduce the time limit now to five minutes because so many people still wish to speak.

5.10 pm

**Mr Ivan Lewis** (Bury South) (Lab): The Prime Minister's announcement that the Government will not apply the local housing allowance cap to supported housing is a welcome U-turn. The proposed changes would have been detrimental to hundreds of thousands of people across the country. This is a victory for the housing sector, the Labour Front Bench and those Tory MPs who sought to persuade Ministers to listen.

The application of the local housing allowance rate was totally inappropriate, as it is a market-facing rate that bears no resemblance to the cost of building a domestic violence shelter, extra care schemes or hostels for homeless people. Had the changes gone ahead, they would undoubtedly have led to an increase in homelessness, which has risen every year since 2010.

There are some on the Opposition side of the House who would accuse the Government of deliberately setting out to target vulnerable people across a whole range of policy areas. The truth is that the pattern since 2010 has been for the Government, using the aftermath of the financial crash as the excuse, to slash and burn budgets in Whitehall with scant regard for the impact on the ground. Too often, those without a voice have borne the brunt of those attacks, with the Government cynically calculating that there would be little or no impact in the ballot box.

**Ben Bradley** (Mansfield) (Con): Constantly under Labour Governments we heard stories of families claiming £100,000-plus in housing benefit. In welcoming the Government's announcement today on supported housing, does the hon. Gentleman accept that there was clearly a need to change the way we dealt with housing benefit?

**Mr Lewis:** This is not the place to repeat fake news. That was not the record of the last Labour Government. The reality is that rough sleeping was a consequence of the Thatcher years, which left a deeply divided and damaged society in this country. I see the consequences of that in my role as joint mayoral lead for rough sleeping and homelessness in Greater Manchester. Benefit sanctions and poverty, which mean that people cannot pay their rent, and the conduct of some private landlords are significant factors in the growing numbers of people sleeping on the streets of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Britain. We should collectively hang our heads in shame at this awful state of affairs.

In Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham has shown real political leadership by making rough sleeping and homelessness a top priority for his mayoralty. We welcome the fact that, last week, the Government made £3.7 million available to enable Greater Manchester to support people who would otherwise end up on the streets. However, the roll-out of universal credit, savage cuts to mental health services, and benefit sanctions are leading to more people ending up on the streets and without appropriate accommodation. The Government are therefore having to spend money mitigating the impact of their own destructive lack of joined-up social policies.

The test of any society and any Government should be how they treat the most vulnerable, and this Government have a shocking record. If today's U-turn is the beginning of a new approach, I and other Opposition Members will welcome it.

A supported home is vital. For women fleeing domestic violence, a supported home is a desperately needed safe space. For war veterans, a supported home is vital to help them to adjust to civilian life. For disabled people, a supported home is the bedrock of an independent life.

According to the National Housing Federation, the uncertainty the Government have been causing has already led to providers having to cut the number of supported housing homes they plan to build by 85%. What will the Government do in the context of this U-turn to deal with the fact that there has been a slowdown in the development of much-needed provision?

For thousands of vulnerable people—in my constituency and other constituencies—this U-turn is indeed welcome. The Government should now adopt the Select Committee recommendations in full. They must safeguard the long-term future, as well as the funding of supported housing and of the many excellent organisations that provide it on the frontline.

But beyond that, the Government should reflect on the consequences of failing to learn the lessons of history. The Thatcher era left a deeply divided and scarred society. I am sad to say that the current Prime Minister, who once spoke of the “nasty party”, will have to make many more U-turns to prevent this national tragedy from repeating itself.

5.14 pm

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister's comments earlier today that the Government have listened to the concerns of all interested parties and that as part of the wider review they will not be applying the 1% cap for supported housing.

I thank the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) for his contribution. He mentioned the National Housing Federation. After the comment this morning, David Orr, the chief executive of the National Housing Federation, reiterated its pleasure in seeing that the cap had been lifted. I know that it will also be welcomed by housing associations such as Havebury Housing Partnership in my constituency, as housing associations provide about 71% of all homes in the area.

I believe that we all want a funding model that is secure, sustainable and understandable for tenants and providers in the long term, and that supports vulnerable people. I thank the previous Work and Pensions Secretary for getting the consultation started. It has to take some time, for supported housing rent levels are higher and the need is greater. I would like to address a couple of areas where we need to think more broadly—standards and supply. This feeds into the DCLG-DWP joint Select Committee report “Future of supported housing”, which recommended using a simple banded supported housing allowance taking into account regional variations and ensuring that London does not overly benefit, as well as dealing with anomalies in the system through a separate model that works with short-term accommodation for those of my constituents who live in refuges and hostels.

People are at the centre of the proposals that we bring forward. We should recognise that in the light of the debate about social care that we had earlier. Whether in social care or supported housing, different groups have different needs, and we must have systems that are attuned to this. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the built environment, I am very keen that we improve standards in our housing, because arguably we need homes for a lifetime. Government need to be more attuned to all parts of the mix when granting planning permissions, as the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) pointed out.

We need to understand that challenges in rural areas require a more holistic approach with regard to housing. A recent survey by one of my district councils frightened the people it consulted. In rural areas such as Stowlangtoft, Needham Market and Rattlesden, we need to gently explain to our constituents the nature of any changes that we are going to make. The great staff who work with them are often peripatetic and are asked to do a difficult job. With regard to space standards, people must not be put in too small houses, and housing must be flexible. For instance, houses should accommodate designs for a wet room, modifications, and places for support equipment. We can do this, but we need to think across Departments. It is also important to utilise modern methods such as quality insulation, which brings down the cost of housing for these vulnerable groups. It seems anomalous that we do not build to a very high standard that saves the very poorest people costs on their everyday household bills.

The Home Group housing association has 1,842 homes in the pipeline, some of which are in my constituency. We want to see those built so that people can have

[Jo Churchill]

proper homes. What is being fed back from my local authorities is not just the lack of integrated supported housing but the need to ensure that it is part of the planning process, and that many wardens can live in the areas that they help to serve. Recent statistics show that 90,000 carers are over 85. This problem is going to grow, not go away. Our older people want to stay near the communities that they know and love, and younger people, like my young constituent who found it hard to travel to work because of her health requirements, need to be nearer to their places of work. We need systems that are attuned to our homeless people and refugees.

I look forward to a positive report on 31 October that gives clarity in looking at a banded system of sheltered, standard supported and specialised supported housing to ensure appropriate care and dignity for every one of our constituents.

5.20 pm

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased to take part in this important debate. It is important that the voice of the supported housing sector, with which I have a long association, is heard.

In their joint report, the Select Committees concluded that, overall, the sector offers good value for money and maximises tenants' quality of life, but that some parts of it need attention. I do not know why the Government did not start by dealing with the parts that need attention, rather than concentrating on the sector as a whole. Overall, it is in pretty fine fettle and just needs more money and support than it is currently getting.

George Lansbury did more than anyone to fight the Poor Law, but if he were here today he would be staggered by the similarities between his time and our own. Underlying the Government's approach seems to be talk about the undeserving poor. I always find that idea deeply upsetting, and we should all do our damndest to make sure that policy is never written with that in mind.

Among the many submissions that we have received, there seems to be one major cry for help, namely that the level of uncertainty has caused immense problems. I welcome the fact that the Government have climbed down on the question of local housing allowance. Their attachment to the cap struck me as a bizarre way of dealing with those who need the most help.

I also welcome the fact that the Government will publish their final report next week. We look forward to that with expectation, and we hope that it will do the things that it should. In that regard, the Government could do no better than to look at the suggestions on page 5 of the report written by Frontier Economics for the Salvation Army; I mentioned that report in my intervention on the Minister.

The Salvation Army report looks at three issues that need to be addressed. The first is cost drivers, which include different geographical areas—that has been referred to—accommodation size and accommodation landlord type. The second issue considered in the report is how the cost compares with that of other provision. There is a range of providers of different types of housing, across a very wide spectrum, including housing for older people and the disabled, who need more generic

help; provision for specialist groups, such as substance abusers and former service personnel, who have been mentioned; and very specialised provision, such as refuges for women who have faced abuse. The third issue considered in the report, and the one that is of most concern to many of us, is the top-up provided because of the nature of the support that very vulnerable people need. I ask the Government, when they make their final and complete judgment on the sector next week, to start with those important aspects.

The sector has faced difficulties, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) has said. The last few years have been very difficult, and we must recognise that we have to move forward. There has been a loss of supported accommodation, and uncertainty has resulted in underinvestment. I hope that the Government will take notice of that and reverse some of the cuts that they have imposed. Dare I say I hope they will recognise that the sector offers good value for money in the support that it provides? It invests its own money alongside that of the voluntary sector to make sure that our most vulnerable people are looked after as well as they possibly can be.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. I am afraid that I must now reduce the time limit to four minutes.

5.24 pm

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): I refer Members to my declaration regarding supported housing in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who held a fantastic debate on this subject in Westminster Hall two weeks ago, and to other Members who have worked so hard to make sure that the concerns of the most vulnerable people in supported housing have been heard.

This year, we are celebrating the 100th birthday of Leonard Cheshire. In my west Cornwall constituency, I have a supported home run by Leonard Cheshire Disability. It does fantastic work, and yesterday I met the charity to hear again about its history of supporting our most vulnerable people over many years.

The YMCA is very active in my constituency. When I worked for it as a volunteer many years ago, I used to interview young people who required supported housing. Such housing was provided for a couple of years to help them to gain independence and rebuild their lives. Even now, despite the uncertainty of funding, it is developing 19 new homes in which to support young people.

In my constituency, DCH—Devon and Cornwall Housing—has forums where young people are supported, particularly those from care. One of my most enjoyable surgeries is when I go along there to work with them, but also to listen to them and respond to their concerns. Many years ago, long before I entered the Commons, I set up supported housing, and I have spent a lot of my time looking at how to support people with severe learning disabilities to stay close to their often elderly parents, but also gain their independence. Mencap does some fantastic work in my constituency, and for some time it supported my brother-in-law.

What is common to these organisations is that they recognise the need to reform how the funding for supported housing is provided. They also have in common the fact that they are delivering a step change in increasing their effort to assist all the people they support towards enjoying much greater independence. There has been a real change in recent years in how supported housing services work. They are seeking greater independence for the people they support, however much the rest of society may take the view that such people cannot live independently. They are doing more work on improving their access to education and further education; in particular, the forums are doing great work in this regard. They are also doing more work in providing opportunities for employment and preparing such people for employment. That fits very well with what the Government are doing through the Disability Confident campaign. I was grateful to hear the Prime Minister say that supported homes will no longer be included in the local housing allowance cap.

These organisations are doing fantastic work in my constituency of west Cornwall and Scilly, as are others around the country, in supporting our most vulnerable people who often cannot, for good reason, be cared for at home. They have a right to have a home of their own and to enjoy the same kind of accommodation and quality of life that everyone in the House does. It is therefore right that we should provide for them a secure, sustainable funding agreement. I look forward to the announcement on Tuesday and to the forthcoming debate on making sure we do the very best we can for these fantastic people who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in need of supported housing.

5.28 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I am delighted to take part in this timely debate. I of course welcome the Government's latest U-turn in saying that the LHA cap will not be imposed on supported housing, although I have no earthly idea why they proposed imposing it in the first place. I look forward to next week's announcement about how the UK Government will fund supported housing, as the devil will most certainly be in the detail. We need to reverse the cuts that have so negatively affected supported housing in the austerity era.

The months of uncertainty inflicted on the supported housing sector have been unfair and unnecessary, and show a failure to recognise the fantastic and all too necessary work done to support some of the most vulnerable in society. I have seen at first hand in my constituency the good work done by providers such as Blue Triangle in Renfrew, which provides housing to those who have been made homeless, and Bridgewater in Erskine, which provides safe accommodation for elderly people while enabling them to retain their independence.

As other Members have mentioned, supported housing provides essential services and it is vital that they are properly funded to help those most in need. Some of the people most in need of assistance are women and children fleeing abusive relationships. I hope, but do not expect, that the Government's response next week will offer a long-term and sustainable funding formula for refuges. Refuges are an absolute necessity to ensure a safe route for those leaving a violent relationship. They perform a different function from other forms of

supported housing and their distinct nature must be recognised. That must be captured in the Government's response next week.

Refuges are categorised as short-term accommodation alongside other forms of housing, but they carry out a very different function and we cannot allow the Government to implement a one-size-fits-all approach to fund supported housing that might not meet the needs of refuges. Their distinct nature was highlighted by the recent cross-party report on housing funding from the Communities and Local Government, and Work and Pensions Committees, which has already been mentioned. It said:

"Refuges for women and children have unique challenges within the supported housing sector"

and called on the Government to

"work with Women's Aid and refuge providers to devise a separate funding mechanism for this sector".

I am keen for the Minister to respond directly to the point about how the changing funding model meets the distinct challenges facing women's refuges and the wider housing sector. Will he confirm whether a bespoke funding model will be developed for those life-saving services and accept the invitation to work with Women's Aid and others to find a system that supports refuges?

The uncertainty around the supported housing sector and the shortfall in the number of refuge places force women and children to continue to live in violent relationships, putting their health, welfare and possibly even their lives at risk. Today's U-turn, although welcome, does not go far enough to offer the long-term funding that these vital services need to enable them to continue to offer the support required. A failure to offer long-term and sustainable funding for refuges next week will result in more services closing their doors for good. In many cases, refuges being closed or full will push women to return to an abusive relationship.

Shamefully, demand for refuges far outstrips supply and the uncertainty over the new funding model for supported housing has only added to that problem. We cannot allow ourselves to close the door on women and children who are looking for help, often at the most critical and stressful time of their lives. We simply cannot allow that to happen. The Government must work with Women's Aid and others to find a system that provides a secure, separate and ultimately sustainable funding settlement for refuges. Nothing else will suffice.

5.32 pm

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): I want briefly to introduce a tone of optimism and positivity to the debate, although before I do so I need to refer people to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, which says that I chair the board of a 20,000-house housing association across 18 separate authorities. I am not speaking from that perspective, however.

Before I came to the House, I worked for YMCA Birmingham for three years. When I joined the YMCA, it was a recent recipient of approximately £1 million from the Homes and Communities Agency, which allowed it to build 33 units of move-on accommodation. Those who know the sector will understand that if someone is in supported accommodation, they need somewhere to go for the next step of their journey, so the delivery of those 33 units was critical in freeing up the pipeline to allow us to move people along their journey. That was three and a half years ago.

[Eddie Hughes]

Move forward three years, and just as I was leaving the YMCA we had it confirmed that we had £850,000 of homelessness change funding from the HCA and the Department of Health that allows us to renovate a homelessness hostel we have in Northfield—a 72-bed hostel in not very good condition. The ground floor of that hostel will now have en suite accommodation as well as training and health facilities. That is an absolutely amazing development for the people who use that service. They will have not just great quality accommodation, but training facilities on site that will help them to get employment. It will also allow health visitors to come in and give them the healthcare they need.

The YMCA has been around since 1844. George Williams founded it and Birmingham set up its YMCA fairly soon after. I am reliably informed by my old chief exec that one of the first meetings of the board of YMCA Birmingham referred to the distinct lack of funds; 173 years later, YMCA Birmingham appears to have coped quite well. Such organisations adapt and change to the circumstances they find themselves in.

The YMCA has set up some social enterprises. For example, Adele Biddle and Emma Rhymes are working tirelessly to generate income from their social enterprises, which they hope will ultimately fund and support some excellent housing activities. Today, we have the announcement from the Prime Minister that the LHA cap will not apply. What do I say? I say some organisations battle on regardless of what the Government do. They continue to do their—

**Mary Glindon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Eddie Hughes:** I am nearly finished. Trust me, I will be quick.

Organisations battle on regardless of what Governments of any persuasion do and they continue to offer excellent work. Occasionally, and fortunately, they are subsidised and supported by an excellent Conservative Government. The YMCA has produced hundreds of thousands of pounds and it will, no doubt, continue to deliver its excellent work for at least another 173 years.

5.35 pm

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): Optimism and positivity: I really hope that is what we get from the Government next week. I really hope they commit to dealing with the funding gap and the details of this proposal. I welcome the metaphorical rabbit that was pulled out of the Prime Minister's metaphorical hat this morning, but I have to say it is a great shame that it took almost two years for it to happen. There has been a great deal of concern on the part of pretty much everyone.

In Wales there are, at a conservative estimate, at least 38,500 supported housing units. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) mentioned earlier, there are real concerns about how any changes relate to Wales and the block grant. I hope the Government will answer that fully next week. In Wales, as in all the other nations and regions of Great Britain, a huge range of projects comes under the banner of supported housing. They include hostels for homeless people, domestic

abuse refuges, and a range of supported accommodation projects aimed at supporting people to move on to independent tenancies. In my own area, there is an excellent women's refuge run by Welsh Women's Aid. There are projects run by Hafan Cymru that support people as they move on in their lives, and Tŷ Nos hostel in Wrexham can house 16 roofless people on a short-term basis.

Homelessness should be a concern for all of us. Last summer, I met concerned local residents from my constituency who formed a group called Help Wrexham Homeless. They are rightly calling for more night shelter places, which requires more security of funding. It is vital that that comes to our area. I pay tribute to Wrexham Council's Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham—AVOW—for its work in this area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) mentioned the recent excellent report, "The Salvation Army's Supported Housing: Analysis of the Costs of Provision". The Salvation Army is a huge provider of supported accommodation right across the UK. The report made the startling point that had the Government continued with the system they originally wanted for local housing allowance, the rates would have borne no relation to the cost of providing supported housing. It also made the point—I hope the Government will take great notice of this—that long-term funding security needs to be offered.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Lady mentions the Salvation Army, which does excellent work and helps 6,000 individual tenants. Does she agree that direct Government contact with the Salvation Army might be helpful, if the Minister has not already done it, to gauge its opinion on supported housing?

**Susan Elan Jones:** Very much so. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I recommend the Salvation Army report and I believe the Government should answer fully all the points made in it.

Many Members will remember eight years ago a gentleman by the name of David Cameron—he subsequently became Prime Minister—giving the Hugo Young memorial lecture. In his speech, he committed to greater support for voluntary groups and charities, expressing the view that they should play a key role in helping people escape poverty. That was called the big society. I listened to the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), but this is not about charities carrying on regardless of how useless the Government are at listening to them; it is about us working together, and I really hope that next week, when the Government come to the House, they will come with new heart, a new vision and new security on this issue.

5.40 pm

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) is absolutely right to say that this is a happy day for the House of Commons: the Prime Minister has made an important remark on policy; the Minister has said the Government will respond to the consultation on supported housing by broadly adopting the recommendations in the joint Select Committee report; and Members on both sides of the House, housing associations and charities have welcomed the direction of travel, and we will have the details in a week's time.

I thank my co-Chair for the joint Select Committee report, the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), who was on the Committee and knows a lot about the sector, other Members, including the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who was on the Committee as well, and the Chairs of the two Select Committees who commissioned our report. We should also warmly thank Lord Best and the five housing associations—I do not have time to name them all—that road-tested our recommendations and improved the detail. We should also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who has held two debates on this subject.

Above all, what this shows—and what today's debate shows—is why Select Committees are important, why working cross-party really does matter, which is not something that all new Members seem to have yet grasped, and why Parliament should be proud that such a report can have a real impact on the Government. It was delivered in May, just before the election and long recess, and the Government will be making the announcement in late October. This, then, is a good day.

It is worth reminding those listening of the key recommendations, which have the backing of the sector and now the Government: a separate supported housing allowance; a limited number of regional variations; tenants eligible for supported housing allowance only if they are in accommodation that is regularly inspected; national standards to monitor the quality of the supported housing allowance accommodation; and a separate funding system—this is important—for women's refuges, about which I hope the Minister will say something later.

I regret that not all charities in their briefings seemed to have read the recommendations. In its response, Shelter wrote that it had

“responded to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's inquiry into the issue”,

but it made no comment on the recommendations. I encourage all charities to look closely at Select Committee reports and endorse them where they find them useful.

Inevitably, success has many fathers, so it is not surprising that the Labour party and the Scottish nationalists—I even heard a reference to Andy Burnham at one point—have wished to add their names to the credits at the end of this film. In my view, it does not matter who tries to take the credit; what matters is that Parliament has had a significant say in shaping Government policy. I hope that the announcement next week will confirm the details, although there are questions that I hope the Government will cover—I know that the Minister will take note of this. We need answers to the questions on funding, the number of regions, the timetable for implementation, the quality assurance and the refuges themselves. I hope that all this in turn will trigger announcements from the housing associations on the go-ahead for the projects that have been put on hold but that will enable us to have more supported housing.

5.44 pm

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): Once again, we see Labour pushing the Government into a more sensible and reasonable course of action, and we await the details of the proposals next week. It is about time, too. The Minister said nothing to enlighten us about why the Government prevaricated over this

decision for so long. Their consultation exercise ended in February this year, and we have waited for six months since the publication of the joint Select Committee report, which produced a huge amount of evidence to show that the local housing allowance rate was a totally “inappropriate starting point for a new funding mechanism for supported housing”.

That view has been reiterated by organisations and charities throughout the housing sector. What they have said demonstrates that the proposals for an LHA cap in the supported housing sector made no sense and that the cap would have been hugely damaging to the lives of hundreds of vulnerable people in our communities.

It is clear from the briefing that we received from the Riverside Group that a number of national studies have shown that supported housing provides excellent value for money, as well as having very good outcomes in reducing health problems and care and criminal justice costs. They also keep many people out of full-time residential social care, which has a considerable bearing on the previous debate. The Government should therefore be thinking about how to support the supported housing sector. What we heard earlier today was welcome, but I do not think they fully understand the impact of their delay and indecision. We know that 2,000 planned supported housing developments have been postponed and more than 800 cancelled, and that 22 existing schemes face closure—and that is quite apart from the impact on individuals who have been extremely anxious.

Let me give an example from my constituency. The one-bedroom local housing allowance cap in Durham is £74.79. The cost of the average supported housing scheme for people with learning difficulties and mental health needs is £164.73, nearly three times the LHA cap. No wonder people have been so concerned about the issue.

My constituency also has a specific problem caused by a hospital closure programme. A specialist supported housing scheme is keeping people out of hospital and is costing £379 per week because they are extremely vulnerable. We need to hear from the Government whether their proposals will cover such schemes, as well as kick-starting development in the sector for people with multiple needs. We also need to hear whether the needs of young people will be addressed. We were given a very good briefing by the YMCA about the shortfall in its funding, and I hope that the Minister will tell us how she will ensure that young people's needs are met.

5.48 pm

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I was very pleased to hear the Prime Minister announce this afternoon that there will be no housing benefit cap for tenants of supported housing. Many Members in all parts of the House have drawn attention in earlier debates to the difference that supported housing can make to individuals. I look forward to the announcements next week and hope that there will be some more positive news then.

In the short time that I have, I want to highlight one example in my constituency of the difference that supported housing can make to the lives of young people. Newhaven Foyer, which is run by the Salvation Army, looks after young people who have either been in care or have been at risk of homelessness because they come from difficult family backgrounds. I have had the privilege of meeting some of those young people, who have told me their stories.

[*Maria Caulfield*]

I spoke to one young man who said that before he went into Newhaven Foyer he had intended to commit a crime to be arrested and be sent to prison, so that he would have a roof over his head and some food of an evening. That cannot be a future that we want for any young person in this country.

Not only is the rent paid for the young people at the Foyer, but the service charge pays for support workers to help them to make a fresh start in life. Those workers help young people to learn how to budget and pay bills, ensure that they get to college in the mornings when they do not particularly want to go, help them into apprenticeships, help them to learn how to write CVs and help them to learn to live with other people.

One young girl told me about her family. Her mum was an alcoholic who was often drunk, so she had to bring herself and her sister up on her own. For her 16th birthday, her mum bought her a bottle of whisky, and drank it before lunchtime, so she got no birthday present at all. This is the sort of background these young people have come from, and supported housing is giving them that fresh start.

In a way, supported housing is a Conservative policy, because it gives people a fresh start regardless of their background, or where they have come from, or how difficult an upbringing they have had. Supported housing can give them the tools to get on in life and allow them to make the most of their talents and aspirations. It is a philosophy that I passionately believe in.

The Minister was right to say in his opening remarks that it is also of net fiscal benefit to the country. For some people, it can make a difference overall of £940 a year in benefits, and if there was no supported housing, we would be paying a lot more than that. For the country, the net benefit is over £3.6 billion a year. It is money well spent and, more importantly, it transforms lives.

I could cite numerous examples from my constituency. BHT Sussex provides addiction services and supported housing for people with alcohol and drug addiction, through many years of an abstinence-based approach. I have met people whose lives have been transformed and who have beaten addiction and are now contributing to society. That is not just rescuing their lives; it is rescuing their families' lives, too, and is making a big difference to the country as a whole.

I welcome today's news, and am optimistic about next week's announcements.

5.51 pm

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I also welcome the announcements. I think I have asked for the local housing allowance rate to be removed in the mind of policy makers from supported housing every single time I have spoken in this House, so I am pretty chuffed that that was finally heard.

The hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) is a passionate speaker, and it is nice to hear somebody in the House who sounds a bit like me, but I do not share much of his optimism, because when I have walked around the streets of Birmingham during the past seven years I now step over the bodies of people who have nowhere to live, and that was not the case

before. In Birmingham, a man was found dead in the streets because he was cold and homeless. With the greatest respect, therefore, although the support of services like YMCA in Birmingham is brilliant, 33 beds for a population of 1 million is a woeful figure.

**Eddie Hughes:** I said there were an additional 33 beds. There are 300 units of accommodation across Birmingham.

**Jess Phillips:** And we would need an additional 300 to get anywhere close to dealing with the problem.

**Rachel Maclean:** I have worked in Birmingham for over 25 years and can confirm that the problem to which the hon. Lady refers has existed for a very long time.

**Jess Phillips:** I have lived there all my life and have worked in homelessness services for most of my adult life, and I can absolutely guarantee that right now it is worse than I have ever known it. For me to say otherwise and be positive about the situation would be to tell a lie, and I am not willing to do that.

Given my own experiences, it will be no surprise that I am going to stick up for refuge accommodation. I take issue with the Minister's assertions that no one is turned away, because currently in this country one in four women are turned away; that is 78 women every day and 78 children every single day who find that there is nowhere for them to live. That is what is happening now. So the future assertions about refuge are very welcome, but, as was stressed in the brilliant report by Members, which has been mentioned already and is worthy of praise, women's refuge needs a specific and different model taken off-stream, and it needs sustainability. I want to talk a little bit about why sustainability matters.

After the most recent general election—there have been more than there should have been in the time I have been here—I recall the Prime Minister commiserating with her colleagues who had lost their seats. How difficult that must have been for her, having caused the demise of their jobs. However, where I worked, I had to put every single member of staff on notice every January. Everyone was given a notice warning that their job might not be there in March because we lived hand to mouth on year-on-year funding. That is not the way I would operate my household income, and it is not the way to operate an organisation. It is not what the Government should want for the most vulnerable people in society, but that is what is happening in every supported housing charity in the country at the moment. Every single year, we had to put people on notice, and sometimes we would find out only on 30 March what funding we were going to have for the next year. There needs to be a sustainable funding pot.

I want to pick up on another thing the Minister said in his opening speech. He said he knew that demand was going to get higher. It is utterly shameful for him to stand at the Dispatch Box in this building and say, "We know it's going to get worse. We know that more people are going to need supported accommodation." There is one reason why the Government will need more supported accommodation for the people I have been dealing with: universal credit.

At the moment, if a woman is receiving benefits through tax credits, the money goes to her. There are lots of women across the country saving up money and putting it away, so that they can escape and will not need a refuge bed. However, under the new universal credit system, every single penny going into that household will be paid to one person. It does not take a genius to work out who usually gets the money in a household, so that money will now be going to the man. The woman, whose financial constraints are already so severe, will be limited even further by the Government's proposals, which will not allow women to break free when they need to.

I have asked the Department for Work and Pensions whether it is monitoring who is getting the money in split payments, why people are asking for split payments and whether anyone has even asked for split payments. I have asked what data it is collecting about split payments and, funnily enough, the answer is always, "I'm sorry, we don't collect that data." The Government are not collecting data, and they are turning a blind eye to a group of people who are so vulnerable that they will be turning up on our doorsteps, at our surgeries and at our refuges, where they will be turned away because there is nowhere for them to go. On Tuesday, I want to see a sustainable plan that lasts for a term that is longer than five years. We have just been given another five-year term here, so how about we give that to them? We need a specific funding model for refuge services because, without it, people die.

5.57 pm

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the contribution from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), and I thank her for taking my intervention. Members on both sides have made some excellent points today and I really hope that the Ministers are listening; I am confident that they are. It was also a great pleasure to listen to the Minister's opening remarks, in which he outlined the extensive investment and support that has gone into this sector over the course of this Parliament and the last one. This demonstrates the seriousness with which the Government are treating this critical issue for our communities and our society. Let us not forget that this has been achieved against a challenging and difficult financial backdrop. When we talk about what we are hoping to hear, let us look also at the record of investment that we have already delivered, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) suggested.

I saw this provision for myself when I visited Dorothy Terry House in Redditch on one of my first constituency visits. It provides incredible enriching care for elderly and complex-needs patients, including people with dementia and a number of other needs. It has 42 highly specified one and two-bedroom apartments and communal areas designed to ensure that residents can lead an enriching life and have access to all the local amenities of Redditch on their doorstep. It has welcomed the announcement that the Prime Minister made at the Dispatch Box today. During my short time in Parliament, I have engaged extensively with representatives of the housing sector, including the National Housing Federation, which I am glad to see has welcomed this announcement. I am glad that the Government are listening, and I have seen Ministers taking extensive notes about the points made today, so I look forward to hearing about what they will bring forward on Tuesday.

I know that Government will be doing this, but I call on them to consider the recommendations of the report by the Communities and Local Government Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee, to which many Members have referred and which contains some excellent points. It is important to have a separate funding model for refuges and hostels, because they play an important role for women and children who are the victims of domestic violence, as we have heard already. We take that seriously, and we want those important services that play a vital role in our communities to be protected. Our Prime Minister also takes it seriously, and when she was Home Secretary I went with her to a supported facility that puts on treatment and programmes for women in Birmingham. I saw how she listened to the families and women and how much she took from that meeting.

As a new Member, I am glad of the opportunity to take part in Opposition day debates, and I think I have taken part in every single one. I do not always agree with the Opposition motion, which is why I choose to exercise my right to vote or not to vote, as the case may be—[*Interruption.*] I think that is democracy. I am here to decide after taking part and sitting and listening to the debate and the arguments.

The Opposition Front-Bench spokesman came up with four tests for the Government's consultation that he expects to see next week, but I want to ask him about one thing. He will obviously be critical of what comes forward, but I would like him to take the proposal seriously and to engage in a serious discussion about the necessary funding and about how he and his party would fund the need in this area without racking up more debt or increasing taxes.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Without interventions, the remaining 10 hon. or right hon. Members who wish to speak will be able to do so for four minutes each. If there are interventions, which is perfectly legitimate, that prospect might be imperilled. I will leave it there, and Members must take responsibility for trying to help each other. They are all on the same side of the House, so it should not be that difficult.

6.2 pm

**Mike Hill** (Hartlepool) (Lab): The proposed changes to funding for supported housing, namely the implementation of the local housing allowance cap, has created considerable uncertainty for the sector and for people who live in supported housing in Hartlepool. The proposed funding model of implementing the LHA cap and then devolving additional top-up funding to local councils would have created a postcode lottery, meaning that tenants in certain areas could lose out and be forced to make up any shortfall in funding.

Rents and service charges in housing association supported housing schemes are regulated, but they are usually higher than in general social housing due to the extra cost of building adaptations and meeting tenants' care and support needs. A typical example of such accommodation is Bamburgh Court in Hartlepool, which I have had the pleasure of visiting. Bamburgh Court provides extra care housing to help over-55s with a range of care needs to live independently within the community.

[Mike Hill]

There are 72 properties at Bamburgh Court, including 41 one-bedroom flats, 24 two-bedroom bungalows and two three-bedroom houses. Care for residents is provided 24/7 through personal support plans.

Bamburgh Court is a fine example of a modern, state-of-the-art complex for the provision of supported independent living for the vulnerable and people with special needs. The weekly rent for a property is £84.89, with a £38.04 service charge to cover all maintenance, fire safety measures and general upkeep. Under current housing benefit rules, most tenants qualify for the cost of their accommodation in full. However, despite their need for specialist accommodation, under the LHA cap these vulnerable people would have received only the maximum of £97.81 for a two-bedroom property and £83.78 for a one-bedroom property. If residents had been forced to fund the shortfall, that would have meant serious hardship and the possible loss of their homes.

Such accommodation as that run by Thirteen housing group at Bamburgh Court gives comfort, support, hope and security to so many people. Such schemes would have been in serious jeopardy if the proposed cap were to be implemented. In my original speech I would have urged the Government to think again, and I hope that next Tuesday's statement will prove that they indeed intend to do so. Given that only a partial statement on the cap was made this morning, I await the full statement with bated breath.

6.4 pm

**Ms Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): Across the two boroughs I serve in St Helens South and Whiston there are 2,894 people living in and benefiting from supported housing. These are people and families who have fled violence in their home. There are 54 homes across the boroughs that provide support to help them build capacity to manage and enjoy family life again. These are people with several and, in some cases, severe disabilities. These are young adults, and occasionally young people, who have found themselves with no home and often no family to turn to. These are young adults who have turned to alcohol and other substances to camouflage the pain of broken family relationships. These are homeless people, some former servicemen and some former prisoners. A significant number are older people who have been encouraged to give up their three-bedroom homes—homes they have built up over several decades—and move into sheltered housing to provide a home for their family.

The purpose of supported housing is to prevent people from reaching a crisis point and placing heavy demands on other, more costly public services, such as when a pensioner trips and falls at home and has to go into hospital. It is therefore important to ensure that there is funding for such housing in the new system and that the Government do not create an artificial distinction between short-term emergency accommodation and long-term accommodation.

The system needs to recognise the dynamic of people's needs and living arrangements. The issue before us today is about not only the availability of funding but the availability of places to support people. I thank the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who was busy over the weekend adopting Labour's plans

for house building. Some say that he is bidding to become leader of the Conservative party, but the quickest, simplest and cheapest method to build houses is to give certainty to social landlords across the country who, in many cases, have delayed and abandoned plans to build new rooms in the supported housing sector. In Knowsley, 227 planned units were subject to a lengthy pause because of the lack of certainty, and there is a risk that once those units, plus 150 homes being built in St Helens, are fully built, they could be taken out of the supported housing sector altogether and let as housing with no support at all.

The Communities Secretary was slapped down by the Chancellor. The supported housing sector has been waiting for an indication of Government policy since February so that it can prepare and plan the funding models for future developments. Instead, the Government's dithering is having a chilling effect on development and much-needed provision.

I appreciate that the Government originally delayed the implementation of their 2015 proposals, giving them time to upskill themselves on the needs of supported housing residents, but the Government have taken two years, they have consulted widely and the sector has made many submissions. One question was on how they can ensure that local allocation of funding by local authorities matches local need. Indeed, we are still waiting for the answer.

The Government's proposal to devolve a set figure via a top-up grant, in light of shrinking council budgets, is not the answer. The devolved figure is a set amount and will not take account of changes throughout the year. It is wholly unacceptable that those in greatest need are materially worse off because of where they live in the borough. We do not accept such a provision on healthcare, and we should not accept it on housing needs.

6.8 pm

**Jo Platt** (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this important debate. First, may I welcome the Government's U-turn, which the Prime Minister announced earlier today? Although we await further details, I am pleased the Government have finally listened to the multiple charities, housing providers and two Select Committees, which told them in no uncertain terms that there is no correlation between supported housing costs and LHA. The Government's proposal would have left constituencies such as mine deeply disadvantaged, with care provision based on a postcode lottery.

Although we have heard that the Government do not now propose to use LHA as a measure for supported housing, we are still none the wiser as to how they will fund it. As a Member of Parliament for a constituency in the north-west, I ask the Government to provide assurances to my constituents that our region will not be underfunded, as the previous proposal would have meant. Supported housing schemes locally have been a successful way of transforming services, while enhancing the lives of our most vulnerable through independent living arrangements, all with an individual story of success. Unless the Government now have a comprehensive offer to replace their previous policy, local charities have warned that this could risk the recovery of those residents with mental health conditions, increase the demand on the already strained NHS, and lead to a spike in evictions and homelessness.

We are talking about the most vulnerable in our society: victims of domestic abuse; those made homeless; individuals who suffer from physical and learning disabilities; and the elderly who are otherwise unable to care for themselves. First, the Government left them with the uncertainty and anxiety of a cap which does not meet their care costs, and they are now being left with the anxiety of what will replace the Government's policy, which is simply a dereliction of duty by the Government. I hope they will act urgently to bridge that uncertainty.

Now that the Government are considering their new proposal, I ask them to consider two points, the first of which is that local authority budgets must be protected and supported. The previous proposal would have placed an enormous strain on local authorities to process top-up payments, which were only ring-fenced by the Government for the first year of implementation. Therefore, whenever the Government come forward with an alternative funding system I urge them to consider the impact it will have on local authorities, which deserve to receive the funding and support they require to assist the residents of supported housing. Secondly, the funding model must be a fair system which provides equal assistance across the country. The previous proposal would have underfunded regions such as the north-west, left tenants relying on local authority top-up funds, and put tenants at risk of eviction and homelessness. Any future proposal must distribute supported housing support fairly and meet the care needs of every tenant.

The previous arbitrary cap has already caused immense stress and anxiety to thousands of people who were unsure whether their supported housing payments would meet their costs. Today, these residents are even more uncertain about their situation moving forward. These include residents with mental health challenges and learning difficulties, who simply should not be subjected to this undue stress. I therefore call on the Government to take this opportunity to apologise to these tenants of supported housing for the uncertainty and anxiety this has caused, and to adopt the Select Committee's recommendations. The Government should also provide assurances to the residents of supported housing, as well as to local authorities, and to the incredible charities and housing groups providing these vital services, that the Government are committed.

6.13 pm

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I recently held a series of events in my constituency called the "Big conversation", and I was pleased to visit an open day on supported housing at the Salvation Army hostel in Hull, with representatives from Emmaus and the Hull Resettlement Project, among others. The real impact these organisations have on people's lives is heartening. One companion from Emmaus described what Emmaus had given him as "a life package". He said that it had given him more than a home—it had given him work and a family, too—and without it he would again be on the streets.

The very idea that such incredible organisations could be at risk because of delays and uncertainty is abhorrent. Yes, the cost of supported housing is greater than that of rented property, but supported housing is cost-effective. The National Housing Federation says that supported housing actually saves the public purse an average of

£940 per year, and, depending on the type of scheme, the savings can be even greater—for example, for people with learning disabilities it could be £6,000 per year. Yes, although it is great that the Prime Minister is giving in to Labour party pressure and abandoning the Government's plans to cap housing benefit at LHA level, the devil will be in the detail on this. She has not told us what the Government plan to replace that funding with, and they must get the plans right.

I have a few questions for the Government. Do they still want to make their proposals fit in with universal credit, as they promised in 2011? If so, how are they going to do that while abandoning the local housing allowance cap? Do they still wish to make their proposals fit with a locally based fund? If so, how will they ensure that investment does not gravitate towards areas with higher property prices and that those in supported housing in places such as Hull are not punished for living in areas with low property prices? Do they accept that any funding formula must provide for choice, control, equality and independent living and ensure that the real costs of supported housing are met? If so, when will they offer the certainty that the supported housing sector needs and publish plans for a supported housing funding formula to do just that? Will they please review the local housing allowance rates for the private rented sector to prevent homelessness and reduce the need for supported housing in the first place?

All societies should be judged on how they treat their most vulnerable and needy. The whole country will judge each and every Member who fails to support those who need us the most.

6.15 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): This has been a long and convoluted debate, starting back in 2011 and continuing through 2015 and 2016 and up to now. It was said earlier that it is good that the Government are listening, but surely it would have been a lot more logical for them to have listened first, before they acted and threw the sector into such chaos. Nevertheless, I am glad that they have listened. I pay tribute to those in the sector throughout the UK, including the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Housing Federation. I pay particular tribute to the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and to Zhan McIntyre and Jeremy Hewer, who have done a huge amount of work on this issue, making sure that we are all kept well informed about the developments in Scotland.

Like other Members, I challenge the Government on some of the detail. At the very least, there should be no detriment to any housing provider—no housing provider should lose out as a result of the future proposals. I challenge the Government to tell us the level of funding for supported accommodation that will be considered reasonable. There has been some debate about the cost of supported accommodation, which varies widely from sector to sector and from specialist provider to specialist provider. We need to understand what a reasonable cost actually is, because there can be such huge variations, depending on the type of housing provided.

We need to look into the funding assumptions for the years ahead, because we know from the National Housing Federation that 85% of developments have been pulled because planning assumptions could not be made on

[Alison Thewliss]

the basis of the funding that was going to be available. That was compounded by the 1% rent reduction imposed on housing associations in England, which meant that they could not act on the funding plans they had made, and there was a subsequent impact on house building and housing provision.

I was tempted to read from the transcript of the debate in June last year, because much of what I wanted to say today was still true, until the Prime Minister sprang her U-turn. I have previously made the point about the time limits on short-term accommodation. Will there be a time limit for people in short-term temporary accommodation? Not everybody will be ready to move on at the point at which someone has set a time limit. Local providers need flexibility to ensure that people are protected.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations asked specifically for any new funding model to be piloted and evaluated before it is fully rolled out. It also asked for the implementation of any recommendation to be deferred until the completion of the universal credit roll-out in 2022. Perhaps the Minister can give us a little more information on those issues.

Scottish Women's Aid has asked for clarification on the shared accommodation rate and for particular provision to be made for cases of domestic violence, similar to the easement in the jobseeker's allowance system, to provide flexibility for women.

Members have not given a huge amount of attention to the wide range of conclusions and recommendations in the report, which I was glad to be part of producing. It recommends that attention be given to the oversight arrangements for housing in supported accommodation in England. The report says that the Select Committees believe that

"the oversight arrangements in Scotland are better than they are in England,"

and that

"lessons can be learned from the Scottish system to make the system of oversight in England simpler and more robust."

I urge the Government to look at the Scottish system, because it is very robust.

The report recommends that a capital grant scheme is introduced for new supported accommodation and that the funding mechanism reflects actual costs. It also recommends that the Government consider the housing benefit rate for 18 to 21-year-olds, because they should be supported when they leave supported accommodation. In England there is currently a disincentive for them to leave supported accommodation because they will not be eligible for housing benefit.

6.19 pm

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I am pleased to contribute to this debate. With the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), I was co-chair of the recent joint inquiry of the Communities and Local Government Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee into the future of supported housing. I add my thanks to my co-chair, to members of both Committees who contributed to the inquiry, to the Clerks and advisers who helped the Committees, and to all the witnesses and organisations that submitted evidence to the inquiry.

It was a privilege to co-chair the inquiry and to read and hear evidence from residents and providers across the country on the difference that supported housing makes to individuals and communities. I am particularly pleased that we facilitated residents of supported housing, including a survivor of domestic abuse, a man with sight loss and Tessa Bolt who has Down's syndrome, to give evidence in person to the Committee. Their evidence on the value of supported housing was particularly powerful.

Some 700,000 people in the UK benefit from supported housing and the different types and categories that those individuals fall into have been referenced today, and, as time is short, I will not rehearse them again. The inquiry received strong evidence that residents of supported housing benefit from better health outcomes, fewer hospital admissions, fewer visits to the GP and less social care support than their peers.

Supported housing costs £6.17 billion, but it delivers savings estimated at £3.5 billion. For older residents living in sheltered housing, there is an annual saving in reduced reliance on health and social care services of around £3,000 per year; for people with learning disabilities or mental health issues, the savings are estimated at between £12,500 and £15,500 a year. Those are not punitive savings delivered by budget cuts, but positive savings delivered through better outcomes.

It was, therefore, very hard to comprehend why the Government decided more than a year ago to throw the entire supported housing sector into disarray by announcing that core rent and service charges would be funded only up to the level of the local housing allowance cap, and that costs above that would be funded via a devolved fund administered by local authorities. The sector has been in total disarray now for more than a year, during which time 85% of new supported housing schemes have been put on hold, and many providers have been considering the financial sustainability of their existing supported housing provision.

I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement this afternoon that the local housing allowance cap will not now apply to supported housing, but it is extraordinary that the Government have left the sector in such a state of uncertainty for so long, and that they have now come forward with an announcement that is only partial, and that does not set out either what the new approach to funding supported housing will be, or where the funding will come from. It is really important that the Government recognise the damage that the uncertainty of the past year has caused to the sector. The Select Committees recorded our concern that the Government seemed unaware—this was despite being presented with undeniable evidence—of both the severe impact their announcement was having on the sector and the urgency of the need to resolve these issues. I should like the Secretary of State to apologise for that, and to set out what the Government will do to repair the damage and to ensure that schemes that were put on hold as a consequence of the announcement get back on track as quickly as possible. It is really important that the Government set out in detail their plans, giving both Parliament and the sector an opportunity to scrutinise how the new funding arrangements will work.

In my last minute, I will mention two further recommendations of the joint inquiry. The first concerns the urgent need to address the shortfall in provision,

which was made worse by the chaos of the past year. The Committees recommended that the Government establish grant funding for new supported housing provision. I would welcome it if the Government were to provide confirmation today that they are taking that recommendation seriously.

The second area concerns refuges for survivors of domestic abuse. It was the Committees' view that the Government should put in place funding and commissioning arrangements to ensure that there is a national network of domestic abuse refuges and to guarantee that support is there for the 12,000 women and 12,000 children who flee to a refuge every year in the UK. I hope to hear those reassurances from the Minister, and to read in detail next week that the Government have indeed taken seriously the recommendations of the Select Committees.

6.23 pm

**Anneliese Dodds** (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I will endeavour to be brief. First, let me thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and the Select Committee members for all their work on this issue.

It was a qualified relief to hear earlier that the Government have, to some extent, listened to sense and will not be going ahead with their original plans to restrict the funding for supported housing to LHA rates only. Many have already talked about the impacts that the original changes would have had on their constituencies. Certainly I calculated that, within Oxford East, we would have seen around a third of supported housing provision wiped out because the LHA rates are around a third below the average private rental cost. That would obviously have had a very negative impact on my constituency.

One point that has not come up so far is the need for any future funding solution to be ring-fenced. There was a difficult situation with another relevant funding stream, Supporting People funding. Some hon. Members have touched on that, although they did not name it *per se*. Supporting People funding was devolved to an extent, but it was not ring-fenced. Many local authority areas, including my area of Oxford, which is covered by Oxfordshire County Council, have faced the removal of all support for facilities such as homeless shelters. That has resulted in a reduction of about half of all shelter places—that is an accurate headcount—for homeless people in places such as Oxford in a time of record levels of rough sleeping.

We need to ensure that any future funding system is locally responsive, potentially reflecting regional costs, as many have advocated and as the Joint Select Committee report suggested. But we should also ensure that the funding is ring-fenced, because we really do not want it to leach away into other areas when local authorities are under such enormous pressure owing to cuts from central Government.

Many speakers have said that there is no relationship between the local housing allowance and the cost of supported housing. Of course that is the case, but it is also the case that in many areas the LHA bears very little relation to private rented costs *per se*. In my city of Oxford there are no—none, zero—family homes that are affordable under the current LHA. Home rental websites show that there is not a single one. I hope that

the Government's reflection, albeit a rather tardy one, on supported housing will lead them to think more carefully about the nature of calculation of the LHA for all rented accommodation.

6.26 pm

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): I, too, welcome the Prime Minister's announcement today. It is, of course, a U-turn and the details need to be seen before the final judgment is out. Future proposals must be fair and compassionate, and should not be an attack on the poorest and most vulnerable in our society.

Supported housing covers a range of different housing types, but what is shared across all tenants—whether in Bath or across the country—is that they are in supported housing because they need support, and that support needs proper funding. There should not be the crass geographical differences that the previous proposals assumed. I hope that tenants will be at the forefront of the Government's future proposals. Rent levels in supported housing are understandably higher than in other social housing. The now abandoned plans for top-up funding were a passing of responsibility from the Government to local authorities, which are already overstretched and underfunded. This must not be the case with future proposals, as it is not a sustainable and guaranteed way of funding supported housing.

The Communities and Local Government Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee, backed by many of the supported housing industry's organisations, have called for a supported housing allowance to give providers more certainty. I really believe that that is the way forward. It was precisely the uncertainty surrounding the cap that led to reports of housing associations cutting 85% of supported housing development after the proposals were announced. The numbers of those sleeping rough has already risen by 60% since March 2011, according to the National Audit Office. The NAO report repeatedly criticised the Government's lack of cohesion in tackling homelessness, and the cap was merely a symptom of the disease. The Government must take a broader, more connected approach to all these issues.

I have already mentioned the issue of national disparities. Tenants should not face a postcode lottery, and that was a crucial concern of many providers before the cap proposals. I call on the Prime Minister to reverse the decision to scrap housing benefit for 18 to 21-year-olds. This policy only serves to push more young people into homelessness. People deserve a roof over their heads, whatever their age and wherever they live. These unfair disadvantages must end.

Finally, I call on the Government simply to give more funding for supported housing. Many of the existing problems caused by a complete lack of funding will remain, despite scrapping the cap. To starve supported housing of cash is to punish all those for whom life is already very hard.

6.29 pm

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): I welcome the announcement made by the Prime Minister at lunchtime and the assurances from the Minister in his speech. I give thanks to Members on both sides of the House for their work—in Select Committees and individually—in pushing forward these issues, and especially to the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), whose Westminster Hall debate I attended on 10 October.

[Ruth George]

As colleagues have said, the Government need to recognise the impact of their policies on long-term sustainable funding for supported housing. I would like to emphasise the supported aspect of that housing, and we have heard many moving stories from Members on both sides of the House about the amazing work organisations in their constituencies do. That work is done by individuals who are often working on the minimum wage with some of our most vulnerable citizens and in some of the most difficult and patience-trying jobs we could imagine. This is really a vocation, not just a job, but those working in supported accommodation at the moment unfortunately often earn only the minimum wage. I really hope the Government will look at making sure that the funding supports quality of provision, as well as quality of employment and real careers for people who support those in supported housing.

May I propose one method of moving forward that will actually assist with the cost? I live in northern Derbyshire, in an area where we have a multitude of small borough councils, each with its own housing area. People in supported housing often wish to move into socially rented accommodation outside the area. That is particularly the case for women fleeing domestic violence—it is very important for them that they do not end up in the same community with the same problems. When the Minister looks at the new scheme, will he therefore see whether it will be possible for people in supported housing to apply to move into social housing and to get support in a different borough? That would save money, assist people and help free up places. At the moment, there are women in refuges in my constituency who would love to move over the border to where they have more support from friends and family, but they cannot do so, because they do not qualify for social housing in that area. I hope Ministers will look at that.

The hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), who is not in his place, said new Members often seem not to understand the importance of working across the House, but I can assure him that, as a new Member, I absolutely do. I have just sent out to all Members an email about an all-party group on universal credit. I very much hope that we can all come together, look at our experiences in our constituencies and work to get some movement on that issue as well.

6.33 pm

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): While I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement today that the local housing allowance cap will be lifted, I fear that the damage has already been done to supported housing providers, including women's refuges.

I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips): housing benefit is vital to women's refuges. As non-profit organisations, they rely on the rental income from the women who stay with them to fund their services. However, LHA is set in line with the lowest 30% of market rents in a given area, and the rates will often not even meet the refuge's rent charges, let alone provide the additional funds needed to maintain specialist emergency accommodation. The capping of LHA led to uncertainty and fear for women's refuges, which are designed specifically to keep women safe and to offer them shelter and support until they can live independently without the threat of violence.

This morning, I spoke to Mary Mason of Solace Women's Aid, which is a fantastic organisation that runs a women's refuge in my constituency and in other areas of London. She told me that women seeking help in the refuge she runs face the most appalling danger and have been forced into homelessness. She further told me that any decrease in funding, including through the LHA cap, would have a very negative impact on women and children in danger. It was therefore entirely inappropriate that services like the Solace women's refuge should have been subject to the LHA cap.

While I welcome today's announcement from the Prime Minister about the lifting of the LHA cap, I await the detail next week and hope that all vulnerable people in supported housing receive the funding they so desperately need.

6.34 pm

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): This has been a comprehensive debate with many good contributions from all parts of the House, if probably more so from the Opposition. There has been a cautious welcome for the Prime Minister's announcement that there will not be a cap in relation to supported housing and LHA—an issue of real concern.

Among the 25 speakers were my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts)—the Chair of the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government—and my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods). A lot of people identified that it was completely inappropriate in the first place to propose that supported housing should be based on an LHA rate, given that it meets very different needs. Several key themes emerged. On the need for sustainability around the funding, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) mentioned the importance of ring-fencing it, and the need for greater co-operation between Departments. The hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who organised the Westminster Hall debate on this issue a few weeks ago, has probably contributed to the position that we are in now.

Many Members wanted to thank local providers and charities. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George) said that what providers do is more of a vocation—that they do it out of love for it. However, we cannot take advantage of that, and we must recognise it in the support that we give them.

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Welcome as the Government's U-turn is, does my hon. Friend agree that their change of mind barely scratches the surface of the overall crisis in the provision of supported and affordable housing?

**Debbie Abrahams**: I will come on to that. Obviously, we look forward to seeing the detail next Tuesday, but yes, we must not underestimate what is happening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) always makes very pertinent points, but I would like to pick out her comments about Government policy contributing to potentially driving people into refuges because they have no financial support through the single householder.

It is so important that we have had this debate on supported housing after years of uncertainty from this Government hanging over the heads of some of our most vulnerable tenants. The Government's announcement earlier today is therefore welcome. I want to reaffirm a point that others have made in the course of the debate. The term "supported housing" covers accommodation for a number of different groups in our society, but one thing that binds them all is the degree of vulnerability of these tenants. This form of housing supports older people in sheltered accommodation, disabled people and those with learning disabilities, people at high risk of homelessness, and survivors of domestic violence and their children, as well as armed service veterans, care leavers, and ex-offenders. The importance of what is provided through supported housing cannot therefore be overestimated.

The Government have asked those groups to wait for nearly two years to find out whether their accommodation is secure. Although, as I say, we welcome the Prime Minister's announcement today indicating that LHA will not be extended to the social or supported housing sectors, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) was exactly right to say that the devil is in the detail. He cautioned that whatever comes out of next week's statement, it must recognise not just that there has been a two-year hiatus for the supported housing sector, but that cuts of half a billion pounds are coming down the line in 2021. We need to have the detail about those proposals, which were in the Red Book and autumn statement last year.

We wait with bated breath, alongside the 700,000 people currently using housing support, to see the adequacy of the supported housing deal. The new deal must recognise that the uncertainty has had an impact on the sector's capacity by undermining providers' ability to build. Government inaction has resulted in an 85% reduction in supported housing development, at a time when there is already a shortfall of nearly 17,000 supported housing units. That means that those who one day might need such provision will not have it. I recently visited a refuge that looks after women and children fleeing domestic abuse. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley has said, people are being turned away. It is important that we recognise the inadequacy of current provision.

When the Government finally publish their statement on the new approach to supported housing next week, I hope that they will recognise the design flaws in universal credit, which make it totally incompatible with the needs of people who are reliant on supported housing. I am pleased that the Government are bringing to an end the uncertainty about supported housing. I hope that they will also think again about the many other universal credit issues and agree to pause it while we work to fix it.

Over a year ago, the Prime Minister stood on the steps of Downing Street and promised to help the worst-off among us, but there has not been a single achievement. In many cases, including this one, progress has stalled. We could point to the Government's slashing of funding for affordable homes, the withdrawal of housing benefit from young people or the reductions in local housing allowance for private tenants, which are making sections of the country into places where low-income families simply cannot live. All those measures

are short-term attempts to balance the books on the back of the most vulnerable. None of them addresses the root cause of the problem, which is the Government's total failure to build enough affordable and social homes to meet people's needs. That problem was recognised by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, although seemingly not by his Chancellor.

I am pleased that today's statement suggests that the Government are considering the recommendations made jointly by the Communities and Local Government Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee on the future of supported housing. I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) on their contribution to that work.

After all, the independent Committees' report, which was drafted and agreed by Members from all parties, found that supported housing delivered excellent value for money and significant cost savings to the wider public sector, while maximising quality of life. They agreed with us that the Government must introduce a long-term and sustainable funding settlement, but raised concerns about previous proposals to extend the LHA. The Committees jointly suggested that the local housing allowance rate is not an appropriate place to start when determining the funding settlement. There is no correlation, as we have heard, between the cost of providing supported housing and local housing allowances.

Labour supports the Committees' calls to introduce a new supported housing allowance set at a rate higher than the current cap. Alongside that, we need a separate funding system to safeguard short-term and emergency accommodation, including women's refuges, and we must ensure that any new funding model does not threaten future supply of supported housing. We will hold the Government to account on their delivery of a new funding model. The next steps are laid out before the Government, and I hope that in their statement next week, they will commit to taking those steps. They should end this two-year impasse now, or stand aside and allow a Labour Government to get on with the job.

6.44 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Caroline Dinenage):** I very much welcome the opportunity to discuss this important issue. We have heard from a huge number of colleagues on both sides of the Chamber. I thank them all for their really valuable contributions, as well as for their support for this essential sector and their individual stories, particularly those drawing attention to the work—we all understand that it is incredible valuable—that is done by the suppliers of supported housing and sheltered accommodation in their constituencies.

I want to emphasise the importance that the Government attach to supported housing. It plays a vital role for many vulnerable people, as so many Members have said. It gives them a safe and supportive place where they can live as independently as possible. The Government are keen to ensure that those living in supported accommodation and those who provide this type of housing receive appropriate payment and protections. We also want building and further development in this sector to meet the projected future demand and ensure we can offer supported housing provision to those who need it.

[*Caroline Dinénage*]

That is why we have announced today that the local housing allowance cap will not be applied to social sector tenants, including those living in supported housing. It is absolutely essential—for providers, commissioners and vulnerable tenants, as well as for taxpayers—that we put the supported housing sector funding model on a sustainable footing and ensure that it works for all. We will announce our proposals for supported housing next week, and I hope these will show that we have listened to what people and organisations have said and that we have understood the issues.

**Mary Glindon:** Will the Minister give an assurance that the YMCA, the largest charitable provider of young people's supported housing, which has expressed lots of concerns, has been given a full hearing and that its suggestions have been taken fully on board in the review?

**Caroline Dinénage:** A lot of comments have been made about how long it has taken to get to this point, but that is because we have spoken extensively with valuable stakeholders such as the YMCA. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) told us about the incredible value of that organisation and others.

As has been said, the DWP, in conjunction with the DCLG, concluded a 12-week consultation on the supported housing sector earlier this year. As many Members have rightly suggested, it is absolutely vital that we listen to the concerns that the sector has raised, and that is precisely what we have been doing. We welcome the input that we have received in this consultation—the views of the sector, local government and other stakeholders—as well as the excellent joint report from the Work and Pensions Committee and the Communities and Local Government Committee. I add my congratulations to both Committees on their work. We have been carefully taking stock of these views, considering the recommendations and continuing our extensive conversation with the sector. We have done so to make sure that we get the detail right before making an announcement and that the services provided are as good as they can be.

This morning's announcement by the Prime Minister has already been embraced by the sector, which has acknowledged that we are listening to their concerns. The chief executive of the National Housing Federation has said:

“Things are really starting to change and it is great to see social housing getting the right kind of attention it deserves.”

The chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing has also welcomed the announcement, suggesting that the Government have

“clearly listened to the concerns of housing professionals across the UK”.

Several Members have raised concerns about how confidence in future funding is having an impact on the supply of supported housing. As I believe has been made very clear during this debate, we are absolutely determined to achieve our goal of ensuring a long-term sustainable future for the whole supported housing sector. Indeed, the National Housing Federation has welcomed the Prime Minister's recent announcements

on housing, which demonstrate that social housing and house building are firmly at the top of the Government's agenda.

We understand that the sector needs certainty to help it to continue to plan and deliver much-needed new supported housing, including sheltered housing for older people. We need to inject confidence into a sector that is in need of clarity about the future arrangements and to reignite the stalled supply as soon as possible. However, it was vital not to be too hasty or rushed in reaching this decision. We have taken time to get things right and to take into account voices from the sector to ensure that this is sustainable in the long term and protects those who are most vulnerable and who most need our support.

The Government have a good track record in safeguarding supported housing and boosting new supply. Since 2011, we have delivered 27,000 units of specialist and general housing for disabled, vulnerable and older people. We announced £400 million of funding in the spending review to deliver new specialist affordable homes for the vulnerable, elderly or those with disabilities. In addition, there will be more specialised homes funded by the Department of Health.

**Paul Farrelly:** In my area of Newcastle-under-Lyme, our local housing association, Aspire, is not building affordable or supported housing at all. It is developing in higher property price areas in Cheshire to recycle the money to support its existing estates because of the squeeze on its finances and income from Government policies. Is there not something fundamentally wrong when a local housing association cannot build affordable housing at all?

**Caroline Dinénage:** That flies in the face of what the National Housing Federation said; the Government are giving confidence to suppliers to build into the future.

As my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) said, we recognise and celebrate the diversity of the supported housing sector and we are reflecting this in the design of the reformed funding model. We want to ensure that the model is flexible and responsive to meet the variety of needs and demands placed on it for such a diverse sector and client base. Across the Government, we have considered the needs of all supported housing groups, including those with learning difficulties, physical and sensory disabilities and mental health problems, older people and those experiencing homelessness and seeking refuge from domestic abuse. We are working hard to ensure that the funding model reflects the unique range of provision in the supported housing sector, and we are listening to the sector to make sure we get that right. I believe that that will be seen in our response to the consultation, and we have always been clear that we are committed to developing a separate model that will work for short-term accommodation.

I want to address some of the concerns raised today about short-term supported and emergency housing such as hostels and refuges, which play a vital role in providing consistent, high-quality support for many vulnerable people who have experienced or are experiencing a crisis, such as fleeing domestic abuse. That was mentioned by a number of Members from all parties. We have always been very clear that we are committed to developing a separate funding model that will work well for people requiring help from these types of accommodation.

As a former Minister for Equalities, I carry on my passion for tackling domestic abuse, which is a key priority for this Government.

We fully support the valuable work carried out by women's refuges and other supported accommodation providers, and we are fully committed to ensuring that victims of domestic abuse are not turned away from the support that they need. Since 2014, we have invested £33.5 million in services to support victims, and the number of beds for victims of domestic violence has gone up. I want to be unambiguous about this: everyone who uses short-term supported and emergency housing such as hostels and refuges and who is eligible to have their housing costs met by housing benefit under the current system will continue to have these costs met through any new funding model for short-term accommodation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North mentioned the YMCA setting, social enterprises and adopting to change. We welcomed his valuable and characteristically positive addition to the debate, and that is exactly the kind of innovative and flexible approach that the Government promote. It is absolutely right that we should do our best in government to listen to and support the sector, but we should also take the opportunity to recognise the tireless work and groundbreaking approaches, such as that which he identified today.

We have listened to the views of the sector on sheltered and extra care housing through its response to our consultation, through its participation in our task and finish groups and through its involvement in the joint work of the Communities and Local Government and Work and Pensions Committees. We have heard the concerns that it has raised, and it is clear that an alternative model is required to secure supply. The Government recognise that supported housing helps many vulnerable people to stand on their own feet and lead independent lives. We have done a lot of work to understand the needs of individuals who live in long-term supported housing. We are committed to protecting and boosting the provision of supported and older people's sheltered housing and to ensuring we get the new model right to ensure that that housing is funded sustainably in the long term.

The Government are clear that everyone who would be eligible under the current system to have their supported housing costs met by housing benefit will continue to have their housing costs met under the new funding model. We are committed to protecting provision of supported and older people's sheltered housing to ensure that we get the new model right and that funding for supported housing is sustainable.

The Government's intention is to find the best means to deliver improvements in quality, oversight and value for money, while recognising the need to give appropriate consideration to the concerns raised by the sector through the consultation and the Select Committees. I can confirm that we will be able to announce the plans for supported housing next week and answer many more of the questions that hon. Members have raised. I am convinced that, when the announcement is made, it will be clear that we have listened and properly consulted and considered the concerns of all.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House calls on the Government to halt its current plans to cap, at the local housing allowance rate, help with housing costs for tenants of supported housing and to adopt instead a system which safeguards the long-term future and funding of supported housing, building on the recommendations of the First Joint Report of the Communities and Local Government and Work and Pensions Committees of Session 2016-17, Future of supported housing, HC 867.

**John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. After the Prime Minister made an announcement at Prime Minister's questions, ahead of our Opposition day debate today, that the Government will drop their plans for a crude cap and cuts to supported housing, have you or Mr Speaker had any indication that Ministers, when they make the full announcement next week, which the Minister has just mentioned, will come and make the announcement to the House with an oral statement? In the light of the unanimous support for our motion tonight and the widespread concern about the Government's plans over the past two years on both sides of the House and across the sector, it is clearly really important that Members can question Ministers on the announcement in full that they make.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** The one thing we can be sure of is that I have been given no notice that anybody is coming forward and I do not think Mr Speaker will have been given notice at this stage. What I would say is that the right hon. Gentleman has certainly put on record his concerns. His views and opinions have been recorded. As he would expect, it is not for the Chair to look at the decision on the vote. That is a matter for the House and certainly not the Chair.

## PETITION

### Save Our Shire Hill Hospital

6.57 pm

**Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab):** I would like to present a petition, signed by 4,670 people, residents of the United Kingdom and Glossopdale, to the House of Commons to save our Shire Hill Hospital. It declares opposition to the closure of the Shire Hill Hospital in Glossop as the only credible option in the consultation given. I pay tribute to the staff of Shire Hill and the people of Glossop, who have spent weeks and months campaigning and getting these signatures.

*Following is the full text of the petition:*

*[The Petition of residents of the United Kingdom,*

*Declares opposition to the closure of the Shire Hill Hospital in Glossop as it is the only credible option.*

*The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to rule the consultation invalid and enable Shire Hill Hospital to continue their excellent rehabilitation service.*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

[P002068]

## Mental Health: Pharmacists

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

6.59 pm

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): I wish to use tonight's Adjournment debate to raise the sad case of my constituent Alison Stamps, a 33-year-old pharmacist who sadly took her own life on 25 May 2015. I will outline the circumstances of the case, but will also raise wider concerns that I and her family have around the operation of Boots UK and how it dealt with her death, as well as my broader concerns concerning pharmacists and mental health issues.

Alison was clearly an exceptionally bright and talented individual. After finishing at Pelton Roseberry comprehensive school in my constituency in 2000, she went on to study—

7 pm

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

**Mr Jones:** Alison went on to study biology at Durham University and graduated in 2003. She then began work as an audit and accounting technician at Sunderland city hospital before choosing to return to university—the University of Sunderland—to study for a four-year masters degree in pharmacy. While she was at Sunderland, Alison was awarded the prize for the best overall student in the first year, before going on to be awarded the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's award for the best student on a masters degree programme in 2012. Her achievements were remarkable, and clearly she was dedicated to public health and the pharmacy profession.

Alison began work at Boots' Tindale store in Bishop Auckland in August 2013. Her parents tell me that she enjoyed the work but increasingly complained about the long hours and demands it placed upon her. By mid-December 2014 she was clearly overwhelmed by what she was having to do. Her store manager noticed that she was losing weight and looking unwell. Following a conversation with the store manager, Alison expressed how down she felt. The store manager provided her with a phone number for an independent counselling service and encouraged her to speak to her GP and her family. Like many people in Alison's position, she felt she could not speak to her family or strangers about her situation. Still concerned, her manager arranged an appointment with a GP for Alison and even attended the appointment with her. I understand that the GP indicated that she should take antidepressants, but Alison did not wish to do that. The GP gave her a crisis number to ring and also suggested some other coping mechanisms.

At this point, I would like to commend the actions of the store manager, who I think genuinely tried to help Alison. I understand that she reported her concerns about Alison to her area manager, and I have had it confirmed by the director of human resources at Boots that this case was referred and flagged up with the firm's central HR department. It appears that all that happened, however, is that the store manager was advised about what counselling was available, but no alarm bells rang in Boots' central HR department that one of its pharmacists

was in a crisis situation and no action seems to have been taken. Instead, it was left to the store manager to do her best to assist Alison in her time of crisis.

This raises serious concerns about how Boots as a company handled the case. Having been made aware of Alison's situation, no attempt seems to have been made centrally or high up in the organisation to intervene directly. This was a young woman not only holding down a responsible job dispensing medicines but who was clearly in a severe mental health crisis. Throughout this time, the store manager was also aware that Alison was self-harming—she had confided in her that she had cut her legs. For six months, Boots was aware of Alison's situation but simply left it to the store manager to deal with it, although I put it on the record again that she did a great job in trying to help, and she did it to the best of her ability.

Sadly, on 25 May 2015, Alison took her own life in a room at the Hardwick Hall hotel, having taken an overdose of prescription medication. At the coroner's inquest, it was determined that Alison had taken her own life while suffering from depression. Her parents, Mr and Mrs Stamps, attended the inquest. So did representatives from Boots, who made no attempt whatsoever to offer sympathy or speak to the family. The coroner invited those present to introduce themselves, but because it was a public hearing, the Boots representatives chose not to do so. Mr and Mrs Stamps felt, I think understandably, that their attitude was very legalistic—that they were concerned with their fears about the possibility of a legal case as a result of Alison's death, rather than with having a compassionate understanding of how her death had occurred.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising an issue in which he takes a great interest, as is clear from other occasions when he has spoken in the House. I believe that this very sad case highlights for all of us the need to ensure that those in the workplace are given adequate training to offer support to workers with depression or other mental health issues. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government must initiate, or make available, courses for all small and medium-sized enterprises, which would be free of charge and which would provide tools for employers that would enable them to help such staff members?

**Mr Jones:** As I have said on other occasions, I think that mental health in the workplace is one of the big issues that we do not talk about. I think the hon. Gentleman's suggestion should be considered, but what struck me about this case was that it involved not a small employer but a huge multinational company, which should have had the capacity within its organisation to provide assistance.

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that all employers could benefit from having policies to support staff when they are at work, and when, sadly, an employee dies by suicide? Should not employers be encouraged to take up programmes such as those developed by the Samaritans, Business in the Community and Public Health England for the benefit of staff?

**Mr Jones:** I agree with my hon. Friend. I know that she is involved with the Samaritans, and I congratulate her on the work that she does. Yes, there are a lot of tools out there for companies to use, but they must take

them seriously rather than treating them as a tick-box exercise. Policies of this kind must actually be used in the workplace, and people must be trained so that if they encounter a case like Alison's, they do take it seriously. That is what I would have expected from a large company such as Boots.

Anyone who has looked at the details of this case cannot but be moved by its tragic nature, and by the failure of Boots to exercise its duty of care at a national level. Mr and Mrs Stamps are certain that the long hours and the workload that Alison faced were a contributory factor in her death. I have spoken to representatives of the pharmacists' trade union, the Pharmacy Defence Association. They made it clear that there are increasing demands on pharmacists, not only in terms of workload but as a result of staff cuts. Last year an article in *The Guardian* highlighted the situation at Boots, including many emails from Boots' pharmacists claiming that profit was being put in the place of pharmacists' health, and that they were increasingly being asked to hit targets for medicines use reviews—the company is paid £28 per review by the NHS—rather than concentrating on dispensing and the care of patients.

Those pressures are putting an increasing strain on pharmacists who work for companies such as Boots, but, like Alison, many choose not to complain, because they fear that if they do so they will lose their jobs or their professional qualifications will be withdrawn. That is a particular issue in the context of mental health, and in professions such as pharmacy. People remain silent for fear of the consequences of speaking up. I think that pharmacists need a system like the one that has been introduced for GPs. Many GPs also do not want to talk about their mental health problems because they fear that they will be disciplined. I think that that was Alison's fear: she feared that if she raised issues relating to her mental health, she would be taken down the disciplinary route and lose her job.

I suggest to the Minister that that needs to be looked at. Pharmacists should have a system similar to that for GPs. I have done some work on this with GPs. The NHS has the GP health service, which is a confidential service for both GPs and trainees. I have met some of its staff, and it works very well in allowing GPs to self-refer confidentially. The GP health service can help doctors with anything to do with mental health, including stress and depression. The effort that has been made to ensure that there is GP support needs to be replicated for pharmacists, because I can say from a personal point of view that, with the best will in the world, giving someone with depression a helpline to ring is not the answer. People do not ring them; I can say from personal experience that I would not have done so when I suffered from depression. The work done for GPs offers a way forward that I ask the Minister to explore.

I also have to raise questions with the Minister about the role of the General Pharmaceutical Council. Following Alison's death and Mr and Mrs Stamps coming to see me, I wrote to the GPC asking for its opinion of the case. It wrote back saying that its role was to protect patients by

“setting and upholding standards for individual pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.”

I understand that the GPC has been aware of complaints concerning Boots' working practices for pharmacists, but has taken no action against that company or—so

far as I can see—any other company about how pharmacists were being employed. That raises the question of what this regulator is actually doing.

It is also disappointing that the regulator sees itself as a peripheral player on the issue of workplace pressure and stress, and the pressures put on pharmacists. This stance by the regulator allows employers such as Boots to preside over poor working conditions without any threat of sanction. It says that its job is to protect patients, but if a pharmacist has a severe mental health problem that is being created by workplace pressures and stress, that must be putting patients at risk. The potential danger of mistakes being made will be heightened if pharmacists are under such pressure.

In response to Alison's death it seems as though Boots was most concerned about its own reputation. At the time, its main concern appeared to be whether any controlled drugs were missing from the pharmacy where she worked. It would appear that the drugs that Alison took to end her life came from the unused drugs that were returned to the pharmacy by patients. Although there is a register of these drugs, I wonder whether there should be tighter regulation because it is up to individual pharmacies whether the drugs are recorded. There should be a process of monitoring how the drugs are collected, registered and ultimately destroyed.

While doing the research for this debate I tried to find statistics on mental health problems and suicide among pharmacists. I am not aware of any statistics being held centrally that show this information. We might look into collating such figures to inform this debate, which is clearly ongoing.

Alison Stamps' death is a tragedy, not only for her family but for us all as citizens, as we have lost a bright, conscientious young lady with much to offer. Her life was, sadly, cut short by circumstances she thought she could not face. It is quite clear that lessons need to be learned and that changes need to be made, not just in the way we regulate pharmacists but in the way we employ them and treat them in the workplace. Alison's employer, Boots, should take stock not only of how it is dealing with her case but of how it employs other people within its organisation. It would be right to finish with something that Mr and Mrs Stamps said in a letter to me when they first raised the case with me. They said:

“It is clear that Alison was a victim of corporate greed and collateral damage by an uncaring company intent only on its own agenda.”

7.15 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price):** I thank the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) for bringing this debate before the House tonight. I am especially gratified to see so many hon. Members in attendance. This illustrates the very real concern that we have for suicide as an issue, and I welcome their participation here. I know that the hon. Gentleman has been deeply concerned by this incident, and my thoughts also go out to Alison's family, friends and colleagues. This must be an extremely difficult episode for them. He has described a young woman of great talent and potential, and with timely support she could still have been with us today. I am truly sorry that we have had to hold this debate at all, but in doing so we must learn the appropriate lessons from this case.

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

Every death by suicide is a tragedy. As the Minister responsible for mental health, I hear from families bereaved by suicide about the devastating impact it has on them. That is why I am determined to drive forward the action we are taking at national level and within local communities to reduce suicides. I am encouraged that suicide numbers have fallen in recent years but they still remain too high. I am aware that the north-east of England has the highest suicide rate in England, and that Durham has one of the highest suicide rates in the region. Really, however, this debate is about Alison Stamps. I am aware that she was a pharmacist, and the hon. Gentleman has raised the issue of suicide risk among pharmacists. He has also put on record his concerns about Boots as an employer. Alison clearly had support in the workplace, but her colleagues did not know how best to help her, and that is not satisfactory.

The hon. Gentleman might be aware that the Office for National Statistics has published research on the suicide risk in occupational groups. While the research did not find a high risk in pharmacists specifically, there is a heightened risk of suicide among health professionals generally. I understand that Alison's family raised concerns with the coroner about the awareness of mental health issues in the workplace and the ability of employers to support people who experience problems. This is an important concern and one that the Government are addressing.

First, we are looking at the issue of mental health first aid. In Alison's case, this could have helped. Although general awareness has been raised, we recognise that there is further to go. That is why we have recently announced that we are investing £15 million to deliver an ambitious national mental health campaign to ensure that at least 1 million people receive mental health awareness training. That will be starting next year. Through innovative national programmes to engage the public and continuing to raise the importance of mental health in the same way that we do with physical health, we will increase awareness and knowledge, as well as challenging stigma.

The real concern that the hon. Gentleman has raised about the support—or rather, lack of it—provided to Alison by her employer is firmly at the top of the list in terms of what the Government are doing to address this issue. We recently commissioned Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer to conduct a review of how people are supported in the workplace in relation to their mental health and wellbeing. I can advise the House that the outcome will be published shortly, and we will expect employers to step up to the plate as a result of what is in the review.

Pharmacists carry out important and precise work in dispensing medication, and the hon. Gentleman is right to point out that they are exposed to the very tools that can be used to take their own lives if they are minded to do so. I am aware that organisations such as the Pharmacist Support charity, which was set up by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, do a tremendous amount to support pharmacists on a wide range of issues. That organisation also publishes information and resources about mental health support.

The hon. Gentleman has asked what more can be done, but from the Government's perspective, the buck stops with the employers. It is they who must ensure

that there is sufficient mental health support for their workers. There is much happening in this space, but change will not happen overnight. I am acutely aware that this has come too late for Alison Stamps and her family and is of little consolation, but I hope that improving mental health awareness and creating more mentally friendly and healthy workplaces will increase the likelihood that people will feel able to talk about their mental health problems at work and be assured they will get the understanding and support they need.

I am pleased to say that the profile of suicide prevention has never been so high, which is testament to the progress we are collectively making in tackling the stigma surrounding suicide and mental health problems more widely. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for that. He has done much to raise awareness in this place of the impact of mental ill health. The Prime Minister has spoken about her commitment to tackling the burning injustices of people who experience mental ill health, and many well-known figures have helped to bring this vital issue into the national conversation. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) for mentioning the fantastic work of the Samaritans—what would we do without them? I am pleased to say that I met Ruth Sutherland just this week. The Samaritans is a key partner as we tackle the whole issue of suicide prevention.

Turning to Government action and the suicide prevention strategy, we are making a big step forward and responding to the calls of stakeholders. We need to ensure that locally managed suicide prevention plans are targeted, and we will provide support where plans are insufficient. We have done that because a previous suicide attempt is the strongest indicator of future risk of suicide, so local areas need to keep that intelligence and act upon it. We welcomed last year's Health Committee inquiry into suicide prevention, which made a wide range of recommendations to reduce suicides. The Government published their response in July to set out how we are progressing many of those recommendations. We also welcomed the recommendation in the five year forward view for mental health to reduce suicides by 10% by 2020-21. The commitment is supported by an additional £25 million between 2018-19 and 2020-21, and we are working with NHS England and other stakeholders to identify the priorities for this funding in local areas.

Local areas are where real change will be delivered, and I am pleased to report that 98% of local areas have a suicide prevention plan in place or in development. I am also pleased that Durham County Council, which serves the constituency of the hon. Member for North Durham, is part of that 98%. Our aim is to reach 100% by the end of the year, but we need a qualitative assessment of the quality of the plans. We do not want this to be a box-ticking exercise, so we will work with local areas to ensure that their plans are high quality and to identify areas for improvement.

We remain committed to delivering the five year forward view for mental health and the Prime Minister's mental health reforms. That work is supported by an additional £1 billion of funding up to 2020-21 to ensure that an additional 1 million people can access mental health services. We certainly do not want people like Alison Stamps to feel that they have nowhere to go. Much of that investment will directly impact suicide prevention, such as the £400 million we have invested in developing mental health crisis services in the community

and the £250 million to implement liaison mental health teams in emergency departments to support people who present at general hospitals with mental health problems.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. In Northern Ireland, where health is devolved, we have not had an Assembly for 10 months and we do not have a Health Minister. May I urge the Minister to ensure that there is a suicide prevention strategy? She says that there is a national strategy. I love the word “national” because Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, so will the Minister ensure that the permanent secretary for the Health Department in Northern Ireland is aware of the progress being made in the rest of the United Kingdom? I am encouraged by what she has said this evening.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The hon. Lady makes a fair point, and I will ensure that that is taken up with officials in Northern Ireland, because it is important that the situation is tackled locally.

Members may also be aware that we launched the “Beyond Places of Safety” programme this month to provide £15 million of support for local community-based projects to ensure that there are more appropriate places of safety for people experiencing a mental health crisis and to avoid police custody or unnecessary hospital admissions. That builds on the £15 million we invested in the first phase of the programme.

The forthcoming children and young people Green Paper will set out a range of measures to improve access to services and support for young people. We will provide mental health first aid training to all state secondary schools by 2019, and we will expand that training to state primary schools. I hope hon. Members will agree

that the Government’s continued investment and drive to improve mental health services will bring real change for people.

The death of Alison Stamps has been particularly tragic. Her case is a clear lesson that employers need to be alive to the mental health needs of their staff, and I make it clear that that is what we expect. There is political consensus that we must address issues such as suicide prevention, so now is the time for us all to take action to make change a reality for people and communities. We must be ambassadors in ensuring that employers step up to the plate.

As I have set out, this Government are committed to tackling the burning injustices experienced by people with mental health problems so that more people will feel able to speak out about their problems and feel confident that they will get support from those around them, including their employer. I was struck when the hon. Member for North Durham said that people are scared to speak out in case they end up being taken down a disciplinary process or losing their job. That is not acceptable, and employers need to ensure that employees realise that support will be forthcoming.

We have made huge strides on delivering parity of esteem between mental health and physical health, and on ensuring that more people have timely access to services when they need them, but there is still much more to do. We must not be complacent in pursuing those goals. We will be tireless in that pursuit, and I can tell from their interest that other hon. Members will be tireless, too. We must ensure that other families do not have to experience the grief and pain that Alison’s family are feeling now.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.26 pm

*House adjourned.*



## Westminster Hall

Wednesday 25 October 2017

[JAMES GRAY *in the Chair*]

### Police Funding: London

9.30 am

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered police funding in London.

I pay tribute to the police officers who work hard every day to keep us safe, but the Metropolitan police continue to struggle with crippling cost pressures. The Met has had to find £600 million in savings since 2010 and is expected to find another £400 million by 2021. The chair of the National Police Chiefs Council, Chief Constable Sara Thornton, confirmed last month that police funding for counter-terrorism is set to fall by 7% in the next three years.

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is right to mention what Sara Thornton said. Does she agree with Mark Rowley, the head of national counter-terrorism policing, who told the Select Committee on Home Affairs yesterday that the hollowing out of neighbourhood policing is deeply damaging and dangerous, both to our intelligence-gathering capacity and to our surge capacity in the event of a terrorist attack? The first duty of any Government is the safety and security of their citizens. The Government are putting the British people at risk.

**Catherine West:** There is no doubt that neighbourhood policing was the biggest police reform in London back in about 2000; it was rolled out in every ward. It made an incredible difference, particularly in our cities, but in rural areas as well. Its diminution over the years is a huge shame.

Police stations are closing and neighbourhood policing is under attack across the capital. Half of London's remaining 73 police station counters are set to close, including a number in Hornsey and Wood Green. There are fewer police officers on the street. The UK has 20,000 fewer police officers than at the peak in 2010, and 924 fewer than last year. The Police Federation has branded those startling statistics "deeply worrying and disappointing".

Our constituents are worried. In my surgeries, I regularly see people who are concerned and scared about the rise in reported gun, knife and moped crime.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): In my constituency, there is now not a single operating police station. Diminishing the police presence in the streets and removing the preventive force across the capital is making people more vulnerable, or at least more fearful.

**Catherine West:** The argument is often trotted out that a police station is just a building, but we all know that it has an authoritative image. Closing all police stations says something about the diminution of the state's role in our communities.

**Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): Some stations and counters have very low levels of usage, so the case can be made for closing them. However, does the hon. Lady agree that if that process continues, which it almost certainly will, we will need to do something about the shocking levels of underservice by the 101 system? I have constituents who no longer bother to report crime because they do not get an answer when they call 101.

**Catherine West:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The debate is similar to the one about hospital closures: we want community-based services, but once hospitals are closed, it is easy to close those services without people noticing. The same rule applies to the 101 service.

Many people feel less safe in London. Figures from the Met suggest a 5% rise in crime overall between 2015-16 and 2016-17.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Has my hon. Friend, as I have, seen an upsurge in the number of people who have witnessed or experienced moped crime? Does she agree that the police need greater powers? Funding for response vehicles has been slashed to ribbons, as it has for everything else. My caseworker Milad, who is ex-Met, tells me that the police feel powerless to deal with moped crime, because criminals can exploit legal and procedural loopholes. The police need greater pursuit powers and legal protections. These cuts have consequences.

**Catherine West:** Indeed. Sadly, moped crime is increasingly prevalent in all our constituencies. We can debate whether to change the law, but first and foremost let us get bobbies back on the beat. If criminals see people they are a bit afraid of, they may be disinclined to jump on the back of a motorbike and steal from old ladies.

I habitually receive emails, letters and phone calls from constituents who want to feel safe and secure in their community and in our capital. Our ability to respond to terror attacks is being weakened; the number of armed officers has fallen by 10% since 2010. Meanwhile, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime fears that officer numbers in London are at risk of falling below 30,000 for the first time since 2003, despite the growing threat of terror and our rapidly growing population. The number of officers per capita has fallen 20% over the past five years. We face ever more austerity, ever more cuts, and the ever more inevitable closure of public services. There is a deep sense that the Government's decisions are bypassing us completely and are failing to take into account the views of those affected.

The Government argue that the police can do more with less, but crime is being increasingly reported and is increasingly violent, including gun, knife and moped crime. Our emergency services put themselves in harm's way every single day to protect us. Our police keep us safe. They are dedicated and professional, despite cuts to their resources. As Steve White, chair of the Police Federation, recently said:

"Whenever a crisis happens there is talk of 'extra' officers being put on patrol but these aren't 'extra' officers. They are the same officers working longer shifts, or who have had days off

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cancelled and are being run ragged. This has a negative impact on their health and wellbeing, which has an impact on sickness levels, which has a further impact on their colleagues.”

The Government’s record is damning. They are led by a former Home Secretary who oversaw and enforced deep cost pressures that have left some in the police force demoralised—there were a record number of resignations from the Metropolitan police last year. In the forthcoming Budget, the Government have an opportunity to amend that record and put us back on the right track. They must increase overall real-terms funding for the police in November. The police must be given the resources they need, not 20,000 cuts.

The Mayor has warned that our city faces losing up to 4,000 police officers at a time of “unprecedented” challenges and that the £400 million gap may endanger the safety of residents. Just this month, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Mark Simmons told us that the Metropolitan police will stop investigating “lower level” crimes, including assaults and burglary, as a result of these cuts. The Met has sold off almost £1 billion-worth of London property over the past five years to fill its funding gap.

A recent cross-party report by the London Assembly’s budget and performance committee, chaired by Conservative Assembly member Gareth Bacon, found that even if these cost savings go to plan,

“the Met still faces a financial black-hole of £185 million over the next four years... Home Office Ministers appear to have ignored the advice of their own scrutiny panel and are underfunding the Met for the cost of policing an international capital city. Furthermore, their guidelines effectively prevent the Met from claiming any financial help for dealing with extraordinary events such as the London Bridge attack or the Grenfell fire.”

That is unjustified, unreasonable and unfair.

Police officers deserve their overdue pay rise, but it has fallen on the Met to find the money in its existing budget, which is already under attack. That is an additional pressure of £10.7 million—money that should come from central Government. The Mayor already increased the council tax police precept last year to fill some of the gap, but it is not enough. The Home Office still has not released the criteria that it will use to calculate the police general grant, but the Met expects further reductions of up to £700 million if the funding formula review goes ahead.

Uncertainty, with no official decision yet from the Home Office on general Government grant, prevents the Met from making considered and long-term financial decisions. The size of the budget for policing across the UK is too small, and it needs to be increased across the board and in our city. While the Government drag their feet, they do so in secret, unwilling to share calculations for how budgets are settled.

Some 70% of the Met’s funding comes from the Home Office, which must wake up and realise that, without urgent action, the headcount will fall further. We cannot protect our communities on the cheap. It has been a difficult year in keeping London and Londoners safe, with rising crime and escalating terror incidents. Throughout these events, our Metropolitan police have risen to the challenges. Let our Government now do the same.

9.40 am

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on securing this important debate on the future funding of policing in London.

I will start by talking about the situation in the borough of Harrow, which my honourable neighbour, the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas), and I share. Back in 2014, Harrow became the safest borough in London, with crime at its lowest level ever. There were still challenges, the key one being that, despite having the lowest level of crime in London, we had one of the highest levels of fear of crime in London. Because crime in the borough was so low, every crime—particularly every violent crime—was on the front pages of our local newspapers, so of course everyone feared that they would either be burgled or mugged on the streets. Dealing with the fear of crime is fundamental.

The hon. Lady forgot one issue in her speech: that the Mayor of London is responsible for policing in London. He is effectively the police and crime commissioner for London, and he must bear responsibility every bit as much—at least—as the Government when it comes to decisions on policing in London.

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I rise because although I am not a Labour Member—I am a Liberal Democrat—I think the hon. Gentleman, if he is to be fair and honest to this Chamber, should admit that a large part of the police funding grant for the Mayor comes from the Home Office. Is that true, or is it not?

**Bob Blackman:** Quite clearly it is true that funding comes from the Government, but it is the key decisions that the Mayor of London makes about the whole budget for London that shows what his priorities are.

**Sir Edward Davey** *rose*—

**Bob Blackman:** Before I allow the right hon. Gentleman to intervene again, I will point out that we should remember that the Mayor of London took decisions. For example, he took a decision to freeze partially fares on the underground, the result of which is that my constituents will not now get upgrades on the Jubilee and Northern lines, and will suffer accordingly. That decision was a deliberate one by the Mayor of London. He can make it because it is political, but he cannot then complain about lack of funding. He made decisions—this is the key point—including a decision to increase the precept marginally. He could have decided to increase the precept and the council tax further, which would have brought in approximately £14.1 million extra. He makes the decisions about where the funding that comes from the Government—from the taxpayer—and the council tax and business rates is apportioned. That is his decision.

**Dr Huq:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Edward Davey** *rose*—

**Bob Blackman:** It is not for the Government to determine that decision; it is for the Mayor to do that. Under the previous Mayor, decisions were taken to ensure that

32,000 police officers were kept in the Metropolitan police, and indeed crime was gradually falling in London. That is the reality.

I will give way to the hon. Lady, as I have already given way to the right hon. Gentleman.

**Dr Huq:** Is the hon. Gentleman not being a bit disingenuous about the Transport for London resource grant, £2.8 billion of which was cut—

**James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but she may not use the word “disingenuous” with regard to another Member. Perhaps she will be kind enough to withdraw that expression.

**Dr Huq:** Is the hon. Gentleman not being tendentious, and overlooking the fact that the former Chancellor, who is now the editor of the *Evening Standard*, cut the TfL resource budget?

**James Gray (in the Chair):** I think we have got the general point, thank you.

**Bob Blackman:** The key point is that we should recognise that when decisions are made about funding and how that funding is spent, we should consider the Government, because the Home Office is providing funding, but we should also consider the key person making the decisions on where that funding goes, who is the Mayor of London. The Mayor has decisions to make and it would be wrong of the Government to interfere in those decisions. He can and should make the case to the Government on behalf of London for additional funding for policing if he believes that we need it.

I will now touch on several of the other issues that affect my constituency and my constituents. The Mayor of London and the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime are now consulting on closing police stations. The position is, as my honourable neighbour knows, that every single police station in Harrow bar one will close, and even the one that we have in south Harrow has had its custody suite closed. That means that people who are arrested on the streets of Harrow must now be taken either to Colindale, on the Edgware Road, or to Heathrow airport. I suspect that what that will mean for crime in Harrow is that when police officers apprehend an individual on the streets, they will contemplate the question, “Should I spend the next four hours transporting this potential criminal”—the person who has been arrested—“to Colindale or Heathrow in order to process them, or should I just give them a ticking-off?”

Now, individuals who are apprehended on the streets of Harrow, who are suspected of committing a crime and taken to a police station, can be processed, their fingerprints and a DNA sample can be recorded, and they can be investigated not only for what they are suspected of doing and what they have been arrested for, but potentially for other crimes that have not been cleared up already. The risk—a direct risk that arises because of both the proposed police station closures and, more important, the closure of the custody suite—is that we will not apprehend those criminals on the streets and that we will not obtain information about them. There is a risk not only of criminals getting away with crime but of the police being unable to clear up the

crime that has already been committed. I think that is a very serious risk in Harrow and, I suspect, across London. At operational level, we have to lay some blame at the door of the Mayor and we must ensure that he understands the risk that is ever present as a result of the decisions that he is making.

The other problem is that I suspect our local criminal investigation department unit will transfer from Harrow, probably to Wembley in Brent. Those who work in the custody suite and who do an excellent job there were informed by the Metropolitan police on a Friday afternoon, by email, that the suite was to close. It is unacceptable that employees are informed in such a way that their job will move quite dramatically, from one place to another. That is fundamentally wrong and should be addressed.

Policing London, as the capital city, has two aspects. One is the policing of crime that we all want to see, but because we are the capital city our police have additional responsibilities. As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green said, there are issues of terrorism. One element of the terrorist crime that we saw at London Bridge was that the terrorists were eliminated within eight minutes of the call to the police being made. That was a remarkable performance by the Metropolitan police, but the reality is that, short of having armed police officers in every hotspot around London, it is not reasonable to expect the police to respond any faster than that.

As I say, the police do a remarkable job, and they do it literally every day. There is a case for additional funding for the Metropolitan police; I always believe that we should look for more funding for the Met.

**Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con):** I agree with everything that my hon. Friend is saying and I agreed with a lot of what the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) said, but one thing that has not been mentioned so far is that the Metropolitan police cover the whole of London. That does not just mean inner London; outer London boroughs also need proper resources. The reality is that far too much is being focused on the inner London areas and boroughs such as mine, the London Borough of Havering, are being underfunded when crime is rising in our areas. Does he agree?

**Bob Blackman:** I quite agree that that is the problem. One of the changes that is under consultation and seems to be rolling out is the merger of boroughs: instead of having a borough commander and a police force for each borough, we are seeing mergers. In our case, Harrow will be merged with Brent and Barnet. The level of crime in Brent—particularly in the southern bit of Brent, which is close to the inner-city area—is far higher than in any of the other places. As a result, the borough commander of those three boroughs will have to transfer resources to where the crime is, which may well push the criminals to go somewhere that the police are not. That is the dilemma and the risk we face.

Where those mergers are being tried—I think the constituency of the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green might be one where they have been tried—we have seen police response times increase and people feel less safe. That is another decision to be made by the Mayor of London, not the Government. As a London MP, I want more funding for policing in London—clearly

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we all do—but we must remember that the operational decisions and how that budget is determined are the Mayor of London’s job. Since he has been elected, he has been trying to deny responsibility and to get away with it by saying, “It’s nothing to do with me. It’s all the Government’s fault.”

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): This is just outrageous. The Conservatives have the cheek to turn up this morning and cry crocodile tears and attack every single measure that the Mayor is taking to manage a difficult budget. The responsibility for the disaster we face in London is central Government funding, or indeed the lack of it. We have already lost £600 million with another £400 million being lost. That is the core of the issue.

**Bob Blackman:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I will conclude my remarks because I know that other colleagues want to speak.

The reality is that the Met police have had, broadly speaking, a flat cash settlement for a long time indeed—since 2010. The previous Mayor managed to manage that budget, and reduce crime, and maintain 32,000 police officers on the beat and on the streets at the same time. The reality is that the current Mayor of London has failed. Violent crime is up; gun crime, knife crime and acid attacks are all up dramatically under his watch. He has to answer for that. He has responsibility for that. He is the Mayor of London and he speaks on behalf of London. If he fails to do that job, he should get out the way and let someone else who is more competent do the job.

**James Gray (in the Chair):** It may be helpful to the House to know that I intend to call the first of the three Front Benchers at 10.30. I do not believe in formal time limits—I think they are a bit obnoxious—but I do think that Members should consider each other in the length of their speeches. In other words, they should keep their speeches very short. I start by calling Stephen Pound, who is always short.

9.53 am

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your command, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on securing this debate. She and I have met the deputy Mayor for policing—I cannot remember a more utterly depressing, soul-destroying meeting. The deputy Mayor is an excellent officer, but during that meeting we realised the scale of the impact of police cuts on our capital city. It is eye-watering and terrifying.

Parts of our city are like Dodge City now, yet the response we get from the Harrovian Dr Pangloss is that things are all right in some areas and we should somehow complete this unbelievable miracle of expanding the cake that the Mayor of London has so that he can provide different slices. What absolute nonsense! I realise that we cannot use certain words—my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) has been rightly ruled out of order—but I have to say

that the last speech was dripping with mendacity. The brute dichotomy in which the hon. Gentleman tried to somehow—

**James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that the expression “dripping with mendacity” implies that the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) was not telling the truth. The hon. Gentleman is not allowed to do that. Will he please withdraw that remark and apologise for it?

**Stephen Pound:** I most certainly withdraw the remark and, through gritted teeth, apologise for it. The trouble is that I think this is a *trahison des clercs*. The hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) knows what he is saying and I think he knows the reality of the situation.

Let us get down to the reality of what is happening to policing in London. What is happening to young black youth on the streets of our city? What is happening to the confidence people have in the police? We can offer all the warm words in the world to the police. We congratulate them on all the incredible, amazing work they have done on counter-terrorism, but warm words are cold comfort when a police officer is facing having to parade in the back of a car and have their evening meal in a motorway service station. There are no facilities for the police to parade up in the morning. There is something profoundly and seriously wrong.

I am not one of the “Dixon of Dock Green” sentimentalists who go on about “bobbies on the beat”; I always think that is a rather silly expression. Feet on the beat do matter, but the physical presence of a police station is crucial. It is not just about that blue light glowing through the mists of some 1950s black and white film. When I was on the buses, I can still remember the times when I used to drive to a police station because someone was in danger on my bus. The police station was a place of safety, and we have surrendered that place of safety.

I do not want to be overly parochial, but my constituents would not forgive me were I not to be. We have heard that Harrow will suffer, and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) has frequently made that point. The idea that the Mayor of London has not pursued the Treasury or the Home Office in seeking additional funding is nonsensical. The Mayor of London is hardly off the phone for a minute in trying to get additional funding, because he knows the realities. The idea that he could somehow cut all the anti-pollution measures, the traffic measures, the spatial development measures, the housing measures and the other things that the Mayor does and divert resources to policing to solve the problem is—I am sure there is a word for it, Mr Gray, but the word that springs to my lips would not be admissible.

One problem in my borough is that we simply do not know what is happening. We know that safer neighbourhood boards have gone. We know that all the work that David Blunkett and Hazel Blears did, which raised people’s confidence, has been jettisoned. We know that there may be something called “dedicated ward officers”, but we do not know who they are, what they are, where they are or how many of them there will be. We do not know whether there will be police community support officers, constables or specials. In Ealing, we

still do not know what is happening about our police stations. Acton police station is fairly close to Hammersmith on the extreme eastern border of the borough, which appears to be being upgraded. Southall police station appears to be downgraded and Ealing police station is falling into a hole in the ground.

While all that is going on, we have lost Norwood Green and Hanwell and we are losing Greenford. We are losing our safer neighbourhood bases in Northolt Mandeville and the Grand Union Village. What are we left with? A few police officers in the Marks and Spencer all-night shop on the Perivale slip off the A40, driving around and being called in on a peripatetic basis. How are the public going to have confidence? Where there is an absence in confidence, there is a growth in crime. If people think that the police will not investigate so-called low-level crime and there is no response or building to indicate a police presence, the villains will be emboldened to act even worse.

I agreed with the hon. Member for Harrow East when he talked about the rise in crimes such as acid attacks. We never knew about acid attacks before. We do not even know what next year's new crime will be. All I know is that whatever the change in the pattern of crime is, a reduction in police numbers, an abandonment of the streets and a surrender of our cities to the criminals will only encourage that behaviour.

The Minister is a decent man. I respect him and I do not want to curse him. I appreciate that I may destroy his career by saying this, but he and I are divided mostly by the Western Avenue. We are neighbours. He and I know what the growth of crime is in our area. He is as well aware as I am of the consequences of constant swingeing cuts. We can argue about the cause, but I do not think there is any argument: the cause is demonstrably at the door of the Home Office.

We are talking about the consequences of the cuts, the fiscal squeeze and that brute, unthinking, inchoate austerity programme. We are talking about chaos on our streets. I am not exaggerating the situation. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) will doubtlessly be summing up for the Opposition, and she can give spine-chilling statistics for the level of criminality in her part of the world.

How are we addressing that? By reducing the number of police officers, by disposing of the Metropolitan police estate and by closing down police stations. That is madness. It is absolute insanity. In my borough, Paul Martin is the borough commander. He is doing his level best to do more with less, but we cannot keep going back to police officers and saying, "We admire you. We respect you. You are wonderful people. Here is a medal. Go out there and do what you are doing on half the budget." We cannot carry on doing that. Paul Martin and other police officers in London deserve a little more than a condescending pat on the shoulder.

**Sir Edward Davey:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stephen Pound:** I was about to finish, but I will certainly give way to a Liberal Democrat.

**Sir Edward Davey:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Has he spoken to his officers and heard about the low morale in the Met police and how they

feel completely overstretched as they see crime going up and officer numbers cut? Has he heard that from the officers themselves?

**Stephen Pound:** I almost wish that the right hon. Gentleman had not said that, because I do not like talking about the realities of modern policing. Policing is a family—I am not talking about direct siblings and uncles and aunts, but it is a police family. I have never known morale to be so low. Like every one of us in this room, I go to police commendation ceremonies two or three times a year, and in that hall of heroes I hear amazing stories of courage, dedication and commitment from police officers. They do staggering, amazing work, and yet what I hear now is not just the quiet, unassuming pride that I always admired so much, but, "I can't wait till I'm out of here." It is not just "Roll on my 22," as we say in the armed forces, but a longing to get away, because people feel that policing is no longer recognised by those who hold the purse strings as a vital and incredibly significant part of our cities.

Today we have the opportunity to put down a marker and say to the Home Office and Treasury that London and Londoners have suffered enough. Give us the money, give us the police officers and give us the peace on our streets.

**James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. Our self-denying ordinance is not working terribly well. None the less, I call Mr Stephen Hammond.

10.1 am

**Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Gray; I will try to follow your stricture to be quick. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on securing this important debate. It is a pleasure, as ever, to follow the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound)—I always feel like the documentary after the comedy show.

I will spare the Chamber pages of my usual introductory waffle and cut to the point. For years we had lectures about crime and the previous Mayor, so let us start with some facts. Let us not talk about the acid attacks, but about some of the crime in London and what we have actually seen. Overall crime since 2010 has fallen by 8%. Knife crime fell year on year under the previous Mayor, and yet in the first year of the current Mayor it has risen by 24%. Gun crime fell and remained broadly stable under the previous Mayor, and yet in the first year of the current Mayor it has risen by a staggering 34%.

**Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op):** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stephen Hammond:** I will—but briefly, because I know others want to speak.

**Gareth Thomas:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that crime is rising across the country and not just in London?

**Stephen Hammond:** I certainly accept that we have seen rises in crime in London that are extraordinary. I absolutely agree with the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green that we should press the Government to do more. In some ways this debate is a few months

[Stephen Hammond]

too early because there will be a new funding formula in January. If we look at the base constituents of the funding formula and how they are likely to be allocated, we as London MPs should have hope that the constituents that make up the new formula will give us a significant chance of a very good settlement in London. I for one will certainly press the Government on that.

I accept that in the aftermath of the Labour Government in 2010 there were cuts to be made. Funding was rightly held constant and was at the level that people expected; spending was about 20% lower across every area of spending, and the police and the Home Office had to take their cut. I also accept that the national and international capital city funding has seen a significant increase and the Government are consulting on more. However, I ask the Government to think seriously about two things: first, multi-year settlements. It is clear that there would be more efficiency gains if settlements were not on a year-on-year basis. Also, I hope the Minister will be able to talk about the special police grant. It is clear that London suffers exceptional events and the criteria for that should change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) is exactly right. Let us be clear about where most, if not all, of the real issues are happening in London at the moment. Why is the person who makes the decisions not up front in leading some of the demands for a greater settlement? Why is he not leading the demand for a multi-year settlement? Why is he behind in his digital savings? Consistently, the numbers have not been achieved. Under the previous Mayor, the Met had set out digital savings through to 2021, but the current Mayor has allowed them to be rescinded.

The Mayor has taken other decisions. The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), who is no longer in her place, tried to talk about another area of policy. The Mayor has responsibility and makes decisions across a whole range of London policy, and there is one consistent theme. Promises he made in 2016 are being broken in 2017, whether it is on transport, housing or policing. That is having a direct effect. I absolutely agree with the hon. Member for Ealing North that police stations are a personification of law on our streets. The reality, of course, is that it is the current Mayor, unlike the previous Mayor, who is making the decision to close some of them.

I want to end exactly where my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East started his remarks: what is happening to constituents. I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Ealing North had a depressing meeting with the deputy Mayor. When she came to me she did not even have her facts right. It is no wonder it was a depressing meeting. There is no logical reason for closing Wimbledon police station. It is at the heart of my constituency and well located in the town centre. There is a large night-time economy. Wimbledon is a large transport hub. The recent terrorist attack on the District Line clearly demonstrates the need for flexibility, and Wimbledon was able to help out. More importantly, the emergency response vehicles for the whole of Merton are based in Wimbledon. If we look at the hotspots across the borough, not just in my constituency, they are as easily reached within the same timescales as regards any other police station.

I am not suggesting that any other police station should be closed. I am here to defend my constituents' safety, but the current Mayor has made the decision to consult on closing police stations. It is entirely his decision and it is time that he took responsibility not only for the decisions he makes in local areas—Wimbledon, Harrow or Ealing—but for the budget. Opposition Members try to blame the Government. I have made the point that the Government need to look at other things, but most of the blame lies with the decisions the Mayor is making and with the reserves he is sitting on and not allocating. It is time the Mayor stood up for Londoners.

10.8 am

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on securing this important debate. I want to start by recognising the excellent work that the police do on behalf of local residents in my constituency, which is policed by the Lambeth and Southwark commands, and by mentioning particular examples of excellent practice.

The Lambeth borough commander has worked with a local mum, Lorraine Jones, who lost her son to knife crime, to establish a boxing gym in a railway arch in Loughborough Junction, where police officers volunteer their time each week to train local young people on a programme called the Lambeth Boxing Awards. A local special constable, Steve Whitmore, has established a fantastic project called Books in the Nick, which provides books to people being held in police custody, who are sometimes distressed and vulnerable. Books help to calm people down and offer a gesture of empathy at a time that can seem very bleak.

Officers tell me that they are responding to an ever-increasing number of calls concerning people with a mental illness. They are often the first point of contact for people in a crisis—people who should really be able to access health services to meet their needs and keep them safe. Alongside that work, officers are engaged in some of the most dangerous frontline work in the capital. Lambeth officers were first on scene at the Westminster terror attack, and Southwark and Lambeth officers responded to both the London Bridge attack and the Grenfell Tower fire.

However, the job of our excellent and dedicated officers is getting harder under the policies of this Government. We have heard that the Met has already had to absorb £600 million of cost savings, with a further £400 million to come by 2021. That pressure, direct from the Home Office, is taking its toll on our police in a number of ways. First, neighbourhood policing has declined. The neighbourhood policing model, which established—under the previous Labour Mayor of London—a dedicated team of officers for each ward in the capital, was absolutely critical to building strong relationships between the police and the community. It increased the visibility of the police and built public confidence. It was also absolutely critical in addressing some of the most serious crimes: gang-related violence, knife crime, forced marriage and terror, as well as distressing crimes such as burglary and fraud.

Neighbourhood policing allows a relationship of trust to build up over time, as the police get to know the community they are policing, and the community get

to know their local officers. I have watched since 2010, when I was elected to Southwark Council, the neighbourhood policing teams in my ward, and then across the wider constituency, being decimated. Dedicated ward sergeants have been removed and are constantly changing, and the number of dedicated officers has been reduced to just one, who is frequently abstracted to other duties.

Secondly, the number of police front counters that are open to the public has also declined. In the face of further savings that it is required to make as a consequence of the Government's Budget decisions, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime is currently consulting on further police station closures. Given the spending restraints imposed on the Met by central Government, I completely understand its decision to focus on maintaining police officer numbers rather than buildings. Nevertheless, I am concerned about the impact that further closures will have.

My constituency comprises five wards in Lambeth and three in Southwark. As a result of the latest round of cost savings, it is proposed that every police station counter in Lambeth except Brixton and every police station counter in Southwark except Walworth will close. The closure of further police front-counter services in Lambeth and Southwark will have damaging consequences for the relationship between the police and our communities, the accessibility of the police, and the ability of the police to work efficiently and effectively.

Brixton police station will become the only police station in Lambeth. I have visited Brixton police station on many occasions since I was elected in 2015; it is currently full to capacity. There is no additional space to accommodate further officers in a comfortable and efficient working environment. The custody suite is one of the busiest in London, and the waiting facilities are already small and often overcrowded.

I am concerned about the impact that will have on the motivation and morale of police officers, and the relationship they have with our communities. I am also concerned about the practicalities. With limited and already overcrowded space, how are the police to accommodate victims of crime and those wishing to report crime, alongside people discharging bail conditions? How are the police to improve their practice concerning the reporting of sexual offences, modern day slavery or abuse that has occurred in the past, if every inch of the police station is full to capacity?

My constituency has been disproportionately affected by previous rounds of police station closures under the previous Mayor of London, which have resulted in the loss of East Dulwich police station within the constituency, and Forest Hill, Penge and Camberwell police stations, which are outside the constituency but also served my constituents. Gipsy Hill police station has reduced from a fully functioning front-counter police station to an operational base that is not open to the public. We have also seen the police network of safer neighbourhood team offices being closed and mothballed. That has had a further direct impact on neighbourhood policing in my constituency, with the limited number of officers in neighbourhood policing teams now beginning and ending their shifts at police stations that are, in some cases, as

much as an hour's travel time away from the ward that they serve—decisions made under the previous Mayor of London.

Residents on the Southwark side of my constituency now have to travel to Peckham or Walworth to access a front-counter police service. Although Brixton police station is in my constituency, it is increasingly so busy that it is difficult for residents to access services at the front desk. The contact point services, which were initiated by the previous Mayor, have entirely failed to provide meaningful access to the police for members of the public. In some parts of my constituency, residents already feel that the police are completely inaccessible. The successive closures of police stations, combined with the decimation of neighbourhood policing under the previous Mayor and the very serious problems with the 101 service, mean that in the face of rising robbery, burglary and aggressive antisocial behaviour, many of my constituents increasingly feel that the police are unable to provide the response they need. Further police station closures can only exacerbate the situation.

The Government are forcing through further savings at a time when the pressures on the Met—arising from an increased terror threat, the rise in violent crime, including knife and gun crime, and the growth of online crime and disclosures of historical child abuse as a consequence of the national inquiry—have never been greater. I have no doubt that, in persisting with those cuts, the Government are putting the safety of communities in London at risk.

Even before the terror attacks and major incidents of the past year, a further £400 million of cost savings for the Metropolitan police looked very challenging, but to persist with those cuts in the current context is simply to be reckless with the safety and security of Londoners. Our police need to be properly equipped not only to respond to emergencies, but to build the basis of a relationship with our diverse communities that allows them to police by consent and opens up access to intelligence and information sharing to combat crime. It is that relationship that risks being ripped apart by the approach that the Government are taking to police budget cuts in London. I am calling on the Minister today to reverse the cuts to the Metropolitan police.

10.14 am

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on raising this topic today. It is a vital issue that is in the interests of all London MPs, and the situation is of growing concern, particularly for Members of Parliament in the outer-London areas.

In my constituency of Romford, local people are genuinely concerned about the lack of police resources for our local London borough of Havering, and also, as was mentioned earlier, about the new tri-borough system, which means that Havering, Redbridge, and Barking and Dagenham are pooling resources. We know what that means: lower-crime areas, such as Havering, will have fewer resources, while high-crime areas, such as Barking and Dagenham and—I hesitate to say it in front of the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting)—Redbridge, too, will receive resources from areas such as Havering. There is real concern about the current strategy.

[Andrew Rosindell]

Let us be optimistic: since 1990, we have seen quite a big drop in crime overall, under all Mayors and all Governments. Crime has fallen dramatically since the 1980s and early 1990s. In recent months, however, we have seen a spike in certain types of crime, in particular acid attacks, knife crime—there have been incidents in my area—and, as has been rightly mentioned already, crime relating to mopeds.

It is a pity that neighbourhood policing, which I agree with, has been reduced. I would like to see both the Mayor and the Government reconsider that decision. Neighbourhood policing at grassroots level is so important, because if crime is dealt with at the lowest level, that helps to stop it gathering pace at a higher level. I must say to the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), however, that ward policing is nonsense. Wards are not communities or neighbourhoods; they are simply electoral blocks of certain numbers of voters. If we want genuine neighbourhood and community policing, it should be based on proper communities. That does not mean walled boundaries; it means that the police should deal with particular communities. The structure of neighbourhood policing in London needs to be properly rethought, so that we are dealing with genuine communities rather than just electoral blocks of voting areas. I do not think that has ever made any sense at all.

Moped crime has been prevalent in my constituency of Romford. During the general election, it was raised many times by constituents, and I was a victim of moped crime myself. My vehicle was parked in Collier Row in north Romford. Admittedly, it had election signage on it, but that is no excuse for the vicious assault that took place on my vehicle, which was smashed up by a local hooligan. I am not suggesting that it was political—

**Stephen Pound:** I have an alibi.

**Andrew Rosindell:** I would never accuse the hon. Gentleman of such activities. It was a hooligan, who was fortunately chased and caught by a member of my team. The police then arrested him, and he is now being prosecuted.

I was a victim of crime, and one of my staff has also recently been a victim of crime. People entered her home at four in the morning, with bats, in a residential area of Hornchurch. They threatened her family and stole her car and possessions. Frankly, the police handled it pretty badly. They did not get there quickly enough or deal with the trauma that that family went through. I could give lots of other examples.

We are seriously not getting moped crime right at all. It would appear that guidance is provided by the College of Policing, which is independent from the Government. The pursuit of motorcycles is not ruled out in all circumstances, but there are many factors to take into account, crucially by the individual officer taking the decision on the ground. The guidelines state that the vulnerability of the person on the moped is a serious consideration. I have to say that I am not concerned about the vulnerability of the criminal on the moped; I am concerned about my constituents who are being terrorised by the person on the moped. Frankly, if the

guidelines advise the police to worry about the criminal, rather than prioritise the innocent people, that has to change. I ask the Minister to look at that. The police should use their common sense, chase those people, apprehend them and tackle this crime head on. I think Operation Venice has been successful—there seems to have been a reduction in moped crime—but I would like it to be given greater prominence.

We are all London MPs, and a lot of political points have been made today, which I am not going to engage in. I am concerned about crime in London. There has been a spike, and we are seeing a lot of dissatisfaction and the closure of police stations. I totally oppose the closure of Hornchurch police station; I think that is ridiculous. I agree with the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green that there needs to be a physical, central point in every town where there is a police station so people can report crimes and talk to the police face to face. We do not necessarily need small community neighbourhood shops, which are usually closed and do not really have any relevance—I can see that they should be reduced—but towns such as Romford and Hornchurch need proper police stations so that people can see a visible police presence in their communities.

10.21 am

**Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow a fellow outer-London Member of Parliament, albeit from the wrong side of London.

I return to the central point that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) made in her excellent opening speech, which is the need for the Government to find additional resources for policing in London. During the general election, I enjoyed regular debates with the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). I remember beating him in every one. Despite the various Trumpian twists he added to his rhetoric today, I fear that he is on the wrong side of this argument and that his constituents and mine will recognise that.

In the public meeting, which the hon. Gentleman and the Minister could have turned up to, held by the chief superintendent in Harrow to give the people of Harrow the chance to reflect on the Mayor's proposed response to the disastrous funding situation that London's police face, we heard about the need for more resources for policing in London. In addition to the programme of police station closures, which everyone in the Chamber is familiar with, if there are no additional resources, 4,000 or possibly 5,000 police officers may be lost from London. That will have potentially devastating consequences for outer-London boroughs such as Harrow.

Since May 2010, when the present Prime Minister became Home Secretary in the new Government, Harrow has lost some 21.5% of its police officers and almost 80% of its police and community support officers. Of the original 513 police officers, 173 are no longer in post—a 34% reduction in policing in Harrow. It is therefore no surprise to my constituents that they are seeing a substantial increase in knife crime—up 36% in the past year alone. Knife crime with injury is up almost 60% in the past 12 months alone in Harrow. I hope hon. Members representing inner-London seats will forgive me for saying that those are the sort of statistics that my constituents might have associated with an inner-London borough in past times.

The hon. Member for Harrow East is right to say that there is significant fear of crime in Harrow. My constituents are concerned about the consequences of a lack of additional funding for the Metropolitan police and the possibility that all police stations in Harrow will close. I gently say to the Minister that in the 13 years that I represented Pinner and Hatch End, which is now in his constituency, Pinner police station was always under threat of closure, but as a Member of Parliament I fought to keep it open, and succeeded. He has the means, and potentially the resources, to keep it open. His constituents in Pinner and Hatch End—my former constituents—and I will be interested to hear how he intends to keep Pinner police station open.

My prime concern is what will happen to Harrow police station as a whole. As the hon. Member for Harrow East rightly said, the custody command across the Metropolitan police was centralised as a result of previous efforts to save resources. Harrow's custody suite is under threat of closure. CID officers will inevitably shift to Colindale or Wembley if the three-way borough merger has to take place because of police funding cuts. The key thing that Labour Members want to hear from the Minister is that he has developed some cojones and is going to demand extra police resources for London from the Chancellor. Without more resources, I fear that there will be more substantial cuts to police numbers in Harrow and, as a result, a further increase in crime.

10.26 am

**Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. As a London MP, I, like many Members from both sides of the House, have campaigned to protect police funding across London. It is right that MPs and Assembly Members continue to do so, and it is right that the Mayor is a leading voice in that campaign. However, the Mayor needs to ensure that his discretionary choices in his budget match up to his rhetoric and his ask of central Government. As we have heard, he has choices that he can make in other budgets and he has significant usable reserves. He removed £38 million from the budget this year, which is roughly equivalent to the amount that would be needed to bring police numbers up to his target of 32,000. The previous Mayor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), identified a funding gap a good few years ago and campaigned about it. He also planned for it—the Met has been planning since 2015. I am sure that if the roles were reversed, Labour would be attacking the Mayor rather than looking at central Government.

We have heard about the up-tick in knife crime and gun crime against a similar financial background to the one seen under the previous Mayor. We have also heard about the proliferation of new types of crime—acid attacks and moped crime. I will not go into more detail about that, because others have done so already.

I am concerned about the proposed station closures, too, but partly for operational reasons. Worcester Park has a shop front, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) said. I am concerned that the travel times for safer neighbourhood teams, which have to come from central Sutton to get to their areas, are included in their shift times—they have a centralised meeting—which takes time out of their time on the beat. That is worrying.

We heard a bit about three-borough mergers. I am particularly concerned about that, because a proposal to merge Sutton with Croydon and Bromley is being looked at, but a linear settlement like that would have a huge effect on response times. We know how difficult it is to get across London, as opposed to in and out.

I commend the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for her work on police safety. In a previous debate that she secured, I talked about the use of spit guards and about the equipment that police need. I do not want the funding issues to prevent the police from having the equipment they need to do their job properly. The Mayor of London is no longer a lawyer representing people making claims against the police. He represents Londoners, including victims of crime, potential victims of crime and the police officers on the frontline. It is important that we support them. I conclude by thanking Sutton police, who provide a fantastic service and keep Sutton one of the safest boroughs in London.

**James Gray (in the Chair):** I call Sir Ed Davey—very briefly.

10.29 am

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): When we have had an enforced sabbatical from this place and then come back, we sometimes see issues from a fresh perspective. Last time I was here, crime was going down despite reductions in police budgets. The situation has changed dramatically in the past few years. Crime figure tables are all going red; the figures are all going the wrong way, and they are for nasty, violent crimes.

Gun, knife and acid crime are up. Homicides and youth homicides are up—an 84% increase in youth homicide in the past year. That is not an “up-tick” in crime, as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) just described it. It is serious and we have to treat it as such.

There has been a lot of point scoring today, which is rather depressing. Who is to blame? We are all to blame. We have all got to take this seriously. We cannot say, “Oh, it's only a small increase in crime.” If we carry on this way, if police cuts continue year on year as they are scheduled to do, with another £400 million taken out of police funds, that will be a disaster for Londoners.

Given that I have a very short time in which to speak, I say to colleagues and to the Front Benchers, who will have a nice long time to speak: please come together for the sake of our capital. Let us deal with this serious epidemic, which will get worse if we do not take action. We can talk about the problems in our constituencies, which are all serious—office closures, the restructuring that will hit response times, the problem with mopeds and so on—but we have to come together and act very quickly.

We have to reverse the police cuts. We have to reverse the cuts to community police. We have to restore something that meant that, only a few years ago, we were really on top of the issues. Now, it looks like we are struggling. The criminals are getting away with it. We have to act fast.

10.31 am

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray.

I come to the debate with a slight impediment in that I do not represent any of the London boroughs—

**Wes Streeting:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Dr Cameron:** I will get under way first, but I will allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene in a few moments, if that is okay.

I felt myself becoming more of an expert as I listened to the debate. Everyone has spoken with passion about the police force and the importance of policing in their area. That is to their credit. In particular, I thank the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) for securing the debate. It is an important one—that is clear from our dialogue—and as the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) said, it is important that parties come together to work on pragmatic solutions.

I pay tribute to the police throughout the United Kingdom. Every day they keep us safe in the face of real danger, the scourge of terrorism in particular, which has affected us in this House as well as people elsewhere in the UK. The police do a remarkable job, wherever they are in the UK, and we should always take that into account.

**Wes Streeting:** I wholeheartedly agree with what the hon. Lady is saying, but I add with no disrespect to her that this is a debate about police funding in London. Not all London MPs have had the chance to speak because of the lack of time. Is it not an absurdity to have a Scottish MP taking up time that could have been used by London MPs?

**James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. That remark is completely out of order. The fact of the matter is that the Scottish National party is the third party in this House. It and the Labour party have the right to wind up the debate, no matter what it may be about.

**Dr Cameron:** Thank you for the clarification, Mr Gray. We are the third party, and policing is extremely important in Scotland. There are many commonalities in the issues that we face. I feel that it is extremely important and would be adult of the House to share best practice, rather than to denigrate what other Members are doing to improve their services.

Today we have had a lot of to-ing and fro-ing about who is or is not to blame. From my perspective, it is clear that we have to share the responsibility. Funding is obviously an issue, as it is right across the United Kingdom, and responsibility must be taken for that. Within that responsibility, further decisions need to be taken about the funding available. That is why we must ensure that evidence-based policing practice is effective and that we do not end up with the postcode lottery of services that has been described today.

We have heard a lot about important issues, the 101 service in particular. For goodness' sake, that is crucial—it is our line to the police. Are there any data that the Minister will provide about the 101 service? Are calls

being taken? Where do the issues lie? What can be done to address that? There is also the upsurge in moped and knife crime—in violent crime in particular. That must be addressed, because we are talking about our communities feeling safe, about our response and about ensuring that people feel that they can go about their daily business in a democracy where crime is taken very seriously and responded to on the same serious note.

We heard from many hon. Members who spoke passionately about their constituencies. The hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) spoke about constituents' fears of crime. The hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound)—an honourable friend, if I may say so—spoke eloquently about the importance of facilities for policing and the presence of police stations being vital. We will not forget his speech in a hurry. The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) spoke about the importance of multi-year settlements, with which I think we would all agree, because a longer-term strategy on policing is required. The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) spoke poignantly about her constituency, the impact of knife crime and innovative ways forward through joint policing and community initiatives. We also heard from the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) about response times across London being important, alongside the equipment to do the job.

We have heard many contributions today, and what I take from them is that we all need to work together to ensure that policing in London and outwith London—we heard from some MPs from outer-London areas, and I might consider myself from an outer-London area—

**Stephen Pound:** A long way out of London!

**Dr Cameron:** I am indeed a long way out of London. Nevertheless, policing is fundamental to my constituents, as it is to those of the hon. Gentleman.

In terms of Scottish government, the main issue that I wish to raise is the importance—

**James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Lady must restrict her remarks to police funding in London; policing in Scotland is nothing whatever to do with this debate.

**Dr Cameron:** Okay. In terms of policing across the United Kingdom—

**James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Lady must restrict herself to policing in London—not in the UK or in Scotland, but in London.

**Dr Cameron:** There are shared issues, Mr Gray, but I will say in conclusion that there are issues of police custody, which is an issue for London as well as elsewhere—certainly my constituents and others have spoken about this. As other hon. Members have mentioned, the police find it difficult when people with mental health issues come into custody; they might be unwell mentally and require hospital services. It is important that police in London and elsewhere have a strategy so that they can work with other services such as the NHS to ensure that those in need and on the frontline who are unwell can access services.

Finally, there is consensus right across the Chamber that local policing is vital—local policing in London and outwith London—as has been spoken about by Members from outer-London boroughs and elsewhere. We are talking about the impact on feeling safe. It is not just about the number of police, but about ensuring that we have police stations. Being able to see the police and police stations locally and throughout our communities is vital. That is a view that all parties share and I want to hear the Minister's.

10.38 am

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on securing this important debate.

Crime, the fear of crime and the fear of the criminal subculture cast a shadow over too many Londoners and too many families in London. Government Members tell us that crime levels are flat or even falling, and perhaps the Minister will try telling us that too. But the statistics show that the crimes that people are most frightened of in London are on the rise: robbery, all sexual offences including rape, gun crime and knife crime. On knife crime, I am sure that colleagues regularly visit their borough commander, as I do. My borough commander recently showed me a display cabinet of the knives that the police have had to confiscate—horrible knives that are designed not to peel an apple but to eviscerate people.

**Stephen Pound**: “Zombie killers”.

**Ms Abbott**: Indeed. Hate crimes are also on the rise. Hate crime is of particular interest to me for many reasons but particularly because I have one of the largest Hasidic Jewish communities in the country.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that all aspects of hate crime are recorded? As it stands, disability hate crime is not thoroughly recorded and we can no longer assess the impact of hate crime towards disabled people.

**Ms Abbott**: I entirely agree.

Hasidic Jews feel particularly vulnerable because they are highly visible when they go about their daily lives. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet the Minister to talk about the specific issues that they face, which they do not think are dealt with by the current Government-funded activities.

We have also seen a steep rise in cyber-crime—a type of crime that comes into people's homes. It is not a crime that people can guard against by being careful where they go and who they meet; it can come into the homes of victims, whether they are an elderly person or a child being groomed online.

There has been a spike in such crimes, but we have also seen a rise—not necessarily reflected in the crime statistics—in the police having to intervene and be involved in mental health issues; local government cuts mean that the police are increasingly the social service of first resort. I have met police constables concerned about the increasing need for them to intervene in mental health issues where they do not feel that they necessarily have the powers or expertise.

Contrary to what Ministers may say, the crimes that people are most frightened of are rising in London. I also referenced a fear of crime and of the criminal subculture: too many mothers in London are terrified that their young sons will be caught up in that. There are many issues around that, including education, but we need a properly resourced and funded police force, and neighbourhood policing that can effectively disrupt some of that gang activity.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that we cannot police our way out of all those problems, including youth crime and hate crime, and that other public services have a vital role to play. However, does she agree that, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies showed, all the additional policing that was built up before 2010 has now been removed? We have gone too far in reducing our police service in London.

**Ms Abbott**: We have indeed gone too far in reducing policing levels. The idea that the police can do more with less is a pretty vapid idea at the best of times, but the spike in issues of such concern to Londoners shows that we have certainly gone too far in bringing down police levels.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Boroughs such as mine are putting very large sums of money into the police. The Mayor is doing his best—he raised the precept and was criticised for it. In contrast, the Government have made the Mayor fund the police pay rise out of existing budgets. Is that not just adding insult to injury?

**Ms Abbott**: Far be it from me to be unnecessarily partisan, but the Government have made a great song and dance about raising the pay cap for the police but they have not funded that. In London alone, it will cost the Metropolitan police £13.7 million to meet that pay rise. The Government should not take credit for lifting the pay cap for the police if they are not prepared to fund it.

My hon. Friends have spoken about the figures, but they are worth repeating. The central Government police grant for the Met was £1.15 billion in 2010-11, but £864 million in 2016-17—a £250 million cut. The Minister may argue that police funding has increased, based on additional funding outside the central Government grant, but overall, taking all allocations, funding for the Met has fallen in a straight line from £2.004 billion in 2014-15 to £1.708 billion in 2017-18.

If the Minister does not believe me—I would be shocked, but perhaps he does not—he should listen to the police. The Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, Craig Mackey, has said that,

“the whole of the Met, not just counter-terrorism policing, needs more funds.”

Ministers can come to the House and pretend that there is not an issue with funding or with police numbers, but the people on the ground know better. Not only have we seen a spike in the crimes that Londoners are most fearful of, but the sanction detection rate—the number of cautions and charges—has fallen by 10,000. There is more crime but less police action.

I support what hon. Members have said about the issues with funding. It will not do for people to try to pretend that this is somehow the Mayor's fault, and it will not impress Londoners. In the end, these funding issues are for the Government, and Londoners take

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them extremely seriously. The issues cast a shadow over people's lives, whether they are the victims of crime or they have to see family members caught up in crime.

The Government have no greater responsibility than keeping people safe; keeping people safe is our most important responsibility as lawmakers. This Government, with their de facto cuts in funding to the Metropolitan police, have let down Londoners on crime. Londoners want less talk about fighting crime and about law and order; they want this Government to put their money where their mouth is. When the Budget comes next month, they want to hear news of sustainable funding for the Met that meets the increased demands on it. Londoners want less playing around with figures and more actual cash. Their lives, liberties and happiness depend on it.

10.48 am

**The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd):** It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on securing this timely and important debate.

I speak as a London MP; I have the privilege of representing constituents in Harrow and Hillingdon. My constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), was quite right to point out that few things matter more to our constituents than their sense of safety. I would add that few things matter more to the future of this incredible city than maintaining its reputation as a safe place to live and work, but this debate is important because there is change that we have to address, as the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) rightly said.

Commissioner Cressida Dick, who, in her own words, is no shroud waver, quite rightly reminded us in a speech last week that we still live and work in one of the safest cities in the world. She pointed out that London's homicide rate is still half that of New York, despite everything that has been done in that city to bear down on homicides. The *Economist* safe cities index recently made it clear that London remains one of the safest cities in Europe. My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) pointed out that the long-term trend of people's experience of crime, which we measure through the crime survey for England and Wales, continues to fall, and recorded crime in London is, on 2017, down 3%. But—and it is a big but—in recent years it has become clear that the threat to public safety has changed. Demand on the police has changed, and it has grown.

We have not talked much about terrorism. We have lived with the risk of terrorism in London for all of my life, but it has evolved and arguably escalated. Crime is changing, most obviously in terms of what is now digital and cyber-enabled. Arguably, the front line of the battle against crime in my constituency is not necessarily on the streets of Ruislip, but in the drawing rooms and bedrooms where computers are being used. That is part of the modern challenge of policing that we have to adapt to. As many have pointed out, we have to contemplate the fact that there is a significant increase in recorded crime in London.

**Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab):** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Hurd:** I will not give way, because the hon. Lady did not have the courtesy to turn up for the beginning of the debate.

The increase in recorded crime is not all bad news, in the sense that, as the Office for National Statistics makes quite clear, it reflects that the police are better at recording crime and people are feeling more confident to come forward in areas that had been murky and complex before. However, undeniably, there is an increase in demand in some worrying areas, which are increasingly complex for the police to police. The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) was eloquent, as I would expect, about the culture: the worrying, shocking, callous attitude to violence that underpins some of the violent crime that shocks us across the city, and not just in inner London but in outer boroughs, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romford was eloquent in pointing out.

When the threat changes we have to adapt, and when I say "we", I mean we: not just parties, central Government, local government and all the statutory agencies, but also the private sector and civil society. This is a shared challenge that we have to meet together to understand what is going on—to be frank, in some areas we do not have a good enough understanding—and to ensure we have the right strategy, the right level of resilience and the right resources in the right areas.

In terms of resources to the police, let us state an old, stubborn truth: we live in very constrained times. That is the political reality of the situation. Within that, the Home Secretary and I will have made it clear that we will continue to ensure that the police have the resources they need to do the job, but we will continue to challenge them to modernise and be more efficient and effective, not least in embracing the power of technology to improve the interface that our constituents have with them, but also to help them be more effective in their work. We do that not just because we have responsibilities to the taxpayer, but because we want the Met to be the best police force in the world. That requires a culture of continuous improvement, which is the hallmark of every successful organisation I have observed.

When we look at the Met's performance—we would not want to let evidence get in the way of a good bit of shroud-waving from the Opposition—the evidence is this. If we compare its performance in 2008 to 2017, we see that in 2017 there were 100,000 fewer recorded crimes and the same number of police officers. The number of police officers in London is by far and away the highest per head of population in the country, at 359 per 100,000, compared with 252 in Merseyside and an average across the country of 200. There are fewer crimes and the same number of police officers, in a police system that costs the taxpayer almost £700 million less than it did in 2008.

The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington said it was a vapid idea that the police could do more with less; the Metropolitan police has proved otherwise. In that respect, I pay tribute to Commissioner Dick. As she has said:

"I won't be waving a shroud, I will be just be giving my professional advice. I think we can make some further savings. I am confident that the Met at the end of my commissionership

might be smaller but could be as effective, if not more effective, through amongst other things the use of technology and different ways of working.”

That is the leadership we need to see, not least from the largest force in England and Wales.

I do not want to misrepresent Commissioner Dick, who is clear that she wants more resource, as does every police force in the country, but when it comes to funding, let us be clear and present the facts. The Metropolitan police's budget for 2017-18 is £2.8 billion, up from £2.7 billion in 2015-16. According to the last figures I have, the Met sits on reserves of £240 million, which is 10% of cash funding. The Mayor, who has been the subject of a healthy ding-dong here, was sitting on total un-ring-fenced reserves of £2.3 billion in 2016. To be fair to the Mayor, by stripping out what he has borrowed, he is still sitting on unrestricted resource reserves of about £300 million. There are choices in this process.

**Sir Edward Davey** *rose*—

**Wes Streeting** *rose*—

**Mr Hurd:** The hon. Gentleman is the only Member I will give way to, because he has been here since the start and he has not had a chance to speak.

**Wes Streeting:** I thank the Minister for giving way. He will know that reserves are not a way to fund ongoing revenue costs. Will he reply specifically on the issue of the £346 million it costs to fund the Met's work to police our global capital? The Government currently short-change London by £172 million. Will he at least try to address that point?

**Mr Hurd:** I do not recognise the hon. Gentleman's point on reserves, because I think the police system is sitting on about £1.6 billion of public money in reserves and we deserve greater transparency and accountability about how that money is intended to be spent. I also do not recognise his other numbers.

What I do recognise is that demand on the police is changing, and we are very sensitive to the stretch and strain that the police are feeling. I am coming to the closing process of speaking to or visiting every single police force in England and Wales. When I visit forces, I make sure I speak to frontline officers with the boss out of the room, and the message could not be clearer: “We are as stretched as we ever have been.” That is recognised, and we are absolutely sensitive to that. However, the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) made was the right one. All the shroud-waving about future savings and loss of police numbers ignores the fact that the Government have not taken a final decision on the funding settlement for 2018-19. That is the point of the review I am leading, which is looking at demand, resilience, scope to make further efficiencies and reserve strategy, so that we take decisions based on evidence rather than assertion. The proposal we make for the 2018-19 funding settlement will come to the House in the new year, in due course.

**Andrew Rosindell:** Does the Minister, as an outer-London MP, agree that wherever resources are coming from—whether central Government or the Mayor of London—outer-London boroughs always get the raw end of the

deal? We do not get the resources we need. Something has to be done to change the system so that boroughs such as Hillingdon, Sutton and Havering get a fairer share of the cake.

**Mr Hurd:** I am obviously sensitive to that, because that is a voice I hear in Harrow and Hillingdon, and I will continue to represent that view. Our job is to ensure that the Met has got the resources it needs. We live in an environment where the Met and the Mayor are accountable for where those resources are allocated, and it is our job to hold them to account and ensure scrutiny.

I want to reinforce that we will continue to ensure that the Met is properly resourced, but we will continue to push it to be more effective and efficient—something on which there was total silence from those on the Labour Benches, because they are not interested in efficiency on behalf of the taxpayer.

**Stephen Pound** *rose*—

**Ms Abbott** *rose*—

**Mr Hurd:** With respect to the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), I will give way to the Front-Bench spokesperson.

**Ms Abbott:** On the question of efficiency and the use of technology, in my view no technology can substitute for actual local policemen engaging in actual neighbourhood policing. That is why it is so important to keep police numbers in London up.

**Mr Hurd:** I totally understand the right hon. Lady's point. I am sure she will be aware that, in the Met business plan 2017-18, it is ring-fencing 1,700 officers for neighbourhood policing. I made the point that protection of police budgets has meant that London has by far and away the highest number of police officers per head of population of any part of the country, and quite rightly. On the point about productivity, what the police complain about is lack of time. She will know that there is an opportunity, not least through mobile working, to transform the productivity of warranted officers.

I want to re-emphasise that of course the issue of police resources matters a great deal, but in facing the challenges we do, this cannot be just about the police. Therefore, when I am looking at our modern crime prevention strategy and what we are doing to tackle knife crime, moped crime, acid attacks, cybercrime, terrorism, domestic violence and modern slavery—I pay tribute to the *Evening Standard* for raising awareness of that terrible crime in London—there is a common thread about the Government taking clear action but seeking to work closely with other stakeholders, whether they be retailers, technology companies or charities much closer to the people we are trying to help.

I close by paying tribute, as some others have, to the bravery and professionalism of the police. It was not that long ago that PC Keith Palmer made the ultimate sacrifice on the cobbles just the other side of that wall. When we look at Parsons Green, London Bridge and Grenfell, we are genuinely humbled by their professionalism and bravery. It is not just those high-profile incidences. As the hon. Member for Ealing North said, anyone who

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has visited the citation awards in our constituencies knows that every day, in every borough, police officers and other emergency services are taking risks on our behalf. It is quite right that we thank them appropriately and make sure that they have the support they need.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Airport Expansion: Economic and Environmental Impact

11 am

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the economic and environmental impacts of airport expansion.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I thank the Minister for attending. I am bringing this issue to the House because of the impact that a third runway will have on significant parts of my constituency—those areas not already under the approach path to Heathrow—and because of wider regional and national concerns about the environmental, fiscal and economic cost of expanding Heathrow.

It is a year to the day since the Government's announcement that the preferred option for an additional runway was Heathrow. Fortuitously, it is also the day after the release of the Government's revised national policy statement. The Government decision to support expansion at Heathrow was based on reports produced by the Airports Commission, but since the publication of those reports in 2015, further analysis has significantly undermined their conclusions, particularly on the economic and environmental impacts and costs of Heathrow expansion versus those of Gatwick expansion. Yesterday's releases undermine the conclusion further.

I will outline a few of the key points, the first of which is reduced net economic benefits. To begin with growth figures, I see that yesterday's Government report revised assumed demand for flying upward, but I wonder if account was taken of UK economic growth: we have in the past year lurched from being one of the fastest-growing G7 economies to one of the slowest. Looking at the comparative figures in the Department for Transport calculations, the new estimates for net economic benefit arising from a third runway at Heathrow compared with Gatwick in yesterday's figures changed the picture further. A year ago, the net economic benefit from a third runway at Heathrow was given as £61 billion over a 60-year period—a negligible net benefit. Yesterday the Government revised those figures upward: the figures given for a second runway at Gatwick are between £74.1 billion and £75.3 billion over 60 years; but this time the figures for the Heathrow option are lower than those, at £72.8 billion to £74.2 billion.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): My hon. Friend is right to highlight yesterday's figures, which completely blow the Government's cover and show that there is no environmental or economic case for Heathrow that compares with the case for Gatwick. Does she agree that what is outrageous is that the figures have been suppressed while Heathrow's cause was advanced? Now that we have the true figures, we should see that the Heathrow option is a totally inappropriate development for London.

**Ruth Cadbury**: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. The election delay and other excuses meant that figures that could have been in the public domain have only just come out.

Job creation figures are often used to justify Heathrow expansion, but those from the Airports Commission report have recently been revised downward. The total

number of jobs that it is claimed will be created is down from 78,000 to 37,000. It is disappointing; the first draft of the national policy statement supported the higher figure and I have not had a chance to read the revisions to see whether that has changed. Analysis by Transport for London demonstrates that the 37,000 jobs are not genuinely new jobs, but merely displaced from other parts of the economy. That is not insignificant in terms of ensuring continued employment for thousands of people, but it is completely different from creating new economic activity. It is not clear that Heathrow's promises to local communities about mitigation, to the regions about connectivity, and to the country about jobs remain the same, given the reduction in the figure for total economic benefit.

**John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab):** Does my hon. Friend agree with my view, from a north of England and Yorkshire perspective, that rather than entrench Heathrow in its dominant position, it would be better for the balance of the UK economy to consider the potential of airports such as Birmingham, which will soon have a high-speed train connection, and Manchester? There is a lot of potential for spreading things around in the UK, rather than concentrating them at Heathrow.

**Ruth Cadbury:** My hon. Friend is right, and I shall come on to that point: expanding Heathrow appears to reduce demand and the ability for regional airport growth, rather than enhance it, as Heathrow airport keeps saying.

To return to comparisons between Heathrow and Gatwick, the Department for Transport states that, "taken over the whole 60 year period, the Gatwick scheme could lead to greater monetised net public value"

when looking only at passenger benefits in terms of reduced fares, fewer delays and better services. Such conclusions do not shout to me that Heathrow is the better option for the country and passengers.

On the cost of surface access, increasing flights by about 47% will of course increase traffic and transport pressure on an airport whose roads and public transport are congested most of the time. That in itself is an economic cost to the local economy and a commercial cost to the airport and airlines. Improvements to public transport should shift a higher proportion of the new passengers on to rail, but many of the improvements, such as southern and western rail access, which are not even funded yet, are needed now for the smooth running of a major two-runway international airport and its hinterland. The imminent upgrade of the Piccadilly line and the creation of Crossrail were designed, according to Transport for London, to support an increased population in west London and beyond—not a third runway. I have seen no assessment of the additional pressure on the roads from freight and flight-servicing vehicles, which cannot, of course, transfer to rail. I have raised that point in the Chamber several times, and have not had an answer.

**Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con):** The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech, which hits exactly the right note. On the point about public infrastructure, TfL put the cost at about £18 billion. It may be less than that, but it is up to £18 billion. The Government have ruled out paying for any of it. Heathrow has promised

to contribute up to £1 billion, and TfL could not pay even if it wanted to, because it is not within its budget. Does the hon. Lady share my hope that the Minister will address the issue of who will pay for the public infrastructure improvement?

**Ruth Cadbury:** The hon. Gentleman, who represents a constituency neighbouring mine, is right and has anticipated my point. The cost of improvements to surface access is disputed, with estimates ranging from just over £1 billion from Heathrow airport to £3.5 billion from the Department for Transport, and £18 billion from Transport for London. Of course, we have no commitment at all from the Government to fund anything that Heathrow airport is not prepared to pay for itself. As Heathrow airport has publicly agreed to commit only £1 billion, there is significant concern that the taxpayer would be left picking up the shortfall if the third runway were to go ahead. Any such contribution from the public sector would further reduce the available capital for investment in infrastructure projects outside London and the south-east, which fellow MPs from the north, Scotland and the south-west continually raise in Parliament.

**Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con):** My constituency has seen the recent expansion of Aberdeen International airport. Does the hon. Lady agree that it is essential that far-flung regions should be connected to London? That is particularly true for Aberdeen, because the oil and gas industry is essentially linked to London.

**Ruth Cadbury:** The hon. Gentleman is right that commercial and leisure interests mean that passengers want to fly from Scotland to London, but there are five airports in London; why should Heathrow be the one that takes additional capacity? Also, many people in Scotland want to fly direct to their primary destination and would prefer not to transfer planes in the south of England.

On the restricted growth of regional airports, the Airports Commission pointed out that Heathrow expansion would negatively affect the opportunity for growth at nearly all regional airports in the UK. Heathrow claims that the third runway will service 14 domestic routes, yet the commission suggests that without a regional slot allocation preference or some sort of subsidy, new domestic routes may not be commercially viable. Indeed, it predicted that domestic airport connections to Heathrow would be reduced from the seven routes today to only four by 2050. The Government have yet to give any commitment on whether they are prepared to financially support these regional connections.

Increases in passenger numbers are regularly cited as the rationale for airport expansion, but interestingly the number of air traffic movements grew by only 0.6% between 2000 and 2014. Obviously, there are restrictions at Heathrow in that respect. Let us move on to climate change, because it is an important issue.

**Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD):** As the hon. Lady moves on to climate change, does she agree that, with Brexit looming and its likely impact on air travel to and from the continent, there is a case for re-examining the possible impact on all our airports?

**Ruth Cadbury:** As time has moved on, that is essential. The Government must go back to square one and look at the whole issue of aviation demand and where supply is provided, rather than being at the behest of one very large commercial interest that needs to expand to please its shareholders and pay its outstanding debts.

If the Government are serious about meeting climate change targets, restrictions on growth at other airports will be essential if Heathrow is expanded. The Aviation Environment Foundation estimates that to remain compatible with the target of the Climate Change Act 2008 of limiting aviation emissions to 37.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide in 2050, 36% fewer passengers would have to fly in and out of airports in the south-west, 11% fewer in Scotland, 14% fewer in the north-west and 55% fewer in the west midlands.

Noise mitigation is dear to my heart because of the cost of insulation to make life bearable for people such as my constituents living under the approach paths, now and in the future. The low-flying, quieter aircraft that Ministers often talk about are much more disturbing on the ground than higher-flying, noisier aircraft. When under the approach path to Heathrow, the only quiet aircraft is a glider, and we have not yet invented the passenger glider. Up to 1 million people will be significantly affected by aviation noise around Heathrow—300,000 more than are affected now. The noise mitigation package offered by Heathrow is not available for the majority of people affected and is lamentably insufficient compared with international comparators.

Aviation is absent from the clean growth plan. If a third runway is constructed, by 2050 emissions from aviation will constitute about 25% of total UK emissions. That will require significant reductions and restrictions in other sectors of the economy, including the complete decarbonisation of the rest of the transport sector. I do not see the Department for Transport moving very fast to do that. The Committee on Climate Change said that allowing aviation emissions to overshoot their target, as would be inevitable with a new runway, would imply other sectors making cuts beyond what is feasible.

Finally, regarding the weak clean air plan, the Government's releases yesterday confirmed what many of us had been saying for some time: expanding Heathrow cannot be done without further breaching air quality limits. The Government's clean air plan has been rightly criticised for seeking to shift responsibility for air quality on to local authorities. The Government should be taking responsibility for this. To meet the air pollution limits would require a significant move away from diesel vehicles on roads surrounding the airport and no increase in airport-related traffic. That is not feasible. A third runway will inevitably increase delays at junctions and slow average speeds on local road networks—things that are already problems—and thus increase emissions at the expense of the health of my constituents and many hundreds of thousands of other people. It will also have an impact on the local economy.

I urge the Government to follow the Mayor of London's lead in prioritising air quality, and remind the Minister that the Government's policy of supporting expansion at Heathrow totally undermines the effort to make London a more sustainable city. Yesterday's figures clearly illustrate that Gatwick expansion would not hit the air quality limits.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister to respond to a number of key questions. What assessment has he made of the impact of Brexit on future aviation demand? What level of subsidy are the Government prepared to give to support flights from regional airports into Heathrow? What is the total contribution required from the public purse to support Heathrow expansion?

11.14 am

**The Minister for Transport Legislation and Maritime (Mr John Hayes):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) has been assiduous in her defence of her constituents' interests. She and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) are beyond question in both the diligence they have exercised and the passion they have shown. Nothing worth while is ever achieved without passion, and no one is more passionate in defending their constituents' interests than she and he. On that basis, I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. I note that my hon. Friend has already briefly contributed and is here to listen to what I have to say.

Let me be clear: the Government have expressed a preference for airport expansion, on which we are consulting. That is where we are with this. Final decisions will be made as a part of that process, but they have not yet been made. I will certainly consider all the matters raised by the hon. Lady, which she kindly informed me about previously. She set out with great courtesy, as she has many times before, the areas she hoped to cover. I will do my best to try to address them; time is short, but we will try to cover as much ground as we can none the less. This is a timely debate, because it was only yesterday that the Government launched our consultation on the revised national policy statement and published our response to our earlier consultation on airspace reform.

If I may, I will deal at the outset with the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Colin Clark). It is right that we see this subject in the context of what we expect of our regional airports. He is right to say that any consideration about airport expansion needs to be on a strategic basis; it would be quite wrong to see the expansion in the south-east in isolation. He can be assured that the Government think strategically about these things. Part of our ongoing consideration, and the discussion we are having on the back of the consultation, will take full account of the point made by him and others about the need for the relationship between the regions and the south to be secure.

I mention those publications because they are intrinsic to the debate. I am sure that the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth has already taken the opportunity to look at the statement from the Secretary of State for Transport, although she may not have had a chance to work through the full suite of documents, as they are extremely detailed. However, it is inevitable that my response today will repeat much of what was set out in the statement yesterday; she would hardly expect me to do anything else.

The important thing about this subject generally is that the Government are not frightened or nervous about taking big, strategic decisions about infrastructure. Members might think that untypical of Governments

in democratic polities; over the last several decades, such Governments have often been reluctant to take big decisions, partly for fear of binding the hands of successors and partly because no one wants to be held responsible for a decision that goes wrong. Governments need to take big, strategic decisions on infrastructure and this Government are determined to do so, notwithstanding the tendency I described—perhaps the inevitable consequence of living in a democracy where we are all, quite properly, answerable to the people whom we serve.

The issue is not about taking the decision but about the process. The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth is right to draw attention to some of the specifics of that, which I will now deal with. We announced last October that the Heathrow north-west runway is our preferred option to deliver extra capacity in the south-east. I have no intention of being excessively partisan, but the hon. Lady knows that her own party's manifesto made clear the official Opposition's preference for airport expansion in the south-east. That manifesto set down four serious and unsurprising conditions, many of which she covered in her brief remarks and, indeed, in her many questions to the Government. We have received a number of responses to the major consultation that we launched originally. The draft airports NPS allowed us to solicit views and opinions, and we have received about 70,000 responses in total. In parallel, Heathrow Airport Holdings Ltd has been working with airlines to bring down the cost of the scheme.

We are now consulting on the revised draft NPS for a further eight weeks. That is in line with our statutory requirements and is the right thing to do. We expect the Liaison Committee to announce shortly which Select Committee will take forward parliamentary scrutiny. The draft NPS has been revised in the light of the consultation responses already received, to reflect changes to wider Government policy and updated evidence, such as the Government's air quality plan and the latest aviation passenger demand forecasts.

To respond to what the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth said about Gatwick, I should say that it is really important to realise that some of the advantages are hard to monetarise; they are not entirely financial. I shall try to elaborate on that in a moment. Although of course money matters, it is not all that matters. There will be strategic reasons why we will come to the decision we come to when we have consulted. Further consultation is not unusual. The Planning Act 2008 requires us to consult again.

Let us be clear about the areas that the hon. Lady addressed. The first is the broad economic case—the net economic benefits and demand. The revised passenger demand forecasts, which the Government published yesterday, show that the need for additional capacity in the south-east is even greater than previously thought. They show that all five of London's main airports will be completely full by the mid-2030s, so doing nothing is not an option.

Our revised analysis shows that the new north-west runway at Heathrow would deliver benefits of up to £74 billion to passengers and the wider economy over a 60-year period. As I have said, the monetarised benefits are part of the strategic approach, and if one looks at the monetarised effects of both the expansion at Heathrow and the possible expansion at Gatwick, one sees that they are fairly evenly balanced over the longer term.

Heathrow offers the greatest economic benefits for at least the first 40 to 50 years. The figures, which the hon. Lady will be familiar with, show an evening out of those monetarised benefits in the longer term. She will know that well.

**Andy Slaughter:** The Minister seems to be rewriting history. At the time the commission produced its report, we were told that the economic benefits of Heathrow were much greater than those of Gatwick. The facts have changed. Surely the Government should be looking at the revised facts and not just saying, "We've made a decision. We're going to go on with it whatever happens."

**Mr Hayes:** The hon. Gentleman is perhaps not quite in the same league as the hon. Lady or my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park, but he is certainly right up there in terms of his interest in this subject. *[Interruption.]* I do not mean to be unkind to him, but I do not want in any sense to underestimate the contribution made by those two colleagues. The hon. Gentleman will understand the point that I made earlier: not all the strategic benefits, the long-term benefits, can be monetarised—a few moments ago, I said that the two were broadly the same. But let us talk about some of the additional strategic benefits, which are pertinent to the hon. Lady's initial remarks.

The ability to secure the United Kingdom's future as an aviation hub is an important part of expansion, as is our ability to compete with other European and middle eastern airports. In 2040, there would be 113,000 additional flights across the UK airport network, equating to 16 million additional long-haul seats. That would help UK businesses to connect to markets across the globe.

I have already mentioned the support for domestic connectivity to the nations and regions of the UK. The importance of freight has often been understated in the debate. Freight is an important part of what Heathrow already handles; I think that it handles more freight by value than all other UK airports combined. We are also talking about up to 114,000 additional jobs in the local area by 2030 and—a subject dear to my heart—very many, perhaps 5,000, additional apprenticeships. I was able to visit very recently the team at Heathrow airport who deal with skills and apprenticeships and saw the effect that they can have on the prospects of, the opportunities for, so many people.

I shall deal quickly with other areas that the hon. Lady would want me to deal with. The Airports Commission estimated the potential costs of the surface access provision for the north-west runway at Heathrow at about £5 billion, but recognised that final details and therefore costs would be determined as part of the statutory planning process. Let me be clear: there will be no planning permission unless a very high bar has been met in environmental terms. It is simply a matter of fact that planning permission cannot be granted unless that high bar is crossed, and I certainly, as Minister of State, would not want it otherwise.

It is right that additional investment will be needed in the infrastructure around the airport. However, I am not sure that I would agree with the Mayor. The Mayor has had a fairly torrid time over the last week. He was criticised in the Chamber last week, and I think I had a go at him yesterday, although, as I said, I do not want to be too partisan about these things. I am not sure that

[Mr John Hayes]

the analysis done by Transport for London takes full account of the infrastructure that we are already committed to improving. None the less, it is right that we have a proper and open debate about the surface access issue, and we will do so.

I have said a little about the growth of regional airports and the Government's support for that. The Government fully recognise the importance of air services to the nations and regions of the UK, and the draft airports national policy statement published yesterday makes it clear that the expansion of Heathrow will be an opportunity to increase frequency on existing domestic routes and to develop new domestic connections.

On the cost of noise mitigation, I have made it clear that there will be no planning permission unless that is dealt with satisfactorily. Any expansion at Heathrow will be accompanied by a world-class compensation and mitigation package, to mitigate the impact on local communities. That is the least that the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend should expect. While I am Minister of State, they can be guaranteed that that will happen; I know that that is the Secretary of State's view, too.

**Ruth Cadbury:** Will the Minister guarantee that “world-class” means equivalent—equivalent noise standards and equivalent insulation schemes to those at comparable international world airports that have cities next to them?

**Mr Hayes:** The hon. Lady will know that we have suggested a package of more than £700 million for noise insulation of homes and £40 million for schools, to be funded by the scheme promoter, but given the point that she has just made, I am more than happy to go back and look at best international practice. It is perfectly proper that the Government should be guided by that best practice. I will take away her point and, if she agrees, I will write to her particularly about that issue and copy in my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park.

On the absence of aviation emissions from “The Clean Growth Strategy”, I should say that if one looks at the revised draft, one will see that it does take account of what we published in respect of emissions—our clean air plan. I was involved in drawing that up with Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and we do need to take account of it. We need to ensure, as the hon. Lady suggested—I entirely agree with her—that that process is consistent and coherent and that we have a holistic approach to air quality. It would be wrong of us to pursue a policy in respect of airport expansion that did not chime with what we hope to achieve more generally.

The hon. Lady also mentioned EU withdrawal. I, of course, look forward to our escape from the European Union; I prefer to talk about it as an escape than as a withdrawal. It has been an awful business over most of my adult lifetime, and hopefully that business is coming to an end. However, it is right that as we regain our independence and freedom, we do so in a way that does not in any sense lead to a detrimental effect for the hon. Lady's constituents or mine. It is important that we plan that process carefully. She will appreciate that the planning of it is well beyond my pay grade, and on that basis it would be quite improper and extremely unwise of me to say too much more about it. None the less, I take her point and, again, we will look very closely at the implications of our escape from the European Union for this area of policy.

I have covered most of the subjects, albeit briefly. The nature of these debates is that they are always brief, but I will end, if I may, with Yeats, because we have not quoted Yeats enough in this debate:

“Happiness is neither virtue nor pleasure nor this thing nor that but simply growth. We are happy when we are growing.”

So it is with airports, so it is with the House and so it is with the hard work of Members of Parliament such as the hon. Lady.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

11.30 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Centenary of the Balfour Declaration

[IAN AUSTIN *in the Chair*]

2.32 pm

**Ian Austin (in the Chair):** I have only recently been appointed to the Speaker's Panel of Chairs and have not done this before, so bear with me until David Crausby, who should be the Chair, arrives.

**Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the centenary of the Balfour Declaration.

I did not turn up for my previous Westminster Hall debate because I was stuck on the tube, so there is something about me and Westminster Hall debates that does not seem to work. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Austin.

It has been almost a year since we last convened in this place to discuss the landmark anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. It is my pleasure to reflect once more on the words of a Conservative Foreign Secretary that ultimately led to the re-establishment of a Jewish state in the land of Israel. In his letter dated 2 November 1917, Foreign Secretary Balfour informed Lord Rothschild, a leading member of the UK's Jewish community, that

"His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object".

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Dr Offord:** Not in the middle of the quote. The letter continues:

"it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

**Robert Halfon:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I was keen to intervene because I am so excited by the quotation. Does he agree that one reason for Britain being one of the greatest countries in the world is people like Arthur Balfour, who recognised that the Jewish people needed a homeland after hundreds of years of being denied one, and that Israel is a place of democracy, aspiration, scientific achievement and refuge?

**Dr Offord:** I certainly do recognise that. Only two days ago, I finished reading a book by Rev. Leslie Hardman, who, as my right hon. Friend may know, was the first Jewish chaplain to enter Belsen. He was a constituent of mine until his death in 2008. In his biography, he talks about the people who were in the camps and how they felt that, after the second world war, Europe was not a place for them. They desperately wanted a homeland called Palestine then. Anyone who reads that book will be aware of the need then and the continuing need now for the democratic and free state of Israel.

**Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab):** I compliment the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and particularly on the complete nature of the quotation. Is this not also an opportunity to reflect on the second part of the declaration, about the obligation to the Palestinian

people? Does it not behove us to pressure the British Government to honour that commitment and recognise Palestine and the rights of Palestinians?

**Dr Offord:** That is a very constructive intervention. I certainly agree, and I hope to discuss that as my speech progresses. I thank the hon. Gentleman and hope that the debate continues in that spirit.

In a mere 67 words, the United Kingdom set in motion a chain of events that led to the historic birth of Israel, one of the world's most vibrant democracies. The United Kingdom has a lot to be proud of, and I welcome repeated statements by this Government and by the Prime Minister, including today at Prime Minister's Question Time, that we will mark the centenary with a sense of pride. It is particularly symbolic that our Prime Minister has invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to London to share our celebrations for this very special occasion. One hundred years on, the UK-Israel relationship is stronger than ever, with our shared commitment to the values of liberalism, democracy and freedom.

**Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con):** Something that struck me when my hon. Friend was reading out the quotation, and a reason we can have some pride, is that it is very balanced and talks about both the right of Jewish people to have a homeland and the rights of non-Jewish people. To pick up on the intervention from the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris), does my hon. Friend agree that the right way to proceed is direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians together, to get to a two-state solution? That is the only way it will happen.

**Dr Offord:** Perhaps I should investigate whether there is something on WikiLeaks, because two Members now have intruded upon issues I wished to attend to as part of my speech. I certainly agree with my right hon. Friend. A peace process should involve both parties; neither should be absent, and talks should not be sought when one party is absent.

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

**Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Is it not also true that we will not get to a peaceful situation if people attend events, for example, where individuals hold signs or sing, "From Jordan to the sea, Palestine will be free"? Must we not remember the loss of citizenship and the pogroms that happened to the Jewish people in the Arab world between 1948 and 1972 and mark that during this centenary year too?

**Dr Offord:** I can only agree with that sentiment. Once again, I will come on to that in my speech.

**Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP):** I am someone who comes from a divided society and a place that has had its own conflict resolution issues and, indeed, successes. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the double problem Israel faces is not only internal divisions but the fact that it lives in a very bad neighbourhood, which adds to and accentuates its problems? It is up to Israel's neighbours to help Israel by acknowledging its right to exist. If we are to have a peace process, people must accept the fundamental principle that they have to stop killing and attacking Israelis.

**Dr Offord:** That is a very sensible contribution, and I am grateful for it, particularly given the hon. Gentleman and his family's experience of the troubles in Northern Ireland.

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

Thank you, Sir Roger, and welcome to the Chair, Sir David. It certainly is a revolving Chair this afternoon.

I feel that there is much more to our deep bilateral relationship with Israel than just shared values. It is one that benefits all our peoples. Over the past 10 years, the value of our bilateral trade has increased by over 60%, and last year it was worth a record £5.5 billion.

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although trade with Israel is excellent, trading with businesses based in the illegally occupied territories of the west bank should be sanctioned?

**Dr Offord:** I am afraid I do not agree with that at all. Some of those businesses, including SodaStream, are providing opportunities for employment to the people in the occupied territories—opportunities for employment that do not exist elsewhere—and a lot of those people are remunerated to a higher level than their peers and neighbours who are not similarly employed.

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con): In celebrating the Balfour Declaration, does my hon. Friend agree that Britain can be proud to have played its part in creating a nation which rose out of the desert to become an innovator and world leader in many areas, including technology, agri-science, cyber-tech and medicine, and that the world has benefited from Israel's development?

**Dr Offord:** I agree that that is something we can be proud of. Those of us who have visited Israel and its tech hub and universities see the innovation and advancement in biochemical technologies, medicine and a range of sciences that is happening in a place that, not long ago, was simply desert, as my hon. Friend says.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Dr Offord:** I shall move on with my speech, but I will take further interventions shortly.

The work of the UK-Israel working group highlights the importance of our trade relationship. I hope that Israel will be one of the first countries that the United Kingdom signs a free trade deal with when we eventually leave the European Union. Israel's and Britain's security services are working around the clock to keep us safe in our fight against the threat posed by Islamic terrorists, and our scientists work together to find cures to the world's deadliest diseases. An Israeli company, Teva, provides more medicines to the NHS than any other supplier.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): Instead of boycotts, sanctions and other measures that drive people apart, is not the answer to promote dialogue, build trust, encourage negotiation, and promote economic development, trade and investment in the west bank? Are not prosperity, trade and jobs the building blocks of the peace process?

**Dr Offord:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Boycotts are divisive, counterproductive and harm everyone. The way forward, as he says, is through trade.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman say that he supports trade with settlements that are illegal under international law, which is discouraged by his own Government. To fulfil the second part of the Balfour Declaration, regarding non-Jewish communities, do we not need to follow international law and end the occupation?

**Dr Offord:** We will certainly follow international law, but we do not want to negotiate and work with people who wish to see the destruction of Israel. Hamas is a leading proponent of that—part of its foundation is that it does not want the state of Israel to exist. I would not agree with negotiating or working with Hamas. We will work with the Palestinian authorities and others who are actually seeking the best for their people, rather than murdering their own people, as Hamas has done in the past.

**Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the reason for the occupation was Israel surviving the war of 1967, which was unleashed by Arab forces, and that the Khartoum conference at the end of 1967 issued declarations of no recognition and no peace? Is not that the cause of the occupation? Does he agree that the way to resolve it is by direct negotiations on the way to securing two states for two peoples, Palestine and Israel?

**Dr Offord:** I agree, and I will come on to what happened in 1948 and again in 1967. It is often forgotten that Israel has not been the aggressor. Others have decided that they want to attack Israel, and Israel has decided to defend herself.

**Ian Austin:** We should remember that the original UN partition plan of 1947 proposed a Palestinian state alongside Israel. The great tragedy is that, instead of allowing that to be established at the same time, five Arab countries chose to invade Israel on day one.

**Dr Offord:** They did, and the people who were harmed the most were those who fled the fighting, many of whom were Palestinians and others who had resided in Israel and no longer do—a point I will come on to.

There can be no doubt that Lord Balfour would have been proud of the unbroken bond between Israel and the United Kingdom that we share today. Since its inception, the state of Israel has stood as a bastion of freedom and democracy in a region where liberties cannot be taken for granted. By accepting the United Nations' partition plan for Palestine in 1947 and absorbing up to 200,000 Arabs who remained in Israel after the war of independence in 1948, the Jewish leadership upheld Balfour's principle of protecting the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish population. Their descendants today make up Israel's 1.7 million-strong Arab minority, forming over 20% of Israel's population. Today there are 17 Arab Members in the Knesset, out of 120—that is an increase from 12 in the last Parliament.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that the Balfour Declaration comes in three parts, not two? The first part is about a national home for the Jewish people. The second part is about protecting the civil and religious rights of Palestinians.

The third part is about protecting the political status of Jews in any other country. That is not what the Arabs have done.

**Dr Offord:** I agree with that understanding of the declaration, but I will move on.

Arabic is Israel's official second language—I thought it was English. Many of the road signs are in Hebrew and Arabic. Just like all Israelis, the Israeli Arab community have freedom to practise their faith. The Palestinians today refer to Israel's war of independence as “al-Nakba”, meaning the catastrophe, when an estimated 750,000 Arabs fled from the fighting. While there is much debate about their reasons for leaving, the Israeli Prime Minister at the time, David Ben-Gurion, had called on all Arabs within Israel to stay and live as equal citizens in a Jewish state. While Israel protected those Arabs who remained, the neighbouring Arab nations refused to absorb the Palestinian refugees; instead, they confined them to refugee camps and have denied them citizenship to this day.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman accept that the reason why a lot of Palestinian refugees and their descendants do not have citizenship in any other country is that they rightly consider themselves to be Palestinian and they will not accept citizenship of any country other than their own? They are not being refused citizenship; they are declining to take it—they are holding out for their right to be citizens of their own homeland, just as we enjoy that right here.

**Dr Offord:** I do not accept that at all.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I'm sure you don't!

**Dr Offord:** If the hon. and learned Lady is so sure, perhaps she can read the rest of my speech, but in the meantime I shall carry on.

**Joanna Cherry:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dr Offord:** No, I will not.

It is all too often overlooked that Balfour's second condition, that the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country must not be prejudiced, was almost entirely ignored by neighbouring states. Over 800,000 Jews were expelled from countries in the middle east and north Africa following the United Nations decision to partition Palestine in 1947. More than 200,000 found refuge in Europe and north America, while almost 600,000 were successfully resettled in Israel. These Jewish refugees were absorbed as citizens and their contribution to society is well known today.

While those Jewish refugees have been forgotten by the world, there have been over 170 UN resolutions on Palestinian refugees and 13 United Nations agencies and organisations have been mandated or created to provide protection and relief for them. Today, Palestinian refugees are the only refugee population in the world whose status includes subsequent generations, with 5 million people defined as Palestinian refugees. To put that into context, the number of Palestinian refugees alive who were personally displaced in the 1948 war of independence is estimated to be 30,000.

It is only right that the UK should use this landmark moment to give fresh impetus to the stalled peace process and support the resumption of direct peace talks without any preconditions. That remains the only way to complete the vision for two states and two peoples. As the architect of the Balfour declaration, Britain retains a key role in this process. I applaud the Government's principled stand at the Paris peace conference earlier this year when they asserted that international conferences without the involved parties cannot achieve peace. Only direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians will result in the two-state solution that we all agree with.

Just as the Jewish people have a legitimate claim to the land, so too do the Palestinians, who deserve a sovereign state of their own. A viable, thriving Palestinian state could offer much to the region. With the highest education rates in the Arab world and the potential for a seaport in Gaza trading with the world, a sovereign Palestinian state would have enormous potential, living in peace alongside a safe and secure Israel. The two countries could be a dynamo for great growth in the area.

**Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. In 2015, I had the opportunity to tour Rawabi in the west bank. Does he agree that Rawabi gives us a glimpse of what a future Palestinian state could look like and aspire to?

**Dr Offord:** Yes, I do. I have also viewed Rawabi, which not only is a great example of what can be achieved in peaceful co-existence with other parts of Israel, but gives a great opportunity to the very people who need assistance. I very much agree with my hon. Friend.

It is time that the Palestinians and their Arab brothers reversed the fateful decision in 1947 to reject the internationally endorsed partition plan. It was a historic mistake, which began the cycle of violence that continues today. That is why the gradual warming of Israel's relations with its Arab neighbours is so especially encouraging. With shared concerns over Iran's hegemonic ambitions and destabilising influence, Israel is now working more closely with the likes of Egypt and Jordan as well as countries that do not even have diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait.

In recent months, there has been a regional push towards a peace process and talk of a revival of the 2002 Arab peace initiative. This year, our Foreign Secretary said aptly that Israel's Arab neighbours “hold the key” to the peace process. It is only with the support of these Arab partners that the Palestinian Authority will be able to make some of the difficult compromises needed by both parties in the peace talks. The Palestinians need support from their Arab brothers to return to peace talks, and I urge the Minister to encourage dialogue in that regard. Will he update the House on the progress of on any initiatives that he has promoted to achieve that?

Polling regularly shows that more than half of Israelis and Palestinians still support a two-state solution, so the window of opportunity is still open—but it might not be forever. Inexplicably, the Labour party's youth wing has this month seemingly repeated the historic

[*Dr Offord*]

mistake of the Arab leadership in 1947 by rejecting a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians. I hope that does not become official Labour party policy.

**Ian Austin:** I point out to the hon. Gentleman that whatever anybody thinks, it remains Labour party policy to support a two-state solution. The Labour party has supported a two-state solution throughout its history, and, as Harold Wilson said, it would not have been possible

“for a political party to be more committed to a national home for the Jews in Palestine than was Labour”.

**Dr Offord:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful clarification. I hope that that remains the stance of the Labour party, and I am sure that he and other sensible members of the Labour party will continue to ensure that it is.

**Robert Halfon:** I have huge respect for the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), who has just spoken, and for a number of his colleagues who feel the way he does. However, the problem is that the leader of the Labour party has said that Hamas are his friends and has invited them into the House of Commons. Everyone looks to the leader of the Labour party to understand what the party’s policy is on Israel and on the horrific things that have gone on in the party to do with anti-Semitism. That is the issue that the public and Jewish people have. There is the feeling that the current Labour party, with the honourable exceptions of people such as the hon. Gentleman, are hostile to the state of Israel and the Jewish people.

**Dr Offord:** I think that that intervention was not directed to me, but perhaps to some other Members in the Chamber. I thank my hon. Friend for it anyway.

The Labour party’s official position has just been confirmed, but it seems to me that the next generation of Labour activists do not believe that the Jewish people have the right to self-determination in their historic homeland. Zionism is entirely compatible with a two-state solution; it does not reject the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Legitimate criticism of the Israeli Government’s policies and actions should be and is justified, just as we in this House rightly criticise the Governments of liberal democracies, but to deny the two-state solution is to side with the hardliners in both camps. The leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition compounded the mess last week when he declined an invitation to attend a dinner to commemorate the Balfour Declaration next month. Hamas’s official English-language Twitter account welcomed that decision.

The horrors of the second intifada abruptly ended a period in which Palestinians and Israelis were interacting more closely than ever on a day-to-day basis. A whole generation of Israelis and Palestinians has now grown up with close to no knowledge or experience of the other side. That is a major obstacle to the long-term viability of any future peace agreement.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is being generous in taking interventions, and the point he is making is extremely important.

Does he agree that one of the most striking things for someone who visits Israel, and has the opportunity to speak in private both to Palestinians and Israelis, is the sense of regret and tragedy on both sides about the decline of engagement and economic interaction, and the fact that they used to do business with each other on a daily basis? That is very sad.

**Dr Offord:** Without a doubt; I have had the opportunity to meet people on both sides of the debate in Israel—and, indeed, outside it—and I do not think that the assistance of those who would term themselves Palestinian refugees, who live in places such as St John’s Wood, is always productive. Sometimes I just wish that they would keep out of the problem and let others who are actually affected by this issue on a day-to-day basis find their own resolution. We do not need assistance from outside people.

As I said, the Government should be proud of their announcement this year to invest an unprecedented £3 million in peaceful co-existence projects, bringing Israelis and Palestinians together. Alongside honourable colleagues here, I have seen some of those projects, so I know how they plant the seeds for peace and understanding. It is hugely symbolic to have made that important contribution this year through that financial remuneration. I could ask the Minister whether he will seek more funding to go further and achieve more good things in the country.

Although a unified Palestinian leadership is an essential component in the successful outcome of any peace process, I have severe doubts about recent developments between Hamas and Fatah. Hamas is, and remains, a terror group committed to the destruction of Israel. The group must be obliged to accept the Quartet principles in full and unconditionally, including full disarmament. Israel cannot realistically be expected to enter into peace negotiations without Hamas taking that crucial step. Does the Minister agree that Israel’s measured response to the unity agreement is laudable and that its continued co-operation with the Palestinian Authority is an important source of stability at this sensitive juncture? I would be grateful if he could address that in his summing-up.

**Ian Paisley:** Those are the principles that led to the successful conclusion of the struggle and the troubles in Northern Ireland—that violence had to be given up and there then had to be the recognition of mutual respect to have talks. What followed from that was the destruction of weapons. If those principles are good enough for a part of the United Kingdom, they are good enough for a part of the world that we believe in.

**Dr Offord:** I am sure that the Minister heard the hon. Gentleman’s comments and will take them on board.

In conclusion, when Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour sent his letter to Lord Rothschild in 1917, I doubt he would have imagined that we would still be debating it 100 years later. With his short letter, he initiated a process that both granted international legitimacy to the Zionist dream for a return to the homeland and gave it the prerequisite legal grounding in international treaties. The legal legitimacy of the state of Israel is simply not up for debate. The Palestinian people, Israel and the wider international community continue to live

with the consequences of the Arab leadership rejecting the internationally endorsed UN partition plan in 1947. The establishment of a Palestinian state is long overdue. I hope that we can see some progress in peace talks; that would be a fitting tribute for this centenary.

Israel has achieved so much in the less than 70 years since it was created. I hope that we will take this landmark moment to reflect on the many successes of Israel and commit to further strengthening our relationship with such a key ally. As the Prime Minister said only today at Prime Minister's Question Time, we should be "proud" to do so.

**Robert Halfon:** On a point of order, Sir David. Just to be safe, I refer Members to my interests in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

**Sir David Crausby (in the Chair):** Thank you. I will call the three Front Benchers to speak at about 3.40 pm, which gives us about 40 minutes for Back Benchers. I will not impose a time limit, because I do not think that is practical, but I ask Members to keep their contributions to about two or three minutes. That will give everyone an opportunity to speak.

3 pm

**Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab):** It is always a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and it is a great relief today. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) on securing this important debate, which provides an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the Balfour Declaration, 100 years on.

The state of Israel was born in the wake of the holocaust—the Shoah—which was a meticulous plan on an industrial scale to wipe out an entire people because of their faith and cultural identity. It was shocking not only because of its depravity, but because of the complicity of many individuals and leaders who looked the other way in the face of unspeakable evil. It is a sad truth that we still need to counter those who seek to deny the holocaust.

Resurgent anti-Semitism is the only form of racism that unites far right and far left. My own party has serious questions to answer about a minority of members and supporters who stain the reputation of a movement rooted in equality and in an abhorrence of all forms of discrimination and racism. Although they are a small minority, they feel able to act with impunity when there should be zero tolerance. To Conservative Members, I say: let us not play party politics with these incredibly sensitive issues. It was not that long ago that senior Tories talked about there being too many Estonians and not enough Etonians in the Thatcher Government.

Why is anti-Semitism so salient to this debate? Quite simply, for many Jews around the world, Israel is the safety net that gives meaning to the phrase "Never again". The reality is that contemporary anti-Semitism is predominantly tied up with attacks on Israel that cross the line in their use of anti-Semitic rhetoric and imagery.

There are many people and organisations who legitimately criticise the policies and actions of the Israeli Government but are not in any way anti-Semitic. They have every right to do so without facing the false accusations that sometimes damage those who claim to

be Israel's friends. However, 100 years on from Balfour, this country, more than any other, has a duty to ensure a balanced scorecard when it comes to judgments about the state of Israel—a small country the size of Wales that has always existed in a hostile neighbourhood and attracted hatred, venom and the daily threat of violent terrorism. It must be acknowledged that Hamas and Hezbollah continue to use violence, not politics, to pursue their objectives. Globally, Israel is a lightning rod not just for anti-Semitism but for people who loathe western values. It is often forgotten that that is what much of the hostility towards Israel is actually about.

Modern Israel is a vibrant democracy with a free judiciary and an independent press. How many countries put former Presidents and Prime Ministers in the same prison cell block? That is just one slightly strange example. Israel is at the cutting edge of the global technological revolution and of life-changing medical and scientific advances. For the most part, Jews, Arabs, Christians and Muslims live side by side in peace. Its stance on LGBT and women's rights is often an example to the rest of the world.

It is only right, however, that we acknowledge that Israel must face up to some harsh realities. West bank occupation dehumanises both Palestinians and young Israeli soldiers. Security must be the No. 1 priority for any Government, but the time has come to consider a different framework that protects Israel's security while allowing maximum freedom for Palestinian residents. Settlement expansion is wrong and unnecessary in advance of a final negotiated settlement. Inequality and poverty have disproportionately affected Israeli Arabs. More should be done to put that right.

Like many supporters of Israel, I continue to believe in a two-state solution that guarantees Israel's security and normalises its relations with the mainstream world alongside a viable Palestinian state that can offer dignity and opportunity to all its citizens. The harsh truth is that the political leadership on both sides cannot—perhaps will not—make the compromises necessary for that to happen. Let us hope that that changes, because bitterness, hatred and division grow every day, leading to no progress and, more importantly, no hope.

The Balfour Declaration was right, because it laid the foundations for the recognition that the Jewish people had a right to self-determination in their own country—the true definition of Zionism, which is a word that has been distorted and demonised by those who do not really believe that Israel has a right to exist. Of course, there are a tiny minority whose Zionism means expansionism and the appropriation of more land, but they do not speak for the vast majority of Israelis or friends of Israel around the world.

I doubt that Balfour believed he was beginning a process that would lead to the creation of a utopian state. Israel is far from that, but nor should she be too often singled out for disproportionate, ill-conceived criticism and wrong-headed calls for boycotts. Our country should be proud of the Balfour Declaration, while also championing the importance of a two-state solution and the rights of the Palestinians to have the dignity of statehood. In this place, perhaps the greatest tribute we could pay to the legacy of Balfour would be for more of us to reject the entrenched divisions of the past and claim the right to define ourselves as friends of Israel and friends of Palestine.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Sir David Crausby (in the Chair):** Order. I remind hon. Members that if they speak for longer than three minutes, I will not be able to call all Members who wish to speak.

3.6 pm

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and to speak in this important and timely debate. Since the declaration and the foundation of the state, Israel has become one of the UK's most important trading partners on the international stage, with record levels of trade, intelligence sharing and ever closer academic, cultural and scientific collaboration. The bilateral relationship runs deep, and it all started as a result of Balfour. I am not oblivious to the fate of the Palestinians—having visited the west bank, I am all too aware of it—but the solution lies in producing a two-state outcome to the current impasse.

Allied to the Balfour Declaration is the issue of Zionism. The Balfour letter expresses “sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations”.

What we mean by Zionism is the belief that there should be a Jewish state in the land of Israel. The Zionist movement received cross-party support in the UK at the time, as well as Government backing in France, the US and other countries. Sadly, it appears that “Zionist” has become one of the most misunderstood and misused words in the English political dictionary. Legitimate criticism of the Israeli Government's policies and actions should, of course, be permitted, just as we rightly criticise the Governments of other liberal democracies, but we must clearly set ourselves apart from those who hate Israel and call into question its right to exist as a Jewish state.

The excellent design for the new holocaust memorial and learning centre near Parliament was revealed only yesterday, and I look forward to seeing it built. In this centenary year, we need to recommit to the values of freedom and tolerance that we share with our friend Israel and proudly celebrate the incredible contribution that Israel has made to this world, which was started by that letter.

3.8 pm

**Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) on securing this important debate. The Balfour Declaration marked a milestone in the Zionist movement's struggle to secure Jewish self-determination in the land of Israel, where the Jewish people have roots that go back 3,000 years. The strong support of the Labour party and the labour movement was shown in the party's war aims memorandum, which was published in August 1917, three months before the declaration. The enlightenment's failure to address anti-Semitism, illustrated by the Dreyfus case and followed by the horror of the holocaust, intensified the need for action. It was not until 14 May 1948 that the state of Israel was declared following UN resolution 181, which was passed in 1947 and called for the partitioning of the land into Jewish and Palestinian states. Palestinian leaders rejected that proposal and five Arab countries attacked the fledgling Jewish state.

What has the state of Israel achieved since 1948? It is a tiny country of 8 million people, smaller in land size than Wales and 10 miles wide at its narrowest point; 74.7% of its population are Jewish, 17.5% are Muslim and 2.7% Christian. It is a refuge for millions escaping genocide and persecution, at the same time creating a dynamic and diverse democracy that includes 17 Arab Members of the Knesset from six different political parties. Israel has a strong record on gay rights and has many leading hospitals such as Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, where both Jewish and Palestinian doctors treat patients of all religions and all backgrounds equally.

Israel has produced 12 Nobel laureates since 1966, nominated for achievements in chemistry, economics, literature and peace. Their inventions include innovations such as a walking system for paraplegics and Babysense, which helps prevent sudden infant death syndrome. Israel has an outstanding record in providing international humanitarian aid in countries such as Indonesia and Haiti, and currently Syria, with 4,000 wounded Syrians treated in Israeli hospitals.

Israel faces many challenges, but it is a beacon of light in a troubled region. It is a permanent part of the middle east. As the nation state of the Jewish people, it is here to stay. It is tragic that Palestinians remain without their state. Their leaders rejected the 1947 UN proposal for partition, and subsequent opportunities at Camp David in 2000 and Taba in 2001 and Ehud Olmert's offer in 2008 were discarded. New efforts are required to enable Israel and the Palestinians to return to direct negotiations to create a Palestinian state alongside Israel. That Palestinian state should have full international backing. If that becomes a reality, the Balfour statement's vision can be fully realised.

3.12 pm

**Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) for securing this debate. I want to reflect briefly on some of the circumstances that led to the declaration. In preparing my speech I have drawn heavily on the work of Simon Sebag Montefiore and an excellent article he recently produced in *The Sunday Times*.

Zionism may have been a word that was coined as recently as 1890, but the aspiration to return to an ancient homeland dates back nearly two millennia, to AD 70 when the Romans defeated the Jewish revolt, marking the end of the Jewish state until its revival in the modern era. Support for the return of the Jewish people to Zion has been present in a strand of evangelical Christianity in England since at least the 17th century. Indeed, it formed part of the background to Oliver Cromwell's decision to readmit Jewish people to England in 1656, some 366 years after their brutal expulsion in 1290.

Prominent evangelical Christian figures in the 19th century such as William Wilberforce also backed the idea, and support for a homeland for the Jewish people gathered pace after a series of horrific pogroms in Russia in the 19th century. As we have heard, Arthur Balfour, the Conservative Foreign Secretary at the time, was also sympathetic to the cause, as was Lloyd George, the son of a Baptist minister and well versed in Bible studies and the evangelical interest in Zionism to which I have referred.

The debate raged in London, in the Cabinet room and in drawing rooms, while General Allenby and his forces moved ever closer to Jerusalem, about to become the first Europeans to control the city since the expulsion of the crusaders by Saladin in 1187.

There was significant opposition to the declaration from figures such as Lord Curzon, but Balfour and Lloyd George ultimately prevailed, and a compromise was reached to ensure it was clear that the text acknowledged the rights of both the Arab population of Palestine and the Jewish people.

Although the declaration is dated 2 November, it was not published until the 9th. The night before, Lenin seized power in Russia. Historians have speculated to this day on what might have happened if that profoundly world-changing event had occurred earlier, but, close as it was to the publication, it did not halt the declaration.

As we have already heard from many participants in the debate today, the declaration set in train the events that eventually led, some 30 years later, to the recreation of the state of Israel. Like others, I believe that is a cause for celebration, and that we in this country and in this Parliament should take pride in the role that the Balfour Declaration played in leading international opinion and promoting Jewish self-determination. Our role in helping to create the state of Israel and its many achievements over its 69-year history is, as others have said, something to commemorate with a sense of pride.

On the eve of this important centenary it is heartening to know that the UK-Israel bilateral relationship is stronger than ever. This debate is also a timely reminder that, just as the UK helped to create the modern state of Israel, so we in this country should help to finish the work that began with the Balfour Declaration and its aspiration to safeguard the interests of both sides. That means redoubling our efforts in supporting the search for a peaceful negotiated settlement, to give Israel the security that it needs and to deliver a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. I urge the Minister to recommit to those important goals this afternoon.

3.16 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, Sir David.

I was recently privileged to meet survivors of the holocaust and veterans of the Kindertransport. Their moving and humbling stories were a timely reminder of the importance of the existence of the state of Israel. Their stories were also a timely reminder that we must always speak out against injustice and abuses of the rule of law and on behalf of refugees' rights.

Many of my constituents have written to me urging me to speak about the rights of Palestinians in this debate. They have pointed out that the Balfour Declaration disregarded the rights, wishes and claims of the Palestinian people, who made up nearly 90% of the population in Palestine in 1917. The land was not, as the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) said, desert. It was towns and villages in which 90% of the Palestinian population lived.

The Balfour Declaration and Britain's subsequent acts when Palestine was under its control created the framework for Palestinian dispossession and the establishment in 1948 of a state whose basic laws and

subsequent policies have privileged the rights of Jewish inhabitants above those of Palestinians. I saw that with my own eyes when I visited the west bank and Israel with the cross-party parliamentary delegation last year, led by the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding and Human Appeal.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Is the hon. and learned Lady equating the survivors and victims of the holocaust with the plight of the Palestinians now, because that is a very serious thing?

**Joanna Cherry**: Of course not. My point was that hearing stories of the abuse of human rights in Europe reminded me that we must be alive to the abuse of human rights anywhere in the world.

**Andrew Percy**: Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

**Joanna Cherry**: I will in a moment, but I want to continue.

When I was on the west bank, I observed two parallel systems of law in the military courts, where human rights and basic legal process are not observed, and that is of particular interest to me as a lawyer.

**Andrew Percy** *rose*—

**Joanna Cherry**: I also saw that the proliferation of settlements in the west bank is sadly making a two-state solution almost impossible. I think all of us in this room agree that a two-state solution is the answer. I can certainly say that is the policy of the Scottish National party, as it is of the Labour party.

**Ian Austin** *rose*—

**Andrew Percy** *rose*—

**Joanna Cherry**: My constituents have asked me to say—I am conscious that other people wish to speak—that the true legacy of Balfour is 5 million Palestinians living in refugee camps or scattered across the globe; a 50-year occupation of East Jerusalem, Gaza and the west bank; and a 10-year illegal and inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip. The point of my contribution this afternoon is to say that two wrongs do not make a right, and that the second part of the Balfour Declaration has not been fulfilled.

**Andrew Percy**: Just to be clear, when the hon. and learned Lady talks about treatment of different groups under Israeli law, she is not suggesting for a moment, is she, that Israeli Arabs are in any way different from Israeli Jews or Christians before the courts and law of Israel?

**Joanna Cherry**: No; as I said, I was talking about the treatment of Palestinians living in the west bank in the military courts, which I observed with my own eyes, and which has been widely reported on by lawyers from across the globe.

**Ian Austin**: Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

**Joanna Cherry**: I do not want to take up too much more time, Sir David. I have taken rather a lot of interventions. I just want to say that it is a matter of law that the establishment of settlements in the occupied

[*Joanna Cherry*]

territories is contrary to international law under the fourth Geneva convention. That is recognised by the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Court of Justice. By all means, today, let us celebrate and protect the state of Israel; but let us not forget, as British people, the other aspects of the Balfour Declaration, and our responsibility to make sure that the rights of Palestinians living in the west bank and occupied territories are respected.

3.20 pm

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I add my congratulations to those that have been offered to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) on securing this timely opportunity to debate the beginnings of one of modern history's most remarkable stories: the rebirth of the state of Israel, the Jewish state.

The Balfour Declaration was described by Winston Churchill in 1921 as “manifestly right”, and we can wholeheartedly endorse that view today. It is manifestly right that we mark its centenary with pride—and that the Government do so too. Israel's achievements since its establishment speak for themselves. It has one of the world's most diverse societies, and its economic successes and commitment to the same values that we hold so dear in this country make it a close and vital ally. Israel's commitment to liberalism and tolerance shine brightly in a region where, sadly, persecution and a denial of basic human rights are all too common. To celebrate the Balfour Declaration, therefore, is to celebrate everything that our nations have achieved together, and serves as a reminder of what two countries can accomplish if they embrace the shared principles of freedom and liberalism.

As we celebrate how far Israel has come, however, it is important to remember that today, in 2017, more than 30 members of the United Nations still refuse to recognise or maintain diplomatic relations with the state of Israel, including 19 of the 21 Arab League states. I believe that that is an absurdity and a stain upon the international community. Let us be clear: Israel's existence is not up for debate. Indeed, few states have such legitimacy in law as Israel. Let us consider, for one moment, the fact that the content of Foreign Secretary Balfour's letter to Lord Rothschild in 1917 became international law after being incorporated into the San Remo resolution in 1920, and was further unanimously endorsed by the League of Nations in its mandate for Palestine in 1922.

**Andy Slaughter:** All states should recognise Israel, as Britain did in 1950, but does the right hon. Gentleman think, also, that all states, including this one, should recognise the state of Palestine?

**Stephen Crabb:** All states in the international system should, I believe, work together for the realisation of the two-state solution. That should be the objective of our foreign policy.

If anything, the lack of recognition by so many UN member states and the resurgence of a vile anti-Semitic ideology around the world underscores again the need for the Jewish homeland.

**Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I am sorry to interrupt my right hon. Friend's excellent speech. Does he agree that the issue is not just about supporting Israel's right to exist; it is about supporting its right to defend itself?

**Stephen Crabb:** My hon. Friend makes an important point about recognising that the country that will take the primary responsibility for defending the state of Israel is the state of Israel itself. We should defend that principle.

At this centenary moment we can with sadness observe—and we have this afternoon observed—that we have yet to see the completion of the vision for the establishment of a viable Palestinian state alongside a safe and secure Jewish state. That has been a difficult path, marked with false starts and missed opportunities, and it will ultimately require bold leadership and difficult compromises from both sides if progress is to be made. On my most recent visit to Israel in February, I was struck again by the number of Israelis from different walks of life who told me of their deep desire to live in peace and security. Those words, “peace and security”, are heard time and again in speaking to Israelis. I remain hopeful that we can reach that point, but, if we are being realistic, recent history does not provide much encouragement. The successive failures of the Palestinian leadership to grasp opportunities have already been pointed out this afternoon. I am reminded of the famous quotation by the former Israeli diplomat Abba Eban:

“Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity”.

It is a great tragedy that Palestinians have been let down by successive poor leadership and poor decisions.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues to redouble their efforts in pursuit of the two-state solution, and to do whatever they can, in a challenging and difficult environment, to get the two sides to speak to each other and pursue that course. I also encourage him to enjoy celebrating the Balfour centenary, and to do so with pride. It is important that we all do so.

3.26 pm

**Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I welcome the opportunity to debate such an important subject, which is still the source of much suffering in the middle east.

The state of Israel has come to exist over the last 100 years, and the document we are discussing is largely symbolic of changes in attitudes, certainly within this country, to the notion of a Jewish nation co-existing in Palestine; but it is crucial that we understand that the 50 years following 1917 probably played a far more important role. It is clear that the vision laid out in the letter was always almost certain to fail. A new state located in a place at the expense of those currently inhabiting it would always be problematic, and it has proved to be that way. Britain has a clear historical connection to both the people of Palestine and the people of Israel. The letter, in my view, goes beyond that and sets out a moral obligation and responsibility to ensure that both are protected. It would not be right to mark Balfour's letter purely through the prism of when it was written, and not to reflect on the current situation in the middle east.

The sad truth is that, while the current situation exists, we are no closer to the vision—if it can be called that—laid out in the Balfour letter. Some 5 million Palestinians of varying descent live as displaced refugees, living by and large in poverty across the middle east; 2.5 million live in torturous conditions in the occupied west bank, and 1.7 million people live in the largest open prison camp on the planet, in Gaza, with no basic rights, no citizenship, and no hope of a lasting future. Given that the current Israeli Prime Minister is intent on further expansion, the border is more undefined than ever and, sadly, lasting peace is further and further away. The Government must recognize just how far away we are from a peaceful solution.

We must recognise that our role has created untold suffering. We have a humanitarian and moral obligation, set out by Balfour, not to leave things unfinished. We must not allow the continued suffering of the Palestinian people and accept it as the norm within the region. We must compel, and recommit ourselves to helping, both sides to find a lasting peace. If the Government are truly committed to a two-state solution, there are steps that they can take, and there are a few things that I want today to call on them to do. One is investing in infrastructure in Palestine, so that we can rebuild. The Government can also go a huge way to ensuring that prejudice and the suppression of the civil rights of Palestinians are brought to an end, by making a commitment to the legal recognition of Palestine. That would be a small but momentous step and might help to create the conditions for peace.

I remind the House not to look at Balfour through the prism of the time when it was written. We have failed the people of Palestine and with each passing day we fail more of them. We must help to find a way to help them out of their suffering and not speak of peace but commit ourselves to trying to make it happen.

3.29 pm

**Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): Sir David, 2 November 2017 is a big day—my 32nd birthday, the airing date of the episode of “First Dates” on Channel 4 that features my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), but, most importantly, the centenary of the Balfour Declaration. In the declaration, the Scottish Conservative MP Arthur James Balfour gave hope and opportunity to a people long beaten, purged and exiled simply because of their religion.

There will be many celebrating the centenary in my constituency of East Renfrewshire, which is home to more than 50% of Scotland’s Jewish population. The Jewish community is an integral part of East Renfrewshire, whether it be with Mark’s Deli, Sora’s Cafe and L’Chaim’s Restaurant, which serves delicious kosher food, or the Maccabi Youth and Sports Centre, all of which are in Giffnock. I am privileged to serve a vibrant Jewish community, whose members all add a vitality to the area.

The people of East Renfrewshire have a strong affinity with Scotland, Britain and Israel, and the centenary of the Balfour Declaration presents a unique opportunity to reinstitute peace talks without precondition, as we work towards a two-state solution, but this cannot be an outreach to terror. We cannot extend the hand of friendship to legitimise the murder of Israelis of all creeds, but we will only see lasting safety and security through such talks. This month in Egypt, Hamas and Fatah signed a reconciliation deal, ending their decade-long split.

Does the Minister share my view that any agreement must ensure the Hamas terror group’s demilitarisation, given its open commitment to the destruction of Israel?

The positive legacy of Arthur James Balfour can be seen in the value of the trade in goods between Scotland and Israel, which stood at £120 million in 2016. Let us build on that figure and ensure that we do not squander this historic opportunity to strengthen Scotland’s ties with Israel, just as Balfour himself did a hundred years ago.

3.30 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. It goes without saying that I am a proud supporter of Israel. I am pleased to celebrate the centenary of the state of Israel today and to support the future of the nation of Israel too. I make no bones about that.

I was also pleased to see our Prime Minister come out and say that we wish to celebrate the centenary with our friends in Israel. Indeed, this year the Government defended Israel against the bias of the United Nations by putting the UN Human Rights Council on notice and saying that they will vote against every motion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict unless the body ends its “disproportion and bias” against the Jewish state. That is the clear opinion of our Government and our Prime Minister, and we congratulate her on that. The Prime Minister has said that the Balfour Declaration was

“one of the most important letters in history. It demonstrates Britain’s vital role in creating a homeland for the Jewish people...Born of that letter...and of the efforts of so many people, is a remarkable country”.

In the very short time that I have, I also welcome the impending visit of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to London, which will happen later this year. It is unfortunate that in a world that attempts to abhor any form of intolerance, there exists an intolerance towards Israel that is widely accepted, including in the form of boycotts. It is clear that there are none so intolerant as the tolerant. The academics who are training students to boycott Israel are happy enough to save their rhetoric on a USB, which was designed in Israel. I wonder whether they would be happy to boycott Israeli medical breakthroughs if they needed them themselves.

The boycott of Israel will not bring understanding; it underlines division. The boycott of Israel is not a form of justice; it is just hatred, which has never brought peace. I am happy that our Government are standing behind the Balfour Declaration. I am happy that we are open to help in the peace process and happy that our alliance with Israel in no way makes us an enemy of Palestine or any Palestinians. I am happy to see the great influence and help that Israel has been in the hundred years since being reclaimed as a homeland. I look forward to seeing just how much more Israel can impact on our world for good with the technological breakthroughs that it is becoming renowned for.

Happy 100th birthday, Israel. We are happy to see you back home and to see you thriving.

3.32 pm

**Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) on securing this debate on the centenary of the Balfour Declaration. As we mark this 100-year milestone, it is important to reflect on Israel and its place in the world.

[Mary Robinson]

As we have heard this afternoon, Israel has made a significant number of contributions to the world, not only in trade but in far-reaching inventions, medical breakthroughs and humanitarian relief. Indeed, Israeli charities are leading research into assistive technology to improve the wellbeing and social inclusion of people with disabilities worldwide. Those charities include Beit Issie Shapiro and Wheelchairs of Hope.

Yet Israel can perhaps be most proud of its significant humanitarian work across the globe. The Jewish state is at the forefront of providing effective and speedy life-saving relief to other countries, following natural or man-made disasters. Just last month, Israeli NGOs sent search and rescue teams to southern Florida, Haiti and the Caribbean, in response to Hurricane Irma, as well as to Texas and Mexico. Israel's Foreign Ministry also sent supplies and donations to those in need via the US embassies. Additionally, Israel has sent teams in recent years to Nepal, Japan and Italy following deadly earthquakes and tsunamis. In many cases it has provided post-traumatic care, even when aid groups and others have left a region.

It is important that we reflect on the humanitarian aid that Israel has given, and also on the way that Israel reaches out to the world. With little fanfare, the Israel Defence Forces have quietly helped beleaguered Syrian civilians on Israel's northern border, in a massive, multi-faceted humanitarian relief operation, which includes treating chronically ill children who have no access to hospitals. The IDF have also built clinics in Syria and supplied hundreds of tonnes of food, medicines and clothes to villages across the border.

Last year I visited an Israeli NGO, Save a Child's Heart. It treats children from across the region, provides live-saving medical treatment to Gazan children suffering from heart conditions, and trains up doctors from the Palestinian territories, so that they can take that expertise back to their own hospitals.

Ultimately, it is through endeavours such as those I have mentioned, and by reaching out into the world, that we can hope to bring about peace and real change. As we move beyond this significant anniversary, we must do all that we can here to support Israel in doing that.

3.35 pm

**Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this very important debate.

The centenary of the Balfour Declaration should not be celebrated in any way, but should instead be a time when we can pause, think about the situation that we are in now because of this statement by a previous parliamentarian, and look carefully at its impact on the situation today. Our responsibility as a country is to find a solution to the problems in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Examining the rights and wrongs of the past does not solve anything, but they do give us a context in which to move forward and find a solution.

If we look at the wording of the declaration—I will not read it again, as it has already been read out a number of times—we see that the first part has been achieved. The second part has not. Indeed, in my view the Palestinian people's situation is much worse than it was in 1917.

I refer Members to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. On my recent visit to Jerusalem and the west bank, I was shocked and horrified at the way that Palestinian people are living and being treated in the occupied territories. I found the trip emotionally draining, but I am so pleased that I went to see for myself the reality of the situation.

I saw illegal outposts, often surrounding Palestinian communities, being built at a rapid pace in area C. I saw communities under threat of demolition. I saw water being diverted away from Palestinian communities to serve the illegal outposts, and I visited the military courts. The way that children are being treated—indeed, the way that our delegation was treated—in those courts was horrific. It is not what I would expect anywhere in the world—being lied to and being thrown out of court, first for “security reasons” and then, we were told, because it was too crowded. It was an utter disgrace. Finally, we saw the intimidation that everyone feels from the IDF presence in the occupied territories. The horror of the wall; the sight of young people walking around the Old City with machine guns on their back—it was horrific.

I absolutely respect the right of the state of Israel to exist and to be recognised, and the right of its people to live in peace. I also accept all of the wonderful things that, as a state, Israel does. I absolutely accept that, but I also respect the right of the Palestinian people to have a state, to be recognised and to live in peace, on equal terms.

It is time that the British Government take responsibility for the actions of Lord Balfour and the Government of 1917, and do their part in fulfilling the second part of the Balfour Declaration. I will quote John Kerry's speech on middle east peace in December last year, when he said, “Britain has an enduring responsibility to the two peoples in the Holy Land”—a responsibility which is not fulfilled by leaving the strong and the weak to “sort it out between themselves”, or by waiting for President Trump.

I would like the Minister to respond to a couple of issues. The British Government should recognise the state of Palestine, to fulfil our moral obligation to the Palestinian people, including the 5 million refugees, who have a recognised right to return. The Government should do everything within their power to get a two-state solution and urgently ensure that international law is upheld in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

**Sir David Crausby (in the Chair):** I am going to move to the two Opposition Front-Bench spokespersons now, because we only have about 20 minutes left. I ask them both to keep their remarks to around five minutes each, because I think we all want to listen to the Minister and give Dr Offord a chance to sum up the debate.

3.39 pm

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful to you, Sir David, for the opportunity to sum up on behalf of the Scottish National party. The Balfour Declaration has clearly been one of the pivotal events in the tragic and often violent history of the middle east, but I do not think that its centenary can be met with unbridled celebration and joy. The Balfour Declaration and the thoughts that went into it have contributed to the

history of the middle east in the past 100 years being more tragic and more violent than it might otherwise have been.

Before I explain that, I will reiterate the SNP's position, which my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) outlined. We fully support the principle of the establishment of a two-state future for the middle east. We absolutely support the right of Israel to continue as an independent state. We support early and, I would argue, immediate recognition of Palestine as an equal state to Israel. I want to see a future in which the two can co-exist as equals in every way, with each fully recognised by the international community, each fully recognising the rights of the other and each fully accepting the responsibilities under international law.

That means that the state of Palestine has to take appropriate action against any of its citizens who engage in acts of violence against Israel or any of its citizens, and it also means that the state of Israel must stop using those murderous attacks as an excuse to launch military action that it knows for certain are likely to result in the deaths of innocent children and other unarmed civilians. Two wrongs do not make a right. As the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) said very powerfully, the first step in any peace process is that all the killings have to stop.

**Ian Austin:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Peter Grant:** I will give way briefly, because we are short of time.

**Ian Austin:** When the hon. Gentleman alleges that Israel is looking for an excuse to bomb people in Gaza, is he suggesting that the Israeli Government want to do that, and that the Israeli people have some desire to wipe the people of Gaza off the map? Is he saying that the people of Israel have no right to defend themselves against rockets being fired into Israel? What exactly is the point he is making when he uses the word "excuse"?

**Peter Grant:** The point I am making is that I entirely respect the right of any nation to use targeted and appropriate military action to defend itself against an aggressor. All too often, the military action from Israel has not been targeted, and arguably it has not been proportionate. The number of civilians who have been killed is far too high for it just to be an accident.

Let me also make it clear that it is completely unacceptable for anyone to use legitimate criticism of the actions of the state of Israel to defend or justify any form of anti-Semitic racism against Jewish people in Israel or anywhere else. People should never blame an individual for the disagreeable actions of the Government of the country in which they live.

I said I would come back to my reasons for saying that I did not think the Balfour Declaration was something to be celebrated without at least some sense of regret. The first part of the declaration has been mentioned, but a huge principle of it has been completely ignored in the past 70 years. The rights of the Palestinian people, certainly in the parts of Palestine that are illegally occupied by Israel, have been violated time and again. Until that stops, we cannot celebrate the Balfour Declaration. We cannot celebrate it while one of the main parties to that declaration is deliberately and repeatedly violating some of its most important principles.

We also need to look at the background of the declaration, and I am surprised that no one has picked up on this point. The declaration was not the act of a Foreign Minister who was a friend of Israel or who cared particularly about the welfare or plight of Jewish refugees. A few years earlier, when he was Prime Minister, the same Arthur Balfour had talked about

"the undoubted evils which had fallen upon portions of the country"—

this country—

"from an alien immigration which was largely Jewish".—[*Official Report*, 10 July 1905; Vol. 149, c. 155.]

Those are not the words of a friend of the Jewish people; those are the words of a racist and an anti-Semite. I believe that that was part of the attitude behind the whole Balfour Declaration and all the manoeuvring and double-dealing that went into it. It was not primarily about the welfare of the Jewish people; it was primarily about ensuring that the desperate problem of Jewish refugees was kept away from the shores of Great Britain. The parallels with the plight of Syrian refugees today are far too obvious to have to be made explicit.

As far as the wider foreign policy agenda was concerned, many of the actions of Balfour and his successors were more about looking about the narrow, selfish, colonial interests of the United Kingdom than about caring for the people of Israel or Palestine.

**Andy Slaughter** *rose*—

**Ian Austin** *rose*—

**Peter Grant:** As I have very little time, I really cannot give way.

I genuinely wish Israel well. I wish my Jewish friends and those who want to celebrate well, but in all conscience I cannot celebrate with them this year. I want to be able to celebrate with them in future. I want to be able to celebrate the fact that this year's celebrations gave an impetus to creating the kind of middle east that we should all be looking for: a middle east where the two peoples who call Palestine/Israel their ancient homeland can genuinely live together in peace and security. I believe that a significant and symbolic step towards that would be for the United Kingdom to recognise Palestine and at the same time call on Palestine to accept its responsibilities as a nation among the international family of nations.

3.45 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. Like many others, I will begin by thanking the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) for securing the debate. The centenary of the Balfour Declaration is an opportunity to reflect on the history of the state of Israel and Britain's role in the region, particularly as a friend and ally of Israel.

Back in 1917, Arthur Henderson, the then leader of the Labour party, said:

"The British Labour Party believes that the responsibility of the British people in Palestine should be fulfilled to the utmost of their power. It believes that these responsibilities may be fulfilled so as to ensure the economic prosperity, political autonomy and spiritual freedom of both the Jews and Arabs in Palestine."

[Liz McInnes]

We remain committed to those important aims today. We want a viable and secure state of Israel alongside a viable and secure state of Palestine.

**Ian Austin:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Liz McInnes:** I am reluctant to, because we have so little time and I want to hear the Minister's response. I am sorry.

There can be no military solution to this conflict. Both sides must stop taking action that is going to make peace harder to achieve. That means an end to the blockade and settlements and an end to rocket and terror attacks, but it also means that those on the extreme fringes on both sides of this debate who believe in a one-state solution must step down from their entrenched positions. Until both sides can live in security, it is difficult to imagine the ambition of a negotiated two-state solution becoming a reality. Leaders on both sides must behave like statespeople. The Israeli Government must stop the building of settlements, and the Palestinians must do far more to stop and condemn the epidemic of terror and rocket attacks against Israelis.

Later this year we will also mark another important anniversary. It will have been 70 years since the UN partition plan that specifically addressed the idea of two states with an international zone in Jerusalem and guarantees for the rights of religious minorities. The Labour party has been clear that it would recognise the state of Palestine. When will the Government do the same?

As we have heard today, the Balfour Declaration did not only agree to the establishment of a national home of the Jewish people, but clearly stated that,

“nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

There is more work to be done. The levels of poverty and the lack of opportunities open to those living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, particularly in Gaza, are shocking. Oxfam estimates that about 80% of the 1.9 million population are reliant on humanitarian aid to survive. Gaza needs more than simply aid; its residents need to be empowered to support themselves. The unemployment rate is 41%—one of the highest in the world. We must ensure strict adherence to international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The UK should use all diplomatic means to pursue accountability for all violations of international law, such as through bilateral relations and multilateral forums such as the UN Human Rights Council.

I will finish with a few questions for the Minister. Last December, UN Security Council resolution 2334 was passed and adopted. It stated that settlements have no validity and pose a major obstacle to a two-state solution; it also condemned all acts of violence against civilians and urged the Palestinian Authority to confront all those engaged in acts of terror. What steps have the Government taken since last December to put these recommendations into action? Over the coming weeks, there will be a number of events to mark the centenary of the Balfour Declaration. I will be grateful if the Minister elaborates on the wider ways that the Government are marking this important anniversary.

In many ways, the anniversary is a sobering reminder that the words that Lord Balfour wrote all those years ago are still not a reality. What steps will the Government now take to make sure that today's speeches result in a more proactive approach towards the middle east peace process?

3.50 pm

**The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt):** As an old friend from Bury, it is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) for securing the debate and the thoughtful way he navigated the balance required as the mover of the motion, while making his position perfectly plain.

I would like to put some things on the record about the Balfour Declaration and that aspect of a regular and important topic of debate in the House. I will not be answering all the questions that have been raised, but I will go through the debate, check the questions and put an answer in the Library, so that colleagues will be able to see not only the answer to their own questions, but everything else.

I have listened to debates on this topic for the best part of 30 years now. I have heard colleagues speak with real knowledge, real passion, understanding and a democratic commitment to respecting the opinions of others. If the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians is to be settled in the way we would like and every part of the Balfour Declaration fulfilled, as we all want, the positions of tolerance, understanding and passion that colleagues have displayed in the debate today will be beneficial.

The contributions have been mostly thoughtful and balanced—I will not go through them all. There has been the odd ember on which it would be possible to pour fuel, but I will not do that. I cannot single out too many Members in addition to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, but I want to mention another old friend of more than 30 years, the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis), who is a former Minister for the Middle East. One would have to go a long way to hear a more balanced, succinct and poignant explanation of the Balfour Declaration, and commitment to peace, than we heard in his speech.

I would also ask my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) not to bang on about his age. Some of us in this room were the future once, and some of us think we still are, so I ask him to go easy on that.

**Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con):** My right hon. Friend talks about peace. I wonder whether he welcomes, as I do, the Prime Minister's words at Prime Minister's questions today. She concluded by saying that it is important that we recommit to ensuring that we provide security, stability and justice for Israelis and Palestinians through securing peace. May I ask the Minister if that demonstrates that the Government give that the highest priority?

**Alistair Burt:** It does. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. I will mention our commitment for the future, as colleagues were keen for me to do so.

**Ian Austin:** Will the Minister give way?

**Alistair Burt:** I will, but only once more; otherwise I will not get everything on the record.

**Ian Austin:** Does the Minister agree that ascribing colonialist motives to Britain and to the Balfour Declaration, as we heard from the Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant), is complete nonsense? Britain restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine until the war, and then put holocaust survivors in camps in Cyprus to prevent them from going to Israel as well. How could that be described as colonialism?

**Alistair Burt:** The hon. Gentleman has made his point. If I may, I would like to get back to what I want to put on record about the declaration.

The Government are proud of the role that the UK played in the creation of the state of Israel. We will welcome the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a guest of the Government on the centenary of the Balfour Declaration. We will mark the centenary with pride and respect, but also with a degree of sadness, as issues between Israel and the Palestinians remain unresolved.

Although history is not everything, it is important to recall the context in which the declaration was written. It was a world of competing imperial powers, in the midst of the first world war. Jews had suffered centuries of persecution, and in that context, establishing a homeland for the Jewish people in the land to which they have strong historical and religious ties was the right and moral thing to do. That is why we are proud of the role that the UK played—a vital role in helping to make that Jewish homeland a reality.

Today, we continue to support the principle of such a Jewish homeland, and the state of Israel. Israel is a symbol of openness and a thriving democracy. It is a beacon for upholding the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The energy, innovation and creativity of Israel's people stand out as an example to the world, and the existence of the state of Israel is not up for discussion.

The UK's relationship with Israel is a partnership that continues to grow in areas such as trade and investment, innovation and technology, and defence and security, as a number of Members have mentioned. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary met Prime Minister Netanyahu in February and March, and reiterated the UK's commitment to building on the strong ties that already exist between our two countries.

Although it is of course right to mark the Balfour centenary, we understand and respect the sensitivities many have towards the declaration and the events that have taken place in the region since 1917. That is why we are resolutely committed to establishing security and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians through a lasting peace. The UK remains clear that the best path to peace lies in a two-state solution, and we believe the declaration remains unfinished business until a lasting peace is achieved.

We are clear that a solution can only be achieved through a negotiated settlement that leads to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both

states and with a just, fair and realistic settlement for refugees. Just as we fully support the modern state of Israel as the Jewish homeland, we fully support the objective of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, and we also recognise the continual impediment constituted by the occupation to securing those political rights.

The Foreign Secretary reiterated the UK's support for a two-state solution when he visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in March, and also expressed concern about Israeli settlements and demolitions. It has long been our position that Israeli settlement activity is illegal under international law. The viability of the principle of two states for two peoples is being undermined by the increased pace of settlement advancement, plans for the first new settlement deep in the west bank in more than 25 years, the first new housing units in Hebron for 15 years, and the retroactive approval of unauthorised settlement outposts.

I am gravely concerned by reports this morning that the Jerusalem municipality planning committee conditionally approved building permits for 178 housing units in Nof Zion, a Jewish settlement within Jabel Mukaber, a Palestinian neighbourhood of east Jerusalem. As a strong friend of Israel, and one that continues to stand by it in the face of bias and unreasonable criticism, we are continuing to urge Israel not to take such steps, which move us away from our shared goals of peace and security.

We should also be clear that settlements are far from the only problem in this conflict. As the Quartet set out in its July 2016 report, terrorism and incitement also undermine the prospects for a two-state solution. We deplore all forms of incitement, including any comments that could stir up hatred and prejudice. We have regular discussions with both the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel, in which we reiterate the need for both sides to prepare their populations for peaceful co-existence, including by promoting a more positive portrayal of each other. Hamas—an organisation supporting violence and denying the existence of the state of Israel—cannot be part of that future unless it moves towards the Quartet principles.

Our unwavering commitment to the two-state solution is why the UK has also been a leading donor to the Palestinian Authority and such a strong supporter of its state-building efforts. The Department for International Development is developing a programme of support for projects intended to bring people together.

**Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con):** Will the Minister give way?

**Alistair Burt:** No, I cannot—there are only two minutes left, and I have to allow my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon back in.

We are proud of the role that we have played in the creation of the state of Israel, but it is perfectly clear that there is more to be done. The matter needs attention on both sides, and the Government certainly intend to do it. I enjoy such debates—we know a lot about the issue—but I look forward to the day when we are no longer debating the two sides. We are good on the arguments, but I want to have a debate where we are talking about the solution, not the arguments.

3.58 pm

**Dr Offord:** We have had a fairly good debate. It was more positive than I anticipated, so I am grateful to the Members who have contributed. In particular, I thank the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis), my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers), the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson), and the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott).

In the very short time I have left, I want to pick up on two issues. First, I will be pleased to welcome Bibi when he comes to the United Kingdom. I met him on his last visit and I hope to meet him again on the next. Secondly, some Members seemed to imply that land was seized from 1970 onwards. If they look at the Ottoman land code of 1858, they will understand that that was impossible.

I thank the Minister, who is not only very good on this subject, but a very good Minister. We are grateful for his support and the comments that he has made today. Long may we go forward and celebrate the Balfour Declaration.

*Motion lapsed, (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Operation Stack/Lorry Parking in Kent

[MR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

4.2 pm

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Operation Stack and lorry parking in Kent.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I am pleased to be joined by my county colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant). It is great to see the Minister in his place. He is no stranger to this issue, and has been involved in it personally over the past couple of years.

For the benefit of hon. Members, I want to define Operation Stack and set out how the situation stands in Kent at the moment. The operational procedure has been in place for a number of years. When delays occur at the channel tunnel or the port of Dover, road freight has no way of exiting the country. Under the system designed by Highways England, lorries park on the M20—in the initial phase, between Maidstone and Ashford, and then between Ashford and junction 11 of the M20. Closing the coast-bound carriageway of the M20 causes major disruption and congestion on the A20 and other strategic roads in Kent, as the traffic has nowhere else to flow.

Operation Stack, in phases 1 and 2, holds more than 4,000 vehicles, and when it is fully implemented it can take up to five days for the management of traffic to return to its normal state. It can be triggered for a variety of reasons; all it requires is a delay. In recent years, it has been triggered by a fire in the channel tunnel, strike action in France and migrant activity in France, which disrupted services through the tunnel. Equally, it could be triggered by bad weather that prevents ships from crossing the channel.

The capacity of the route is strategically important to the country, as 90% of the country's road freight trade with Europe runs through Kent and either across the Dover straits or underneath them through the channel tunnel. If there is a problem at either the tunnel or the port, there is not enough capacity for the other to compensate, which causes delays. Whether the delays are caused by the weather or human action, they can come suddenly and without warning, so a system of resilience is required.

Kent residents and businesses have lived with Operation Stack for a number of years, but the situation came to a head in 2015, when it was implemented for 31 days, mostly in June and July. It caused major disruptions and a major loss of revenue for businesses, and made life intolerable for many people in the county. As Kent Members of Parliament, we felt that the people of Kent should never again have to experience what they lived through that summer.

**Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. I am extremely disappointed about the amount of time it is taking to action a solution to Operation Stack. Every time it is implemented, Maidstone—the

county town of Kent—which is in my constituency, grinds to a halt, causing havoc. Matters could be improved if Highways England worked more effectively and more closely with parish, borough and county councils.

**Damian Collins:** I completely concur with my hon. Friend's remarks.

After the crisis in 2015, the Government agreed that a different solution to Operation Stack was needed to allow the motorway network to remain open, even when there are delays. It was agreed that an off-road solution was the only workable, long-term solution to Operation Stack. That means that the 4,000-plus lorries held in phases 1 and 2 of Operation Stack need to be held off road at a location that can serve both the channel tunnel and the port of Dover. It needs to be to the east of the channel tunnel and directly accessible from the motorway network in order not to disturb other roads, and it needs to be delivered at pace.

In the 2015 autumn statement, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, committed the Government to a £250 million investment that would deliver that solution. The idea was that it would be delivered at pace, and it should have been operational this year. Highways England embarked on a process of consultation to identify the correct site for the lorry park, and the site at Stanford West in my constituency was chosen. The choice of the site had the support of the district council, and it received majority support from the respondents to a consultation conducted by Highways England.

Nevertheless, the location of a piece of major infrastructure is not to be taken lightly. It clearly causes concern and disruption for the people who live close to it, so it is incumbent on the Government to work with the local community to try to put those concerns at rest. They should make clear their intention to carry through their plan to build the lorry park, so we can end the blight of Operation Stack and give the country the national infrastructure and resilience it needs to protect that important strategic route. They must also reach a settlement with the people who live close to it and are most directly affected.

The Department for Transport started a compulsory purchase scheme on a discretionary basis for residents whose properties abutted the site. It also identified that Westenhanger Castle—a business run as a venue for events and weddings—would also be blighted by the building of the lorry park and therefore should qualify for compensation. Talks along those lines were progressing but were stopped when a judicial review application against the building of the lorry park was submitted by Westenhanger Castle and supported by two other entities—Stanford Parish Council and Henry Boot plc.

There has been considerable negotiation between the Department and the castle owner about their judicial review application. The consequence of the judicial review application, in addition to the general election and other delays, is that a year has been lost. Rather than waiting for the judicial review, will the Minister commit to having a last attempt at negotiating with the castle owner and the other applicants so that a settlement can be reached and the judicial review application withdrawn? That would enable work to start on the lorry park, and the business owner will receive the compensation he is due and will be able to move on.

Given that the Prime Minister and Ministers have always stated that the Government intend to build the lorry park to give us the resilience we need, I see no reason why the discretionary purchase of properties in Stanford village cannot continue, so that residents are not trapped in limbo but can reach a reasonable settlement with the Department and move on with their lives.

Highways England has completed the consultation with the local community to determine what they would like to see in mitigation, such as the design of the lorry park to reduce its visual impact or the creation of a buffer zone between the northern part of the site and the village of Stanford. The completed plans, updated by Highways England in response to the consultation, were secured by my constituent, the owner of Westenhanger Castle, under freedom of information. Given that those plans have already been published by the Department, they should be made publicly available so that people can see how the Government have responded to the consultation with their plans for the lorry park.

Will the Minister recommit to the commitment made by the Prime Minister and other Ministers that the Government intend to deliver the lorry park at pace, to contest the judicial review with the intent of winning it and, if unsuccessful, to make whatever adjustments are necessary to their plans in order to continue with them and to make the lorry park operational? As the Government prepare and negotiate for Britain's exit from the European Union, investment in this sort of robust infrastructure is more important than ever.

We cannot say what the future will hold in terms of how frictionless trade will work if Britain is not a member of the single market, but it is possible that delays will be caused. I was looking at a speech made by Margaret Thatcher in 1988, launching the business case for the creation of the single market. She highlighted two things. First, she expressed the concern that the issue was about

“Not the classic barriers of tariffs, but the insidious ones of differing national standards, various restrictions on the provision of services, exclusion of foreign firms from public contracts”,

so what she wanted to ensure was

“Action to remove the customs barriers and formalities so that goods can circulate freely and without time-consuming delays.”

When the single market was being created, Margaret Thatcher understood that it was about removing not only tariffs but restrictions on and delays to trade.

Any time delay in the processing of freight in and out of the country will cause massive traffic congestion in Kent. If we want the country to be ready for Brexit on day one, that includes being ready with the infrastructure in place to support it. If there were customs delays, it is possible that Operation Stack would once again become a frequent and unwelcome visitor to the county, causing massive congestion and making life intolerable for residents and businesses. It is therefore even more important that the investment that the Government promised two years ago to deliver the Operation Stack relief lorry park is proceeded with at pace. If it is possible to avoid the judicial review and negotiate a settlement, we should take that opportunity. After the review is completed, we should make sure that we get on with the work.

If there is any danger that the lorry park will not be completed in time for spring 2019, the Government should put in place additional resilience for when the

[*Damian Collins*]

park is still being finished—not instead of the lorry park, but in case it is needed ahead of the park's being completed. It is better than nothing to have Manston airport on standby, ready to provide parking space for freight that cannot leave the country, but it is not an adequate or long-term solution. The Government have recognised that.

The only and proper long-term solution that has been planned for is the relief lorry park. We need to get on with that for the country and the county. We should put the residents of my constituency whose property abuts the lorry park site out of their plight and proceed with the compensation that they are due, so that they can move on with their lives and not have to wait for any further delays.

4.13 pm

**The Minister for Transport Legislation and Maritime (Mr John Hayes):** What a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope, and to engage once again with my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (*Damian Collins*) on these matters! I congratulate him on securing this debate.

My hon. Friend has shown immense perseverance in the pursuit of this subject; as he implied at the beginning, he and I have discussed it during my various stints at the Department. He has been courageous. I think it was C. S. Lewis who said that courage was not merely one of the virtues, but the greatest of the virtues: my hon. Friend has been not only courageous but patient, because this has been a long business.

Let me say a word or two at the outset about lorry parking more generally. As my hon. Friend knows well, I have taken a direct personal interest in the issue of heavy goods vehicles and their parking, as well as in the circumstances in which many lorry drivers find themselves when they park. Too often, lorry drivers face inadequate parking provision—not only the number of spaces available, but the conditions that they have to endure. I am absolutely determined that that should not perpetuate.

It is perfectly reasonable that truckers should be able to stop and rest—they are obliged to, by the way—in reasonable comfort. We will never get more women to drive HGVs while there are no facilities for them at many truck stops. We will never get more people to consider a career in logistics while they face inadequate security at truck stops. We will never get satisfactory working conditions for people while they do not have somewhere to rest, recoup and enjoy decent food before going about their lawful business. I am absolutely determined to ensure that all those things happen.

There are two pertinent pieces of work, the first of which is our work on motorway service areas. As the House knows, I have convened a working party to look at that matter generally. Lorry parking is a key part of its study, from which we will report in connection with the matters mentioned by my hon. Friend. Secondly, I have convened a couple of roundtables with the industry, working with the companies involved, the trade unions and others to ensure that we get better provision throughout the country, not just in Kent.

The problems highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe pervade in Kent. As we know from previous debates on the subject, including

here in Westminster Hall, there are problems in other parts of the country too. For example, there is inadequate lorry parking provision in the midlands: we have heard contributions from hon. Members about the problems they face there when great new logistic parks are built without adequate lorry parking. That planning issue needs to be addressed, and I am happy to commit to holding further discussions with the Department for Communities and Local Government about whether the existing planning rules and assumptions are sufficient.

Those are my more general points; I will come to the specifics in a moment.

**Damian Collins:** The Department should also look at the story of the lorry park and the fact that we are where we are two years on, with a year lost because of the judicial review. I am sure that there are lessons to be learned from the way in which Highways England proceeded with its application, which was not good. Certainly the previous Prime Minister's ambition that the park should be finished "at pace" has not been met because of planning issues.

**Mr Hayes:** As my hon. Friend knows, I was involved in establishing Highways England to replace the old Highways Agency. In doing so, we were anxious that Highways England should adopt a rather different approach from its predecessor's. That is not to say that everything the Highways Agency did was wrong—of course it was not—but I saw the opportunity to improve on its approach.

We continue to work with Highways England to get that right; part of it is proper engagement with colleagues in this House and with the general public. Had there been a more generous regime in that respect—to put it as mildly as possible—we might have ended up in a different place. Apart from the issue of the character of the environmental impact assessment, which is at the heart of this debate, greater engagement and dialogue is an important part of how we want to move forward.

Yes, I am conscious of the needs of our truckers. I would like to see myself as the truckers' friend—it is better for other people to say that than me, but if that is how the truckers want to see me, so be it—and I am certainly determined to ensure that our HGV drivers and the businesses that employ them get a better deal on lorry parking generally. My hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe I know shares that ambition—he has been a great champion of their interests, too.

Now let me turn to Kent. My hon. Friend knows that we are in the middle of a judicial proceeding, which limits some of what I can say. It does not limit me entirely; he knows me well enough to know that I will stretch those limits to their very breaking point, but I have to be cautious. We are subject to a judicial review, of which he is well aware, and he and I have discussed it previously.

Nevertheless, let me make three or four core points, the first of which is that two objectives are associated with the circumstances in Kent. I have a pre-prepared text with me, but as you know, Mr Chope, it is not my habit to read them—I think it is terribly tedious to do so. The Chamber deserves better.

The first objective, to which my hon. Friend made ample reference, is to ensure that when Stack is operational we do not end up with the delays, congestion and all

that arises from that in Kent—particularly on the M20, but well beyond, too, to the adjacent roads. That requirement is fundamental. My hon. Friend has said before, and rightly implied again today, that in 2015 there was what might be called a perfect storm, when a series of events occurred that meant that Stack happened several times during a relatively short period. That can occur as a result of weather conditions, industrial action, circumstances on the other side of the channel and so forth—he is well aware of all that. That created an intolerable burden on the people of Kent.

Operation Stack has a big effect on the wider economy, as my hon. Friend has also said many times. We move goods largely by sea and then by truck—and train, too. When congestion occurs in Kent, it has a knock-on effect across the whole of our kingdom. Ninety-five per cent. of the goods that we export and buy—some we want and some we need—are carried by sea. They often end up on trucks because of how commerce works. We cannot allow that congestion to perpetuate, so we must have a solution that avoids congestion in Kent. I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that I am considering a range of short, medium and long-term options. We should be nothing other than lateral and broad-minded in our thinking about how we avoid the eventuality. That is not to say that he is not right, but there are several ways in which we can deal with the problem. I assure him that that work is ongoing.

The second requirement is to have sufficient lorry parking space. The proposal that is now subject to judicial review originated because we recognised that we needed considerable space to accommodate the volume of traffic that might be displaced as a result of Operation Stack. We know the history very well, and this is where I have to be cautious. The assessment that was done was gauged by some to be insufficient, and as a result the process stalled. We are now part of judicial proceedings, of which my hon. Friend is well aware. The fact remains that the issue will not go away, given the 40 ferries leaving the port of Dover, the 130 train departures handled by Eurotunnel and the growth that we anticipate in that traffic. We have to deal with the challenge of congestion and the prevailing challenge of lorry parking.

I take the view, which I think my hon. Friend shares—he may intervene if he does not, or even if he does—that we need to look at other sites in Kent, too. There is certainly space for incremental growth at a number of the existing sites in Kent and beyond. I have told the sector that I am very happy to look at where we can achieve that incremental growth. It is not sufficient in itself, but it is an important additional consideration.

**Damian Collins:** Does the Minister recognise that there are two issues? There is a need for incremental growth in lorry parking, particularly on the M2/A2 northern routes through Kent. But that should not be instead of the Operation Stack lorry park needed on the M20 route to cope with phases 1 and 2 of Stack.

**Mr Hayes:** I entirely endorse that view. That is a separate and related matter, but it is not an alternative—it is a supplement to the fundamental issue that my hon. Friend has raised. In that respect, I want to look at whether we can consider an easier process for the incremental growth of lorry parking, both in Kent and more widely across the country. There is a thirst for

additional lorry parking at a number of locations, and providers are willing to consider incremental growth. It does not seem to me that when there is no obvious objection—from adjacent properties or about the effect on local amenities—growth should not be accelerated. Again, I am happy to talk to my colleagues across Government to try to bring that about.

With respect to Kent, my hon. Friend knows that we are putting into place a “clamp first” policy, for which I take most of the credit but not all, and which we will trial from the end of this month. Colleagues across Kent complained about some of the illegal parking that was taking place and the difficulties that local authorities in Kent were having in deterring and indeed punishing those involved in such parking. Indeed, I met local authorities to discuss that. People park in the most extraordinary places: on slip roads to service stations, in small villages, by people’s driveways, in lay-bys and so on.

Given that about 88% of traffic going to Europe both through the tunnel and by ferry is foreign, it does not seem unreasonable to assume, as the Road Haulage Association has told me, that the vast majority of those who park illegally are foreign, too. Collecting fines from people who were going to far-off places is not straightforward, so we will trial the “clamp first” policy—but if we have such a policy, we must have lorry parking so that people can park legally. We are now back to our original proposal, which is subject to the judicial review, and my point about additional parking. It is not good enough to clamp people if they cannot park somewhere safely, securely and legally.

**Damian Collins:** I appreciate that the Minister is running out of time, but will he address the specific questions that I asked about settling the judicial review proceeding with compensation for residents in Stanford and publishing the revised lorry park plans?

**Mr Hayes:** I am happy to address all those matters on a considered basis. I suggest that I meet my hon. Friend promptly, with my officials, to discuss those particular issues. His advocacy of the interests of the people directly concerned is beyond question and it is quite proper that he should consider support for those residents. I am more than happy to explore that with him. I can tell him this: he will get a lot more out of me than he would out of a lot of Ministers.

**Damian Collins:** As the Minister knows, I have met him and the Secretary of State before on that basis; I do not want us to keep going round in circles on this issue. We need the Minister to state a position. I do not know whether he can do that today or whether he will check with his officials and the Secretary of State and do so in writing to me later in the week, but I feel that we need an answer. The issues are very familiar to him and his officials.

**Mr Hayes:** I am prepared to both meet and write to my hon. Friend; I have no hesitation in offering both. It is very important that we offer sufficient reassurance to persuade the people he represents and others that the Government are serious about these matters and are acting with honour. The Government must stand by the people affected by Stack and the congestion that I have

[Mr John Hayes]

mentioned, and we must stand by those affected by proposals for dealing with the inadequacy of lorry parking space.

In summary, it is always a pleasure to respond to my hon. Friend. I do not say lightly that he has shown courage, patience and perseverance in pursuit of this matter. The Government are in a difficult position because the matter is subject to judicial proceedings and it would be quite wrong for me to stray beyond the parameters that have been set for me, notwithstanding the fact that—so far at least—I have made no reference to my prepared text. I will meet my hon. Friend and write to him promptly along the lines I have described. I hope that he will accept that as not only a gesture but a substantial expression of good will.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## National Railway Museum and Ownership of National Assets

4.29 pm

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the National Railway Museum and ownership of national assets.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I am pleased to have this opportunity to raise a matter of serious concern relating to the National Railway Museum and ownership of national assets. The National Railway Museum has described itself as the greatest railway museum in the world. I am sure that is true. It is indeed a wonderful institution, housing many of the priceless treasures of our unequalled railway history. As a lifelong lover of railways and trains, I have of course visited the NRM. Beyond that, I have travelled on many of our great heritage railways and been hauled on classic steam railway train trips across the country, including on the majestic Settle and Carlisle line and over the Ribbleshead viaduct.

Britain invented railways and steam engines and gave them to the world. It is right that we celebrate and remember our superb railway heritage. The National Railway Museum opened in 1975, 25 years after an official national collection of vested railway exhibits was established by the British Transport Commission to safeguard priceless and historic locomotives from the Rocket to the Mallard, as well as other railway artefacts. The museum is part of the Science Museum Group, run by a board of trustees under the National Heritage Act 1983 and with a chair appointed by the Prime Minister.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I also declare an interest as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on industrial heritage. Does he agree that the time has come, when looking at the National Railway Museum and other assets, for a comprehensive strategy from the Government on preserving our industrial heritage and utilising it for the future?

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I agree absolutely. Losing our heritage would be a disaster for our history. Some countries have had their histories almost destroyed and forgotten, and they have been lessened by that experience. We must preserve our great industrial heritage.

My concern—indeed, my alarm—has been raised by the giving away of three steam locomotives during the past 18 months without consultation and outside the terms of both the 1983 Act and the Museums Association guidelines. I ask Ministers today to intervene to ensure that that practice is stopped and, if possible, that the decisions affecting the three locomotives and other National Railway Museum-gifted possessions are reversed.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Which ones are they?

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I will come to the specific detail about the particular engines.

The decisions were unprecedented and indeed set a dangerous precedent that could be followed by others unless abandoned now. Precious artefacts of all kinds

must remain owned by us all, for us all, and be exhibited in our great museums and galleries of all kinds, showing to the world our rich national heritage in all its glory.

The first “gifted” locomotive, handed over in April last year, is a North Staffordshire Railway 0-6-2T No. 2, which was given without consultation or announcement to Foxfield Railway, which is not an official accredited museum under the terms of the 1983 Act. The engine is still listed on the NRM’s website, 18 months after its legal transfer. The previous custodian of that engine, the Churnet Valley Railway—the only surviving stretch of the former North Staffordshire Railway—has said:

“We certainly were not consulted by the NRM nor invited to make a bid for it.”

In March this year, a second locomotive, the London and South Western Railway T3 4-4-0 locomotive No. 563, was gifted, again without consultation, to Swanage Railway, a non-accredited museum. The engine made a six-figure sum for the Science Museum Group in theatre appearance fees immediately before disposal, with the museum group’s commercial arm having given the okay before the show ended. That locomotive is a unique survivor, selected for preservation by Southern Railway in the 1940s to represent its own history. National Railway Museum curator Andrew McLean said that the engine was

“one of the great examples of late-19th century locomotives.”

I am told it has been left outside in all weathers for the past six months and has deteriorated. In the last two days, however, I have been informed of plans for the engine to be refired and made to work sometime in the future, but that is still uncertain.

The third engine, given to Swindon Borough Council’s Steam Museum, was saved for the nation as a perfect example of the work of the foremost steam locomotive engineer G.M. Churchwood—a brilliant designer, who introduced standardisation to British manufacturing. The engine in question is Great Western Railway 28xx 2-8-0 No. 2818, a design that revolutionised the transport of freight, increasing train weight and length fourfold. It had a vital role in supplying the first world war grand fleet at Scapa Flow. Railway expert David Ward has said that the 28xx is more important to the collection than the Flying Scotsman—some comparison indeed.

Each of those three locomotives is a unique and historic treasure that belongs—and should belong—to all of us, so that future generations can visit the NRM at York, wonder at the beauty of these machines and celebrate the genius of our forebears in creating them. If there were several identical locomotives, there could be a case for distributing them, but only on lease or loan while remaining in the ownership of the nation through the NRM.

Heritage steam rail services are one of the great joys of all railway enthusiasts. I have been on many such trips, including being drawn by the Flying Scotsman, the Duchess of Montrose and many others. Those services should continue, but our precious railway heritage must not be given away. The disposal of assets by our great museums is tightly governed by strict criteria in the 1983 Act.

**Helen Goodman:** I am deeply grateful to my hon. Friend for initiating the debate. I am concerned about Locomotion No. 1, the first passenger train steam engine. Built in 1825 by Timothy Hackworth in Shildon in my

constituency, it ought to be in the NRM branch museum in Shildon; instead, it is in a small museum where people have to pay. It should be in the free, public museum that 200,000 people visit every year. I hope the Minister, with the Science Museum Group, will also address that point.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. I agree with her. Giving away publicly owned locomotives from museums that are free to enter to institutions where people have to pay is, in effect, privatisation.

**Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab):** I feel moved to intervene, following the intervention from our hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman). Locomotion is in the Darlington Railway Museum, which she describes as a small museum where people have to pay. That is true. I am here today to make a plea that it should not be in a museum where people pay to get in because such important artefacts are held there. I hope they can continue to be at home in Darlington.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** Of course, Darlington is one of the historic towns of our railway history, with the Stockton to Darlington Railway being the first effective steam railway in the world, let alone in Britain. I am therefore pleased that my hon. Friend is here.

There is also the matter of the Museums Association guidelines and the disregarding of safeguards specifically set up to ensure ethical disposal. I have the terms of those guidelines with me, but time constraints suggest that I should not spell them out in detail. The association has described the NRM as being in a “disposal controversy”—perhaps a euphemism or understatement.

The general case against the NRM’s actions can be summarised as follows. National collections are the result of decades of acquisitions and care at national expense. Exhibits of irreplaceable individual items together comprise a coherent whole. The National Railway Museum previously said that locomotives would not be disposed of. The NRM’s action constitutes privatisation without consultation or charge. National collections are for posterity, and private ownership is inherently insecure. The NRM has set a precedent for dismantling publicly owned collections, which must be prevented as a matter of urgency.

In conclusion, first, I suggest there should be an immediate ban on future locomotive disposals. Secondly, the three locomotives in question should, if possible, be restored urgently to the national collection. Thirdly, there should be an inquiry into disposals management at NRM and the Science Museum Group. It may be that the NRM has acted illegally as well as immorally. Finally, my personal suggestion is that all National Railway Museum locomotives should bear a welded brass plaque recording their NRM ownership on behalf of the nation, so that even if they are leased or loaned out, their ownership is clear for all to see.

I could say much more about my love of railways, locomotives and trains, but perhaps I have said enough. I hope that action will now follow and Britain’s wonderful railway heritage is saved by the nation for our future joy and wonder in all its exquisite detail. Many thousands—indeed millions—of children have been inspired to a

[*Kelvin Hopkins*]

love of engineering by these magnificent machines and have kept alive a culture of engineering and science in our nation. That culture must never be lost.

4.39 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is good to see you in the Chair, Mr Chope. I can relate a railway story from when I was growing up in your constituency, when I spent a day on Hinton Admiral station waiting for the Flying Scotsman to come through—alas, it came by road. Thankfully, it is now restored to the rail.

This is an important debate. I am so fortunate that the National Railway Museum is in my constituency, with its incredible collection. It is a dynamic museum that is not preserved in aspic, and I will talk about some of the exciting developments there. I am sure everyone hearing the debate will want to embrace them and one day come to visit. In fact, I am sure everyone has been to the museum.

The museum has an incredible collection, and it is always a joy to go there to see new locomotives. The exhibitions change on a continuous basis to ensure that visitors are always treated to something new. Visitor numbers are rising, from three quarters of a million to nearer millions. I ask Members to please come to York to boost those numbers and enjoy a day at the museum. Everyone has their favourite engines; most people come to see wonders such as the Mallard or the Flying Scotsman. Personally, I like to see the Scotsman out on the line doing its work. There are many delights and hidden treasures in the museum.

Between 2010 and 2014, the museum undertook a complete review of its collection and how best it could share its assets and ensure they were all on display. Previously, about 2,000 objects would be on loan to different exhibitions and museums, around the country and beyond, but in reality, that was neither manageable for the museum nor in the best interest of the items. I have discussed that at length with the museum. Often, when objects were loaned by the National Railway Museum, identifying who was responsible for the upkeep of the objects, keeping them in a good state of repair and functioning, was of prime concern, to make sure that those assets were kept in the best condition. The previous model, with such a scale of distribution of different pieces of the collection, did not work. Sadly, as a result the upkeep of some pieces, including some of the engines, was not in the best state.

The museum wanted to address that and ensure that upkeep was maintained. It therefore looked at how it could have the best arrangements possible for care, which often meant passing pieces to another museum. The question was who was responsible for an item loaned to another museum or collection. If the museum was going to have it back, why would somebody invest in that particular artefact? Gifting the artefact—it is only gifting; we are not talking about selling the items and losing them from the public space—and having local interests upgrade, keep up, restore and, as we have heard about the gift to the Swanage Railway Trust, even bring the locomotive back into steam, would bring real improvement.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I must say that it is only in the last two days that I have heard about the possible promise to get the Swanage steam engine into steam again. I suspect that might be a reaction to today's debate. Wonderful as small private railways are as a supplement to the NRM, they cannot have the resources to do the job properly and ensure that our national assets stay in good condition. I could go on, but perhaps I have said enough.

**Rachael Maskell:** I can inform my hon. Friend that the Swanage Railway Trust is working with the National Railway Museum, using its expertise to look at how it can improve the condition of that piece of the collection. We are not talking about a divorce settlement; it is about working together on a national asset and looking at how it can be best cared for, and having the space to display it. Some of the locomotives to which my hon. Friend referred were kind of put in the back cupboard, but have now become the star of the show, because one thing that is really important to the NRM is for locomotives to be displayed where there is a geographical relevance. For example, an LSW or GWR train might be taken down to the south-west, as opposed to having it in a shed in the north-east.

The NRM has a clear desire to best exhibit its collection and to make sure it is accessible. I completely agree that we should be able to freely access the collection across the country and not have to pay for the privilege, but at the same time we must recognise that the collection's upkeep costs money. We must therefore ensure that the collection is at least accessible, even if not everyone has the means to access it.

The Science Museum Group, of which the railway museum is a part, has in place a process for disposal that the museum assured me it follows, acting as other museums of global standing act on their collections. It wants to continue to refresh its collection, and there are gaps within its collection that it wants to fill to make sure it is telling the complete railway story. It looks at issues such as duplication, and as I say, geographical relevance. It first sends its items for disposal to be peer-reviewed by the group's board of survey. Recommendations then go on to the collection and research committee, and then, ultimately, to the full board of trustees before items can be disposed of. The museum said that it has gifted a significant number of items from the museum to ensure they are better cared for and looked after elsewhere.

As I have said, locomotives that were perhaps put in the back shed are now being upgraded to their former glory and, we trust, even restored back into use, which is an exciting development for the museum. However, there is oversight—this is not privatisation or selling, or the locomotives going into a private collection. If, for instance, Swanage Railway Trust or any other body goes into receivership, the NRM has the first option of taking that locomotive back if other museums want it. I talked it through with the NRM, and it is like a loan on the never-never, with the local interests upgrading and restoring the collection. We need to make sure, as time marches by on that incredible 200-year history, that the collection is kept in good order.

The NRM is changing. It is currently undertaking the greatest development in its history. As we heard, in 1975 it opened in the UK's largest urban development site, York Central, with £50 million of investment. To me,

this is what is really exciting: the museum has tasked itself to inspire the next generation of rail engineers by taking people through that incredible 200-year journey of the railway, moving from the past to the present and on to the future. We know that Britain did not just create the railways of the world—its railways changed the world.

The museum now has the ambition to capture the imagination of young people and to expose them to the opportunities of engineering and to take them on that new journey, looking through science, technology, engineering and maths in its new centre. The railway museum has an incredible future in York, and it wants girls as well as boys to come from the city and to the city to engage in the new hands-on gallery, so it can teach them about the opportunities that engineering brings and ignite their imaginations to bring forward a new era of engineering innovation on the railways.

These are exciting times for York and for the NRM, celebrating the past and looking to the future. I hope everybody gets behind this project, including funders, and that the NRM will not only be about an exhibition of the future and showing off the technological advances that our country is making today and tomorrow, but will ensure that its collection is displayed across the nation for all to enjoy.

4.49 pm

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) on securing the debate. Unlike him, I am not an expert on trains and have not devoted much of my life to studying steam engines, but I can say that although many towns and communities around the country claim to be the birthplace of the railways, Darlington has the true right to that claim, for one very special reason. Yes, there were railways in mines and close to ports before 1825, but Darlington had a very special ingredient in its railways: passengers. It was the first place that was able to combine the transport of freight and passengers, on the Stockton and Darlington railway, and we are incredibly proud of that history. Darlington has the oldest passenger railway station, which is now used as our museum. Everyone in Darlington is taken to that site as a child—I remember going there when I was growing up—and it is a place where we then take our children.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I am very much enjoying my hon. Friend's speech. Is it not even more remarkable that railways have become the transport mode of the future? Across the world, countries are building railways. When I was working in the TUC economic department and was responsible for transport policy, railways were being phased out through the Beeching cuts and so on. Now, we realise that that was a terrible mistake. Railways are the mode of the future, and it all started in Darlington.

**Jenny Chapman:** Absolutely, and I shall be using that quote. We are excited that we are building the trains of the future, at Hitachi in Newton Aycliffe, and that we are still building steam trains in Darlington. I think the Tornado was the first steam train to be built for decades, and it was built in Darlington, next to the museum, where it ought to be built. We are very proud of it. *[Interruption.]* Is my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) intervening on me?

**Helen Goodman:** I was just suggesting that if the Tornado was built in Darlington, Darlington should have the Tornado, but Shildon should have Locomotion No. 1.

**Jenny Chapman:** I see that this local rivalry could get out of hand! We would love the Tornado, but we are proud that the Tornado, made in Darlington, is being used and enjoyed regularly by passengers around the country, although we are thrilled when it comes back to the north-east, too. My hon. Friend has now made her point twice. Shall we leave it there for today and perhaps pick it up again in *The Northern Echo* some other time?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North said, the growth of the railways changed this country. Without the railways, we would not have Middlesbrough or Saltburn; indeed, the whole shape of the north-east, and later the country, changed because of the railways, which were created, built, designed and invested in in the north-east of England. We take enormous pride in that, and we are concerned when assets are given away. There are serious questions for the National Railway Museum on this matter. I am sure that those questions can be answered, but to a town that struggles to support its own small railway museum—we struggle hard to keep it interesting and thriving—gifting an asset such as an engine seems rather odd.

We would like assurances on what a gift is. Is this more of a long-term loan? What safeguards are in place for the upkeep of the asset? How do we know that it will be cared for in the way we know it could be cared for? How do we know that it cannot be disposed of in future in a way that would be detrimental to our national heritage? It is pleasing that my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) was able to answer some of those problems, but there is still a question mark over the concept of gifting in these instances.

I wonder whether such a relaxed approach would be taken if the asset were not part of our industrial heritage. What if it were a piece of fine art or a piece of statuary? Rules need to be applied in every case. Industrial heritage is just as important to my constituents as—

**Helen Goodman:** Italian art.

**Jenny Chapman:** As Italian art, for example.

The National Railway Museum is in a privileged position, in that it has all those assets in a wonderful location. Visiting it is an incredible experience, as is visiting the site at Shildon. I have enjoyed both, and families across the north-east enjoy them regularly. However, Head of Steam, which is the Darlington railway museum, is not as privileged, and as I have the Minister's attention, I shall explain the situation that we are in.

The railway museum in Darlington is supported by the Friends of Darlington Railway Centre and Museum, by local residents and, principally, by Darlington council tax payers. We have benefited from Heritage Lottery Fund money for special projects, and we are very grateful for that, but we do not benefit from—my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North referred to this—any national strategic consideration of how these assets ought to be looked after and how they might be better promoted in the future.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland said, the railway museum in Darlington is not free. It is closed on Mondays; indeed, at this time of year it is

[*Jenny Chapman*]

closed on Mondays and Tuesdays. From Wednesday to Sunday, it is open only from 11 am to 3.30 pm. To get in, adults need to pay £4.95; for young people, a visit costs £3.00. That museum is therefore at a considerable disadvantage compared with the nearby Shildon and York railway museums, important to our heritage though it is. It is to the credit of local people that they have managed to support the museum for as long as they have. I understand that this week, it being half-term, entrance is free.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** As my hon. Friend points out, the fundamental difference with museums such as Darlington and others that are essentially private or local authority is that they charge. Our party had a policy of free access to national museums in public ownership. That is a fundamental difference, and of course we then take responsibility for the upkeep of the museum, for investment in preserving the assets and so on, be it the National Gallery or, indeed, the National Railway Museum.

**Jenny Chapman:** I take that point. At the time, I was a bit annoyed that our museum was not to be part of the national museum programme and that it would retain the status that it had, but there are some benefits, in the form of keeping control locally and keeping decision making locally for something that we feel belongs to us in Darlington. The problem is that a national organisation is, rightly, thinking very long term, and a very small organisation is really struggling, because decisions about the first passenger railway station in the world and the significant role that Darlington played in railway history are being made by an organisation that has competing priorities. Those priorities are not just about which engine to preserve, but about looked-after children, adult social care, support for older people locally and so on. We are demanding an awful lot of local authorities with the high standards that we hold them to in securing these assets, and without very much oversight or support from the Government. We need a strategy that looks much more widely at all these issues and that takes our industrial heritage as seriously as we do other areas of our heritage.

I make these comments not in a spirit of any criticism at all—this is not a new problem—but out of concern. We are approaching 200 years of the railways, in 2025. The whole nation should be aware of, enjoy and celebrate that. It should be a platform for our international profile. My fear is that an opportunity could be missed. I am sure that York will do a great job celebrating what it has and does, but there is much more to this story than just the National Railway Museum. We need to think about important local sites such as Darlington too.

4.59 pm

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. May I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) on raising this incredibly important matter? He has not only highlighted the specifics of the National Railway Museum's decision to dispose of these three locomotives to private companies but given the House the opportunity to debate the principle of who has the power to do what with important

national assets. Unlike some of the previous speakers, I cannot claim to be an enthusiast. I cannot possibly display the passion of the hon. Members for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), but I can claim to have been born a platform's length—albeit a long one—from the legendary St Rollox works in Springburn in Glasgow many years ago.

**Rachael Maskell:** I just need to correct the hon. Gentleman: nothing has moved into private organisations. They are charitable organisations.

**Brendan O'Hara:** I thank the hon. Lady for that, but I think we are dancing on the head of a pin. They have been taken out of public ownership and removed from public control.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I have had advice from an academic lawyer who has investigated Swanage Railway in particular. It has charitable connections but is actually a private company.

**Brendan O'Hara:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point of clarification.

I am not at all surprised that a locomotive engine was the motivation behind today's debate because I well remember, just before the summer recess, being caught between the hon. Member for Luton North and my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) as they indulged in a deeply passionate, highly technical and absolutely bewildering debate on every aspect of every vehicle ever invented that had wheels and an engine. I understand the hon. Gentleman's passion for and knowledge of the subject.

This debate goes much further than the deaccession of the three locomotives in question. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right—it raises the question of who has the right to deaccession, flog off, privatise or sell these national assets and treasures that the public believe are being held securely for future generations to enjoy and appreciate. Let me be absolutely clear: I am making no criticism whatsoever of the Foxfield Railway company, the Swanage Railway Trust or any other recipient of these locomotives.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** As I said in my speech, I am an absolute admirer of all the heritage railways and have been on many of them myself. They do a fabulous job supplementing the national collection.

**Brendan O'Hara:** The hon. Gentleman is right. This is not about the companies involved; it is about questioning the decision of the National Railway Museum to dispose of its assets to organisations that, however reputable, are steam railway services and not accredited railway museums.

As we have heard on a number of occasions, this is not a loan of an asset to another organisation; it is the disposal of an asset. Deaccessioning is defined as the process by which a work of art or object is permanently removed from a museum's collection. As it stands, a national museum seems unilaterally to have decided to dispose out of public ownership a number of its assets into private hands. That sets an extremely dangerous precedent. Today we are talking about three locomotive

engines being passed on, but where could that lead? Will the cuts affecting the arts and culture budget in England in particular lead to other museums and collections disposing of assets similarly?

I appreciate the comments of the hon. Member for York Central and have no doubt that a transfer to enthusiasts may seem like an attractive option. However, I fear that it is not a long-term solution for how we deal with our industrial heritage. These are national assets, and they should remain within the ownership and care of the National Railway Museum. The hon. Member for Darlington asked a number of very pertinent questions about the whole idea of gifting these assets from our national museum collection.

There are a number of questions to be answered. Why were these locomotives allowed to be given to the companies they were given to? Why did the National Railway Museum feel unable to look after this important part of our industrial heritage? What did the museum mean when it said that the T3 in particular was causing an “imbalance” in its collection? Given this precedent, how can the Government guarantee that other museums will not deaccession some of their collection in order to ease financial worries? As the hon. Member for Luton North said, where is the strategy for preserving this country’s cultural heritage?

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is about more than just the fate of these three locomotives, important as they are. It sets a dangerous precedent for who has the right to deaccession, flog off or privatise these national assets, which should be held for future generations to enjoy and appreciate.

Scottish National party Members believe that culture and heritage make an invaluable contribution to our social and economic wellbeing. Everyone, no matter their background, should be able to experience, enjoy and access these cultural activities and pleasures. Despite this Government’s swingeing cuts, I am pleased to say that the SNP Scottish Government are doing their utmost to preserve the culture budget in Scotland, and national museums in Scotland are still free to access for everyone, regardless of where they come from.

In conclusion, I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate and agree with what he said. We are entering dangerous territory if national assets can be disposed of without public consultation. That is something we have to be very wary of and guard against.

5.16 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): This has been a very interesting debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) on securing it and will go on to talk about the issues he raised.

There were interesting contributions from other Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), who is not in his place, rightly called on the Minister to emphasise the importance of—and ensure there is a Government strategy for—developing policies around our industrial heritage. That did not surprise me, as he and I attended the same school, St Alban’s RC comprehensive in Pontypool, which was located around the house of the Hanbury-Tenison family, who were the ironmasters in Pontypool. It is a constituency with a great industrial heritage.

We also had interventions from my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), who managed to get into quite a nasty spat with my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman). No doubt the rivalry between the two will be played out in the pages of their local newspapers, probably to the benefit of the popularity of both with their constituents.

There was also a very knowledgeable contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), who told us about the wonderful National Railway Museum in her constituency. I confess that I have not visited it, but I will put that right as soon as I can. She tried to assuage the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North.

Sadly, I have to correct my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington, who is a good friend. The first steam-powered rail journey took place on 21 February 1804, when Trevithick’s locomotive hauled a train along the tramway of the Penyarden ironworks in Merthyr Tydfil, south Wales.

**Jenny Chapman:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that there were actually no passengers on board that train?

**Kevin Brennan:** Well, it was hauling coal at the time; I do not think it would have been a very pleasant journey among the high-quality south Wales anthracite coal. It was the first steam-powered rail journey in the world, and it took place in south Wales, not Darlington, but I will not labour the point. My hon. Friend made a good point about the lack of parity of “esteem”—excuse the pun—between fine art and our industrial heritage sometimes. The Minister should bear that in mind in his response.

I am immensely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North for securing the debate, not least because it gives us the opportunity to talk about steam trains. Who would not want to do that? It has been a really interesting debate. I well remember as a young boy growing up in south Wales often visiting Barry Island on a day trip. Hon. Members may be aware that at the time Barry Island was known not for the television programme “Gavin & Stacey”, as it is now, but because it had a great elephants’ graveyard of locomotives.

In the late 1950s, a scrap merchant from Barry Island called Dai Woodham began procuring steam locomotives that were being taken out of service as part of the 1955 railway modernisation plan. In 1959, he visited the Swindon works, where he was shown how to scrap a steam engine—a completely new process for the family’s scrap business. Fortunately, it was a difficult process; it was much easier to scrap the carriages, so that is what they did for the first few years. By the late 1960s, when the great revival of interest in steam engines and heritage railways really took off, hundreds of steam engines—I think there were 217—were left in Barry Island in Dai Woodham’s scrap yard. They had not been scrapped because it was easier to cut up the carriages than the steam locomotives. Barry became a great source for steam engine preservation when the heritage railway movement gathered pace in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I have visited Barry Island, which is also a seaside resort. My late mother-in-law came from Penrhiwceiber in south Wales; we went to stay with her

[Kelvin Hopkins]

relatives, naturally. The Barry railway preservation graveyard has saved hundreds of superb engines for the future. We must be grateful for that, even though it was a matter of accident. Many of the artefacts at heritage railways and the NRM originally came from Barry, and we must also be grateful for that. What would have happened had we not had railways to transport coal, which was the major industry of south Wales?

**Kevin Brennan:** Indeed. My mother's brothers and my grandfather were coalminers who were part of that whole process. Further, one of the first jobs I had as a young man was working over the summer as a platelayer in the British steelworks at Llanwern. I had some real hands-on experience of working on the railway, and can tell the House that lifting lines and packing ballast under the tracks and sleepers quickly convinced me that politics was a much better profession to go into. It is an easier occupation than working on the railways, which is a tremendously skilled but very labour-intensive job.

Later, as a skills Minister, I had the great opportunity to visit Pete Waterman's site at Crewe—he of “The X Factor” fame—where lots of young people are trained as apprentices to work on the wonderful heritage railway lines and schemes we have around the country. As the older engineers were all dying off, that skill and knowledge had to be passed on to the next generation. I commend the work that Pete Waterman, as a railway enthusiast, has done over many years to ensure that those skills are indeed passed on.

This country's heritage railway industry is extraordinary. I looked earlier at the list and thought I might read out a few, but I am not going to because there are countless wonderful heritage railway lines around the country. It is appropriate that we are debating that today. This debate is very important. We have heard about the National Railway Museum in York, where visitors can enjoy two centuries of railway history. As we heard, it was opened in 1975; it nearly doubled in size during its expansion in 1990, and in 2004, along with the local authority, it opened the museum in Shildon, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland mentioned earlier—the first national museum in the north-east.

It would be helpful if, when the Minister replies, he answers the questions raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North and some questions that I would like to add. We have rightly focused on the National Railway Museum today but, as hon. Members may know, the Government are currently carrying out a museums review. Will the Minister give us a steer as to when he expects the review to surface? I understand it is very close to completion—perhaps the write-around is going on among Ministers at the moment—but it would be helpful to the House to know. That is reasonable; this should not be a state secret.

Will the Minister also tell us what impact cuts to local authority budgets are having on local museums—in particular, on opening hours? Has he undertaken any kind of survey of local museums to try to estimate that? My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington mentioned the fact that her local railway museum is generally closed on Mondays and sometimes, at this time of year, on Tuesdays as well. Is that something that the Minister is worried about and is it getting worse?

We also heard the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North about how museums manage their collections. Will the museum review deal with questions regarding ethical disposal and collection management? Is that going to be part of the review? Will the Minister confirm that the Government intend to keep Labour's policy of free admission to our national museums, which the previous Labour Government introduced, including the National Railway Museum at York? My hon. Friend also raised specific concerns about the disposal of three locomotives. He did not quite accuse the Minister or the National Railway Museum of the great train robbery, but he did raise questions that the Minister needs to answer about consultation, transparency, tendering and fairness, as well as compliance with the National Heritage Act 1983.

In conclusion, Britain has a remarkable museums sector. We welcome the museums review that the Government are undertaking and that Neil Mendoza is doing for them. We are concerned that, unlike with previous reviews under Labour, no new resources will be made available to support museums, which are under severe financial pressure as a result of those cuts at the local level. That will inevitably lead to further issues around the disposal of museum collections. I hope the Minister will give the House reassurances on those issues.

5.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (John Glen):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Choqe. I thank the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) for proposing this debate about the National Railway Museum and the ownership of national assets. I am grateful to the large number of hon. Members who have contributed. In my response I will seek to address the specific points made.

As we have heard, the collections of our national and regional museums are of profound importance. We can be extremely proud of the local, regional and global significance and diversity of many of those items. It is right to ensure that the collections are managed well.

The hon. Gentleman is concerned that the National Railway Museum has disposed of assets that should be retained within the national collection. However, I do not agree with his proposal that the National Railway Museum reopens this question. The museum is bound by the National Heritage Act 1983, but is not required by that to consult the public before disposing of items. Those are curatorial decisions and are therefore independent from Government—and I believe rightly so. I will go into some detail on how the process works.

While the 1983 Act sets out some restrictions on the museum's disposal powers, the Science Museum Group, of which the National Railway Museum is a part, has a rigorous process in place to ensure that disposals are consistent with those restrictions. Having spoken to Andrew McLean, the assistant director and head curator at the museum, yesterday afternoon, I am confident that the decision to transfer the engines, particularly the engine to Swanage railway, was the right decision in this circumstance. It does not set any precedents, as I think the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) suggested, but follows accepted museum practice. It has

been undertaken in this way in other situations for many years. It would not be appropriate for me to intervene, even if I desired to do so.

Since I took on this ministerial role, I have had the opportunity to visit many museums and heritage sites all over the country. I have not been to York or Darlington yet, but there is always a new opportunity.

**Kevin Brennan:** We could go together.

**John Glen:** Perhaps we could—I welcome that.

I have been deeply impressed by the passion that staff and visitors have for their museums and how seriously museums take their duty to preserve and care for their collections, which in many cases, including the national collection, are specifically held in trust for the public now and for the future.

The hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman) gave a passionate defence of and was an advocate for her museum. I point out to her that Arts Council England is investing £118 million in museums in the current period, up to next year, and from 2018 many more museums will be part of the national portfolio. Museums will be able to apply for grants from the Arts Council, so there are more opportunities. I recognise the funding constraints and urge her to liaise with her local museum on how that could happen.

The National Railway Museum sites at York and Shildon are among the most popular museums in the UK. Visitor numbers are around 750,000 a year and were boosted in 2015-16 by the exciting arrival of the Flying Scotsman. The collection there includes more than 250 locomotives and rolling stock, 628 coins and medals, and nearly 5,000 pieces of railway uniform, equipment, documents, records, artwork and photographs. Such a fantastic and popular array of objects—especially including large locomotives—naturally requires a lot of management. The curators and museum in York need to be given full credit for the role they have played, not only within their own precincts but in the regeneration of York. They must decide what to display to the public, and how best to construct an interesting and informative narrative around the collection, and take into account the historical and physical quality of the objects. With locomotives, a large amount of storage space is also required.

It is clear from what we have heard that the hon. Member for Luton North holds the National Railway Museum collections in great esteem, as we all do, and naturally is concerned to ensure that they are being well managed. That is of great importance to me too, particularly as the assets of our national museums are, in essence, owned by the public and their upkeep and display contributed to by taxpayers. It is only right and proper that national museums are run at arm's length from Government. We expect, however, that collections are reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain relevant, appropriate and accessible to the widest possible audiences. The collections management policy of the Science Museum Group, including its disposal guidelines, is publicly available. For clarity, I will set out how such decisions are made.

Recommendations for disposal must be approved by a board of survey—as the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) mentioned—held at the

individual museum site, where they are peer-reviewed by colleagues. Recommendations then go to the collections and research trustee sub-committee, followed by the Science Museum board of trustees. It is in the nature of the heritage transport sector that some charitable institutions with heritage rail collections do not necessarily operate as accredited museums. As such, when disposal to a national or accredited museum is not possible, the aim is to keep objects in the public domain. The Science Museum Group also gives priority to transferring items to museums or heritage organisations with a local or regional connection. That decision-making process is not random, but clear and well considered, with a number of checks.

The National Railway Museum's decision to deaccession this particular locomotive was based on three factors: first, duplication of this type of locomotive within its collection; secondly, the vehicle being in particularly poor condition; and finally, the vehicle being more suited to a museum telling local and regional stories. I am confident that due processes were followed and that the museum made the right decision for the object.

Swanage Railway Trust is a well respected heritage railway organisation, which has the knowledge, skills and storage facilities to care for the engine in a way that will let future generations enjoy it. Indeed, only yesterday we found out that it had received a generous private donation that will allow it to strip down and examine the T3 to establish whether it can be restored to full working order. Swanage Railway believes that the engine can tell its story most effectively by hauling trains on a branch line railway that it was built to run on more than 120 years ago, and I am inclined to agree.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): I speak both as a railway enthusiast and an officer of the all-party group on heritage rail, which is particularly interested in ensuring that locomotives are in steam and that people see them running. I have visited York on many occasions and the days on which the locomotives are in steam draw the real crowds. Will the Minister assure us that if locomotives are transferred, whether to Swanage or wherever, they can be seen operating on the many preserved lines we have up and down the country?

**John Glen:** The principle behind decisions on disposal and dispersal of assets are designed to maximise public exposure to fully functioning assets, so that as many interested people as possible are brought into the country's museums. I cannot give categorical assurances on exactly how the assets will be displayed and used, but I imagine that is the aspiration in every case.

That recent development in Swanage demonstrates that the move there was in the best interests of the engine and the public who want to see it. Swanage Railway has a long historical association with the T3 and receives more than 200,000 visitors a year. In the long term, it hopes to fully restore the engine to steam and increase its accessibility to the public. Those goals may not have been possible for the National Railway Museum, given the range of issues that it has to deal with. For those reasons, the National Railway Museum and trustees of the Science Museum felt that Swanage Railway would be extremely well placed to look after the engine and display it to a wider audience.

[*John Glen*]

The news of the transfer was generally well received, both locally and with the descendants of the locomotive's designer, William Adams. Indeed, only *Steam Railway* magazine, to which the hon. Member for Luton North contributed, raised any concerns. No other organisations have come forward to say that they wanted to acquire the T3. The museum abides by the Museums Association's code of ethics on disposals and best practice. That includes advertising objects for disposal in some circumstances. The museum has committed to going above and beyond that and will advertise every rail vehicle disposal to ensure that the best home can be found for these important objects.

More broadly, the question of how to make disposals sensibly and ethically is taken very seriously by the museums sector. The hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) asked about the Mendoza review of museums in England. That will report soon and will look at collections management, including disposals. On funding, some proposals are being examined for how we can encourage better collaboration between big national museums and regional and local museums. I hope that that will provide more opportunities in due course.

In conclusion, although I understand and appreciate the sincere concern of the hon. Member for Luton North that the national collections are well managed, I do not agree that the disposal of the T3 engine should be re-examined. I understand that the National Railway Museum has invited him to visit the museum to discuss the matter in person. I encourage him to take up that

offer, because I think that such a meeting would allay many of his fears. I have every confidence that the museum has managed, and will continue to manage, its collections to ensure that it can inspire its visitors, but I will continue to observe the sector closely in my role as Minister.

5.28 pm

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I thank the Minister and all hon. Members for their contributions. I am pleased that I raised this important issue, because the debate has shone a light on a subject that may not have been illuminated before.

I would perhaps demur from some of the Minister's points. The rules under the National Heritage Act are fairly strict, including the criteria by which assets can be disposed of, and I do not think that they have been observed properly in this case. However, we have heard some interesting contributions. I do not have time to go into them in great detail, but I thank everybody for them. I hope that in future we will guard all our national assets, in every kind of museum or gallery, with great reverence and ensure that the public interest is protected at all times, so that we keep our wonderful heritage accessible to all, free of charge, throughout the country, both nationally and locally.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the National Railway Museum and ownership of national assets.

5.29 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*





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